“I’m Leaving!”: Understanding the Effects of Action Research Communities on Teacher Retention in One International School

by

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ABSTRACT

International schools and international education initiatives are experiencing tremendous growth as the world's economy continues to globalize. International schools operating outside of the traditional boundaries of state and national contexts have become havens noted for their diverse and multicultural staff, student bodies and school communities. However, the challenges facing international education have only recently begun to be studied independent from their traditional teaching counterparts. International schools, and any study associated with them, require an individual approach for identifying and solving the challenges unique to their context.

"I'm Leaving!" is an action research study which incorporates phenomenological hermeneutics, action research, and a transformational innovation to examine the social structures associated with the decision-making process of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon and the administrative action developed in response. Guided by Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT), this study combined the latest action research methodological perspectives with hermeneutic tradition and Professional Learning Community (PLC) theory to provide a deep and unflinching view into the real and lived experiences of the one subject often forgot about in educational research: the teacher. The study results confirm previous study findings that teacher feelings and perceptions of the leadership effectiveness, teacher-leader relationships, and teacher professional growth opportunities were all improved after teachers participated in an action research communities.

DEDICATION

This one is for my old man and my Debbie Dog. You are my heroes.

And to my little buddy, just for being you. I love you.

Also, to my little Monkey. You are the magic in my life.

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It is a rare thing these days, at least in my experience, to find a university professor who prizes their role as a teacher and mentor. I was lucky enough to find Dr. Danah Henriksen. Her personal investment in me, her continuous support for me, and her unwavering belief in me will never be forgotten. I cannot and will not ever be able to thank her enough for her patience and kindness.

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CHAPTER 1

LEADERSHIP CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future.
—John Dewey, Experience and Education (1938)

The quality of a leader is reflected in the standards they set for themselves.
—Ray Kroc, Founder of McDonald's, (n.d.)

The principle goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done—men who are creative, inventive, and discoverers.
—Jean Piaget (1964)

"I'm leaving," Dan casually told me over lunch. I couldn't believe my ears. Less than two years prior I left my job as the dyslexia special advisor for a magnet school in Florida for a new teaching experience halfway around the world. Now, just as I was beginning to feel like Singapore was becoming my new international home, my best friend Dan decided he was leaving the school where we were both teachers. Dan and his wife had been teaching internationally for nearly a decade, but their two years of teaching at our small private international school had proven to be less than satisfactory for them. It was a devastating blow for me.

My transition from teaching in the public schools of the United States into the international school teaching scene had been difficult, but I saw Dan's tutelage as critical to my successful conversion into an international teacher. I was hardly prepared for just how many more times I would hear my colleagues utter those same words: "I'm

leaving!". With his quick and unemotional announcement, Dan unknowingly launched my pursuit for a doctorate degree and a multi-cycle action research project examining teacher retention, or as I came to call it, the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon.

The "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon became a regular occurrence over the next year. I began to wonder why so many of my colleagues were deciding to leave our school. What was happening here? The question lingered in my head, and it demanded an answer. Thus began this journey, this study, and eventually the deeper understanding of how job satisfaction, school climate, and teacher retention are an intricately interconnected web, forming one of the most critical foundational stones for improving school performance and student achievement.

This investigation, like this paper, has taken on many different versions and interpretations throughout the past couple of years. The identification of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon came early in the process, but with each stage I was confronted with the inadequacies of my own research. My initial attempts at understanding and explaining the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon were focused on trying to understand the decision-making process of the teachers who were choosing to leave my school. A phenomenological study is the study of social interactions, but I was only telling the story of one data source.

An interaction requires at least two data sources; the phenomenon (the teachers) provided one data source. Later, inquiries would come to include the second data source. The organization (school leadership and administration) was studied for its response to the phenomenon. The organizational response, or action, was an innovation based on

educational theory. As the investigation changed and developed it really began to find its value in exposing the deep social aspects that make up our educational institutions. Specifically, this work seeks to interpret the social realities surrounding and creating the feelings and perceptions of satisfaction in the workplace.

This action research project synthesizes multiple cycles of previous research. Through these early cycles I was able to identify Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) and Professional Learning Community (PLC) models as the guiding theoretical perspectives for understanding the phenomenon and the innovation, respectively. This cycle of research expands on previous research cycles through the incorporation of the data analysis method, Action Research—Hermeneutical Analysis Framework (ARHAF), and the PLC model, Action Research Communities (ARCs). ARHAF and ARCs each incorporate action research (AR) methods, which allowed me to use my unique positionality within the research setting to combine the phenomenological findings and innovation findings into a singular data set based on their commonalities, differences, and interactions.

The structure of Chapter 1, displayed in Figure 1, begins with a general introduction of the concepts of a phenomenon, an innovation, and the AR cycle. As the chapter unfolds, the specific theoretical perspectives guiding the research and the contextual layers surrounding the study are detailed. The chapter concludes with the establishment of the research purpose, including a clarification of the problem of practice and research questions, which forms the overarching guiding inquiry of the study. As much as this is a scientific investigation, it is equally an account of my journey as future

educational leader. I believe that it is my unique viewpoint and positioning which prove to be the most valuable insights of this work.

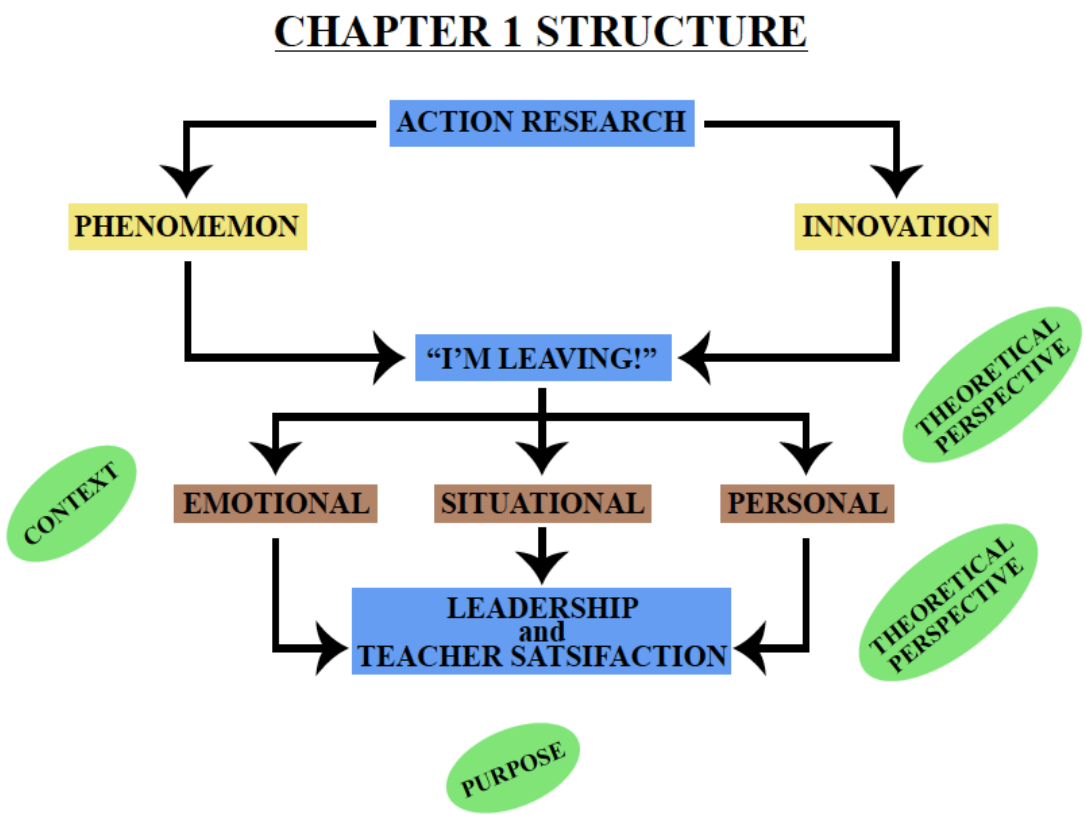


Figure 1.

Introduction

International School Consultancy (ISC) predicts that nearly one million teachers could be working in an international school setting within the next ten years; that is double the number of current international school teachers (as cited in Wechsler, 2017). International school education is reshaping the working environment for teachers around the world. International schools often use lucrative benefits packages, state-of-the-art facilities, and exploratory teaching methods to fill teaching vacancies (Wechsler, 2017). The changing dynamics being spurred by international schools requires research targeted

at identifying innovations capable of equipping schools with the ability to retain high-quality teachers.

Phenomenon

Harari (2015) defines a phenomenon, or phenomena, as an experience or situation that actually occurs but defies the ability of complete explanation. A phenomenon exists within the communication network linking the subjective consciousness of many individuals and their social interactions. A phenomenon can be viewed as being objective, subjective, or intersubjective. An objective phenomenon exists independently of human consciousness, beliefs, and experiences, whereas a subjective phenomenon exists depending on the consciousness, beliefs, and experiences of a single individual. The objective phenomenon remains even if an individual changes his or her beliefs.

An intersubjective phenomenon, like the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon, results from and occurs within the social interactions between subjects. It is the product of a shared meaning or interpretation of the world. One's understanding of the world and one's experiences in the world occur in both the single mind and in the collective imagination of thousands and millions of people. Intersubjectivity allows a phenomenological study to work with more than one definition or explanation for the findings.

Palei (2014), in her study of the "creativity phenomenon" in education, notes that the social phenomenological challenges facing education cannot be answered using traditional linear and/or lateral thinking and problem-solving strategies. Understanding and addressing a phenomenon requires the uniting of cognitive theory and practical

theory through the integration of a reproduction process. In other words, a phenomenon can only be understood when matched with a practical action and studied in a cyclical framework. Throughout this paper, the term "practical action" is referred to as the innovation.

Innovation

Innovation is the introduction of something new or a change to an existing idea, product, or field (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). When innovation is understood through the lens of Activity Theory, it takes on a much greater role for understanding and explaining the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. Innovations are the practical actions that shape and are shaped by the interactions of individuals and institutions. Innovation, as I came to see it, was more than just a documenting of the changes or effects of an intervention. The study of an innovation is an analysis of the conceptual framework guiding its development and implementation. Vygotsky saw educational innovations as a generator of both individual and organizational learning (Wiske and Spicer, 2010). The innovation is the voice of organization and, therefore, it embodies the second subject necessary in a phenomenological investigation. Innovations are continually changing and adapting, just as the phenomena they affect.

Tillema (2010) notes that an innovation must be directed by objectives and be clearly aligned with practical evidence and theory. Successful innovations create alliances and promote cooperation amongst the participants and the organization. Innovations are long processes and they require effective communication and collaboration. PLCs, as an innovation, provide one of the most researched and tested innovations available to any

educational researcher or institution. PLCs exemplify an innovation focused on information sharing and working jointly to meet the challenges presented by the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. In order for this study to generate intersubjective conclusions, a cyclical model capable of capturing the interaction between the study subjects was employed.

Action Research

The "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon, as an inter-subjective phenomenon, is directly linked with the PLC innovation. The interplay and relationship between the phenomenon and the innovation form the subject of this study. The study requires a multifaceted inquiry approach and a cyclical guiding research model. This study is built around an AR model as the mechanism for the innovation to be tested and retested against the phenomenon. Mertler (2014) described AR as a process in which people within an organization can identify problems, proactively address those problems, and reflect on progress, while using data to drive their decision-making process. An action researcher is a person who reflects on who they are as an educator and focuses on what they can do to improve outcomes.

AR has a multitude of applications and interpretations. AR moves beyond the generic self-reflections and "realizations" of the researcher. AR focuses on the "interstices between people and organizations, and across boundaries between life-world and systems" (Carr & Kemmis, 1998, p. 123). Real learning and change takes place in the AR cycles where constant reflection leads to action. AR provides the process for connecting the data to achieve findings that are based in the real experiences of

individuals and contribute, in a real way, to a deeper understanding of our educational system.

Setting

The study occurred between February 2018 and June 2018 at Kodiak International School Singapore (KISS). *Kodiak International School Singapore* is a pseudonym assigned to the school for the purpose of protecting the anonymity of the school and the study participants. KISS was chosen as the setting for the study for multiple reasons: KISS is a fully accredited and respected international school, which subscribes to the tenants of the International Baccalaureate program across both sections of the school. KISS also offers a unique opportunity, as teachers in both sections of the school operate under the same general contract structure, work conditions, and student population.

KISS is located in the city-state of Singapore. Singapore is one of only twenty cities in the world to host over fifty international schools (Wechsler, 2017). Singapore is a truly "international" country, where non-resident or expatriate workers formed nearly 30% of the total population in 2014, with plans to continue to increase the numbers of foreign workers at the same rate through to 2030 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2015). Singapore is the second most densely populated nation in the world and boasts a multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual society. KISS provides as "typical" a setting for an international school as can reasonably be achieved.

Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

This study, and its previous cycles, were guided by a myriad of theoretical and methodological perspectives. As each cycle of research progressed, so did my

understanding of and ability to apply different guiding perspectives within the AR process. This discussion of the guiding perspectives expands on the brief and broad definitions of phenomenon and innovation introduced previously. The first section introduces TLT as the guiding theoretical perspective used for investigating the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. The second section focuses on introducing the theoretical underpinnings of PLCs as a practical action innovation.

Phenomenon

Bass' (1985) Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) found its relevance to the inquiry into the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon based on my previous research findings and the recommendations of the seminal research studies on teacher retention. The seminal work of Hardman (2001), Odland and Ruzicka (2009), and Mancuso, Roberts, and White (2010) into international teacher retention serves as the guiding research used for identifying organizational conditions as the most critical overarching factor influencing teacher retention, whether positively or negatively. Specifically, a teacher's perception of the school head as a supportive leader and a teacher's ability to influence the decision-making process of the organization were noted as the two most influential variables. Organizations led by leaders who display characteristics consistent with TLT have been found to offer higher rates of employee satisfaction and lower employee attrition. TLT identifies the personality traits critical for addressing the organizational conditions, *school leadership* and *teacher feelings of inclusion in school direction*, which are directly tied to teacher satisfaction and retention rates; thus, TLT serves as a practical

guiding theoretical framework for unifying, aligning, and focusing this study's research question/inquiry, purpose, and methodologies.

Educational organizations require, now more than ever, transformational leaders capable of responding to the changes in global economic and political conditions, leading a new generation of teachers with vastly different skills, capabilities, and motivations than previous generations (Bass, 2000). International teacher retention studies clearly indicate that institutions with school leaders who embodied transformational leadership qualities experience fewer teacher retention problems. School leaders who wish to increase retention may need to modify their leadership style to include components consistent with TLT (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Mancuso et al., 2010).

Innovation

An innovation, whether in education or in any other organization or endeavor, is anything introduced into a system which is new and different. This is not to be confused with change. Change is spontaneous, whereas innovation is a deliberately planned action designed to create an improvement that is measurable. An innovation is the result of deliberate choice and development; it is durable, spreadable, and is unlikely to occur without direct and explicit leadership (Morrish, 2012). Innovations are the product of a process of development in which smaller ideas and hunches collide as a result of the connectedness of people and communities. Steven Johnson (2010) described these collisions as a "liquid network". A liquid network only occurs in an environment where lots of different ideas and different people from different backgrounds with different interests come together to solve a problem.

Educational innovations, interventions, and remedies exist for nearly every obstacle an educational institution may face. Yet, educational innovations experience a major "scaling-up" problem because they are focused on specific contexts and, therefore, they have little influence on the larger educational system (Huberman & Miles, 1984; Looi & Teh, 2000; Anderson & Herr, 2011; Barab & Luehmann, 2003; Constas & Sternberg, 2006; Schneider & McDonald, 2006). What works in one context cannot be applied to all contexts. All innovations require adaptation to particular environments. Looi and Teh (2000) advocate for an approach to innovations and research which balances the emphasis between "the learners, the agency of practitioners and the contextual complexity . . . instead of the predominant focus on scientific evidences and the assumed stable internal logic that tightly link one stage of cycle of innovation to another across contexts" (pp. 3–4). Innovations that allow schools to define their problems and then design and implement their own innovations in collaborative contexts can create and scale innovation more effectively than from a top-down approach.

Professional learning communities models support the development of a PLC as an innovation for addressing organizational problems. The conceptual framework for nearly all PLC models is based in the idea of shared decision-making between teachers and school leaders (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Fullan, 2001). The deliberate distribution of leadership functions combined with the transition of school leaders from instructional to transformational make the PLC model a powerful innovation. The additional flexibility of PLC models and frameworks make it highly adaptable to a multitude of situations, phenomenological obstacles, and organizational problems.

An innovation is only as strong as the culture surrounding it. Therefore, a powerful innovation must be matched with an equal emphasis on transforming the school culture (Fullan, 2016). The positive relationship between transformational leadership, increased teacher retention, and improved student achievement demands that educational organizations develop and implement strategies and innovations to minimize the impact of teacher turnover. Transformational educational leaders have responded to the changing and unique conditions of the educational setting by implementing professional learning communities as the primary innovative tool employed to "promote and maximize the individual and shared learning of its members . . . as they strive for specified common learning goals" (Lenning, Hill, Saunders, Solan, & Stokes, 2013, p. 7).

Senge (1990) originally contributed the concept of the learning communities to organizational learning theory in his book *The Fifth Discipline*. He envisioned the workplace as a learning organization where a shared vision was collaboratively developed, and problems were collectively identified and effectively resolved. At the core of any PLC definition is the concept of community, or a wide-ranging group of people collaboratively interrogating their practice to enhance organizational outcomes (Stoll et al., 2006; Hord & Sommers, 1998). PLCs are reliant on the organizational leaders to be effective (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lenning et al., 2013) and effective educational leaders are transformational. PLCs shift the leadership model from instructional to transformational by first creating a shared mission and then distributing leadership power through the shared decision-making process of the PLC (Marks & Louis, 1997, Marks & Louis, 1999; Hord & Sommers, 2008).

Here is where a majority of researchers and practitioners fail to fully appreciate the role learning communities have on developing transformational leaders and improving the work experiences and job satisfaction of teachers (Jessup-Anger, 2015). When effective PLCs are researched they are lauded for their distributed leadership, which effectively increases feelings of satisfaction, raises teacher retention, and ultimately increases student achievement. When the distributed leadership model becomes the basis for implementing a PLC, the PLC will be poorly implemented and deemed ineffective. PLC members will lack the common vision and singular organizational direction necessary to drive an effective PLC (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Implementation science has shown that poorly implemented innovations will more than likely fail. The PLC, as an innovative practice, requires the restructuring of the entire workplace culture (Blase, Van Dyke, Fixsen, & Bailey, 2009). It is transformative leaders who possess the characteristics necessary for establishing a new culture based on a singular mission. Once the culture has been established, transformational leaders can begin to distribute leadership and enter roles as members of the community, learning and leading alongside of their colleagues (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004).

Contexts

This paper began with an introduction of the concepts *phenomenon* and *innovation* as the two interacting subjects. I then connected each subject to a guiding theoretical framework for underpinning and focusing the work. The contextual section now seeks to describe and understand the environment surrounding each of the subjects.

The contextual layers are presented in three guiding sections, narrowing the focus from larger to smaller. Each section consists of two subsections: The first subsection addresses the contextual environment related to the phenomenon, moving from the global context, to the situational context, and finally to my personal context as a teacher. The second subsection addresses the contextual environment related to the innovation, as a product of the organization, moving to the organizational contexts and concluding with my personal role as the researcher.

Global and Larger Contexts

Global context. Globalization is characterized by an education system that has shifted from a focus on the needs and development of the individual and how they fit into a specific community, towards a global system that creates individuals who are prepared to participate in a broader, more diverse and global community extending beyond the traditional family, region, or even the nation. The global economic revolution is forcing modern nation states to begin grappling with the new tension of local versus global, as people slowly become world citizens while still maintaining their local roots (MacLean, 2001). Governments, universities, secondary and primary schools, and parents are now encountering an educational landscape where teachers are no longer "stuck" to traditional public and private school organizations. International schools and international education are increasingly offering teachers an enticing alternative. With promises of higher salaries, more autonomy, and freedom from "high-stakes" testing cultures—combined with attractive salary and benefit packages, and increased cultural and travel opportunities—international schools are succeeding in hiring vast numbers of teachers

from around the globe.

The forces of globalization are affecting nearly every segment of our global society. Organizations experience fast-paced changes that require leaders to have a well-developed understanding of organizational theory in order to effectively address systemic problems. Sinha (2012) identified retention issues as one of the most critical workforce management challenges emerging in the immediate future across all industries and organizations. The rapidly changing global contextual situation, economic uncertainty, and rapidly changing work environment dynamics support the need for more research into how any organization can improve retention. International schools are especially vulnerable to tumultuous workforce conditions and are facing the difficult challenge of retaining highly skilled teachers in a highly competitive market with increasing uncertainties.

Larger context. In recent years, international education has experienced remarkable growth. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines international education as teaching: (a) peace and understanding, (b) conflict resolution skills, (c) respect for cultural heritage and the environment, and (d) intercultural understanding, specializing in a focus on global issues and attitudes of solidarity at national and international levels (Hill, 2012). Estimates show the international school market as currently serving nearly 3.7 million students at an estimated 7,200 schools. By 2024, that number is expected to jump to 12,000 international schools, teaching nearly seven million students (ICEF Monitor, 2014). Brummitt and Keeling (2013) predict an increase in the number of full-time international

school teachers from 90,000 to 529,000 by the year 2022.

The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is one of the driving forces behind the growth in international education. In the past five years, the IB has experienced growth of nearly 50%, and currently serves 4,335 schools around the world, with schools in the Americas accounting for 61% of the IB schools in the world (International Baccalaureate, 2016). Traditional educational organizations are now encountering an environment where teachers report lower job satisfaction rates, decreased autonomy, and a greater imbalance between workload and pay. The "deskilling" of teachers, combined with the deprofessionalization of the teaching profession in many nations, are factors driving teachers into the international teaching community (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Brummitt & Keeling, 2013; Mancuso et al., 2010; Bailey, 2015).

According to the IB, in their publication *What is an IB Education* (2015), an IB education focuses on teaching students to be critical analyzers, while emphasizing choice, transdisciplinary learning, and multiple perspectives. It is based on a constructivist approach to building knowledge, in that students actively engage in problem solving and knowledge creation through hands-on learning experiences. The IB constructivist education is embarked upon with the goal of empowering students for a lifetime of learning, independently and in collaboration with others. IB educators facilitate learning by providing the tools for accessing knowledge, rather than the knowledge itself (Maclean, 2001). The goal of the IB curriculum is the preparation of a community of learners who can engage with global challenges through inquiry, action, and reflection. Thus, IB learners are meant to become inquirers, thinkers, communicators, and risk-

takers who are principled, open minded, caring, knowledgeable, balanced, and reflective (IB Learner Profile).

The IB provides a rigorous curriculum framework that prepares students for the academic demands of university (Byrd & Fordham, 2007) while also preparing students through approaches to learning—critical thinking, inquisitiveness, self-management—that are critical for success inside and outside of academic settings (International Baccalaureate, 2014). According to Stephanie Bell-Rose (2007), the president of the Goldman-Sachs Foundation, an international education provides the means by which we are able to bridge the cultural and linguistic divides that exist globally across a range of nations, cultures, and settings. Without an appreciation for other cultures, other languages, national history of other countries, and the problems and contributions of other countries, children will not be able to become effective global leaders.

Despite the rapid change many educational systems are experiencing, the teacher remains the most critical component of student and school success. The recruitment and retention of an effective workforce is one vital way organizations obtain a competitive advantage over competitors. Strategies which focus on improving retention strategies have been found to increase growth and success while also enhancing an organization's ability to adapt to quickly-changing conditions and markets (Agrela, Carr, Veyra, Dunn, Ellis, Gandolfi, Gresham, King, & Troutman, 2008; Lee, 2005). Educational institutions are under increasing pressure to devote significant resources to recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers.

Bailey's (2015) discourse analysis of teachers in an international school setting in

Malaysia offers insights into why teachers may be leaving their countries of origin and moving into the international school setting. Teachers cited that their ability to reclaim their autonomy, the increased professionalism and personal freedom, along with the challenge to their "professional strategies" left teachers feeling re-skilled and re-engaged in developing their teaching pedagogy. I echo the sentiments expressed in the Bailey (2015) study. These sentiments were and continue to be the driving factors behind my pursuit to understand and protect the educational system which saved my career, brought me from America to Singapore, and supported my pursuit of an educational doctorate degree.

Global and larger contextual conclusions. Preliminary research into international teacher turnover rates justified my concerns about the secondary school teacher turnover rate. Mancuso et al. (2010) report an average teacher turnover rate at international schools in the Southeastern Asian region of 17%. With a teacher retention rate of nearly double the Southeastern Asia average, I concluded that an examination of teacher attrition and retention was a uniquely appropriate topic to be studied deeper, especially when the situation was only occurring in half of the broader school.

Situational and Organizational Contexts

Situational context. Singapore, or the Republic of Singapore, is a tropical island sitting just one degree north of the equator in Southeast Asia. It is located off the southern tip of Malaysia, with an original landmass of 361 square miles, but land reclamation efforts have increased the island size to over 446 square miles. The main island of Singapore and the sixty-two smaller surrounding islands boasted a population of 5.399

million in 2013 with a projected population of nearly seven million by 2030. Non-resident or expatriate workers formed nearly 30% of the total population in 2014, with plans to continue to increase the numbers of foreign workers at the same rate through 2030 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2015). Singapore is the second most densely populated nation in the world and boasts a multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual society. Malay is the national language, but English is the official "working" language and is used in all local schools and government institutions.

Modern Singapore was established by Stamford Raffles, of the East India Trading Company, in 1819 as a trading post and then passed into the hands of Britain in 1826, and Japan for a brief period during World War II, until achieving independence in 1963. Since achieving independence, Singapore has developed into a financial and transportation hub. Singapore boasts the world's third-largest foreign exchange center, third-largest oil refining center, one of the top two busiest container shipping ports, and the sixth busiest airport (Singapore, 2016). Singapore's government is a multiparty parliamentary republic, with nearly 84% of its citizens expressing confidence in the national government (Leong, 2015). Singapore offers a rule of law including one of the lowest crime rates in the world, orderly labor relations, effective public transportation, and an educated, efficient, skilled workforce, making it one of the friendliest countries in the world in which to do business and live (Shipley, 2015).

Education in Singapore is a vastly different experience for international students as compared to local students. The Singapore government has placed restrictions on international or expatriate students from enrolling in the local school system and on

local citizens attending international schools (Tulshyan, 2015). The local Singapore education system has consistently ranked at the top of world student achievement rankings. Their pupils lead the rankings in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a triennial test of 15-year-olds around the world, and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (The Economist, 2018). *The Straits Times* reports that the average cost for an international school education in Singapore from reception (age three) to graduation (age 18–19) is $589,900 SGD per child (Williams, 2015).

Organizational context. In the midst of the metropolis, sitting inconspicuously among the characteristic and colorful shop houses of the old straits settlement just outside of the central business district, lies my international school, here given the pseudonym 'Kodiak International School Singapore' (KISS) to protect its anonymity. KISS occupies a former Peranakan mansion and its grounds; the mansion was originally constructed in the late nineteenth century as the family home of an influential doctor. At the time of this study, KISS had an approximate enrollment of 675 students from 46 different nationalities. KISS primarily served the children of expatriates residing in Singapore, usually for an extended but temporary basis. KISS opened in January 1995 as a fee-paying, private, independent, international, English medium, day-school operating a program from Kindergarten to Year 13, with students ranging from age three to eighteen. KISS operates as an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School and is divided into two sections: Primary (Years K–6) and Secondary (Years 7–13) (Western Association of Schools and Charters, 2016).

KISS is a semi-selective private school, meaning there are no entrance examinations or specific academic requirements, although students with major academic, age, or physical limitations are not accepted. Each applicant is assessed based on previous school reports, previous teacher recommendations, and interviews (as necessary). KISS has a maximum class size of twenty students. Students are provided a rigorous college preparatory curriculum as they progress through the primary and secondary school curriculums.

KISS provides a continuum of IB programs across grades in both the primary and secondary schools. KISS primary school provides the IB Primary Years Program (PYP) for students aged 3–12 years old. In the PYP, students learn to use knowledge, concepts, and skills from a variety of subjects to explore six transdisciplinary themes of global significance (i.e. How the World Works, Where We Are in Space and Time). KISS secondary school provides the IB Middle Years Program (MYP) for students aged 12–16, and the IB Diploma Program (DP) for the final two years of a student's secondary education. In the MYP, students study a range of subjects and bring together two or more established areas of expertise to build new interdisciplinary understanding through the co-creation of knowledge across subject lines (i.e. Health and Science, Science and Math, Humanities and Literature). In the DP, students encounter a range of subjects, and through the creativity, activity, service (CAS) component of the DP core they continue their own explorations of physical activity and the creative process by engaging in community service projects. Interdisciplinary DP courses and requirements offer students

ways to explore new issues and understandings that transcend subjects, and were designed to help students connect their learning across the curriculum.

Students are prepared, through the IB curriculum, to either enter universities around the world or to transfer to other international schools as expatriate families leave Singapore. KISS provides limited support to students with disabilities through its learning support program. Students requiring extensive learning support (special education or exceptional student education) and therapy (occupational, physical, speech/language, etc.) are referred to outside agencies by the KISS Student Services Team, at the expense of the student's family.

The physical layout of the campus, being situated in a historical building, means that there is limited access to major parts of the school campus for people with physical disabilities. KISS provides student services through the Student Services Department, including counseling, university advising, guardianship services, and academic advisors. The majority of parents are from an above average socio-economic group, with many holding managerial or executive positions within their companies in Singapore (Western Association of Schools and Charters, 2016).

KISS has invested heavily in education technology. It has a 1:1 Apple laptop program where all students own their laptops and take them home to extend daily learning. All teachers are provided with MacBooks, which are used to deliver twenty-first century instruction. Teachers plan lessons remotely. KISS is also a Google Apps for Education (GAFE) school. All students and teachers have unlimited access to the GAFE suite of apps and programs, which provide unique and different ways for teachers to

engage students, differentiate instruction, and provide multiple pathways for assessment (Western Association of Schools and Charters, 2016).

Situated and organizational contextual conclusions. After four years in the international school teaching world, I concluded that KISS offered an authentic view of a typical international IB World School. Furthermore, KISS offered proven stability, with more than twenty years of existence, documented success in the preparation of students, a stable administration and governing board, and a staff of experienced IB educators from around the world. KISS is in good standing with the Singapore educational governing board, EduTrust, the IB, and the Accrediting Commission for Schools Western Association of Schools (WASC) (Western Association of Schools and Charters, 2016).

Teacher and Researcher Contexts

Teacher context. My first four years of teaching students with special needs in one of the lowest-performing urban schools in the State of Florida should have prepared me to deal with saying "goodbye" to many of my close teaching colleagues. It was not until many years later that I realized how many teachers quit or moved on from my first school. Perhaps I was too busy, too isolated, or just too young for the high rate of teacher turnover to ever enter into my consciousness. I was just trying to "survive". I did, somehow, manage to survive those first tenuous years, eventually moving from classroom teacher into a "middle-management" position as an administrator of a special dyslexia program aimed at students in grades 3–5. One year into my district level assignment I began applying for new teaching jobs. I had grown disillusioned with the public-school system in the United States and could feel my passion for teaching rushing

out from me. Advertisements for international teaching began to populate my web browser, prompted by my continual searches for a new teaching environment.

Within the year, I arrived in Singapore with two suitcases and quickly settled into my new teaching role at my first international school. I felt my passion for teaching being reinvigorated, while the stress of life as a public-school teacher in the United States drifted away. I once again found myself believing in the power of education. The increased autonomy, freedom, and sense of adventure all contributed to my newfound happiness, but it was the financial security offered by my vastly superior salary that first opened the door to my lifelong desire to become a school leader and agent of change.

Researcher context. When I began searching for educational doctorate programs I realized that I actually now had the reinvigorated passion to pursue this goal. Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald's, is quoted at the beginning of the chapter because he so succinctly captures what defines a leader. He calls leaders to challenge themselves and to always hold themselves to the highest of standards. These are the qualities of a true and ready leader. These are the qualities of what is termed a *transformational leader*. With my acceptance and entrance into the Educational Doctorate Degree (Ed.D.) at Arizona State University (ASU) I commenced a four-year journey of self-discovery, of self-doubt, of pure adulation, and of pure misery. I also began the process of growing into a budding educational leader, an action researcher, and an agent of change. What started with Dan leaving has culminated in my first multi-cycle action research project.

Teacher and researcher contextual conclusions. KISS will not only serve as the setting for the research study, but also as my sole employer prior to and throughout the

duration of the study. The study was qualitative in nature, drawing insights from looking deeply at one international school which might suggest avenues for exploration for similar schools. I will continue to serve as a teacher under the same guidelines and expectations as other teachers. KISS will make no special accommodations and will provide no additional financial support either to the study, Arizona State University, or to me personally. As with the previous cycles of research, I will remain what Herr and Anderson (2015) referred to as an "insider in collaboration with other insiders" (p. 31). I will be naturally embedded in the school climate, the classrooms, and the larger context. I am a trusted colleague and I view my positionality as a benefit to the research project.

The School Board of Governors gave permission for the research study to be conducted under strict guidelines, including:

- all identifying features of the school be changed, including the school name, location within Singapore, and any physical or statistical description which may be used to identify the school;
- current students were not allowed to participate in the study;
- current staff members could only participate on a voluntary basis and could only use their personal time and contact information, unless school administration deemed their participation in the study as part of a schoolwide program or initiative;
- school statistics on enrollment and demographics could only be used if derived from the 2016 school WASC report and did not jeopardize the school's anonymity.

Despite some restrictions placed on this research project, KISS has nurtured my growth, as well as hosted this dissertation research. School administration and leadership regularly opened their minds to my ideas, dedicated large swaths of teacher planning time toward ensuring teachers were able to participate, and took an active interest in my personal progress as well as the study procedures, results, and conclusions. Despite my employment with the school throughout the entirety of the program I never felt pressured to compromise my personal or professional integrity in any way.

Phenomenological and Innovation Contexts

Phenomenon. The phenomenological conception of the problem viewed the teachers as independent actors who, if given the right innovation or set of incentives, would respond favorably through increases in feelings of job satisfaction and close the retention gap. Phenomenologically, the problem of practice (PoP) was interpreted using TLT. I hypothesized that the phenomenon would respond favorably to an administrative action if the organization's action is in line with the tenets of transformational leadership.

As the Learning Support Coordinator at KISS, I am an active participant in the school's "Data Team". In 2016, the school was facing a series of "site visits" from various accrediting agencies, as well as visits from the IB organization. Our team played a prime role in reporting a litany of school data and performance indicators. As we jostled through the numbers one afternoon, our team reviewed teacher retention numbers from the past five years. We quickly concluded that our school replaced an average of twenty-three out of seventy-five teachers every year. However, a closer look revealed something much more troubling about the numbers. When the secondary school numbers were

separated from the primary school numbers we found a notable difference between the two school sections. Annually, the KISS secondary school experienced nearly double the teacher attrition rate of the KISS primary school.

The distinction between the secondary and primary school teachers' experiences and expectations has long been researched. The primary factors contributing to job satisfaction are directly related to the general trend of higher retention rates in primary school settings when compared to secondary school settings. Primary school teachers' identities are closely connected and contribute to motivation, commitment, and job satisfaction. For secondary school teachers, subjects and relationships are related more closely to feelings of job satisfaction (Day, 2006). Additionally, the natural fluctuations in enrollment numbers, changing school priorities, and staff capabilities account for some of the differences in teacher attrition. However, KISS retention data from the 2007–2008 school year to the 2011–2012 school year show consistently higher retention rates in the KISS primary school when compared to the KISS secondary school (WASC, 2012). The differences in the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon was evident in program continuity and teacher satisfaction rates between KISS secondary and primary school teachers.

Our task force returned to the data from the WASC report, as well as to the data, insights, and meta-inferences from my preliminary cycles of research in search of a possible solution to the problem. We agreed to focus on what differences were occurring between the KISS primary and secondary school, which may explain the drastic differences in teacher turnover rates. As the 2016–2017 school year came to a close we had concluded, based on an informal school-based teacher survey, that a small program

implemented by the primary school principal five years earlier, 'Mentoring Each Other's Success In School' (MEOSIS), had likely played a prominent role in reducing turnover in the primary school. Out of the forty-one teachers surveyed, thirty teachers responded to an open-ended question asking what school initiative they felt contributed most toward creating a positive school climate, with some reference to MEOSIS.

Innovation. MEOSIS was a mentorship program at its heart, but when I asked its "creator", the primary school principal, it was described as, "a program to get teachers to just talk to each other". MEOSIS effectively helped to create a collaborative problem-solving environment in the KISS primary school. MEOSIS is best understood and analyzed through the lens of the PLC framework. MEOSIS was never referred to or labeled as a PLC at KISS, but it did feature many of the tenants of PLC literature. MEOSIS featured groups of various members of the KISS primary school community, each working collaboratively to address a common goal.

There exists no single consensus for what defines a PLC, but Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006), in their review of PLC literature, concluded that a PLC is a wide-ranging group of people based inside and outside of a school who collaboratively interrogate their practices in a manner which mutually and continuously seeks to enhance learning and school development. Members of an effective PLC, as described by Hord and Sommers (2008), (1) have shared beliefs, values, and vision, (2) have a shared and supportive leadership, (3) believe in collective learning and its application, (4) work in supportive conditions, and (5) share their personal practice. MEOSIS was highlighted by the presence of a community of individuals who worked

collectively towards a common goal, therefore establishing the foundation of a PLC. Stoll et al. (2006) reiterated a critical point when discussing PLCs. The goal of a PLC is not to be just be a PLC, rather it is to enhance school effectiveness for the benefit of students.

MEOSIS had the simple purpose of connecting and encouraging KISS primary school teachers to meet and learn from each other. Meetings were informal and expectations were minimal. Each MEOSIS group was given autonomy to decide the issues important to them and generate problem-solving strategies using a bottom-up approach. Each group unit consisted of KISS primary school leader, teachers across multiple year levels and experiences, and a parent representative. Members committed to working with their group for the duration of their tenure at KISS.

The contextual situation and use of collaborative teams in the problem-solving process was found to be completely different in the KISS secondary school when compared to the KISS primary school. KISS secondary school leadership relied heavily on a system of teacher "working groups" (WGs) to address areas of organizational concerns and issues. The WGs were committees or teams of KISS secondary school teachers who worked on a specific task and operated with a predetermined goal, as established by the KISS secondary school leadership team. WGs were designed to address limited problems, with KISS secondary school leadership serving as the primary identifier of the problem(s).

Structurally, WGs operated similarly to the *task force* design described by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006). Task forces, like WGs, were implemented to address systemic organizational issues by dispersing leadership into temporary groups

that are charged with addressing a specific issue, after which the group is disbanded. An interview I conducted with one secondary school teacher during a previous cycle of research yielded a brief window into what WGs looked and felt like for secondary school teachers. He described a forced system of "volunteering" when talking about participating in his WG. At the beginning of each academic year, a list of WGs—complete with group titles, group leaders, and goals—was compiled into a shared electronic document where teachers were required to sign up for their "desired" group. A typical WG in the KISS secondary school followed the general structure, timeframe, and knowledge dissemination method displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

WGs Structure, Timeframe, and Knowledge Dissemination Process

Step	Action	Actors	Timeline
Identification	Between five and seven secondary school issues or problems are identified	KISS Secondary School Leadership Team	Summer holiday
Assignment	Teachers sign up to participate in one WG for the academic year	KISS Secondary School Leadership Team KISS Secondary School Teachers	Pre-planning week
Participation	WGs meet bi-weekly throughout the calendar	Working Groups	Bi-weekly

	year		
Knowledge dissemination	WGs present initial findings and illicit feedback from staff	Working Groups	January pre-planning week
Knowledge dissemination	WGs present findings and recommended changes to be implemented for the following academic year	KISS Secondary School Leadership Team Working Groups	June post-planning week

In the Summer of 2017, I analyzed the procedures, guidelines, and structures of the WGs using meeting agendas and meeting minutes collected from three different WGs. I utilized the work of Boudett and City (2014) as the source for assessing and reflecting on the organizational meeting practices and processes of the WGs. Boudett and City (2014) draw on transformational leadership theory (TLT) to develop their effective framework for creating effective problem-solving teams in complex organizations. All three meeting agendas were initially analyzed using the "Meeting Wise Checklist" (Boudett & City, 2014, figure 2.1), followed by the analysis of agenda commonalities and sentence patterns.

The three agendas chosen represent a cross section of meeting agendas gathered from different WGs. Each agenda utilized a different format, with all three identifying the meeting purpose, process, preparation, and pacing either ambiguously or not at all. I concluded that each meeting agenda placed more emphasis on documenting what actually

occurred in the meeting than on clearly establishing the meeting purpose, focus, and action plan. Boudett and City (2014) find that meetings lacking these key components represent "bad" meetings where participants are "consumed by endless chatter" (p. 14).

Overall, the broad analysis of patterns and trends across the three WG's meeting agendas returned little to no evidence of any pattern or systematic manner for creating meeting purpose and engaging participants in anything other than a superficial manner. The lack of consistent structure between the meeting agendas was viewed to be a primary indicator that participants were either unaware of expectations or even discouraged from actively participating in the meeting process. I concluded the lack of buy-in or engagement in the WG process to be a major contributing factor leading to increased rates of teacher dissatisfaction and teacher attrition in the KISS secondary school.

Phenomenological and innovation conclusions. Dufour et al. (2006) establish that although WGs have the potential to improve organizational effectiveness and feelings of personal satisfaction with the school culture, their temporary status and narrow focus limits their effectiveness. The short-sightedness inherent in the purpose of WGs leads to a focus on issues which do not directly affect student learning or achievement. They conclude that WGs are not able to achieve the same results as PLCs. PLCs, which are effectively organized and led by school leaders focused on implementing transformational change, possess the ability to achieve long-term improvement to organizational outcomes. The achievements of WGs is temporary, "but the work of collaborative teams of teachers is always focused on learning and is ongoing and never ending" (DuFour & DuFour, 2011, para. 14).

Problem of Practice

Multiple extensive studies have confirmed that schools with leaders who embody transformational leadership qualities achieve higher rates of student achievement and have high rates of teacher satisfaction (Mancuso et al., 2010; Griffith, 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). These findings were extended by Brown and Wynn (2007), Hallinger and Lee (2012), and Fisher and Royser (2016), with all finding that transformational school leaders report using a PLC as a primary tool for achieving organizational change and addressing systemic problems. There is also overwhelming evidence establishing strong links between a school's climate and the factors of teacher motivation, teacher satisfaction, and leadership (Mertler, 2016; Surji, 2013). The results and conclusions drawn from the major research studies into international teacher retention point directly to two variables, *school leadership* and *teacher feelings of inclusion in school direction*, as the most significant factors in job satisfaction.

The factors contributing to job satisfaction and its influence on teacher retention and attrition in the international school setting differ significantly from those in national or state school systems. International schools are traditionally independent operations with scattered locations, each with individual circumstances surrounding its school culture. International school teachers are normally signed to short two-year contracts, a system that encourages teacher movement and increases competition between schools for retaining high-quality employees. International school environments are free from the restrictive structures of state and national schools that limit teacher pay, set arbitrary advancement rules, and have poorly-established evaluation systems.

International schools by their very nature are transient, both for teachers and for students, resulting in an educational system where student learning is still left to the individual teacher. Teachers in many state and national educational systems have few options for seeking better working conditions inside of the teaching profession. International school teachers, however, can easily pursue higher salaries, working environments more aligned with their personal views, and opportunities for advancement. Therefore, international schools and international school leaders who fail to address issues around teacher retention risk decreasing feelings of teacher satisfaction and lower organizational outcomes.

Chapter 1 has, thus far, established the existence of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon as the PoP guiding this research inquiry. Retention research has identified three broad categories critical for understanding and addressing systemic retention problems: (1) teacher conditions, (2) school conditions, and (3) leadership conditions. Each of the three conditions at KISS supported the creation of a strong school-wide professional learning community. Teachers were naturally inclined to embrace the change process. The diversity of the staff encouraged inquiry, collaboration, and the sharing of personal practices. The school, as demonstrated through the existence of MEOSIS, displayed the capacity for implementing a broader PLC program. Lastly, KISS leadership embraced the role of "gatekeeper" (Hord & Sommers, 2008), necessary for addressing the PoP.

Through MEOSIS, the KISS primary school leadership was able to create a supportive and challenging environment, resulting in increased teacher retention and

higher levels of student achievement, and positively contributing to the progress of the wider KISS community. Extending the core PLC principles of MEOSIS into a school-wide innovation potentially addresses the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon, while simultaneously improving on the school's collective vision for promoting student learning. MEOSIS, when viewed through a PLC lens, allowed me to not only study its effect on teacher retention, but also to, be it overtly or not, demonstrate the school's capacity and thirst for collectively solving a multitude of problems. The conceptual framework for nearly all PLC models is based on the idea of shared decision-making between teachers and school leaders (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Fullan, 2001). The deliberate distribution of leadership functions, combined with the transition of school leaders from instructional to transformational, make the PLC model a powerful innovation.

Purpose

The cyclical nature of action research allowed me to redefine and clarify my understanding of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon and examine the effects of a PLC on teacher perceptions of satisfaction. This investigation progressed with a dual purpose: The first purpose was to scientifically research the effects of a school-wide PLC upon KISS teacher perceptions of the transformational leadership qualities displayed by KISS leaders. The research was guided by a single research question. The second purpose was to conduct an informal inquiry examining personal researcher bias, documenting the research process, and exposing the social interactions of KISS teachers and leaders; this was guided by a more general research inquiry statement.

The Research Question

The purpose of the research question (RQ) was to determine how and to what extent the implementation of a school-wide PLC impacted teacher perceptions of KISS leadership across three variables. Each variable was determined to highly correlate with feelings of job satisfaction and retention. I operate under the belief that improvement in teacher self-reported feelings of job satisfaction could eventually lead to a reduction in teacher turnover rates. The RQ was developed after carefully considering examining the results from previous cycles and the seminal research studies, specifically those examining teacher retention in the international school setting. The recommendations of the existing literature were upheld, reinforced by the results of my previous research, which identified the same two factors, *school leadership* and *role in the decision-making process*, as critical to job satisfaction and teacher retention. The guiding research question asks:

1. How and to what extent does the implementation of a PLC impact teacher self-reported feelings of job satisfaction as related to:
    a. school leadership effectiveness?
    b. teacher–leadership relationships?
    c. their professional growth and learning opportunities?

This RQ was significant because it continued the recommendations of previous research and adds the dimension of examining the influence a powerful innovation has in changing teacher feelings and perceptions. Taken as a single question with four underlying driving variables, the study is focused and narrow, increasing the likelihood of

gaining valuable information for informing future cycles of research, and contributing toward the ultimate goal of improving student achievement.

The Research Inquiries

In addition to the guiding RQ, this project also incorporated three conceptual research inquiries (RIs) to examine the underlying learnings, assumptions, and bias of the researcher. An inquiry pushes beyond the narrow reporting or results towards a deeper examination of the methods, interactions, and results. The RIs pull back the curtain on the social aspects of the research, but more importantly, they expose the initial understandings (IUs) or researcher bias' predicating the research. The RIs and IUs are inextricably intertwined and are, therefore, referred to interchangeably.

The RIs sought to capture the learnings and experiences significant to the research that fell outside of the details captured by the RQ. They were guided by the core tenets of AR, TLT, and PLC research. The RIs were vital for understanding and explaining the real and lived experiences of KISS teachers and leaders, in addition to my personal learning and growth. The research inquiries were:

1. The leadership style(s) of the KISS leaders were inconsistent with transformational leadership style.
2. Increased use of transformational leadership strategies improve teacher feelings of job satisfaction and perceptions of KISS leadership effectiveness.
3. AR and PLCs contribute to a motivating, challenging, and engaging school environment and school culture at KISS.

The Research Design

Investigation of the research question and inquiries employed a transformative mixed-methods design (TMMD), relying heavily on the cyclical structure of the AR cycle to inform both the quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as for interpreting the study results. Quantitative data was obtained from the results of two administrations of the Panorama Teacher School Climate Survey (PTSCS). Quantitative data participants included seventy-five KISS teachers for the first PTSCS administration and forty-five KISS teacher participants for the second administration. Qualitative data was gathered from KISS teacher and leader interviews, researcher field notes, observations, and reflective journaling. Semi-structured formal interviews were conducted with a total of ten KISS teachers and two KISS leaders.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH GUIDING THE PROJECT

> *All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts.*
>
> —Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2:7:139–142

> *Theoretical inquiry is central to the vitality and development of a field of practice – not to mention its recognition and credibility from those not yet initiated into the field. The theoretical foundations of a field describe and inform the practice and provide the primary means to guide future developments.*
>
> —Randy Garrison (2000, p. 1)

The "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon was viewed as a mainly socially constructed problem of practice (PoP). Social science researchers use a theoretical framework as a guide for understanding and interpreting data results. An extensive review of the existing literature is also undertaken to understand the tangled web associated with the investigation of socially constructed inter-subjective phenomena. This chapter serves as a systematic synthesis of the links between the guiding research perspectives, Bass' (1985) Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) and the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). TLT and PLCs models are then connected to employee feelings of satisfaction and views towards leadership through a literature review. The chapter concludes by connecting the guiding theoretical perspectives and literature review to the problem of practice with the introduction of an evidence-based innovation model capable of addressing the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon at Kodiak International School Singapore (KISS). Figure 2 displays the structure guiding Chapter 2.

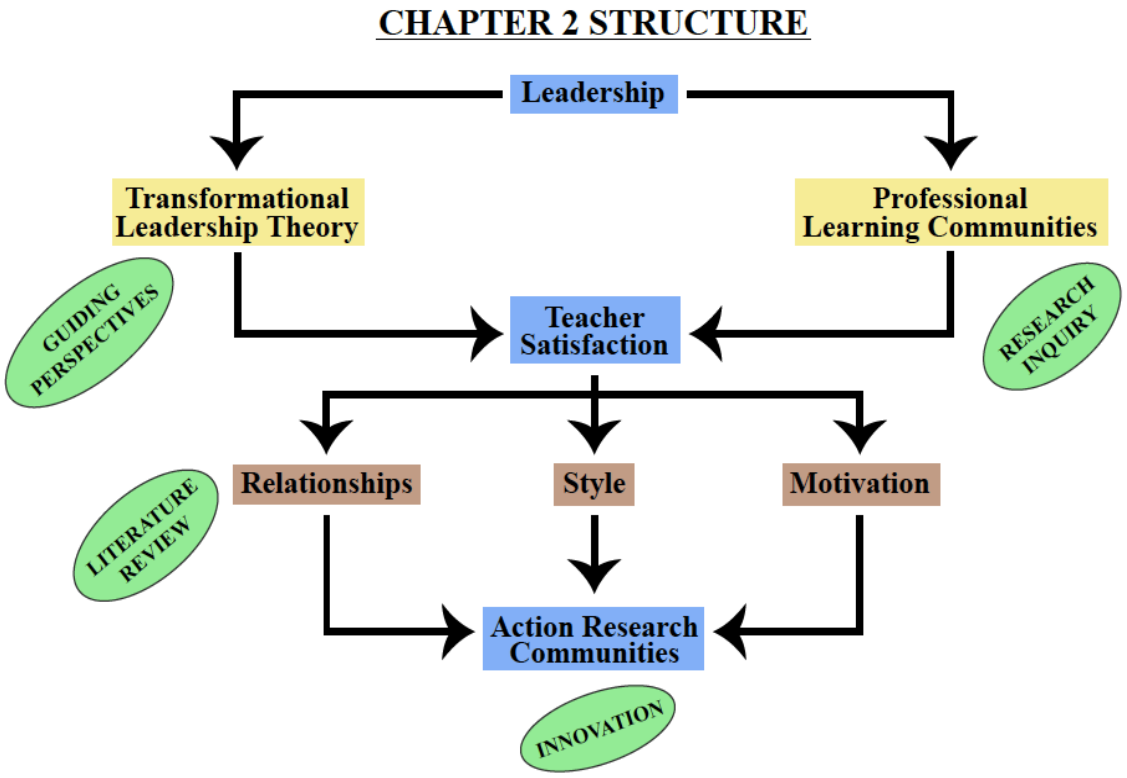


Figure 2.

The Context and The Problem of Practice

Context

Teacher retention research has a long history, but the ever-changing educational landscape requires continuous inquiry. The individual uniqueness of each school's contextual situation, combined with the influence each educator can have on improving the problem, make action research, in my opinion, one of the most effective and transformational forms of research into teacher retention.

It is difficult to construct a meaningful picture of the life and the lived experiences of an international teacher who decides to remain with or move on from their current teaching position. The particular events, feelings, and perceptions may not ever be

completely retrievable for the individuals themselves, let alone for researchers. The data collection and analysis structures and frameworks presented provide a guide for intensely scrutinizing the data and for extracting information about the experiences of a small group of international school teachers with the hope of extrapolating these experiences to achieve a deeper and more complete understanding of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon.

Harari (2015) urges scholars and researchers to move beyond only asking those questions that they can reasonably expect to answer. Social science researchers must ask questions for which no answers are available or where answers are buried so deeply that it is extremely difficult to draw conclusions. The results of the data analysis presented in the next section are an attempt to draw back the curtain on the actual lived experiences of individual internal school teachers in order to expose the reality of the complex, complicated, and often conflicting emotions driving the decision to stay or leave their current teaching position.

Problem of Practice

Educational organizations with higher rates of teacher retention are highly correlated with a number of positive organizational attributes and outcomes. Teacher retention and attrition rates are also clearly linked with teacher feelings of job satisfaction. It is more difficult, however, to isolate the myriad of factors contributing to higher or lower feelings of satisfaction. Teacher retention research, as with any complex social research, is intertwined with many other factors—such that it is challenging to address any one factor without affecting the others. Yet it is a challenge that we must face head-on; after all, educational organizations who have successfully implemented

strategies that reduce teacher attrition have experienced increased teacher satisfaction and, ultimately, gains in student achievement.

Research has proven that high quality and experienced teachers have a greater impact on improving student outcomes than nearly any other factor (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Mancuso et al., 2010, Hardman, 2001; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). Research into teacher retention is one of the most regularly studied and updated educational research topics, especially as schools across the world compete to attract and retain effective teachers. Darling-Hammond (2003) identified high rates of teacher turnover as an indicator of underlying problems with a school. Although teachers choose to leave or stay in their current contextual situation for countless different reasons, Mancuso et al. (2010) concluded that international schools experience teacher turnover for vastly different reasons than their national or state school counterparts. Yet the effects of high teacher turnover rates are comparable across school types, countries, and populations. High rates of teacher turnover contribute to the loss of program continuity, negatively affecting learner outcomes and contributing to low school, teacher, and student performance (Ingersoll, 2001; Flamholtz & Lacey, 1981).

Understanding "the reasons for teacher turnover in international schools is essential if schools want to retain good teachers and preserve their learning environment" (Mancuso et al., 2010, p. 308).

Guiding Research Perspectives

Although I do not typically prescribe to a single paradigm or theory for understanding how individuals and societies construct understandings and knowledge, I

view the decision to leave an international teaching position and move to a completely different country, culture, and society as a phenomenon which requires the employment of theoretical perspective to serve as a guide. Action researchers rely on theories drawn from social sciences and humanities to provide a conceptual framework and to inform their findings. Societal problems, organizational operations, and human behavior, including the issues of teacher retention, are complex and nuanced. Different theories illuminate different aspects of the problem being studied, thus providing focus for this cycle of study, as well as increasing the reliability and validity of the study's conclusions (Reeves, Albert, Kuper, & Kuper, 2008).

Transformational Leadership Theory

Bernard Bass (1985) introduced the modernized theory of transformational leadership, expanding upon Burns' (1978) work on leadership theory. Since its introduction, Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) has become intertwined in organizational theory. Educational organizations require, now more than ever, transformational leaders capable of responding to the changes in global economic and political conditions, leading a new generation of teachers with vastly different skills, capabilities, and motivations than previous generations (Bass, 2000). International teacher retention studies clearly indicate that institutions with school leaders who embody transformational leadership qualities experience fewer teacher retention problems. School leaders who wish to increase retention may need to modify their leadership style to include components consistent with TLT (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Mancuso et al., 2010).

Bass' (1985) Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) postulates that transformational leaders display a unique set of personality traits which can be identified, measured, and learned. Transformational leadership characteristics are more strongly correlated to leader effectiveness, improved organizational outcomes, and higher levels of employee satisfaction and commitment (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Tafvelin, Aremelius, & Westerberg, 2011). Bass and Riggio (2006) summarized the underlying psychological mechanisms transformational leaders utilize to inspire individual and organizational growth into four components: (1) idealized influence, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) individualized consideration, and (4) intellectual stimulation. When personality traits are compared to these four components, idealized influence, or a leader's *charisma*, has been found to be the component most strongly correlated with leader effectiveness (Lowe et al., 1996; Bono & Judge, 2004). Transformational leaders have the charisma to lead organizational change by clearly articulating a vision and motivating followers to high levels of performance and support each individual's quest to realize their own leadership potential. However, TLT, postulates that charisma can be learned and current leaders can implement changes to inspire and stimulate their organizations (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bass, 1990).

TLT directly applies to any investigation of retention. Since Ingersoll's (2001) findings that schools experienced less teacher turnover at institutions where teachers rated their leadership higher, multiple researchers and studies have extended Ingersoll's conclusions. School leaders that displayed the characteristics of transformational leadership specifically were consistently rated higher by teachers. These findings imply

that schools with lower turnover rates are, more than likely, led by a transformational leader and schools with a higher retention rates experience higher student achievement rates (Mancuso et al., 2010; Griffith, 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

The seminal work of Hardman (2001), Odland and Ruzicka (2009), and Mancuso et al. (2010) into international teacher retention serves as the guiding pieces of research used for identifying organizational conditions as the most critical overarching factor influencing teacher retention, positively or negatively. Specifically, a teacher's perception of the school head as a supportive leader and a teacher's ability to influence the decision-making process of the organization were noted as the two most influential variables. The results and conclusions of Mancuso et al. (2010) extend and support the work of Hardman (2001) and Odland and Ruzicka (2009). Both works conclude that leadership characteristics consistent with TLT are vital in understanding the teacher retention problem, specifically in the international school setting.

TLT identifies the personality traits critical for addressing the organizational conditions, *school leadership* and *teacher feelings of inclusion in school direction*, which are directly tied to teacher satisfaction and retention rates. Professional learning communities models supports the development of a PLC as an innovation for addressing organizational problems. The conceptual framework for nearly all PLC models is based in the idea of shared decision-making between teachers and school leaders (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Fullan, 2001). The deliberate distribution of leadership functions, combined with the transition of school leaders from instructional to transformational, make the PLC model a powerful innovation. An innovation is only as

strong as the culture surrounding it. Therefore, a powerful innovation must be matched with an equal emphasis on transforming the school culture (Fullan, 2016).

Professional Learning Communities

PLC literature also identifies the characteristics consistent with those found in transformational leaders as essential for the long-term success of a PLC. However, PLCs do not necessarily require transformational leaders to begin; instead, they have been found to be effective in helping leaders to develop some of the characteristics of transformational leaders (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Hallinger & Lee, 2012).

Transformational educational leaders have responded to the changing and unique conditions of the educational setting by implementing professional learning communities as the primary innovative tool employed to "promote and maximize the individual and shared learning of its members . . . as they strive for specified common learning goals" (Lenning, Hill, Saunders, Solan, & Stokes, 2013, p. 7). Senge (1990) originally contributed the concept of the learning communities to organizational learning theory in his book, *The Fifth Discipline*. He envisioned the workplace as a learning organization where a shared vision was collaboratively developed, and problems were collectively identified and effectively resolved. At the core of any PLC definition is the concept of community, or a wide-ranging group of people collaboratively interrogating their practice to enhance organizational outcomes (Stoll et al., 2006; Hord & Sommers, 1998).

PLCs are understood, defined, implemented, and adopted in dramatically different ways across the educational landscape, thus, PLCs are reliant on the organizational

leaders to be effective (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lenning et al., 2013) and effective educational leaders are transformational. PLCs shift the leadership model from instructional to transformational by first creating a shared mission and then distributing leadership power through the shared decision-making process of the PLC (Marks & Louis, 1997, Marks & Louis, 1999; Hord & Sommers, 2008). Here is where a majority of researchers and practitioners fail to fully appreciate the role learning communities have in developing transformational leaders and improving the work experiences and job satisfaction of teachers (Jessup-Anger, 2015). When effective PLCs are researched they are lauded for their distributed leadership, which effectively increases feelings of satisfaction, raises teacher retention, and ultimately increases student achievement. When the distributed leadership model becomes the basis for implementing a PLC, the PLC will be poorly implemented and deemed ineffective. PLC members will lack the common vision and singular organizational direction necessary to drive an effective PLC (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Efforts aimed at improving teacher job satisfaction must address the sociological and psychological factors simultaneously. Teachers who report working in an environment with high levels of collaboration with colleagues, management, and the wider school community report higher levels of satisfaction. The PLC model introduced earlier in this chapter is specifically designed to increase the collaborative nature of teaching and learning. Learning communities models postulates that learning and knowledge are social constructions where individual autonomy is replaced with collective autonomy and shared responsibility (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Rogers, 2015).

Collegiality, cooperation, and a commonly shared vision and goals are essential features of highly effective schools. Professional learning communities create the collaborative work environments essential to improving teacher satisfaction and in turn increasing student achievement (Marzano, 2003).

Stoll et al. (2006) reiterate a critical point when discussing PLCs, which I use to analyze the current state of PLCs. The goal of a PLC is not to just be a PLC; it is to enhance school effectiveness for the benefit of students. If students fail to experience the PLC then the PLC has failed at its very purpose. International schools, by their very nature, are transient, both for teachers and for students, resulting in international schools where student learning is still left to the individual teacher. This is precisely why international teachers feel increased autonomy in the international setting, however, I contend that this is precisely why international schools need to embrace professional learning communities. Teacher learning, just like student learning, does not occur in a vacuum. Our complex world demands schools and teachers that work together in larger communities to create change. It is only through the creation of a larger community that international schools can overcome high turnover rates and continue to promote the programs and progress of the wider school system. One of the defining characteristics of an international school teacher is in how they embrace change. A PLC is rooted in an individual's ability or desire to experience change. It is my contention, therefore, that the international teacher and the international school already possess the characteristics necessary for the utilization of the PLC for success.

Literature Review

In Chapter 1, I established the contextual and personal experiences leading to my identification of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon as the problem of practice and explored the connected research justifying its further study. Chapter 2, thus far, has bridged the gap between theory and practice by anchoring the study's focus and innovation in guiding theoretical frameworks. In this section, I extend my review of the research to examining the underlying contextual components of the research question by analyzing key research concerned with measuring the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon, the PLC innovation model, and their social interaction.

This literature review attempts to capture the multiplicity of factors simultaneously bombarding, changing, and influencing the phenomenological and innovative research inquiry. I attempt to intermix related research studies without categorization. I try to weave a loose connecting web of studies to tell a story of how teachers and organizations understand and react to each other. TLT and PLC literature and conclusions are also interwoven in order to highlight areas where the theory action research gap can be filled.

Satisfaction

The research question guiding this proposed cycle of research addresses the nature of job satisfaction, specifically in relation to teacher perception of school's leadership and their involvement in the organizational decision-making process. Job satisfaction is regularly cited as a significant contributing factor to retention across nearly all organizations, a fact that is more difficult and nuanced to understand than first meets the

eye. This is especially true for teachers. Studies relating to teacher retention and job satisfaction continually struggle to adequately address the myriad of contributing factors contributing to retention. Research shows us that teachers who feel satisfied in their jobs have better job performance, raise student achievement levels, and are less likely to leave their school or the teaching profession (Mancuso et al., 2010; Griffith, 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). However, most studies, innovations, and professional development aimed at increasing teacher retention and job satisfaction fail to account for the dichotomy of feelings many in the teaching field feel each day.

The International Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) studied the working conditions of teachers across the globe and concluded that teachers feel "caught" between opposing feelings of frustration and hope (Sparks, 2014). The National Education Association (NEA) found similar conflicting feelings amongst teachers, with 75% of teachers reporting that they were satisfied with their jobs. However, 45% of teachers had considered quitting (as cited in Mertler, 2016), a statistic that has been shown to be relatively consistent in international school teachers (Hardman, 2001; Mancuso et al., 2010). The tension between factors able to influence job satisfaction for teachers lies in the often-opposing nature of the unique sociological and psychological forces—or the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, respectively—unique to the nature of teaching (Mertler, 2016; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1984).

A teacher's job satisfaction is not reliant on stable sociological or psychological factors. Teachers experience a range of strong emotions, which are heavily dependent on the emotional investments they have personally made (Day, Kington, Stobart, &

Sammons, 2006). Both sociological and psychological factors contribute to the satisfaction a teacher and, in turn, the wider community, experiences. The psychological and sociological factors contributing to teacher retention intersect at the school climate, or work environment. The school climate, as a factor of teacher retention, clearly contributes to teacher job satisfaction (Certo & Fox, 2002; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Johnson, 1992).

Since 2009, researchers have expanded on the seminal international studies by Hardman (2001) and Odland and Ruzicka (2009). Mancuso et al. (2010) measured consistencies between their own findings and the findings of the international and national studies. They note significant "cross study consistency", which "provides validation of the findings" (p. 308) when drawing conclusions about the factors contributing to job satisfaction. Other researchers all consistently report negative perceptions of school climate as a major motivating factor for job dissatisfaction resulting in high teacher turnover rates (Murakami-Ramalho & Benham, 2010; Hallinger & Walker, 2012; Bailey, 2015).

An individual's perceptions and feelings regarding their environment are a result of the interaction between sociological and psychological forces. A teacher's satisfaction is rooted in how they experience the social, cultural, and institutional environment they encounter on a daily basis. The nature of teaching is isolating; thus the perceptions and feelings of any individual teacher are often formed without input from the wider community (Day et al., 2006; Anhorn, 2008; Wong & Rousmaniere, 1998; Cuban, 1999).

Teacher–Leader Relationships

The quality of teacher–leader relationships is heavily correlated with teacher perceptions of their school's climate. The school climate is typically composed of a multitude of individual components, not limited to school leadership, wider school community involvement, teachers, teacher preparation time, and collegial relations. School climate research has been occurring in some form for over 100 years (Certo & Fox, 2002; Mertler, 2016). Pioneering school climate researchers Perry (1908), Dewey (1916), and Durkheim (1961) recognized that the distinctive culture of a school affects the life and learning of the entire school community (National School Climate Council, 2007).

Research related to teacher–leader relationships, school climate, and satisfaction rates in international schools are rare, despite their rapid growth (Hayden & Thompson, 2007; Brummitt & Keeling, 2013). International teachers, however, regularly cite poor teacher–leader relationships as a significant contributor to feelings of dissatisfaction. Lack of administrative support and the lack of opportunity to collaborate with colleagues leads to feelings of exclusion from the organizational direction and decision-making process.

Brown and Wynn (2007) conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve principals, as well as focus group interviews with more than sixty new teachers, to understand the leadership styles of principals who lead schools with low attrition and transfer rates. Researchers specifically sought to identify and analyze common characteristics and successful strategies that principals use to support and retain teachers.

Researchers conclude that teachers are increasingly more "adept at working in groups or teams . . . and that working collaboratively in professional learning communities is second nature to them" (Brown & Wynn, 2007, p. 669). Although the study is limited by the relatively small numbers of participants and context, internal validity strategies allowed researchers to make some sense of larger phenomenon's from the small research context. School principals who displayed transformational leadership styles reported using a professional learning community as a primary tool for engaging the school community and driving organizational change.

Teacher Motivation and Development

Studies have identified school climate factors, teacher motivation, teacher salary and benefits, community status, decreased teacher autonomy, and the increasing pressure placed on teachers through high-stakes testing as some of the major factors leading to teacher turnover (Mertler, 2014; Mancuso et al, 2010; Bailey, 2015; Agrela, 2008; Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Hardman's (2001) and Odland and Ruzicka's (2009) seminal works on international teacher turnover conclude that teachers remained in their positions because of advancement opportunities, respect from colleagues and administration, security, salary, and job challenge.

Amrit Thapa and his colleagues at the National School Climate Council reviewed over 200 articles encompassing the breadth of research methods and contexts. They strongly affirm the importance of a motivating school climate and a rich professional development environment for addressing teacher retention and satisfaction. Their review specifically cites several large and seminal works (Connors-Krikorian, 2005; Greenwald

et al., 1996; Grissmer & Kirby, 1997; Grissmer et al., 2000; Kasen, Johnson, & Cohen, 1990; LaRusso, Romer, & Selman, 2008; Ruus et al., 2007; Shochet et al., 2006; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1989; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Reid, 1982; Rumberger, 1987; Sommer, 1985), showing strong correlating evidence that teachers depart from their jobs for organizational reasons tied to the lack of a challenging school climate encouraging of their personal and professional growth (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Allessandro, 2013).

Hallinger and Lee (2012) use leadership theory as the guiding theoretical perspective to understanding how instructional leadership responsibilities are distributed in International Baccalaureate (IB) schools. Researchers conducted case studies in five international schools located in Thailand, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and China to explicitly answer two main research questions: (1) How are instructional leadership responsibilities distributed in full continuum IB schools? and (2) How does distributed instructional leadership contribute to more successful transition between programs and school wide success? (p. 666). Exploration of these research questions has enhanced our understanding of how leadership is enacted in the context of international schools. The researchers used an extensive literature review to guide their adoption of the theoretical perspective of distributed leadership to inform their assertion that school leaders are viewed as "facilitators for teacher professional growth rather than supervisors of their activities . . . this shift in role behavior can motivate teachers to accept principals' support" and can increase "teachers' willingness to engage in professional learning" (pp. 670–671).

Leadership Style

The globalization of the world's economy, combined with the rise of the digital revolution, has transformed the role of educational leaders. Twentieth century educational institutions favored and selected instructional leaders over transformational leaders to lead schools. Instructional leaders were focused on achieving institutional goals by improving curriculum, instruction, and teaching methodologies. Instructional leaders were typically the most accomplished teachers. Twenty-first century educational institutions, however, require educational leaders that are transformational. The modern school system demands *charismatic* leaders capable of transforming school culture through the creation of a collaborative and stimulating environment (Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Literature studies confirm the importance of leadership style in influencing job satisfaction rates and teacher retention, with three leadership styles—transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire—found to be significantly related to organizational factors. Transformational style is correlated with a positive impact, while transactional style has an uncertain effect and laissez-faire style is associated negatively with organizational factors contributing to job satisfaction and teacher retention (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003). When school leadership styles were described by KISS primary and secondary teachers in previous cycles of qualitative research, the Head of Schools was consistently characterized by terminology consistent with a laissez-faire approach to leadership, a style which I found to be consistently viewed negatively by KISS primary and secondary teachers. Additionally, KISS secondary school teachers

were found to hold a more negative view of the leadership style of the secondary school principal than the primary school principal.

Data was collected mainly through interviews with teachers, administrators, and students. In total, sixty-eight teachers and administrators as well as twenty-five students were interviewed. Researchers also conducted thirteen in-school observations to check impressions gained through the interviews. Finally, archival data about each school site was collected in order to triangulate the qualitative data and develop a narrative description of each of the schools. Study findings and conclusions were interpreted through the lens of the theoretical perspective of leadership theory.

Instructional leadership is complex and nuanced. Using leadership theory provided a consistent basis for interpreting results and drawing conclusions across multiple study sites. Aligning all aspects of the study through a theoretical lens allowed for researchers to advance understanding, not just of the contexts, but also for the application of leadership theory to other contexts. The study did not parse out the specific and roles of leaders within the contexts, nor did it examine how leaders sought to foster instructional leadership. However, it did provide evidence for how leadership theory could be applied to resolving and studying these factors.

Innovation Research

An innovation, whether in education or in any other organization or endeavor, is anything introduced into a system which is new and different. This is not to be confused with change. Change is spontaneous, whereas innovation is a deliberately planned action designed to create an improvement that is measurable. An innovation is the result of

deliberate choice and development; it is durable, spreadable, and is unlikely to occur without direct and explicit leadership (Morrish, 2012). Innovations are the product of a process of development as smaller ideas and hunches collide as a result of the connectedness of people and communities. Steven Johnson (2010) described these collisions as a "liquid network". A liquid network only occurs in an environment where lots of different ideas and different people from different backgrounds with different interests come together to solve a problem.

Educational innovations, interventions, and remedies exist for nearly every obstacle an educational institution may face. Yet educational innovations experience a major "scaling-up" problem because they are focused on specific contexts and, therefore, they have little influence on the larger educational system (Huberman & Miles, 1984; Looi & Teh, 2000; Anderson & Herr, 2011; Barab & Luehmann, 2003; Constas & Sternberg, 2006; Schneider & McDonald, 2006). What works in one context cannot be applied to all contexts. All innovations require adaptation to particular environments. Looi and Teh (2000) advocate for an approach to innovations and research which balances the emphasis between "the learners, the agency of practitioners and the contextual complexity . . . instead of the predominant focus on scientific evidences and the assumed stable internal logic that tightly link one stage of cycle of innovation to another across contexts" (pp. 3–4). Innovations that allow schools to define their problems and then design and implement their own innovations in collaborative contexts can create and scale innovation more effectively than from a top-down approach.

Action Research

Action research (AR) and its many associated models and cycles are all conceptualized using the same basic research design principles. AR is a cyclical research design focused on examining the effects of organizational innovations in a continuous process of examination and re-examination (Ivankova, 2015; Mertler, 2014). AR uses new knowledge and interpretations to change existing processes or to implement new or updated innovations with the goal of improving the system. The action research cycle is an ideal methodological approach when the researcher seeks to generate new knowledge about a social system in order to create change with the goal of improving the system while acting as both participant and researcher (Ivankova, 2015; Mertler, 2014).

Examination of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon required a guiding methodological perspective rooted in the AR cycle. Figure 3 displays the action research cycle used in this research study. Phase one (red) of the research cycle began with the diagnosis of the problem of practice and concluded with an extensive review of the existing literature and applicable theoretical perspectives used to guide the research methods. Phase 2 (green) consisted of the implementation and evaluation of the innovation. Phase 3 (blue) specified the learnings accrued over the previous stages. These learnings are then fed back into cycle and re-examined again.

Figure 3.

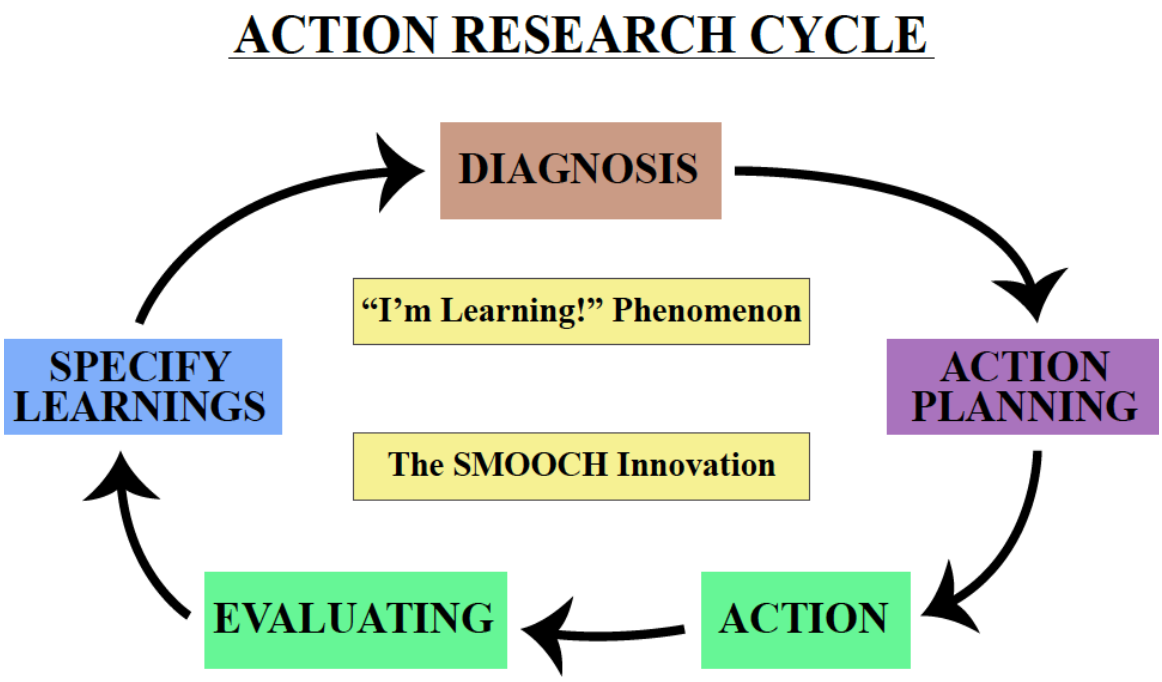


Figure 3.

Mertler (2013) expanded his AR model by applying its principles directly to the creation of a transformational education change. Mertler (2018) draws direct connections between the idea of transformation with the concept of innovation, defining both as a radical action aimed at renewing an existing system. Figure 4 displays the five components of Mertler's Action Research Model for Transformational Innovation (ARMTI).



Figure 4.

A transformational innovation places the action research cycle and its associated data collection and analysis procedures at the core of the model. The five components of ARMTI are directly associated with the five actions participants in a transformational innovation must display concurrently. Additionally, ARMTI emphasizes the embracing of "outliers" in all aspects of the data and the related social environment. There should be no limit to the types or amount of data collected. The freedom from rigid data collection techniques requires an innovation and environment where mistakes lead to continual growth.

Mertler (2018) places the data collection process at the center of the action research cycle. However, as critics of action research have cited, the continuous, inclusive, and open nature of AR data collection, combined with the high subjectivity and inherent personal bias of any AR study can make research a difficult process (Kock, 2005). Researcher positionality and bias is a concern for all research. Positionality is about where and how the researcher interacts, participates, or is influenced by their personal belief about the research. Understanding the positionality of the researcher in an action research study is an important, even vital, component to the process. By openly discussing the positionality of the researcher the audience can engage in the reason for the study, understand the viewpoint of the investigator, and critically examine the results of the research. As noted by Herr and Anderson (2014), because of the "unique positionality of action researchers, further measures are sometimes necessary to establish the trustworthiness of the research" (p. 74). Clearly defining the positionality of the investigator reduces the bias, opens the action research to debate, and improves overall understanding.

Action Research Communities

Action Research Communities (ARCs) combine the action research cycle with the innovative potential of a professional learning community (Mertler, 2018). ARCs represent the first actionable transformational innovation, guided by the same principles as Bass' (1995) model for Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT), offered by modern educational researchers. Figure 5 is Mertler's (2016) visual display showing the relationships which make ARCs a transformational innovation. Ongoing cycles of action

research form the foundation for the outgrowth of collaborative learning and professional learning communities, all embedded within the Action Research Community.



Figure 5.

ARCs combine the essential elements of PLCs with ARMTI to move PLC models toward an action-oriented mindset. Figure 6 displays Mertler's (2018) visual for combining ARMTI and PLC into an ARC.

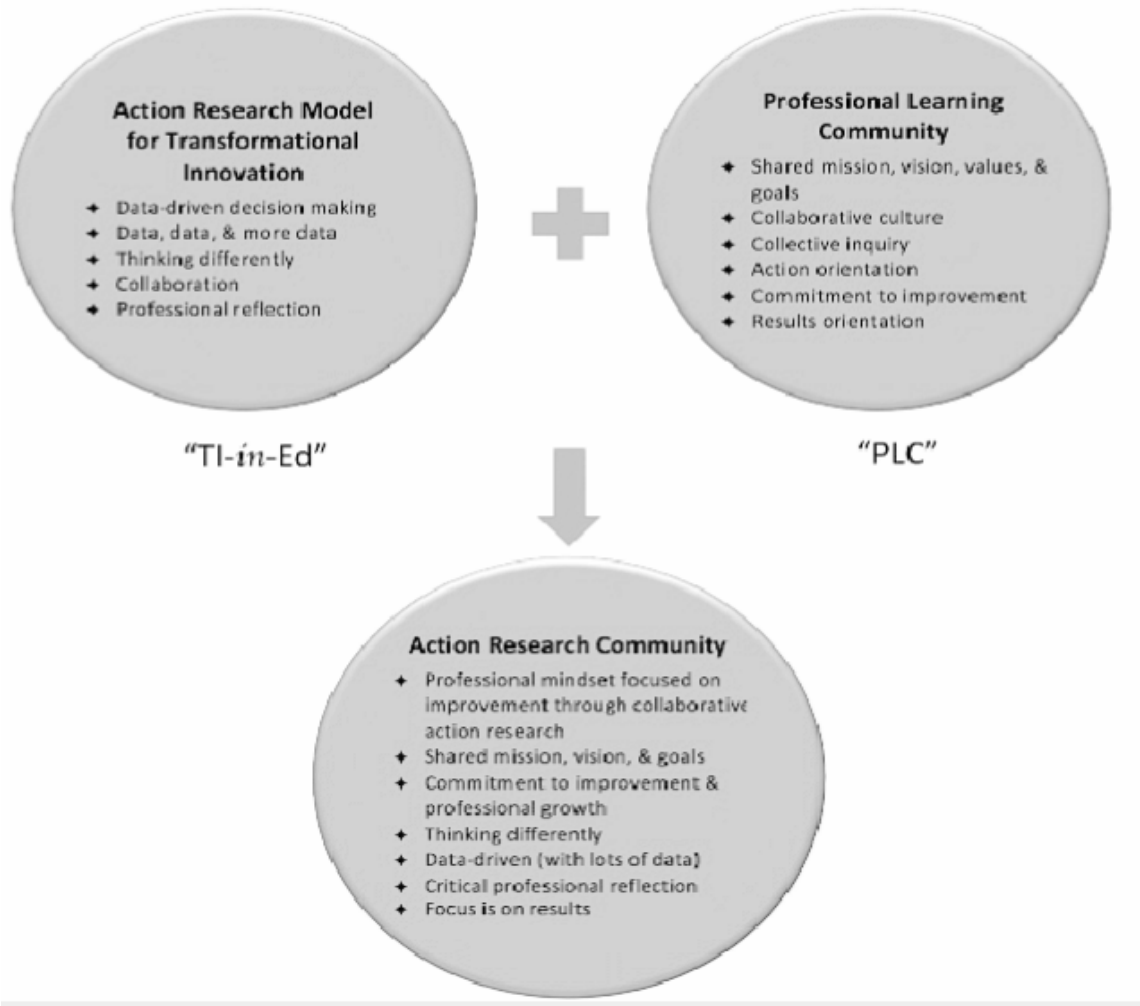


Figure 6.

Mertler (2018) identifies the opportunities for a more individualized, customized, and valuable professional development as one of the most promising aspects of ARCs. Teachers, school leaders, and the wider community are able to develop a voice in the direction of the school, the organizational decision-making process, and in their own growth and learning. Additionally, ARCs provide educators with the tools and support to begin taking direct action aimed at solving problems and obstacles most important to them. ARCs connect the components of transformational leadership and transformational

innovation in a model capable of radically transforming a school's environment, addressing satisfaction, improving relationships, and addressing phenomenological obstacles facing schools.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

> *. . . that professions employ methods and procedures based on theoretical knowledge and research; that the members of the profession have an overriding commitment to the well-being of their clients; . . . that, individually and collectively, the members of the profession reserve the right to make autonomous and independent judgements, free from external nonprofessional controls and constraints, about the particular courses of action to be adopted in any particular situation.*
>
> —Wilf Carr & Stephen Kemmis,
> quoted in *Action Research, Principles and Practice* (McNiff, 1988)

All educational organizations are confronted with the intense pressure of retaining quality teachers. International schools are especially susceptible to the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. I began Chapter 1 by recalling my first encounter of this experience with an international school teacher. Supported by multimillion-dollar recruitment agencies, international school teachers possess the mobility, information, and freedom to change schools at least every two years if they choose. The explosive growth of international education also ensures a steady stream of job opportunities. International schools that adopt, develop, or implement evidence-based strategies for addressing teacher retention will see an improvement in organizational growth and student achievement.

Chapter 2 identified Mertler's (2018) Action Research Communities (ARCs) as the most suitable and practical professional learning community (PLC) model for addressing the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon at Kodiak International School Singapore (KISS). ARCs are specifically developed to encourage school leaders to develop transformational leadership qualities. Additionally, ARCs have proven to be an

educational innovation capable of driving transformational organizational change. This chapter describes the research methods adopted for this examination. The chapter opens with a reintroduction of the study's purpose, the problem of practice (PoP), as well as the guiding research question and inquiries. Next, the ARC innovation is introduced and described in detail. The research procedures, including the data sources and sampling process, are introduced and then connected to the data collection methods and the research design. The chapter concludes with a complete description of the guiding research methodologies and the data analysis frameworks employed. Figure 7 displays the structure for Chapter 3.

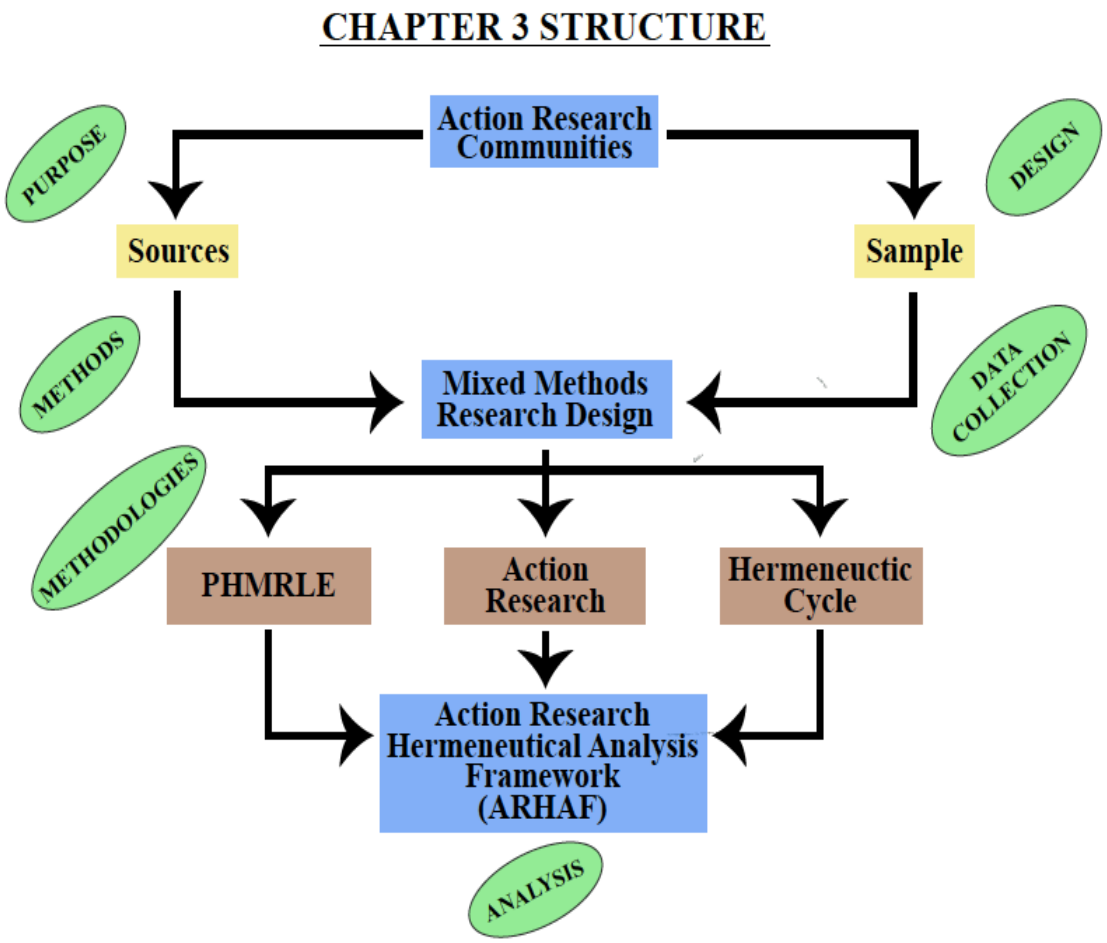


Figure 7.

Purpose

Setting

*Kodiak International School Singapore** (KISS) served as the setting for this study into the teacher retention phenomenon, "I'm Leaving!". KISS represents a typical international school. It boasts a diverse community of leaders, teachers, students, and parents. I, the researcher, was employed at KISS prior to and throughout the course of the study. I was paid as a normal KISS employee and executed all of my employee and teaching responsibilities in addition to serving as the primary researcher. Internal school

data and accrediting agency reports identified a higher than average rate of teacher attrition at KISS. Specifically, the KISS secondary school data revealed an average teacher attrition rate of 30% over the previous five school years.

As the sole learning support teacher for KISS, I represented the only member of the KISS teaching staff tasked with working in both the KISS primary and secondary school sections. It is through this unique positioning that I originally began to develop an understanding of the vastly different perspectives and feelings of job satisfaction and school leadership held by primary school teachers versus secondary school teachers. The results and conclusions drawn from the major research studies into international teacher retention pointed to the same two variables, *school leadership* and *teacher feelings of inclusion in school direction*, as primary factors in job satisfaction and teacher retention.

Research Question

My review of the existing literature in Chapter 2 identifies high teacher turnover as a significant contributor to student achievement. Addressing the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon at KISS required the implementation of an administrative action, or innovation, capable of addressing the social aspects of the phenomenological problem of practice. Previous cycles of research identified the KISS primary school program, Mentoring Each Other's Success In School (MEOSIS), as the basis for an expanded ARC innovation. This cycle of research aimed to deepen the understanding of how ARCs influenced the multidimensional relationship between teacher perceptions of school leadership style, teacher feelings of job satisfaction, and their role in the decision-making process.

The research was guided by a single research question:

1. How and to what extent does the implementation of a PLC impact teacher self-reported feelings of job satisfaction as related to:
    a. school leadership effectiveness?
    b. teacher–leadership relationships?
    c. their professional growth and learning opportunities?

Research Inquiries

The problem of practice was further investigated through three initial understandings (IUs). The IUs were assumptions rooted in the conclusions of previous research cycles and extensive literature reviews. The examination of the IUs occurred as a research inquiry (RIs). The RIs deepened the understanding of how and to what extent study participant feelings and perceptions changed in relation to each other and to the ARC innovation. The research inquiries were:

1. The leadership style(s) of the KISS leaders were inconsistent with transformational leadership style.
2. Increased use of transformational leadership strategies improves teacher feelings of job satisfaction and perceptions of KISS leadership effectiveness.
3. AR and PLCs contribute to a motivating, challenging, and engaging school environment and school culture at KISS.

Approach

Phenomenology, the scientific study of a phenomenon, examines the structure of our experiences—specifically, the appearances of things, things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things—the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first-person point of view. The "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon was first identified through my own personal experiences and was the product of social processes that influenced me at an individual level. For this reason, the interpretive constructivist mixed-methods design, which concerns itself with deeply understanding why and how an individual makes meaning, was chosen to guide the research design and methodologies (Creswell, 2015).

Interpretivism, as opposed to positivism, focuses on understanding actions and decisions, rather than explaining them. Interpretivism proposes that individuals do construct knowledge and they possess the capacity to understand how they constructed their knowledge (Crotty, 1998). The research design and methodologies used to examine the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon followed an interpretive mixed-methods design. The interpretive paradigm concerned itself with understanding the underlying social process, which contributed to feelings of job satisfaction and, ultimately, to understanding how feelings of job satisfaction were affected by the implementation of a professional learning community. Teacher feelings of job satisfaction, as related to the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon, are highly dependent on complex social processes, yet are intensely personal and based on an individual's unique experiences. The research design, methods,

and methodologies therefore employed interpretive methods to gain knowledge through social constructions, shared meanings, documents, tools, and other artifacts.

Design

Creswell (2013) describes research design as the intersection of research innovation, inquiry strategies, and specific methods and procedures. The research design reflects the researcher's "general orientation about the world and the nature of the study and is shaped by her/his discipline, personal and research experiences, and the beliefs and orientation of an adviser, advisory committee, or prominent scholars in the chosen field of study" (VanLeeuwen, Guo-Brennan, & Weeks, 2017).

The discussion of the research design elements aligns the study purpose, RQ, and RIs with the innovation, methods, and instruments. The AR cycle incorporated in and through each of the previous cycles of research provided the flexibility for balancing the research design elements with the guiding research methodological perspectives. This section begins by introducing the innovation and procedure for implementation. Next, the data sources and study sample are introduced. The section concludes with a detailed description of the research methods and data collection instruments.

Innovation

In Chapter 1, I provided a detailed contextual analysis of the preparedness of the KISS community to implement a school-wide PLC based on an expanded MEOSIS program. I concluded that the fluid structure of MEOSIS and its documented success in achieving change in school and student performance created the school-wide environmental conditions necessary for successful expansion of the model. Blankenship

and Ruona (2007) compared six major PLC models and concluded that, despite variances across the models, successful PLC implementation was dependent on four critical components: (1) membership, (2) leadership, (3) culture, and (4) knowledge sharing. The new MEOSIS featured specific structural mechanisms, supported by TLT and ARCs in each of the four critical areas identified by Blankenship and Ruona (2007), to guide the description and theoretical basis for the structure, framework, and guiding principles of the innovation. This section is a detailed description of the expanded school-wide innovation based in MEOSIS, but transformed by the incorporation of the ARCs model and TLT.

Description. Transforming MEOSIS into a school-wide innovation commenced with a renaming of the framework. MEOSIS became "KISS Teachers Socially Moving Our Community Higher" (SMOOCH). The renaming of MEOSIS was a critical step in the implementation process. Rebranding MEOSIS with a new name captured the school-wide expansion, the alignment of primary and secondary school processes, and the renewed focus on improving student achievement. SMOOCH came to be referred to, in jest, as "KISS Teachers SMOOCHing". The play on words signified the general loose structure of SMOOCH and, perhaps, a subconscious reference to the collaborative spirit the innovation came to embody.

Membership. Membership, or participation, in SMOOCH was an expected job duty for all KISS faculty members. All KISS employee contracts contained the clause:

> The Teacher shall participate in a weekly or biweekly professional development meeting or refresher courses on a regular basis as well as any other training

> organized by the School. Notwithstanding that these courses may be arranged outside of school hours, the Teacher is required to attend such training and is considered to be compulsory.

Mandatory participation was a feature of MEOSIS in the KISS primary school and of the Working Groups (WGs) in the KISS secondary school, previously. SMOOCH replaced both initiatives and filled the *collaborative team meeting and planning time* contractual requirement.

The SMOOCH design incorporated the ARCs model. For example, the process for forming the collaborative teams was changed to overcome some of the observed weaknesses in MEOSIS and in the WGs. Collaborative teams were formed organically in the MEOSIS program, leading to the formation of, as one teacher told me, "rival groups, struggles for power almost like something out of a Hollywood movie about high school". Blankenship and Ruona (2007) identified this phenomenon and discuss its role in limiting innovation and promoting exclusivity. SMOOCH was designed to maintain the openness of the collaborative team formation process, while adding some basic qualifiers. Groups were limited, in line with the PLC structure espoused by Dufour and Eaker (1998) and Hord and Sommers (2008), to eight members and should consist of at least a representative from the primary school and the secondary school, a non-teaching staff member, as well as a member of the school's leadership team.

Leadership. The most basic, yet seemingly the most elusive, transformational leadership quality is the establishment of a clear organizational vision. The ARCs models

provides a practical pathway for leaders to begin implementing transformational leadership strategies. The clear structure, procedures, direction, and goals inherent in an ARC provide the crucial first steps for leaders to begin taking responsibility for organizational change. The SMOOCH framework was developed collaboratively between teachers, parents, myself (the researcher), and school leadership. The structure of SMOOCH demonstrated how ARCs naturally created opportunities for transformational leadership qualities to flourish.

SMOOCH drew on the Data Wise Improvement Process (Boudett & City, 2014) to improve meeting structure and knowledge dissemination process. Boudett and City (2014) contend that teachers need "to feel challenged by the exchange of ideas and the weight of the objectives, but not to feel confused by a lack of clarity about purpose, process, or next steps" (p. 85). The Data Wise Improvement Process established a clear framework for SMOOCH meeting structure, purpose, and accountability. Table 2 displays the framework, overarching structure, purpose, actions, and timeline of the SMOOCH innovation.

Table 2

The SMOOCH innovation—Structure, Purpose and Timeframe

Step	Purpose	Action	Timeline
Build data literacy	Identify priority organizational	Professional development by KISS data team on interpreting	February 2018

	problem of practice	school data	
Organize for collaborative work	Establish structures, teams, and individual roles	Introduce "Data-Wise" meeting agenda template and establish meeting norms and protocols	February 2018
Develop action plan and dissertation proposal	Establish clear actionable steps to address or further examine the problem	Action plan completed and presented to school leadership and dissertation proposal submitted	February 2018
Phase one	Establish baseline data	Gather input and additional data from the wider KISS community	February 2018
Phase one data analysis	Review and adjust innovation	Prepare for phase two of study	April 2018
Phase two	Check progress and gather midpoint data	Conduct teacher focus group, informal interviews, and continue observations and reflections	April 2018
Phase three	Collect final data	Conduct exit interviews and second administration of PTSCS	June 2018
Analyze data results	Interpretive and Iterative analysis	Make initial recommendations to leadership	June 2018

Note. Adapted from the Data Wise Improvement Process (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013)

KISS leadership and administrators led a unified rollout of the program during a professional development day. The researcher presented the results of previous cycles of research and the teacher survey, followed by school leaderships presentation of SMOOCH according to the details of SMOOCH laid out in a previous section. Individual PLCs conducted their first meeting during the last half of the professional development day. I, as the researcher, collected field notes and audio recordings of individual meetings, but I was also actively involved in a PLC as an equal teacher participant.

Culture. School leadership is crucial to creating and maintaining a school culture that embraces a professional learning community as a tool for creating positive change. When I previously interviewed KISS secondary school teachers, I found strong correlations between lower rates of job satisfaction and feelings of lacking purpose. Many teachers cited unproductive meetings, feelings of "meeting for the sake of meeting", and a lack of response from school leadership regarding important issues. The individual meeting structure, norms, and protocols concerning how the various collaborative teams conduct and approach the problem-solving process was also noted. SMOOCH established a common system and language, which was used to connect the various collaborative teams and maintain the collective focus on the overarching school mission.

SMOOCH established some basic logistical plans, including a maximum time limit of one hour per meeting and a minimum of three meetings per month. KISS leadership allowed individual collaborative teams to establish their own meeting times. Additionally, KISS leadership encouraged collaborative teams to experiment with holding virtual meetings or other innovative ideas in place of some of the traditional face-

to-face meetings. These are examples of the transformational leadership decision-making qualities, indicating that ARCs promote transformational change in line with TLT. It also confirmed that the contextual and cultural situation at KISS was favorable for SMOOCH and that the school leaders were highly engaged in the implementation process.

Knowledge sharing. SMOOCH established individual meeting guidelines by adapting the guiding "Meeting Wise Checklist" (Boudett & City, 2014, figure 2.1). Appendix A contains the "Good SMOOCHing Guide", which was designed to provide general guidance to meeting structure, participant roles, and general expectations. More importantly, the "Good SMOOCHing Guide" served as the primary tool for groups to guide their development of effective meeting agendas. Boudett and City (2014) proposed that meeting agendas are a highly effective tool for guiding collaborative work, increasing communication between teachers and leadership, and positively impacting innovation success.

SMOOCH provided consistent structure throughout each collaborative meeting through the expansion of an existing meeting agenda template, the "Data Driven Decision-Making (DDD) Meeting Agenda", already in use by the KISS data team. The DDD Meeting Agenda is based on the Data Wise Improvement Process and the "Meeting Wise Checklist". SMOOCH fully adopted the DDD Meeting Agenda, but changed its title to "SMOOCHing Minutes". Each collaborative team used the "SMOOCHing Minutes" as a common template to guide the structure of individual SMOOCH meetings. The "SMOOCHing Minutes" exemplified a focused group meeting agenda tasked with a specific purpose, a common approach for assessing, and a clear process for reflection and

refinement. Boudett and City (2014) identified an effectively constructed meeting agenda as a primary mechanism for establishing clear expectations and encouraging participation. Appendix B contains a template copy of the "SMOOCHing Minutes".

Procedure

This cycle of study occurred over three main phases beginning in February of 2018 and ending late in June of 2018. Phase one of the study began with the preparations for implementing the SMOOCH innovation, initial teacher surveys, and opening teacher and leader interviews. Phase one concluded after the first SMOOCH meetings were conducted. Phase two of the study was focused on collecting new qualitative data through observations and reflective journaling of the various weekly SMOOCH meetings. Archival data from SMOOCH meeting minutes was also heavily scrutinized for areas of weakness and opportunities for improvement. In addition to this, phase one data was analyzed for actionable information. Phase three of this research cycle continued with the qualitative data collection and analysis procedures used in the previous phases. Phase three concluded with a series of semi-structured exit interviews and a second administration of the teacher survey from phase one.

Each phase of research aligned with basic principles of human interactions. Social interactions are predicated on a cycle of understandings and interpretations, followed by new understandings and interpretations of those experiences. Phase one of the research project was predicated on three initial understandings (IUs). The IUs aligned directly to the guiding research inquiries introduced previously in this chapter. Phase two of the research project focused on examining the new understandings (NUs) formed during the

first two-thirds of the study process. Phase three generated three new interpretations (INTs) of the completed data set. Each NU and INT was a re-examination of the research inquiries. Individually, they capture snapshots of individual experiences and interactions. Collectively, they effectively capture the nuanced changes of the larger organization. Figure 8 displays the process for creating and informing the understandings generated from this cycle of research.

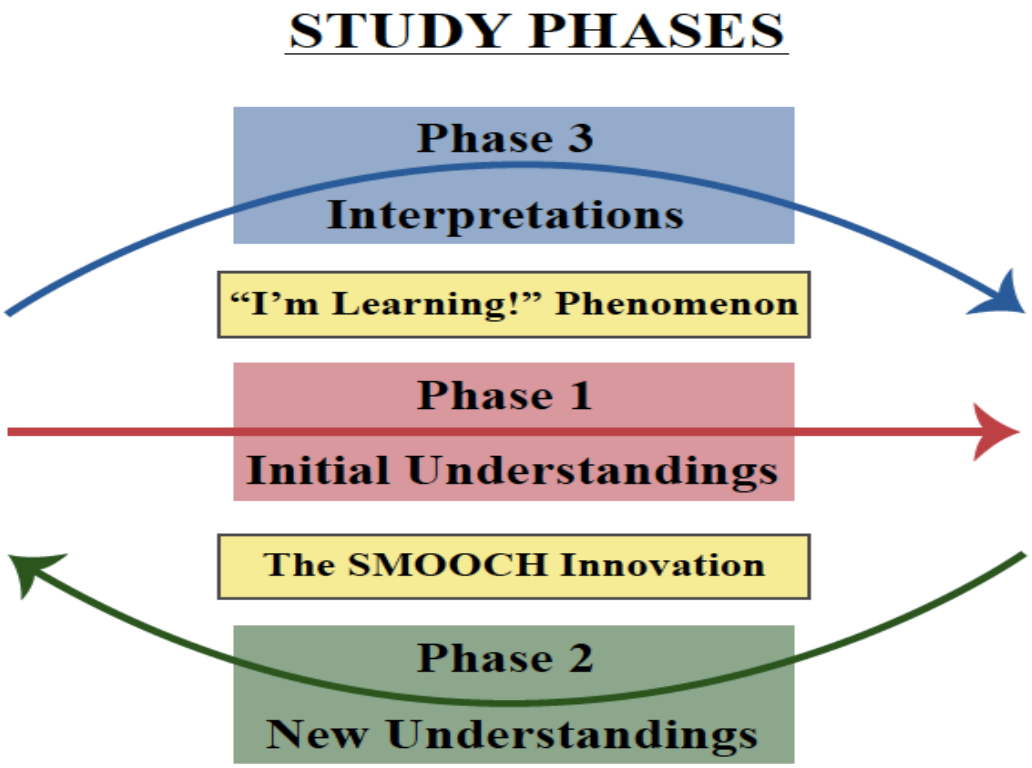


Figure 8.

Sources

Traditional scientific research, in general, obtains its data from a single source. Lewin (1944) first proposed a model for scientific research, which included a second data source. The model became known as Action Research. AR incorporated and prioritized

data generated by the research and the organization alongside participant data. This is a vital concept concerning the rest of this paper, as the two data sources lie at the center of any discussion of research methods, data analysis, and the subsequent findings. Figure 9 displays a visual of the two data sources. The researcher, alongside the local organization (KISS leadership and administrative team members) comprise the contextual data sources, while simultaneously serving as the co-producer of data with the study participants (KISS faculty and staff).

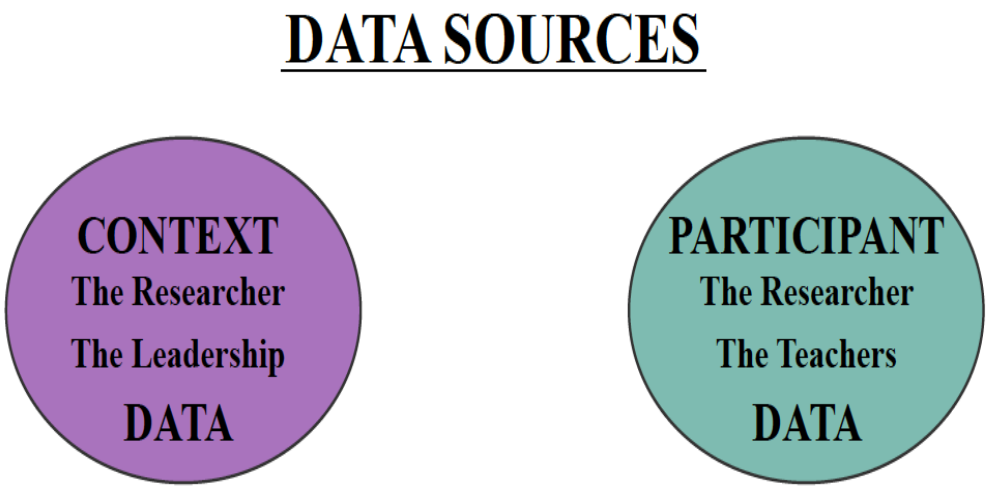


Figure 9.

Carr and Stephen's (McNiff, 1988) quote, used to open this chapter, reminds us that only when individual members of a profession or organization are empowered to make autonomous judgements independent of the organizational decisions will an action be adopted and embraced. In other words, a study involving the understanding of the effects an administrative action or intervention has must include an examination of the study participants alongside their context. The context and the participants both provided a continuous source of new and old information. Each source provided

meaning to the other through their interactions. The "two-way" street of information and data between the context and the participants provided the required environment and a joint data set for simultaneously studying the social aspects of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon and the SMOOCH innovation.

Sampling

Sampling methods and procedures focused on generating a representative sample of the contextual and participant data sources capable of capturing the perspectives and feelings of the organization and their response, through SMOOCH, to the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. The context data samples and methods were designed to provide a generalized, yet deep understanding of interactions, relationships, and understandings that occurred between KISS leadership and KISS teachers. Sampling procedures were designed to study SMOOCH as an administrative action or innovation. The context sample pool was decidedly smaller and more sensitive to privacy concerns than the participant sample. Privacy concerns led the KISS leadership team to revoke their consent for participation in the leadership survey after the dissertation proposal process. Therefore, information on the context data sources was gathered solely through qualitative research methods.

Qualitative data was gathered using the purposive sampling method, as described by Creswell (2015). Participants were intentionally selected because of their unique positioning or ability to deepen understanding of the SMOOCH program and the perceptions and feelings of the larger participant pool (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Volunteer

participants were selected based on their ability to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other sources (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

Participant. The participant data sample consisted of KISS primary and secondary school teachers and leaders, who were current and active employees at the time of the study. I, as the action researcher, considered myself as a member of the participant sample, however my personal perspective was held to be unique and distinct from the rest of the participant sample. Additionally, study participants were viewed as a fluid data source. Sixty out of seventy-five teachers returned "consent for participation" forms. The high number of participants allowed for the researcher to conduct and engage in a high number of informal discussions and interactions with the participant data source. Of the sixty consenting participants, five teachers were chosen for the formal semi-structured interviews, which occurred during phase one and phase three. Ten additional teacher participants participated in the teacher focus group during phase two. Anonymized quantitative survey data gathered from the participant source was provided by KISS. Survey participants numbered seventy-five out of seventy-seven KISS teaching staff.

Context. The context sample included the administration and leadership team members, who are considered to be representatives of the larger KISS organizational system. The leadership team included: (1) KISS Head of Schools, (2) primary and secondary principals, assistant principals, and (3) curriculum coordinators. The context data source consisted of ten members. Eight out of ten KISS leadership team members returned consent for participation forms. I, as the researcher, was also considered a source

of context data due to my role as researcher and my representation of the larger educational organization.

Methods

The research approach for this study used a mixed-methods design, relying heavily on the cyclical structure of AR to inform both the quantitative and qualitative methods. The research methods were designed to examine the interactions between the participant and context data sources using a mixed-methods approach. Data were gathered in three phases previously introduced as the IUs, NUs, and INTs. The study framework was designed to provide deeper insights into the social aspects concerning the RQs and RIs. Figure 9 captures how the social experiences and new learnings of each data source was measured. The framework focused the data collection methods on contextual data and participant data sources equally. Additionally, the framework's design allowed the researcher to achieve research validity and reliability while simultaneously representing both the context and participant data sources.

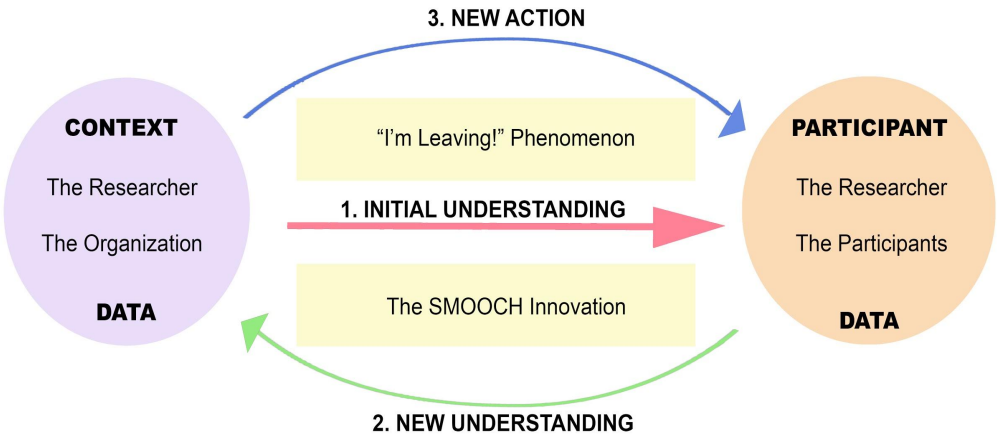


Figure 10.

Instruments

Data collection served as the core tenet for this research study. The action research cycle was useful for establishing data collection methods capable of producing clear, reliable, and valid results and interpretations in the unstable and inconsistent measuring of an inter-subjective phenomenon, like the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. The AR cycle provided the process for continuously collecting data, reflecting on the meaning of the data, and establishing meaning in the interactions between participants and context was invaluable. The data collection tools used in this AR cycle included teacher surveys, researcher field notes and reflective journaling, teacher interviews, and an archival records review.

Survey. Quantitative data was collected using the Panorama Teacher School Climate Survey (PTSCS). The PTSCS is designed to gather feedback on the school and institutional issues that teachers are facing, ranging from teacher feelings about professional learning, administrator feedback, and coaching. Additionally, the PTSCS is customizable and can be tailored to measure teacher–family relationships, teacher future plans, staff–leadership relationships, and overall job satisfaction in relation to each measured subset. The PTSCS features interactive results and comparisons, which are specifically designed to identify the factors teachers care most about (Panorama Education, 2015). The PTSCS can collect data covering fourteen constructs related to teacher perceptions of:

- School Climate
- Professional Learning
- Teaching Efficacy
- Feedback and Coaching

- Staff-Leadership Relationships
- Educating All Students
- School Leadership
- Testing
- Faculty Growth Mindset
- Staff-Family Relationships
- Evaluation
- Student Mindset
- Resources
- Grit

The PTSCS is constructed using a five-point Likert scale to measure each item. Completion time averages between twenty-five and thirty minutes. Surveys were completed using the online survey format. The survey is open-source and free to use, as long as appropriately identified as the Panorama Teacher School Climate Survey. Responses were analyzed using the Panorama Education online analytics tool and reported descriptive statistics including: the measures of central tendencies, the measures of spread, and frequencies. PTSCS data results were provided to all members of staff. Results were anonymized and visually displayed in multiple formats on the Panorama Education website (www.panoramaed.com), as well as in hard copy forms (Panorama Education, 2015).

The design of each PTSCS item adheres to the science of best survey design practices (Fowler, 2013). I evaluated the PPTSCS for some of the most common mistakes in survey design. For example, survey items, particularly ones that require respondents to agree or disagree, are likely to inject additional measurement error into responses. Asking questions with response options that are linked to the underlying concept is the preferred practice (Fowler, 2013). The PTSCS labels all response options using verbal rather than numeric labels, and uses a stable and adequate number of response options, all of which

adhere to best practices (Fowler, 2013). Adherence to best practices was confirmed during the validity and reliability studies conducted using the six-step design process developed by Gehlbach and Brinkworth (2011).

The open availability and flexibility of the PTSCS design, construction, and deployment made it a valuable tool for measuring specific constructs related to teacher perceptions of a school's climate. I was able to isolate survey components and questions that were directly related to my RQ components addressing *teacher perceptions of school leadership effectiveness* and the teachers' perceived *role in the school decision-making process* variables, as well as informing my guiding RIs. The PTSCS and the Leadership Styles and Climate Survey (LSCS) were used to measure changes in teacher views of the general school climate and perceptions of school leadership, before and after the implementation of SMOOCH. The PTSCS was administered at the beginning and conclusion of the study.

Interviews. Teacher interviews were conducted with six study participants, five teachers, and one leader. Initial and exit interviews followed a semi-structured style. Interview questions focused on understanding feelings of satisfaction, perceptions of school leadership, and their view of the future organizational directions. Interview items encouraged interviewees to provide honest reflections about their feelings and perceptions of SMOOCH and how their feelings and perceptions may or may not have changed in relation to the RQ and RIs.

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed using an iterative process following the constant comparative method developed by Corbin and Strauss

(1998). Initial codes were reduced to descriptive codes from which pattern codes were then identified (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used computer qualitative data analysis computer software, HyperResearch, to assist in developing categories and themes from the interview data, which were then explored further using analytic memoing techniques (Saldaña, 2016). Interview data was further examined for connections to other sources of qualitative and quantitative data collected.

Field notes. Detailed field notes were collected for all formal observations (SMOOCH meetings and leadership meetings), the teacher focus group, and the leadership roundtable. I observed twenty-five SMOOCH meetings and four KISS leadership team meetings. I also kept extensive field notes from the ten teacher focus groups, which occurred in phase two of the study. Focus group questions centered on gauging the teacher understandings of a professional learning community, exploring the previous experiences teachers may have had with a professional learning community, as well as, assessing the general attitude toward participating in a professional learning community at KISS.

Field notes formed a large portion of the qualitative data collection. SMOOCH was introduced and implemented on a tight timeframe. The speed of change required data from each study phase to be collected and analyzed quickly in order to inform the next study phase. Stewart and Shamdasani (2014) support reviewing field notes and recordings of observations and focus groups in lieu of analysis techniques requiring transcription when quick turnaround is required. Field notes were reviewed using more

formal qualitative analysis procedures for identifying general themes, commonalities, and differences between data instruments and sources.

Reflective journaling. Reflective journaling occurred an average of five times per week throughout the course of the study. Journal entries represented my personal reflections of the daily experiences, interactions, and informal discussions related to the RQ and RIs. Reflective journaling as a qualitative data collection procedure is effective for achieving methodological rigor. Additionally, journal entries expose the personal researcher bias and effectively made the research process and action steps during the research cycle visible. Reflective journaling was also effective in allowing for and documenting changes to the research design and methods (Denzin, 1994; MacNaughton, 2001). Finally, reflective journaling was a valuable instrument source in the data analysis process to triangulate inferences gathered from other quantitative and qualitative data sources.

Archival data. Archival data collection and analysis served a special role throughout each phase of the study. Archival data collection and analysis followed the methodological structure proposed by Fischer and Parmentier (2010) for understanding the perspectives of specific individuals. Archival data collection and review prompted the researcher to "consider the circumstances under which the data was created, the limitations on the perspectives of those who created it, and the possible motivations that shape what is included and omitted, and how the phenomenon of interest is portrayed" (p. 799).

Archival data collection consisted of information from a wide array of materials individuals have, intentionally or unintentionally, compiled for personal reasons. These sources, which were once highly personal and difficult to find, are now increasingly made public through social media, blogs, and other online sources. Studies since the mass public adoption of these platforms have effectively illustrated the disconnections between what study participants often say in interviews, report in surveys, and discuss in focus groups with what they actually do outside of the study (Chong, 2010). Therefore, archival data information was used as a checking mechanism for the researcher to confirm or contest research findings.

Methodologies

In Chapters 1 and 2 I established my personal and the larger contextual setting surrounding this research inquiry. I also provided a broad picture of the study participants and the social context in which they operate and work within. Chapter 3 has, thus far, aligned the research design, the study purpose, the RQ, and the RIs. This section extends the alignment of the researcher study to include the research methodologies used to justify the research design.

Hermeneutics

The AR cycle shown above provided a consistent and practical structure for examining the effects of the SMOOCH innovation, but the AR cycle alone does not provide the structure for achieving a deeper understanding of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. Hermeneutics provided the research methodology for examining the deep social aspects, personal experiences, and their relationships required for understanding

the individual decision-making process. Mixed-methods research design assumes that the combination of data approaches provide a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone. My use of the hermeneutics moved my research to the deeply personal level required for understanding the individual.

Hermeneutics is based in the religious textual analysis of seventeenth century protestant theologians. However, when the approach was applied to human studies by western philosophers, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and others, they discovered a powerful tool for uncovering the "hidden" meanings and intentions buried within the text or data (Crotty, 1998; Lindseth, & Norberg, 2004). The key understanding when implementing hermeneutical methods is the "recognition that basic philosophical assumptions inform our interpretations and our assumptions about what we are seeing and how we are making sense of what we see" (Higgs, Paterson, & Kinsella, 2012, Para 4).

Hermeneutical approaches are fundamentally different from other research methodologies. Hermeneutics uses an inductive approach to achieve a holistic perspective. This is wholly different to traditional approaches, which are reductionistic in nature, in that they first develop a system of categories into which data are coded. A hermeneutical analysis moves beyond simply identifying important themes into showing the interrelationships of the important themes. Hermeneutics provides the methodology for retaining the rich characterization of the individual as a human, and not simply a category or something assigned to a theme (Patterson & Williams, 2002, pp. 45–46).

Hermeneutic Circle and PHMRLE

The hermeneutic circle (HC) and the Phenomenological Hermeneutics Method for Researching Lived Experience (PHMRLE) were used to understand the meaning-making process and interactions between the phenomenon and the innovation. A hermeneutical approach is cyclical process, known as the HC, where researcher and participant develop a shared understanding and meaning through a dialogue. The conversation between the participant and the inquirer is how knowledge is created and understood (Koch, 1999). It is through the HC that the researcher attempts to makes sense of the "the whole" by grasping its parts and comprehending the meaning of the parts divining the whole (Crotty, 1998). It is through this process, or circle, that hermeneutics became valuable for understanding the complex social world surrounding KISS teachers and leaders.

PHMRLE, originally developed in 1989 by Drs. Lindseth and Norberg, is based on the work of Paul Ricoeur (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004) and provides the ideal structure for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data using hermeneutics. PHMRLE required me to shift my attitude away from the natural attitude where I have already made judgments about the existence of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon, to a phenomenological attitude where I refrain from judgment in lieu of deeply examining and explaining the learning process. The concern for PHMRLE is not in statement of facts, or an examination of the direct effects of an innovation, but, rather, in the relating of what participants have experienced (Lindseth, & Norberg, 2004).

PHMRLE, which concerns itself with understanding rather than explaining research findings, provided the structural framework for the hermeneutical methodology.

PHMRLE focused the understanding of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon directly on the individual participants and their actual lived experiences. Data interpretations codify the unique meaningful units that the researcher derived through the process in order to create new understandings and future innovation. The dialogue between participant and context creates new understandings, updated perceptions, and individual meaning-making. As new knowledge and understanding was derived from the hermeneutical analysis it was incorporated into the overarching action research design.

The primary concern of hermeneutical research is concerned with finding meaning in the complex, cloudy, and often contradictory feelings and experiences of the participants. Hermeneutics provided the pathway towards understanding for the researcher, the participant, and the larger contexts (Gadamer, 1994). Figure 11 aligns the HC and PHMRLE research methods with the research design. The flexibility and utility of hermeneutic constructs for gathering and interpreting information from a multiplicity of data collection techniques made its application in this study a powerful technique for bridging the gap between theory and implementation.

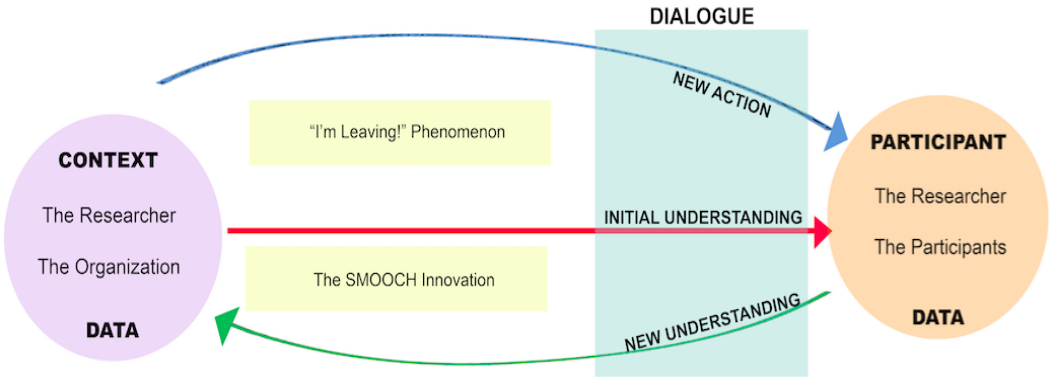


Figure 11.

Action Research-Hermeneutical Analysis Framework (ARHAF)

The HC and PHMRLE provided the data analysis methodology for examining the social aspects related to the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. Hermeneutical research is a cycle that required the researcher to analyze the data set multiple times and revise understandings each time based on new insights, discoveries, and information. The process may not necessarily ever be "completed", but a certain level of data "saturation" was achieved. Action research and hermeneutical studies can and often do serve as stand-alone frameworks for research studies. However, the combination of the models into a single framework provides an extremely potent research methodology. Twinomurinzi and Phahlamohlaka (2005) first introduced the Action Research-Hermeneutical Analysis Framework (ARHAF). They successfully demonstrated the ARHAF in their analysis of web-based group support systems in South Africa. Figure 12 shows an adapted version of the ARHAF model used as the guiding methodological perspective in this study.

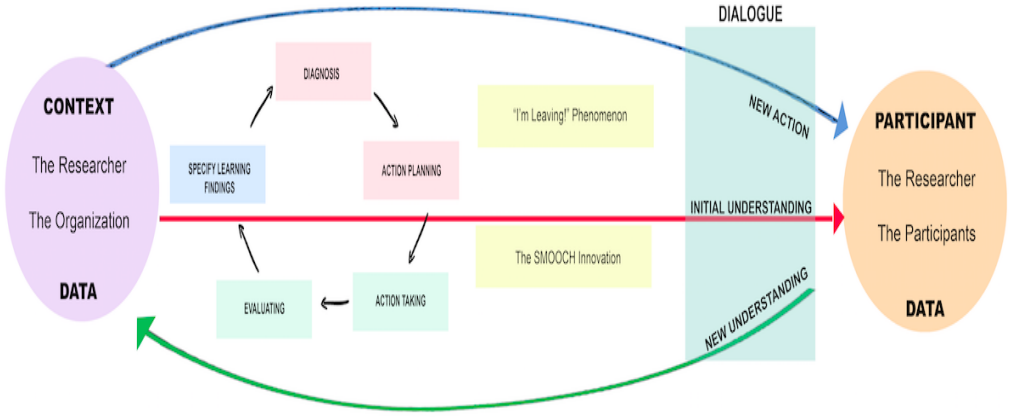


Figure 12.

The ARHAF data analysis framework uses the relationship between the hermeneutics and action research to build understanding and guide future action and discussion of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. The HC and PHMRLE were grounded in the AR cycle throughout the three phases of the research study. Each stage of the process led to new understandings, learnings, or actions. The AR cycle and hermeneutics required a consistent process and procedure to achieve reliable and valid findings for each cycle of research. The data analysis and interpretation structure is achieved through the constant moving between all of the collected data, the researchers personal experiences, and the understandings from the existing research to identify significant meaningful units (Twinomurinzi & Phahlamohlaka, 2005).

The structure is both interpretive and iterative, with findings from each forming the next steps of the research. Initial understandings of the context were derived from the diagnosing and action planning stages of the action research cycle. Data was then collected from participants and was fed back to the context during the action taking and evaluation stages. Finally, the new contextual understandings were codified into specific learnings and new interpretations of the lived experiences of study participants.

Validity and Reliability

Any hermeneutical study poses a validity risk. Hirsh (1967) criticized hermeneutics because the circularity of the data collection and analysis easily leads the inquirer to collect evidence which "tends to support his hypothesis because much of it is constituted by his hypothesis" (p. 166). The cycle may lead to the failure to see beyond the evidence and result in a self-confirming hypothesis. Freeman (2011) countered

validity criticisms of hermeneutical studies by challenging the traditional notions of validity. By applying a framework originally developed by Cho and Trent (2006), hermeneutical research studies achieve validity (i.e. the correctness of a description, conclusion, explanation, or interpretation) through the presentation of the work in a way that opens experience and dialogue (Maxwell, 2005, p. 106; Freeman, 2011, p. 544). Validity is about achieving truth, and truth in hermeneutical research lies in the process of "thinking out loud"—it is about describing the contradictions, the miscues, the misunderstanding (Freeman, 2011; Shank, 2006).

Freeman (2011) contends that validity is not determined by a predetermined set of rules or constructs, rather it is "the philosophical or theoretical orientation of the study determines the kind of validity questions that matter" (p. 544). Validity is achieved when the reader believes what is being conveyed. Truth, or validity, lies not in the results but in the story or explanation of how the researcher comprehended the phenomenon. Hermeneutical research can only achieve validity by crafting "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973).

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The first step is to measure whatever can be easily measured. This is OK as far as it goes. The second step is to disregard that which can't be easily measured or to give it an arbitrary quantitative value. This is artificial and misleading. The third step is to presume that what can't be measured easily really isn't important. This is blindness. The fourth step is to say that what can't be easily measured really doesn't exist. This is suicide.

—McNamara's Fallacy (Handy, 1994, p. 221)

Data are just summaries of thousands of stories—tell a few those stories to make the data meaningful.

—Dan & Chip Heath, Made to Stick (2007)

The high attrition rate of teachers is a terrible loss of human capital. High attrition rates disrupt program continuity and increase costs, thereby creating ceiling effects for student achievement (Minerick, Thornton, & Perreault, 2003). My personal experiences working in schools with high teacher attrition rates confirmed that studies of teacher retention could provide significant insight into improving student achievement. The opening three chapters established the existence and importance of studying and understanding more deeply the issues surrounding teacher retention and attrition; the shared experiences and the meanings of those experiences comprise the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon.

A phenomenon, by definition, is a circumstance or occurrence which is ideal for research because changes in an individual's perceptions, feelings, and experiences can be observed and measured (Izard, 2009). Kodiak International School Singapore (KISS) provided a unique setting to examine the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. KISS was experiencing a higher than expected teacher attrition rate prior to this research study. A

review of KISS data identified that a disproportionate number of teachers were leaving the KISS secondary school compared to the KISS primary school. The KISS primary school was found to be operating a program, Mentoring Each Other's Success In School (MEOSIS), based in PLC ideology. MEOSIS was expanded into a school-wide PLC, coined "KISS Teachers Socially Moving Our Community Higher" (SMOOCH). SMOOCH was based in the Action Research Communities (ARCs) model (Mertler, 2018), based on the model's potential for creating a practical pathway for the transformational change required to address the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon.

Chapter 4 represents the analysis and results of the quantitative and qualitative data collected throughout the SMOOCH project. The study was guided by the following research question (RQ):

1. How and to what extent does the implementation of a PLC impact teacher self-reported feelings of job satisfaction as related to:
    a. school leadership effectiveness?
    b. teacher–leadership relationships?
    c. their professional growth and learning opportunities?

The "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon was further investigated through three initial understandings (IUs) or research inquires (RIs). The research inquiries were:

1. The leadership style(s) of the KISS leaders were inconsistent with transformational leadership style.

2. Increased use of transformational leadership strategies improve teacher feelings of job satisfaction and perceptions of KISS leadership effectiveness.
3. AR and PLCs contribute to a motivating, challenging, and engaging school environment and school culture at KISS.

This chapter opens with a discussion of the framework before procedures for the data analysis are identified and described. This is followed by the presentation of the results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The results were subjected to an additional interpretive analysis using hermeneutics. Figure 13 displays the structure of Chapter 4.

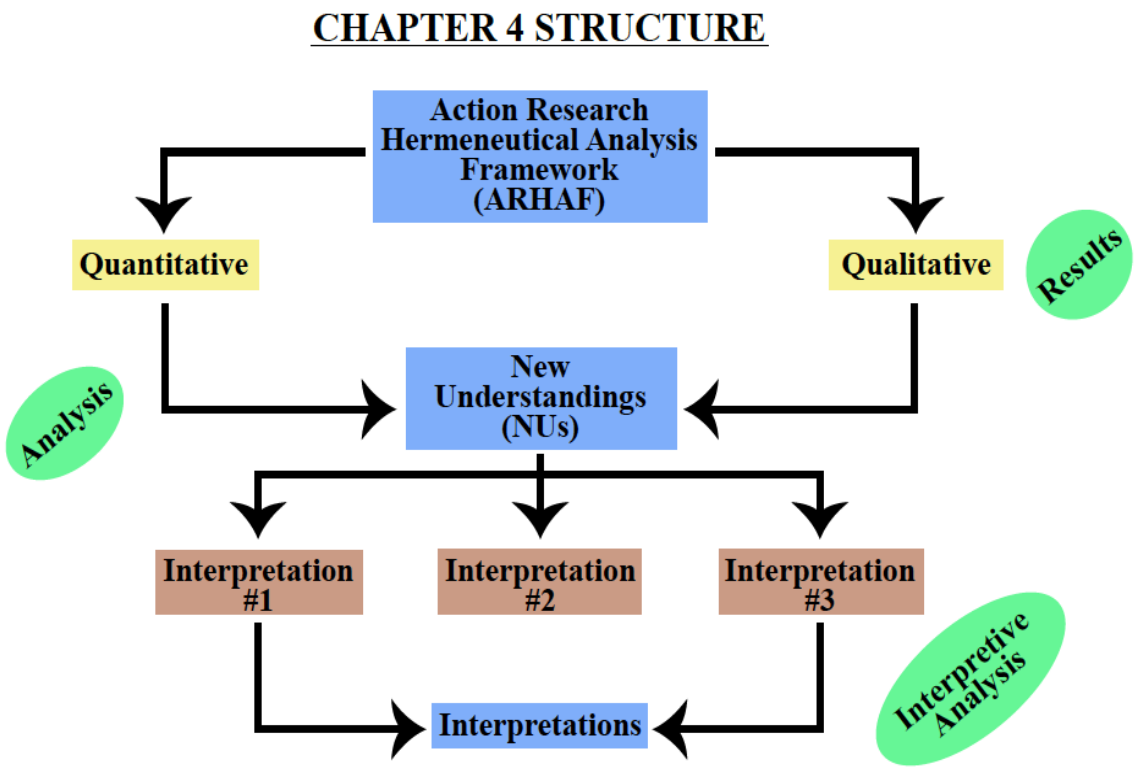


Figure 13.

Analysis

Framework

The Action Research-Hermeneutical Analysis Framework (ARHAF) structure introduced in Chapter 3 provides the framework for the analysis of the results. Table 3 represents the ARHAF grid used to move from the initial understandings (IUs) of participant experiences, to the action planning and implementation of the SMOOCH innovation to being codified into individual meaningful categories, called new understandings (NUs). The NUs are then used to guide the discussion and interpretations (INTs) of the results in the final section. Interpretations of data results are presented in a first person narrative form with each of the significant meaning units guiding the interpretation of the data. The personal narrative form was designed to capture the shared knowledge, insights, and understandings of both the participants and the context, as well as provide guidance to discussion of study conclusions, limitations, and to inform the next cycle of research into the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. The IUs, NUs, and INTs are aligned to the three study phases represented as red, green, and blue respectively; additional alignment with the five AR cycle stages is also displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

ARHAF Procedures

Initial Understandings (IUs)		New Understandings (NUs)		Interpretations (INTs)
Diagnosis (D)	Action Planning (AP)	Action Taking (AT)	Evaluating (EV)	Specify Learning (SL)

IU 1	NU 1	INT 1
IU 2	NU 2	INT 2
IU 3	NU 3	INT 3

Note. Adapted from Twinomurinzi and Phahlamohlaka (2005)

The color codes represented on the framework grid presented in Table 3 match with the different stages of the ARHAF analysis structure displayed in Figure 14. The research methods introduced in Chapter 3 are displayed in the center of the process their primary role within each phase or stage of the study. Each stage of the data analysis structure was aligned with the guiding framework and the three phases of data collection. The alignment of the guiding framework, the data collection process, and the data analysis structure is visually demonstrated through three color codes.

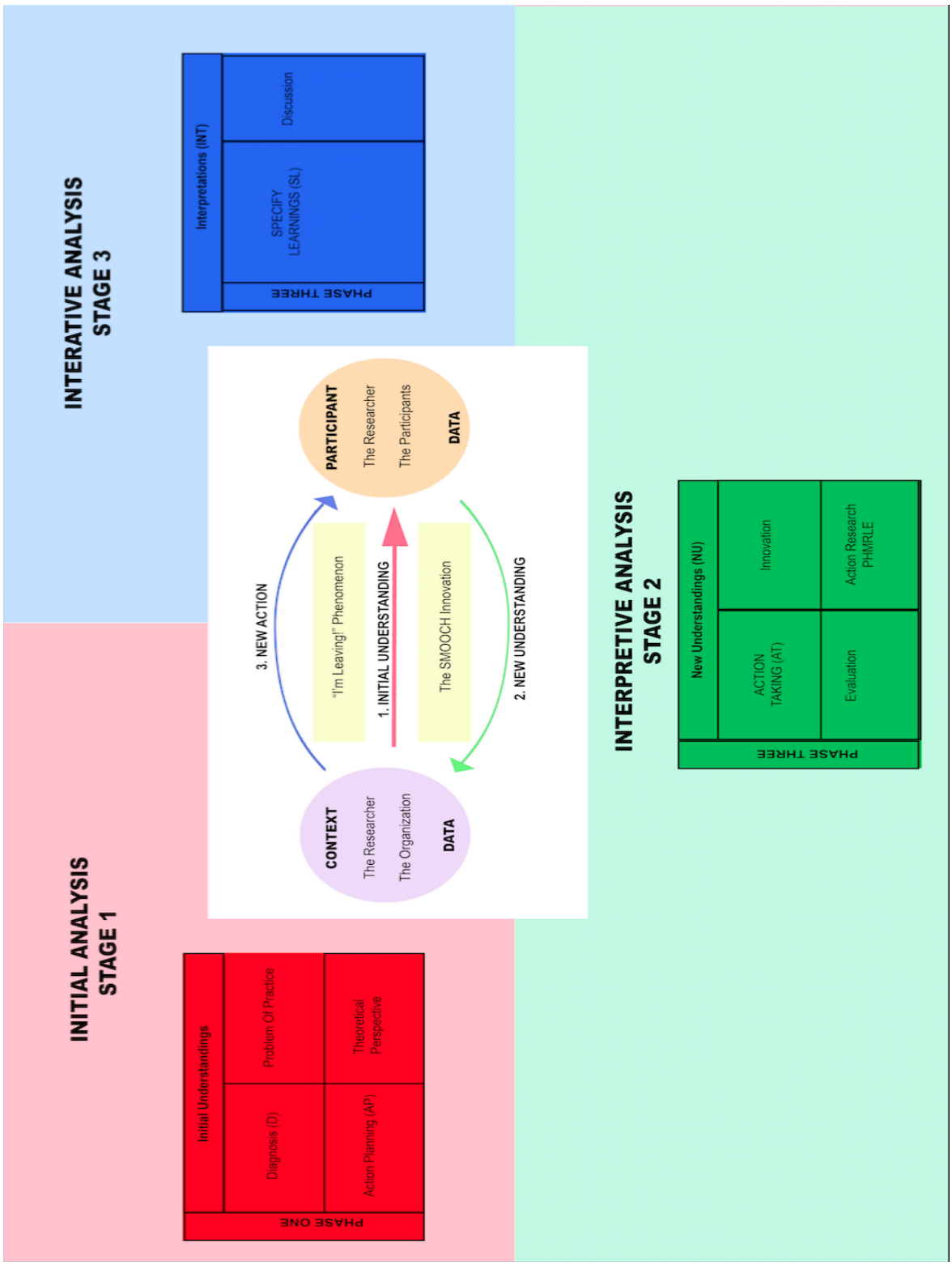

INITIAL ANALYSIS
STAGE 1
PHASE ONE
Initial Understandings
Diagnosis (D)
Problem Of Practice
Action Planning (AP)
Theoretical Perspective
CONTEXT
The Researcher
The Organization
DATA
3. NEW ACTION
"I'm Leaving!" Phenomenon
1. INITIAL UNDERSTANDING
The SMOOCH Innovation
2. NEW UNDERSTANDING
PARTICIPANT
The Researcher
The Participants
DATA
INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS
STAGE 2
PHASE THREE
New Understandings (NU)
ACTION TAKING (AT)
Evaluation
Innovation
Action Research PHMRLE
INTERATIVE ANALYSIS
STAGE 3
PHASE THREE
Interpretations (INT)
SPECIFY LEARNINGS (SL)
Discussion

Figure 14.

Quantitative

Quantitative data was gathered using a pre- and post-intervention teacher survey. The Panorama Teacher School Climate Survey (PTSCS) was administered under the authority of KISS leadership. The researcher was provided with the raw anonymized data and the analysis results automatically calculated using the PTSCS analysis software. PTSCS data were further analyzed using response frequency statistics, paired samples statistics, and a paired samples T-test.

The PTSCS instrument was designed to measure highly subjective variables, making the link between observed variables and latent variables uncertain. The analysis was done to determine the extent or variance in the observed variables and how they are linked to their underlying factors (Woolley & Benjamin, 2004, p. 323). The paired t-test analysis occurred after the data were collected in order to compare responses before and after the SMOOCH innovation. Response frequency means and paired t-test statistical analysis were compared against the null hypothesis that there would be no difference in the mean scores before and after the innovation.

Qualitative

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, field notes taken from direct observations of meetings, focus groups, and informal interviews. Qualitative data occurred continuously through all three phases of the research study. Hermeneutical analysis prioritizes the identification of multiple viewpoints through repeated analysis. Accordingly, the qualitative data results were subject to two different

coding approaches. The coding process in qualitative research is focused on uncovering links and relationships in a systematic and repeatable manner.

In the first cycle of coding, I elected to use the emotion coding technique described by Saldana (2009). Emotion coding examined the changes in feelings and perceptions related to individual teacher and leader emotions. The "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon is highly personal and filled with potentially conflicting feelings. My close relationship with the participants created an environment where participants could be open and honest about their feelings. My research is centered on understanding the feelings that participants have on their feelings of school direction and school leadership. Saldana (2009) advocated for using emotion coding as a first cycle coding approach in order to explore complex social issues.

After the first cycle of coding I employed the "coding the codes" transition approach for understanding the emotion codes and for guiding my choice of coding techniques for my second cycle. "Coding the codes" involved me taking the large number of emotional codes which resulted from my first cycle and reducing them to a more manageable number of codes. I used my close ties and experiences in the context to make some assumptions, which made narrowing my focus easier. I further analyzed the qualitative data using focused coding. Focused coding was chosen because I wanted to focus on finding the feelings and experiences that contributed to one of three codes: *Idealized Influence and Inspiration*, *Intellectual Stimulation*, and *Individualized Consideration*. The contributing data to each focused code was examined for similarities and contrasted with differences found in the other codes during the analysis process.

Using the data analyzed with the HYPEResearch software, I then used the data to draw some conclusions and connect them to RQ and RIs. I used the "code-weaving" technique from Saldana (2013). Code-weaving involved taking the key words and phrases from the coding process and molding them together into a descriptive narrative piece of writing. Over several attempts, I was able to construct a brief using the participants' words that I felt conveyed their feelings and intentions.

Qualitative data collection techniques represented the *dialogue* introduced by Lindseth and Norberg's (1994) Phenomenological Hermeneutic Method for Researching Lived Experiences (PHMRLE). Each dialogue was read through and listened to multiple times to generate an understanding of my own experiences. These "naïve" readings served as the beginning of the hermeneutical analysis process. The naïve readings of the text were coded into meaning units. Meaning units, segments of the interview that are comprehensible on their own, were derived from groups of sentences and were not focused on individual words or phrases, but represented the actual words and phrases used by the interviewee. Meaning units were returned to and revised multiple times in accordance with the hermeneutic circle of analysis (Patterson & Williams, 2002, p. 47). Finally, the text was interpreted and a comprehensive understanding of the *dialogue* was developed (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p. 150). As the comprehensive understanding unfolded, I reflected on meaning, updated my assumptions, and incorporated new observational text and archival data to further illuminate my understanding (p. 151).

The process for developing the hermeneutical organizing system proceeded according to the following steps set out by Patterson and Williams (2002).

1. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed (p. 46).
2. The text was indexed and organized into a spreadsheet for referencing specific units of the text (p. 46).
3. The text was read and re-read. Additionally, the original recording was listened to multiple times to develop an initial understanding of the content (p. 47).
4. Meaning units were identified and marked on the spreadsheet. Meaning units were derived from groups of sentences and were not focused on individual words or phrases, but represented the actual words and phrases used by the interviewee. Meaning units were returned to and revised multiple times in accordance with the hermeneutic circle of analysis (p. 47).
5. Meaning units were then developed into thematic labels, which represented the researcher's analysis or interpretation of what the meaning units revealed regarding the phenomenon being studied, allowing for multiple interpretations to coexist (p. 47–48).
6. The interpretation process was extended through the creation of a visual organizing system, which captured the themes and their interrelationships (p. 48).
7. Interpretations which provided insight into the phenomenon were then written, with empirical data playing a justificatory role, rather than an illustrative role (p. 49).

Results

This section presents a summary of the results for both the participant and context data sources. The analysis methods were employed to identify patterns in the various data

sets, which could be sorted into codes or meaning units so as to give meaning to the results. These key themes from the initial analysis are presented below for both the participant and context data sources. Thick descriptions of quantitative and qualitative data are presented, interpreted, and reinterpreted through the use of a personal narrative and reflection of the data collected from both participant data and context data. Participant data consists of the quantitative and qualitative data concerned with identifying changes in teacher feelings of job satisfaction before, during, and after the implementation of SMOOCH. Context data was focused on the administrative actions of the researcher and the school leadership.

This cycle of research was based on three IUs. These IUs formed the basis for the RQ, RIs, and the guiding theoretical and methodological perspectives. The IUs were:

IU #1 — transformational leadership principles were lacking

IU #2 — participant and organization contexts were prepared for implementation of PLC innovation

IU #3 — increased dialogue would create more positive feelings and perceptions of school climate.

The IUs directly linked to the guiding RQ and RIs, which sought to measure how and to what extent an ARC effected teacher perceptions of leadership effectiveness and their inclusion in the organizational decision-making process. The results of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis are presented below. The results were then subjected to an interpretive analysis using ARHAF for establishing the NUs, based on data analysis results.

The quantitative results report was structured using the three PTSCS leadership sub-constructs as a guide. The qualitative data results were reported and examined using the tenants of core tenants of TLT. The connections between the two guiding structures and the components of the research question are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

Connections Table

TSCS Sub-Construct	Transformational Leadership Quality	Research Question Variable	Research Inquiry
Leadership Effectiveness	Idealized Influence and Inspiration	Teacher satisfaction in relation to perceptions of school leadership effectiveness	The leadership style(s) of the KISS leaders were inconsistent with transformational leadership style
Teacher–Leader Relationships	Intellectual Stimulation	Teacher satisfaction in relation to perceptions of teacher–leader relationships	Increased use of transformational leadership strategies improve teacher feelings of job satisfaction and perceptions of KISS leadership effectiveness
Growth and Learning Opportunities	Individualized Consideration	Teacher satisfaction in relation to perceptions of growth and learning opportunities	AR and PLCs contribute to a motivating, challenging, and engaging school environment and school culture at KISS

Quantitative Results

The quantitative data was collected using the Panorama Teacher School Climate Survey (PTSCS). KISS teachers completed the first administration of the PTSCS during the last week of February 2018 and completed the second administration during the second and third week of June 2018. The PTSCS was used to determine changes in teacher perceptions of school leadership and the wider school climate before and after the implementation of the SMOOCH innovation. The quantitative results are presented below for each of the three PTSCS sub-constructs related to leadership and the research question variables. Quantitative results from the PTSCS were collected and analyzed during both the first and last study phases.

The first PTSCS administration participants consisted of sixty full-time teaching staff, ten part-time teaching staff, and five teaching assistants for a total of seventy-five (n = 75) responses. The second PTSCS administration participant sample included forty-three full-time teaching staff, four part-time teaching staff, and two teaching assistants for a total of forty-nine (n=49) survey respondents, a 35% decrease from the response sample generated in the first TSCS administration. I expected a decreased response rate between administration, but I had not planned for members of the teaching staff not returning for the next academic school year to be excluded from taking the second administration of the PTSCS.

A response frequency analysis is then presented for each sub-construct. Descriptive statistics for the items within each sub-construct were automatically

calculated through the survey software. Mean and median responses are measures of central tendency and were used to determine the average level of responses on the sub-constructs. Standard deviation for each question was computed to determine the overall variability and reliability of responses. The quantitative results section concludes with a paired samples t-test comparing the means of each leadership sub-construct across administrations.

Leadership effectiveness. The PTSCS leadership effectiveness sub-construct was measured through nine questions. Table 5 displays the response anchors for each question. Table 6 displays the response frequency results for each PTSCS administration.

Table 5.

Perceptions of School Leadership Effectiveness

Item	Answer choices				
How clearly do your school leaders identify their goals for teachers?	Not at all clearly	Slightly clearly	Somewhat clearly	Quite clearly	Extremely clearly
How positive is the tone that school leaders set for the culture of the school?	Not at all positive	Slightly positive	Somewhat positive	Quite positive	Extremely positive
How effectively do school leaders communicate important information to teachers?	Not at all effectively	Slightly effectively	Somewhat effectively	Quite effectively	Extremely effectively

How knowledgeable are your school leaders about what is going on in teachers' classrooms?	Not knowledgeable at all	Slightly knowledgeable	Somewhat knowledgeable	Quite knowledgeable	Extremely knowledgeable
How responsive are school leaders to your feedback?	Not at all responsive	Slightly responsive	Somewhat responsive	Quite responsive	Extremely responsive
For your school leaders, how important is teacher satisfaction?	Not important at all	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Quite important	Extremely important
When the school makes important decisions, how much input do teachers have?	Almost no input	A little bit of input	Some input	Quite a bit of input	A tremendous amount of input
How effective are the school leaders at developing rules for students that facilitate their learning?	Not at all effective	Slightly effective	Somewhat effective	Quite effective	Extremely effective
Overall, how positive is the influence of the school leaders on the quality of your teaching?	Not at all positive	Slightly positive	Somewhat positive	Quite positive	Extremely positive

Table 6

Survey Response Frequencies (Leadership Effectiveness Sub-Construct)

Item	Admin	Response frequency percent	Mean	Std deviation

Q1. How clearly do your school leaders identify their goals for teachers?	1	8	12	15	23	17	3.39	1.29
	2	4	7	12	17	9	3.41	1.89
Q2. How positive is the tone that school leaders set for the culture of the school?	1	4	7	8	30	26	3.89	1.15
	2	1	3	12	20	13	3.84	0.96
Q3. How effectively do school leaders communicate important information to teachers?	1	8	13	29	16	9	3.07	1.14
	2	4	9	20	10	6	3.10	1.10
Q4. How knowledgeable are your school leaders about what is going on in teachers' classrooms?	1	10	14	32	10	9	2.92	1.16
	2	4	8	13	12	12	3.41	1.26
Q5. How responsive are school leaders to your feedback?	1	7	8	21	28	11	3.37	1.14
	2	3	4	15	17	12	3.61	1.11
Q6. For your school leaders, how important is teacher satisfaction?	1	7	10	24	20	14	3.32	1.20
	2	3	5	19	14	9	3.42	1.09
Q7. When the school makes important decisions, how much input do teachers have?	1	9	13	29	14	10	3.04	1.18
	2	4	6	20	12	7	3.24	1.11
Q8. How effective are the school leaders at developing rules for students that facilitate their learning?	1	6	13	26	21	10	3.21	1.12
	2	2	5	20	13	9	3.45	1.04

Q9. Overall, how positive is the influence of the school leaders on the quality of your teaching?	1	10	12	35	12	6	2.89	1.09
	2	4	4	18	15	8	3.39	1.11

Admin 1 n=75
Admin 2 n=49

The first administration PTSCS response frequency data from the leadership effectiveness sub-construct generally showed a strong concentration of responses in the middle range of the scale. Eight of the nine questions have a majority of responses in the neutral or within one value of the neutral indicator. This possibly indicates that KISS teachers, prior to the SMOOCH innovation, were: (a) unsure of how they felt about the effectiveness of KISS leadership, (b) did not possess overwhelming confidence in the consistency of school leadership, or (c) did not feel empowered or had not received enough feedback or response from school leadership in areas they valued. Q2, *How positive is the tone that school leaders set for the culture of the school*?, resulted in the most positive responses, with fifty-six of the seventy-five (74.6%) choosing positive item anchors, indicating that KISS teachers believed that their leadership was capable of leading the transformational change process. The high levels of neutral responses limit the conclusions which can be drawn from this analysis, however, neutral responses do support early assumptions that KISS teachers were open to engaging in the SMOOCH innovation.

Second PTSCS administration mean and median data results showed KISS teachers reported a more positive view of the effectiveness of KISS school leadership after the implementation of the SMOOCH innovation. Only one of the nine questions

returned a stagnant result. Q4, *how effectively do school leaders communicate important information to teachers?*, was the only question that returned a relatively stagnant response across administrations, however, mean responses both returned a slightly favorable view of KISS leadership communication before and after the SMOOCH innovation.

Standard deviations (SDs) for the data were relatively high for all questions from the first PTSCS administration. All standard deviations were calculated above 1.00. The high SDs showed the existence of KISS teachers with vastly different views of KISS leadership effectiveness prior to the introduction of the SMOOCH innovation. Q6, *For your school leadership, how important is teacher satisfaction?* and Q1, *How clearly do your school leaders identify their goals for teachers?* returned the highest SDs in the sub-construct. The second PTSCS administration results returned lower SDs across six of the eight questions. The lower SDs could indicate that the SMOOCH innovation helped to establish a more cohesive view of KISS leadership. However, the exclusion of non-returning teachers from the second administration likely resulted in the exclusion of KISS teachers with a more negative view of KISS leadership effectiveness.

Teacher–Leader relationships. The PTSCS teacher–leader relationship sub-construct was measured through nine questions. Table 7 displays the response anchors for each question. Table 8 displays the response frequency results for each PTSCS administration.

Table 7

Perceptions of Faculty and Staff Relationships with Leadership

Item	Answer choices				
How friendly are your school leaders toward you?	Not at all friendly	Slightly friendly	Somewhat friendly	Quite friendly	Extremely friendly
At your school, how motivating do you find working with the leadership team?	Not at all motivating	Slightly motivating	Somewhat motivating	Quite motivating	Extremely motivating
How much trust exists between school leaders and staff?	Almost no trust	A little bit of trust	Some trust	Quite a bit of trust	A tremendous amount of trust
How much do your school leaders care about you as an individual?	Do not care at all	Care a little bit	Care somewhat	Care quite a bit	Care a tremendous amount
How confident are you that your school leaders have the best interests of the school in mind?	Not at all confident	Slightly confident	Somewhat confident	Quite confident	Extremely confident
How fairly does the school leadership treat the staff?	Not fairly at all	Slightly fairly	Somewhat fairly	Quite fairly	Extremely fairly
When you face challenges at work, how supportive are your school leaders?	Not at all supportive	Slightly supportive	Somewhat supportive	Quite supportive	Extremely supportive

How respectful are your school leaders towards you?	Not at all respectful	Slightly respectful	Somewhat respectful	Quite respectful	Extremely respectful
When challenges arise in your personal life, how understanding are your school leaders?	Not at all understanding	Slightly understanding	Somewhat understanding	Quite understanding	Extremely understanding

Table 8

Perceptions of Faculty and Staff Relationships with Leadership

Item	Admin	Response frequency percent					Mean	Std deviation
Q1. How friendly are your school leaders toward you?	1	4	9	15	29	16	3.60	1.13
	2	1	5	12	20	11	3.71	1.00
Q2. At your school, how motivating do you find working with the leadership team?	1	17	20	12	15	11	2.77	1.39
	2	2	3	17	18	9	3.59	1.00
Q3. How much trust exists between school leaders and staff?	1	8	13	19	20	15	3.28	1.27
	2	4	9	9	14	13	3.47	1.29
Q4. How much do your school leaders care about you as an individual?	1	6	8	12	27	22	3.68	1.23
	2	3	4	9	18	15	3.78	1.16

Q5. How confident are you that your school leaders have the best interests of the school in mind?	1	11	20	21	16	7	2.84	1.20
	2	3	4	9	22	13	3.75	1.11
Q6. How fairly does the school leadership treat the staff?	1	10	10	18	23	20	3.41	1.32
	2	3	4	14	18	11	3.60	1.11
Q7. When you face challenges at work, how supportive are your school leaders?	1	9	25	17	17	7	2.84	1.19
	2	2	4	10	22	11	3.73	1.04
Q8. How respectful are your school leaders towards you?	1	6	13	14	27	16	3.45	1.23
	2	1	4	8	25	11	3.83	0.96
Q9. When challenges arise in your personal life, how understanding are your school leaders?	1	10	12	24	19	10	3.09	1.22
	2	3	4	11	23	8	3.59	1.06

Admin 1 n=75
Admin 2 n=49

First administration response frequency data from the teacher–leadership relationship sub-construct revealed a clear distinction between teacher feelings as an individual and as a professional. Three of the nine questions (Q1, Q3, Q4, Q6, and Q8) asked teachers to report on how friendly, caring, and respectful they felt KISS leadership was. These three questions all returned responses with means and medians in the upper range of the scale, suggesting KISS teachers found their interactions with leadership to be

generally positive and professional. However, the four questions (Q2, Q5, Q7, and Q9) associated with the transformational leadership characteristics of motivation, confidence, fairness, and supportive returned much lower results. The results support the understanding that poorly developed relationships left teachers feeling disconnected from leadership and the direction of the school.

Results from the second administration show an increase in teacher perceptions of their relationships with leadership on all four questions associated with transformational leadership qualities. Although KISS teachers felt that their interactions and relationships with KISS leadership were generally good prior to the implementation of the SMOOCH innovation, this did not translate into a belief that KISS leaders were transformational leaders. The mean increase across Q2, Q5, Q7, and Q9 exemplifies that effective teacher–leader relationships require more than an aura of positivity. Effective teacher–leader relationships are deepened when kindness and caring leadership qualities are balanced with a sense of challenge and motivation.

Growth and learning opportunities. The PTSCS growth and learning opportunities sub-construct was measured through eight questions. Table 9 displays the response anchors for each question. Table 10 displays the response frequency results for each PTSCS administration.

Table 9

Perceptions of the Amount and Quality of Growth and Learning Opportunities

Item	Answer choices

Overall, how supportive has the school been of your growth as a teacher?	Not at all supportive	Slightly supportive	Somewhat supportive	Quite supportive	Extremely supportive
At your school, how valuable are the available professional development opportunities?	Not at all valuable	Slightly valuable	Somewhat valuable	Quite valuable	Extremely valuable
How helpful are your colleagues' ideas for improving your teaching?	Not at all helpful	Slightly helpful	Somewhat helpful	Quite helpful	Extremely helpful
How often do your professional development opportunities help you explore new ideas?	Almost never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost all the time

Through working at your school, how many new teaching strategies have you learned?	Almost no strategies	A few strategies	Some strategies	Many strategies	A great number of strategies
How much input do you have to individualizing your own professional development opportunities?	Almost no input	A little bit of input	Some input	Quite a bit of input	A tremendous amount of input
Overall, how much do you learn from the leaders at your school?	Learn almost nothing	Learn a little bit	Learn some	Learn quite a bit	Learn a tremendous amount

Table 10

Perceptions of the Amount and Quality of Growth and Learning Opportunities

Item	Admin	Response frequency percent	Mean	Std deviation

Q1. Overall, how supportive has the school been of your growth as a teacher?	1	8	15	12	23	17	3.35	1.32
	2	1	4	6	24	14	3.94	0.97
Q2. At your school, how valuable are the available professional development opportunities?	1	15	26	19	19	4	2.65	1.16
	2	1	3	12	20	13	3.84	0.96
Q3. How helpful are your colleagues' ideas for ~~improving your teach~~ing?	1	8	13	10	26	18	3.44	1.32
	2	0	1	9	26	15	4.07	0.74
Q4. How often do your professional development opportunities help you explore new ideas?	1	10	18	28	10	9	2.87	1.78
	2	0	1	1	30	17	4.29	0.61
Q5. How relevant have your professional development opportunities been to the content you teach?	1	11	20	21	18	5	2.81	1.16
	2	2	2	10	23	12	3.84	0.99
Q6. Through working at your school, how many new teaching strategies have you learned?	1	7	17	24	20	7	3.04	1.12
	2	0	2	7	25	15	4.08	0.79
Q7. How much input do you have to individualizing your own professional development opportunities?	1	9	18	29	14	5	2.84	1.08
	2	1	2	10	19	17	4.00	0.96
Q8. Overall, how much do you learn from the leaders at your school?	1	13	21	16	16	9	2.80	1.30
		2	2	13	19	13	3.80	1.02

2							

Admin 1 n=75
Admin 2 n=49

Mertler (2016) identifies teacher motivation as a primary factor of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon, concluding that factors of teacher motivation and job satisfaction were highly influenced by the level of investment the organization makes in its teachers. When professional growth and learning opportunities are not present in the day-to-day activities of teachers, "it is as if part of their profession has been taken away from them" (p. 44). Response frequency data results for the growth and learning opportunities PTSCS sub-construct showed a mean growth for each question between administration one and administration two.

Teacher responses to Q4, *How often do your professional development opportunities help you explore new ideas?*, returned the highest mean growth across administrations. Over 95% (n=47) of teacher respondents returned a response of *frequently* or *almost all of the time* to Q4. Conceptually, an effective ARC creates an environment where new ideas and individual creativity are celebrated. Response frequency data comparisons showed a clear improvement in teacher feelings of growth and learning opportunities after the implementation of the SMOOCH innovation. The international school educator values a personal approach to professional development, as evidenced in the results from Table 10.

Quantitative conclusions. The mean score and standard deviation for questions in all three sub-constructs associated with teacher perceptions and feelings of KISS leadership were compared using a paired samples t-test. Measures of central tendency and

standard deviations were computed using the online PTSCS software and then the quantitative analysis software SPSS was used to conduct a deeper statistical analysis of the three sub-constructs, leadership effectiveness, teacher–leadership relationships, and professional growth and learning. Data analysis results from the paired samples statistics are displayed in Table 11 and the results of the paired samples test are displayed in Table 12. Table 13 displays the t-test statistics matrix.

Table 11

Paired Samples Statistics — Leadership Sub-Constructs

Admin 1 n=75 Admin 2 n=49	Administration 1		Administration 2	
Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Construct 1: Leadership Effectiveness	3.23	0.31	3.43	0.21
Construct 2: Teacher–Leadership Relationships	3.22	0.35	3.67	0.12
Construct 3: Growth and Learning Opportunities	2.98	0.28	3.98	0.16

There is strong evidence ($t = 3.23$, $p = 0.004$) that teacher responses to questions in the teacher perceptions of leadership construct improved because of SMOOCH. The statistics show that is a very small probability of the result occurring by chance. The significant difference ($p \geq 0.05$) between the leadership effectiveness sub-construct and the teacher–leadership relationships sub-construct indicate a potential significant difference between the means and this difference may not be due random error. However, there is evidence of a significant relationship ($p \leq 0.05$) between the leadership effectiveness construct and the growth and learning opportunities construct ($p=0.005$), and between the

teacher–leader relationships construct and the growth and learning opportunities construct (p=0.000). Standard deviations between all three sub-constructs was less than .1.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative data results presented below clarified the quantitative data results, deepened the understanding of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon, and provided the basis for interpreting the dialogue between participant and context data sources. Qualitative data was collected through two semi-structured teacher and leadership interview sessions, field notes from formal observations, a teacher focus group, and informal interviews, as well as extensive researcher reflective journaling.

Table 14 summarizes the qualitative data sources and quantity of data gathered from each research phase. The SMOOCH innovation was based on and developed in conjunction with the core principles of Mertler's (2018) Action Research Communities (ARCs) model. The ARCs model provided a practical and natural pathway for KISS leadership to implement transformational leadership techniques and strategies. Qualitative results are presented in a narrative form and organized according to the transformational leadership qualities, *idealized influence*, *intellectual stimulation*, and *individualized consideration.* Transformational organizations are communities of people united and inspired by a common vision collectively concerned with elevating the growth and achievement of each other (Bass, 1999). Qualitative meaning units identified through the qualitative analysis were examined through the lens of Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) and exposed the dialogue between the participant and context data sources.

Table 12

Summary of qualitative data

	Phase 1			Phase 2		Phase 3		
	Interviews	Field notes	Reflective Journal	Field Notes	Reflective Journal	Interviews	Field Notes	Reflective Journal
Number	6		20		22	6		17
Approximate word Count	47,000	30,000	16,000	53,000	20,000	64,000	25,000	13,000
Qualitative codes	24	15	5	12	4	26	12	5

Idealized Influence and Inspirational Leadership. Effective leaders articulate the changes that are required by establishing a shared vision and message. Changes, consistent with this message, are introduced in the daily practices of the organization. Transformational leaders are concerned about organizational renewal and seek to foster organizational cultures that are hospitable and conducive to creativity, problem solving, risk taking, and experimentation (Bass, 1999). The transformational leadership qualities, idealized influence and inspirational leadership, are displayed by leaders of organizations with clear and desirable vision. Transformational leaders set the example for high standards of performance, showing determination and confidence in their followers (Bass, 1999).

KISS school leadership opened itself to transformational change when they supported my first AR project three years prior to this cycle. They invested in me and believed in me. Despite the challenges and the changes, they remained committed to the change process, to me, and to my personal and professional growth. However, the results

and conclusions from previous research cycles showed that many KISS teachers did not feel my same level of satisfaction and support. KISS teachers consistently reported a more negative view of their relationship to KISS leadership. Teachers reported that KISS leadership failed to actively engage them professionally or support them personally. Additionally, KISS teachers felt alienated from the organizational decision-making process leading to a more pessimistic view of the future school direction.

The SMOOCH innovation applied the principles of Mertler's (2018) ARCs model. ARCs create environmental conditions ideal for transformational change led by organizational leaders. Qualitative data results analysis provided evidence that the SMOOCH innovation contributed to an increase in the use of transformational leadership techniques and techniques.

Previously, KISS administered a self-developed school climate survey. The original survey did not adhere to or incorporate basic survey construction principles, nor did it meet basic validity and reliability requirements. The survey was conducted using Google Forms and the anonymity of respondents and responses was not assured. Yuri, a senior school teacher, expressed the viewpoint this way during his initial interview: "everybody knows they do all the school surveys on Google because they will get more positive results". Its poor design was regarded as a sign that school leadership did not actually take the views and opinions of its teachers seriously. The original school climate survey was cited as an example in previous cycles of research as an indicator of a school leadership failing to apply the TLT. IU #1 informed me that KISS teachers generally

reported that they felt school leadership lacked many of the qualities commiserate with transformational leaders and TLT.

Phase one of the study began with a direct response from the KISS organization. KISS leadership contracted an independent assessment of their school climate, which was capable of providing immediate feedback, reliable results, and was robust enough to be used multiple times annually. The PTSCS served as the first independent and anonymized survey of the school climate at KISS. Administration of the PTSCS represented a change from the past leadership actions. KISS teachers viewed the administration of the PTSCS prior to the implementation of the SMOOCH innovation as a signifier of organizational transformation being led by KISS leadership. Teachers were invigorated immediately by a leadership team with a clear vision, a purpose, and a plan.

My first reflective journal entry, dated February 19, captured my first accountings of transformational leadership actions.

> I did not administer the PTSCS or even pick it as the preferred school climate measurement tool. Those were KISS leadership actions. Hopefully, it is something that they follow through on now and in the future . . . So far I have been provided with a level of access to the thinking and decision-making process of school leadership at a level that I have not seen prior.

When the PTSCS was first presented to the teachers it was a direct response to the results of my previous research cycles. My field notes, dated February 20, 2018, quoted the Head of Schools for KISS.

> Bret [me, the researcher] told us [school leadership] that we needed a new and better system for understanding our school community. We have a some big plans that we are ready to roll-out, but we want to be sure we are on the right track. Please take the survey serious, take it home, be honest. Next Friday, we will, together, embark on a new journey.

Field notes also captured the general mood and feelings of the teachers after the announcement of the PTSCS. Cherie said: "It is weird to be taking a school climate survey in the middle of the year, but I feel like they [leadership] are really looking to make some changes".

Marques said:

> He [Head of Schools] seems really excited about something. I have never heard him use words like "journey". Usually, at these meetings, we are just focused on talking about sorting out little problems and who is going on a field trip, and then we all just go hunker down in rooms. Sounds like we will find out what all the hype is about next PD day.

Post PTSCS administration, KISS leadership led the implementation of the SMOOCH innovation. Mertler's (2018) ARCs model was designed to create a school working environment that was both challenging and motivating. KISS teachers responded to the transformational change that was created through the SMOOCH innovation. Through SMOOCH, the KISS climate pivoted towards an action oriented approach. Qualitative data analysis of interviews, field notes, and reflective journal entries from

phase three showed codes related to idealized influence and inspiration increased the most from phase one data analysis.

Chris, a veteran primary school teacher, reflected on the opening stages of SMOOCH during his exit interview:

> It is rare to not hear 'next year' from an administration. I just liked that they were going to try something now. It's not like we are a bad school, but I want to do good things today AND tomorrow with KISS.

My field notes from the final SMOOCH meeting of the year for one group captured KISS teacher reflections on their participation in SMOOCH:

> I used to be purposefully five minutes late to faculty meetings. But now I can't be late… I have responsibilities now!

> At least we had some control with SMOOCH — **Interrupted** — Yeah, but now we actually have to do something other than grade papers at our meetings.

Rodrigo (Rod), a relatively new KISS secondary school teacher, explained his personal experience with the SMOOCH innovation as inspiring:

> I met Luke from the primary school at our first meeting and, man, it was absolutely what I needed. I was feeling a bit down, but he really just turned out to have so much knowledge. I mean he had so many tricks and he is so so good with finding the right piece of technology to help his kids and help him. He showed me this thing called EdPuzzle that lets you edit videos from any website and then

> insert little quiz questions and comments throughout the video . . . so much knowledge. SMOOCH was fine for me, you know, really it was just kind of another meeting. So really the best thing about SMOOCH was meeting Luke.

Rodrigo's experience encapsulates the potential experience of working within an ARC. SMOOCH pushed transformational change, inspiring the individual teacher by establishing a common goal-oriented direction. My field notes from the KISS leadership roundtable documented more than fifty references relating to the school mission, vision, and values. My favorite quotes from my field notes included: "See, that is what we are all about" and "I want my kid to be in her class! That is so cool". My reflective journal entry, dated June 12, 2018, from the day of the leadership roundtable reflected the change in the KISS school culture:

> I expected to walk into this leadership roundtable and just hear the worst things. I imagined that if you got all of the school leaders into a room during the last week of school that it would not be a positive atmosphere. Unlike teachers, the summer holiday only brings more work for school leaders. While teachers jabber on about their extended holidays with the weight of the school year off their shoulders we are one happy group of people. But the mood at the roundtable was like a party. I couldn't help but smile as all of the school leaders gathered around a single phone to watch to look at photo taken from a school field trip. It was like KISS leaders were inspired by their teachers and their increased contact with them.

Intellectual Stimulation. Intellectual stimulation is the transformational leadership quality displayed when leaders create an environment where teachers feel supported. The relationship between leadership and teachers supports and promotes innovation and creativity throughout the organization (Bass, 1999). Positive relationships lead to a sense of belonging. TLT emphasizes the importance of the leader–employee relationship in highly effective working environments. High levels of teacher satisfaction are correlated with positive relationships and report feeling included in the decision-making process of the organization.

The most common theme discussed by both interviewees was about how KISS provided an environment that promoted deep and rich relationships. They specifically felt that the openness, size, and flexibility of the school climate allowed them to connect with their students and the wider community on a personal level. Abby spoke at length, often on the verge of tears, when describing the role KISS students played in her perceptions of job satisfaction. At one point near the end of the interview, Abby concluded:

> If I had a choice I would stay at KISS for the rest of my career. For 15 years, I searched for a place where the only thing that mattered was the students. When I leave KISS at the end of the year I am afraid that I will be only be left with a hole in my life that no other school will ever be able to fill. Those kids . . . those kids . . . our kids . . . I love them.

Steve echoed Abby's feelings about relationships. He repeatedly used phrases such as "the best kids," "community," and "my relationship with each kid" when

describing factors that created positive perceptions of school climate. As a Facebook® friend of Steve's, the researcher, with permission, identified over fifteen individual postings made by Steve during the current school year, which specifically praised his students. His page is littered with pictures of moments of classroom joy, athletic team photos, and student quotes. Parents, colleagues, and other community members were seen chiming in on Steve's posts—all evidence of the community relationships which created a sense of belonging and positive feelings of job satisfaction.

As I said, I was provided with a level of access to the thinking and decision-making process of school leadership at a level that I had not seen prior. Other teachers also noticed significant changes in the tone and presence of school leaders before, during, and after the school day. I commented in my reflection journal about something Malik, a secondary school teacher, said to me:

> This was the first year that I scheduled my formal evaluation with my head in person. No endless email trail. He just said, can I come back next week at the same time. Today was great.

Malik was satisfied, not necessarily by SMOOCH, but by a leadership that directly communicated with him. Transformational leaders have teachers with higher satisfaction rates, and this begins with effective communication. I reflected:

> Malik was not worried about his upcoming evaluation. So many teachers I know are so afraid of the moment a principal is going to come in for their evaluation. They aren't nervous because, although many think they are, they are bad teachers. They are nervous because they have never really had the principal in their

classroom. Principals have certainly now been so far removed from the kids that even they know they are no longer qualified to even evaluate a teacher. It is not their fault, it is just the reality of our schools.

I went back to Malik's class the next week. I was curious about the observation. To my surprise, the principal was already in the room, laughing about a video that Malik was going to show his upcoming class. Malik was relaxed. He was himself. He was a good teacher. The open line of communication appeared to be an empowering force for Malik. I observed he was happy to show off his craft. Teachers want autonomy, not isolation. Teachers want to be in the "trenches" with their leaders. Common vision, common values, common goals—this is how transformational leaders opened lines of communication and connected with their teachers.

I came back from my midpoint beach holiday to have a roundtable discussion about the progress of my study, SMOOCH, and to just have a general "catch-up". At some point in the meeting I brought up the story of Malik and how happy he was with his formal observation process. Before I finished my story, I was interrupted by the Head of Secondary: "Malik is in my SMOOCH group. Of course, I had to go see him in person. I didn't really think that much about it." I later reflected in my research journal, "the best relationships are always the organic ones, often triggered by the smallest of interactions".

Individualized consideration. Individual consideration refers to the transformational leadership traits displayed when leaders focus on the professional growth and development of teachers. Leaders seek to provide opportunities for growth and practice the successful delegation of leadership assignments (Bass, 1999). I was

leaning on the fence one day in late March (recess duty, of course) when Emily approached me. Emily taught ten- and eleven-year-olds, needless to say, she was a saint. After a couple of minutes of "small talk", she told asked me if I could help her look at a couple of different doctoral degree programs she was considering applying for. She just wanted to pick my brain about my experiences and just see what I thought. I didn't think much of it, especially in relation to my own research. We chatted a few times and exchanged some emails about her search and I gave her my honest feedback.

I never individually interviewed Emily for this study. I conducted extensive interviews throughout the study, yet I never identified Emily as a primary source of information related to my study. Emily had 10+ years at KISS; her two sons attended the KISS secondary school, and by all indications she was highly satisfied with her position and role at KISS. She was the rare primary school teacher chosen by the graduating class to deliver their farewell speech at graduation. She was not going anywhere.

I was sitting in the KISS conference room, as I needed a big table. It was two weeks after the close of the 2017–2018 school year. The study was finished. I probably looked like I was finished. The Head of Schools knocked on the door and entered before I could wave him in. "You see what you started?". He smiled wryly, holding up his phone. "Looks like I am going to have to put up with this 'research' for another three years." I looked questioningly, fully aware of what he was getting at with his good-natured accusation. "Now Emily got into some program." I played a "tiny violin", feigning sympathy. "Good luck. Now get out of my office," I jokingly said. "This isn't over yet Mirna!" he shouted towards the school receptionist, "More research!" He turned his

attention back to me and joked, “Maybe Emily can fix the mess you made, Bret”. I laughed. All I could respond was, “Touché”.

A couple of days later I received an email from Emily:

Bret,

Holy crap! What have I got myself into? Just like you said it would. I got into the program at [withheld]. Ken [husband] says I should do it. Plus [Head of KISS] seemed like it wouldn’t be a problem, but he had to take it to the board or whatever. I guess I wouldn’t have applied if I didn’t want it so I think I am going to do it.

I won’t take up your time. I am sure you are crazy busy. Just wanted to let you know. I am glad you went first.

I am going to try to enjoy this summer as much as I can because it looks like it might be my last for awhile.

Thank you so much for all of your help!

Emily

Emily’s story is an example of the positive impact SMOOCH had on the personal and professional growth of the KISS community. In addition to supporting Emily, KISS leadership introduced a revamped professional development policy beginning in the next academic year. The policy, directly driven by the work of a SMOOCH group, doubled

each teacher's allotted professional development fund from $750 to $1500 sgd. Additionally, each SMOOCH group would be encouraged to identify potential professional development opportunities where the entire group could attend and learn.

A teacher or reader in most western education systems may not grasp the importance of these changes to the international school teacher. International teachers are judged on the certificates and trainings they receive through their professional development courses. The $750 PD fund barely covered a single course for a teacher each year. With a $1500 PD fund teachers could now pursue higher level and more specialized PD. Teachers treasure their PD fund because it offers them the rare ability to miss school in order to improve themselves and their own résumés. The small $750 bump to the PD fund was the type of quantitative data that is significant to people. It was a piece of quantitative data that simultaneously addressed the financial needs of its teachers and was the first demonstration that SMOOCH was no longer my innovation.

Emily's story, qualitatively, supports the NU that teacher–leader relationships are strengthened when transformational leaders create an environment supportive of teacher professional development and growth. KISS had developed into an environment where Emily was confident exploring her own professional development and growth. Emily was a veteran KISS teacher, well educated but a bit unsure about how or if she would have the support to successfully complete her doctoral degree. KISS leadership clearly communicated a message of support to its teachers. They wanted their teachers to be the best and it resonated. Their message was supported by the quantitative data results showing improved teacher perceptions of the learning and growth opportunities at KISS.

Qualitative conclusions. KISS secondary school teachers have previously reported that school leadership operates without many tenets of TLT. Transformational leaders are a critical component in the creation of an environment where teachers experience high levels of job satisfaction. TLT narrowed the qualitative research methods and focused the data analysis on examining the social aspects of KISS teacher and leader experiences. The NUs from the qualitative results sought to identify the intersection of the guiding theories, frameworks, and the real experiences of the data sources.

An administrative action, like the SMOOCH innovation, occurs within the same contextual environment as a phenomenon, such as the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. A phenomenon is guided by experiences, while an action is guided by theory. Qualitative data collection and analysis results for this study found value in the dialogue. The "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon is experienced in the rational and the romantic worlds. The qualitative data results, therefore, are concluded when the connections between subject experiences are illuminated, subjecting the NUs to an interpretive analysis in order to achieve the holistic conclusions desired.

Interpretive Analysis

The quantitative data and the NUs from the qualitative data results presented above were formed in the dialogue between the data participant and context data sources. Taylor (1976) viewed dialogue between the data sources as often being incomplete, cloudy, or unclear. Therefore, the meanings drawn from the dialogue can provide contradictory understandings for both data sources. Hermeneutics, through the HC and the PHMRLE, clarified and guided the qualitative data results and the ARHAF provided

the structure for the interpretive analysis of the data results. The interpretive analysis resulted in three interpretations (INTs). Each INT represents the synthesis and re-examination of the NUs. The INTs are a holistic understanding and assessment of deeper meaning found in the data results.

Interpretations of data results are presented in a first-person narrative form, with each of the significant meaning units guiding the interpretation of the data. The personal narrative form was designed to capture the shared knowledge, insights, and understandings of both the participants and the context, as well as provide guidance for the discussion of study conclusions and limitations, and inform the next cycle of research into the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. The INTs are presented with an obvious subjectivity. The inherent subjectivity and bias of hermeneutic research are profound problems in hermeneutic research (Kleining & Witt, 2001). The interpretive section addresses the subjectivity and bias of the research by seeking "to use it creatively and to struggle beyond towards the never ending possibility of further interpretation" (Twinomurinzi & Phahlamohlaka, 2005). Gadamer (1994) proposes that bias, or prior exposure or understanding the researcher has of the dialogue, is only a negative if there is no real dialogue or the researcher fails to capture the dialogue.

Data interpretations lie in the intersection of all of the available data, experiences, guiding theories, and existing research. The three INTs seek to make sense of the NUs resulting from the data analysis by identifying their underlying commonalities. Each INT is my personal understanding of the meaning of the data. I am fully aware of, and openly discuss, how my own views, experiences, and prejudices influenced the data analysis and

interpretations. Each INT seeks to provide a conclusive summation the research finding and are, therefore, intentionally brief, yet direct responses to the guiding research question.

Interpretation #1

The Action Research Communities model used to guide the SMOOCH innovation provided a rational and practical path for KISS leadership to create the transformational change capable of addressing the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. In his 1999 review of Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT), Bass concluded, "much more explanation is needed about the workings of transformational leadership and how followers are moved from compliance, to identification, to internationalization" (p. 24). The interpreted results effectively conclude that the ARCs model provides a simple and practical mechanism for international school leaders to address the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. Comparison results of the quantitative and qualitative data showed a clear improvement across the measures of leadership effectiveness, teacher–leader relationships, and the growth and learning opportunities. The improvement was correlated with qualitative data evidence connecting the SMOOCH innovation adoption process with improved feelings and perceptions of KISS teacher satisfaction.

There was certainly a general buzz surrounding the SMOOCH innovation. The implementation process for the SMOOCH innovation from the development, the announcement, through to its conclusion captured the attention of KISS teachers. There was a sense of urgency and purpose surrounding the SMOOCH innovation, but more importantly, it represented the first strategic use of TLT. The SMOOCH innovation

reflected how ARCs helped KISS leadership develop a common vision and mission for the entire KISS community. I later noted in my reflection journal:

> It is important to understand the life of a teacher. Every single day they walk into a classroom filled with dozens of the toughest audience members in the world. Every single day they push and work to convey a message. They WANT their audience to understand. They are singularly focused on responding to the unique needs of their audience. It is a difficult and sometimes unfruitful profession. So imagine the difficulty a teacher faces when their own school fails to even make a lukewarm attempt at understanding and responding to their needs as an educator. Leadership has really taken a huge step towards changing their approach. This is a good sign for SMOOCH I would think.

Working with children all day is certainly amazing, but it is also emotionally draining. Teachers have been found to be highly motivated by an inspirational working environment. I found an image, Figure15, on the Instagram feed of a KISS teacher. The image was captioned with the words: “Oprah has clearly never been a teacher”. This piece of archival data captures the emotional state of at least one KISS teacher prior to the SMOOCH innovation. This KISS teacher was clearly desperately in need of the idealized influence and inspiration of a transformational leader.



Figure 15.

When KISS administration began to move forward with administration of the SMOOCH innovation they were risking running into a group of resistant and uncooperative teachers. Yet, I heard and felt a very different response from KISS teachers. The SMOOCH innovation was viewed as confirmation that teacher opinions were being listened to and, furthermore, that KISS leaders were committed to the immediate implementation of organizational transformation.

KISS teachers come to the school because they see a place where students develop as individuals and not according to predetermined standards or expectations. I predicted that any movement or collaborative approach in line with this vision would be embraced by all members of the KISS community. My contextual analysis found KISS to be a collective community consisting of teachers from over twenty-five nations and students/families from nearly eighty nations. Each community members' experiences were and are embraced and given equal footing. No national curriculum or system was or is favored over another. The school culture was found to be inclusive and welcoming. Moreover, the SMOOCH innovation was implemented in a contextual environment

where the entire community shared a collective responsibility for advancing student learning and achievement.

The SMOOCH innovation originally began as an experiment to enhance teacher collaboration in the KISS primary school, coined MEOSIS. The expansion of MEOSIS into a school-wide innovation was guided by the Mertler's (2018) Action Research Communities (ARCs) model. Mertler conceptualizes ARCs as a robust model which is easily customized to the setting and capable of providing a clear direction and framework for decades (Mertler, 2016). The SMOOCH innovation was able to address multiple organizational weaknesses, drive new successes, and create a collaborative and effective environment. Quantitative data results and the new understandings (NUs) from the qualitative data analysis show that KISS teachers experienced an increased ability to explore their individual interests and were empowered to develop personally and professionally through the SMOOCH innovation.

Famed educational author, Andy Hargreaves (2016), proposes that collaborative "creativity" is the most vital component in the transformation process:

> Creativity, we are seeing, is a collective responsibility, not an individual characteristic. Creative learners need many creative teachers who work together effectively for the good of all their students. A system that empowers teachers in this way usually results from deliberate design, not just luck or circumstance. Creative learning and teaching call for creative system designs too.

The SMOOCH innovation created a "collective autonomy" in KISS teachers. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe collective autonomy as places where teachers have more

independence from organizational bureaucracy, but less independence from other teachers. In the culture of collective autonomy, teacher and organizational practices remain highly independent, yet the practices are the result of a collective creative process. The quantitative and qualitative data results show that through the ARCs model, the SMOOCH innovation was able to address the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon through the creation of collective autonomy in KISS teachers. In other words, KISS leaders were able to promote individual creativity and collective responsibility through the ARCs model and, in turn, experienced an organizational increase in feelings of satisfaction in KISS teachers.

Interpretation #2

KISS leadership use of transformational leadership techniques were enhanced through the SMOOCH innovation, positively contributing to ARCs to improved teacher–leader relationships and personal growth through professional learning opportunities. Chapter 4 opened with McNamara's Fallacy (Handy, 1994, p. 221). McNamara's Fallacy describes the logical thought process that disregards variables that cannot be proven. TSCS quantitative data and the NUs from the qualitative data indicate a clear positive improvement in the teacher–leader relationships and an increase in commitment to individual growth and development, however, measuring and interpreting data related to relationships and personal growth embody the fourth step of McNamara's Fallacy: *what can't be easily measured really doesn't exist.* Yet, relationships and individual growth do exist. Through the application of hermeneutical analysis, I re-examined the qualitative data using the HYPEResearch code frequency report tools.

Hermeneutics re-examines the understanding and interpretations of the data through a critical examination of the biases and assumptions of the researcher. The guiding research inquiry is directly tied to understanding the effects an ARC modeled on TLT have on teacher feelings of job satisfaction, as related to school leadership. I assumed that improvements in teacher–leadership relationships were directly tied to the increased use of transformational leadership strategies provided by SMOOCH. In order to test my assumption I conducted a word frequency analysis of words used directly related transformational leadership qualities. House and Shamir (1993), and Shamir et al. (1993) established the six qualities transformational leaders produce in their organizations: (1) a collective identity, (2) a sense of consistency between their personal values and actions of the organization, (3) a greater sense of self-worth, (4) a feeling of connection between themselves and leaders, (5) a sense of collective efficacy, and (6) a sense of "meaningfulness" in their work. The six outcomes are unconsciously produced in organizations undergoing a transformational change. For the KISS community, SMOOCH was designed as the spearhead of change. If the SMOOCH innovation contributed to the improvements, then evidence directly related to the six transformational leadership qualities would exist.

I used a series of three Code Clouds, or word clouds. Code Clouds help researchers to approach their data from a different perspective. Each word is sized in proportion to its frequency of use in the qualitative data set. Figure 16 displays the Code Cloud of the 100 most frequently used words relevant to the study taken from Phase 1 of

the study. Figure 17 displays the Code Cloud of the 100 most frequently used words relevant to the study taken from phase three of the study.

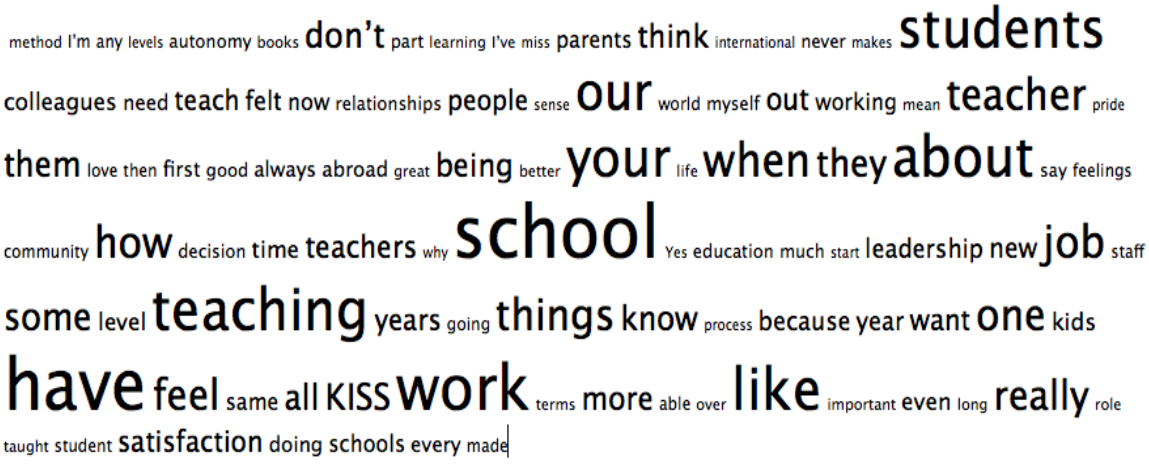


Figure 16.



Figure 17.

Six transformational leadership quality codes were found to be in top ten response code frequency percent increases. The prevalence of the increase in response frequency

codes associated with transformational leadership qualities adds to the evidence supporting the conclusion that ARCs promoted transformational leadership qualities through an improvement in teacher–leader relationships and increased the growth and learning opportunities for KISS teachers.

The qualitative data analysis provided powerful new insights into the data. First, 40% of positive references to improved teacher–leader relationships could be attributed to data from KISS leadership. This is a striking number given that data from KISS leadership accounted for only 30% of all the qualitative data gathered. This information strongly suggests improved teacher–leader relationships were felt from both parties, but school leaders experienced a very significant improvement in their perceptions and feelings related to their relationships with KISS teachers.

Case data from KISS teachers were much more likely to cite or attribute positive changes to their improved feelings of personal growth and professional learning opportunities. I recorded eighty-two teacher uses of the word "invest" and its conjugates. Improved relationships for teachers centered on their feelings of being wanted, trusted, and valued by their entire school community. One possible simple interpretation of this information is that as KISS leadership increased its contact with teachers, leaders felt more connection to and responsibility for teachers. The positive feelings provided a more supportive path for teachers to grow, learn, and develop. A more complex interpretation is that KISS teacher–leader relationships were improved through increased opportunities to take greater creative leaps in their profession.

When Bernard Bass first conceptualized TLT in 1978, he distinguished transformational leaders as those who inspire followers "to achieve and self-actualize while focusing their efforts for the greater good for group, organization, or society" (Bass, 1999, p. 12). I think it is safe to assume that teachers and school leaders can and should be able to find common ground in their shared commitment to moving beyond their own self-interests for the betterment of our world. Yet, it is a precarious position for school or organization pushing for transformational change. The transformational process requires change to align the teachers' self-interests in their own development with the interests of the wider group, organization, or society (p. 13). The ARCs model provided KISS leadership with a practical mechanism for balancing the interests of both the organization and the teachers.

Interpretation #3

ARCs contributed towards increased feelings of optimism of the direction and future of the KISS community. The data results and interpretations have thus far focused on reporting data centered on the research question variables, *leadership effectiveness*, *teacher–leader relationships*, and *professional growth and learning opportunities.* INT #3 moves the discussion to the broader examination of teacher satisfaction in relation to the collective spirit of an optimistic future direction of KISS. It was beyond the scope and timeframe of this research cycle to determine the direct effects SMOOCH may have on addressing the long-term satisfaction and retention of KISS teachers. Transformational leaders create a real and palpable sense of optimism in their school community. Teacher responses to the PTSCS question, *how optimistic are you that your school will improve in*

the future? were examined and analyzed. Table 13 displays a comparison of the response frequency for the optimism question on each administration of the PTSCS. The examination of a single question is a far cry from the rigorous quantitative data analysis methods required to draw evidence-based conclusions. However, I present this data not as proof or evidence, rather as an entry into a discussion of the effects an ARC can have on an individual teachers views and perspectives.

Table 13

Survey Response Frequencies (Teacher Optimism)

Admin 1 n=75 Admin 2 n=49 Item	Admin	Response Frequency				Percent	Mean	Std Deviation
How optimistic are you that your school will improve in the future?	1	14	16	13	20	12	3.00	1.38
	2	1	3	10	25	10	3.82	0.91

The results of the response frequency analysis clearly demonstrate that KISS teachers returning for the upcoming 2018–2019 school year are overwhelmingly optimistic about the future direction of KISS. Thirty-five of forty-nine respondents indicated that they were either quite optimistic or extremely optimistic about the future of KISS. Gawali (2009) finds that it goes against human nature to remain sluggish, to carry out the same jobs every day, and to not possess any optimism for change in practice. New teaching staff will arrive at KISS prior to the next academic school year; according to the

results presented above, these new staff will be walking into an environment full of optimistic and empowered teachers.

Throughout this study, teachers and leaders were asked, formally and informally, about their views and perceptions of the presents status of KISS and their opinions about the future direction of KISS. Data pertaining to these themes were coded using *optimistic* and *pessimistic*. Table 14 displays the findings obtained from the analysis. Findings are organized according to the number of optimistic and pessimistic codes from the two themes, *perception of the present* and *perception of the future*, across the three study phases.

Table 14

Analysis of Perceptions of Present Situation and Future Direction of KISS

Theme	Code		Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Perception of the present situation of KISS	Optimistic	Adequate, clear, positive, bright, developing, improving	65	110	145
	Pessimistic	Fractured, complex, uncertain, lack of empathy, questioning, negative	43	30	24
Perception of the future organizational direction	Optimistic	Promising, hopeful, clarity, confident, encouraging	78	155	240
	Pessimistic	Uncertain, low expectations, hopeless, cautious, distrustful	33	24	14

The number of participants' codes corresponding to an optimistic view of the present situation and future situation increased throughout each phase of the study, corresponding to a reduction in the number pessimistic codes. Prior to the implementation of the ARC, SMOOCH, the number of optimistic and pessimistic views of the current situation and future direction of KISS was nearly the same. The split in views is captured in the following examples:

> We always just do a lot of stuff at KISS, like it seems like there are always new things coming at us, but nothing ever really sticks.

> I just smile and nod and then get back to my class as soon as I can. I guess it sounds bad, but I have learned to just let certain things go over my head, say "yes", and then do what I need to do in class.

> I have what I need to teach and teach effectively. Everybody's classrooms are crammed with technology, we take the kids on field trips all of the time, I am free to try new things, not to mention, there are some really smart people here. I learn new things all of the time.

> No matter what, people are always going to think the "grass is greener on the other side." Some people are just insecure about everything. They find fault in anything . . . Just one big blame game here at KISS . . . for no reason, really.

By the third phase of the study, the views and perceptions of KISS teachers and leaders reflected a more optimistic spirit. Optimistic references regarding the current situation increased by nearly 30%, while optimistic references to the future direction of KISS increased by 60%. The results of the qualitative data analysis matched with my personal experiences. I know that teachers were happy with SMOOCH. They enjoyed the light-heartedness of the name, the more frequent contact with school leadership, and the deeper connections they formed with the school community. The changing views of the KISS community are captured below:

> I have always taught older students, but this year I took on a class of Year 7 students. This was really the first time I was faced with a group of pre-teens . . . I was stunned by how many of these kids struggled with reading comprehension. When I asked around for advice or help at the beginning of the year no one really had any answers . . . Now I am hooked up with Yanti [primary school reading specialist], I have a couple of reading PDs lined up for next year . . . so, yeah . . . things are interesting now.

> When I joined my SMOOCH group I met Shannon. She really changed the way I viewed the teachers in our secondary school. We are trying to do some nice things in our science classes where my little ones go into her science class. I think when the other primary teachers find out that my class is going to go dissect a frog with Shannon's class next year they are going to be so jealous. It is kinda cool, you know?

> The future is bright for KISS. We achieved all time highs in student enrollment this year, not to mention that we almost doubled the amount of primary school kids moving into the secondary school next year . . . plans to expand out campus . . . things look good for us. We are stable but hungry.

Conclusions

The implementation of SMOOCH, as an Action Research Community, increased the organizational adoption and use of transformational leadership principles and strategies. TLT and PLC research support the conclusion that continued implementation of these strategies could quickly increase the feelings of job satisfaction for KISS teachers. The research establishing a very high correlation between high satisfaction rates, low teacher attrition, and improved student achievement is strong. The conclusions of this study have clearly established a solid case linking the implementation and use of an ARC with improved teacher perceptions of and feelings of school leadership. Teacher satisfaction is deeply rooted in their connection to and with school leaders and their leadership style.

Additionally, the research conclusions support the wider implementation of and research into the potential for the ARCs model for addressing the myriad of other phenomenological problems facing educational organizations across the world. Bass (1985), when first extending the concept of transformational leadership, highlighted the core personality traits commonly displayed by transformational leaders. Most notable are

the high percentage of traits associated with teamwork, unity through a common vision, and the development of a positive social environment. The quantitative and qualitative data results presented in this chapter support previous research conclusions that ARCs are an effective tool for promoting a collaborative and engaging learning environment capable of both supporting and challenging teachers and leaders simultaneously.

The hermeneutical analysis of the dialogue between the context and participant data sources revealed the development of new understandings, mutual conclusions, and increased communication networks between the data sources. The guiding research question and inquiries focused on understanding teacher satisfaction related to leadership effectiveness, teacher–leader relationships, and growth and learning. The NUs and INTs showed that ARCs provided the opportunity for KISS leadership to use transformational leadership principles to instill transformational change at KISS. As the KISS community experienced the effects of transformational leadership and a transformational innovation, teachers reported increased feelings of optimism and feelings of satisfaction.

Hermeneutical analysis of the data results captured the evolution of the project from multiple perspectives and levels, providing for a holistic understanding of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon and the ARCs innovation model. The guiding research inquiry sought to understand "how" the ARCs model influenced teacher feelings of satisfaction related to three leadership variables associated with TLT. The results presented in this chapter conclude that the implementation of an ARC at KISS increased the use of transformational leadership strategies, cultivated new and deeper connections and relationships, and promoted the professional growth and learning opportunities

throughout the community. The ARCs model created a more cohesive vision, as well as serving as a practical innovation for unifying the KISS community.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

It is true enough that not every conceivable complex human situation can be fully reduced to the lines on a graph, or to percentage points on a chart, or to figures on a balance sheet, but all reality can be reasoned about. And not to quantify what can be quantified is only to be content with something less than the full range of reason.
—Robert McNamara (US Secretary of Defense 1961–1968)

He [Robert McNamara] was haunted by the thought that amid all the objective-setting and evaluating, the careful counting and the cost-benefit analysis, stood ordinary human beings. They behaved unpredictably.
—Robert McNamara Obituary (The Economist, July 9, 2009)

By now they had mastered my own language, but they still made simple mistakes, like using hermeneutics when they meant heuristics.
—Woody Allen (1981)

Measuring progress is important. We need to know that what we are doing is having an impact against another approach that might yield better outcomes, but the current fetish of crude numerical quantification in education is misleading and fundamentally inappropriate for the unpredictable nature of the classroom. We need better ways of recording the phenomenon of the classroom that captures more than simply test scores and arbitrary judgements on teachers, and seeks to impose an order where often there is none (Biesta, 2015).

The bulk of Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 were concerned with establishing the structure and frameworks used for deriving results and arriving at interpretations based in the real lived experiences of the KISS community. However, I make no contention that the interpretations are “correct”. The interpretations are always changing. Subjecting the interpretations to iterative analysis focuses this final chapter on the continuous meaning-

making process. While single "one shot" solutions do not exist in complex educational phenomena (Jordan, Kleinsasser, & Rowe, 2014), through this process of analysis and interpretation we can better understand and illuminate the complexities of these phenomena—in this case, teacher retention and transformational leadership.

This chapter connects the study findings and interpretations to the larger research problem, the previous research, and the guiding theoretical frameworks. The American Psychological Association (APA) describes the process as revisiting the research to discuss the potential implications, strengths, weaknesses, and the larger contextual meta-inferences. Figure 18 displays the structure for Chapter 5.

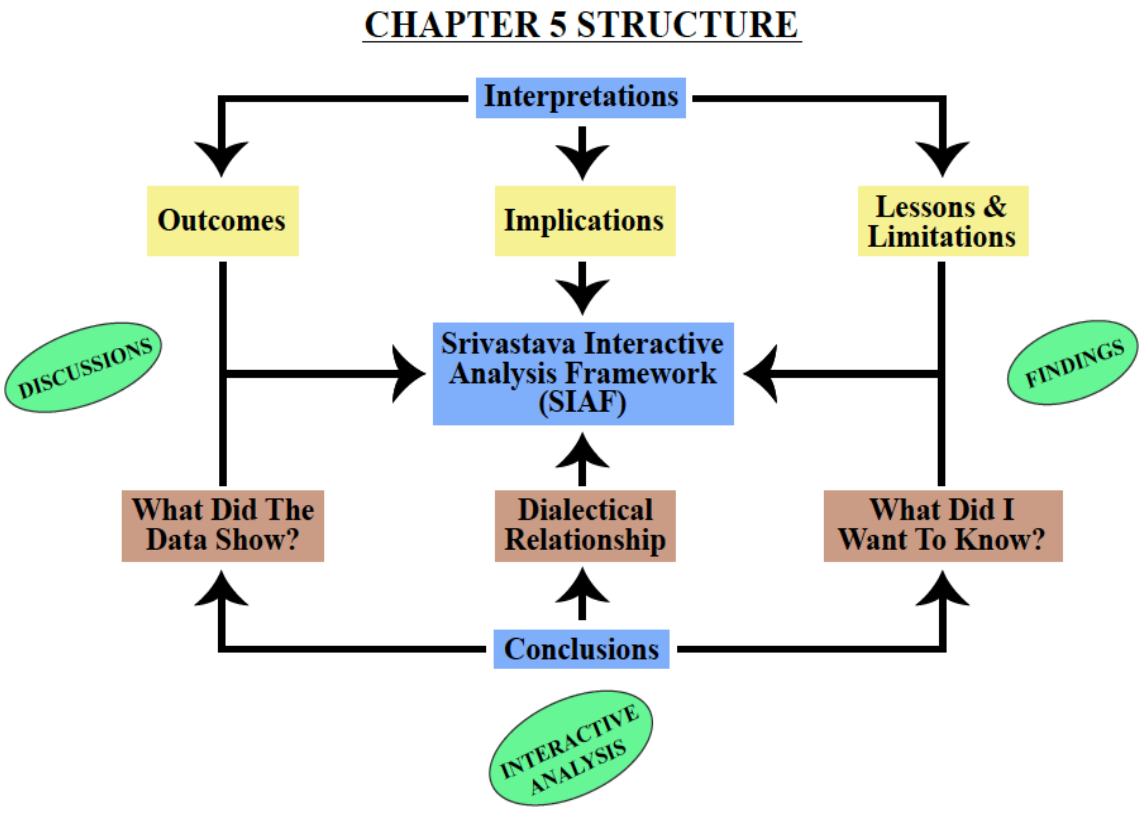


Figure 18.

Framework

Iteration, or repetition, carries multiple understandings in qualitative research literature. Srivastava (2009) advocates for an understanding of iterative analysis as a reflexive process, not as a repetitive mechanical task. The role of iteration "is key to sparking insight and developing meaning" (p. 77). Reflexivity is concerned with connecting emerging insights and effectively communicating the highly abstract meaning-making process of people and organizations. Srivastava (2009) proposes an iterative analysis framework, shown in Table 15, which consists of three guiding questions and specific reference points for engaging in the analysis process.

Table 15

Srivastava Iterative Analysis Framework (SIAF)

Question 1	What are the data telling me? (Explicitly engaging with theoretical, subjective, ontological, epistemological, and field understandings)
Question 2	What is it I want to know? (According to research objectives, questions, and theoretical points of interest)
Question 3	What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know? (Refining the focus and linking back to research questions)

Srivastava Iterative Analysis Framework (SIAF) is a reflexive approach guided by the "I" in each question. Q1 clarified and re-examined my guiding theoretical and paradigm lenses. Q2 connects the my subjective views with the objective research goals. Q3 identifies the my gaps in knowledge, my emerging understandings, and how to employ them into the next cycle of research. This chapter sets out to subject my findings to an iterative analysis guided by my personal views and reflections of each question. The

"Discussion" chapter of a more traditional dissertation is structured slightly differently than this chapter. Table 16 provides a correspondence table connecting the three SIAF questions with the typical "Discussion" sections of a dissertation.

Table 16.

Chapter 5 Section Correspondence Table

SIAF Question 1 What are the data telling me?	Integration of quantitative and qualitative data
	Outcomes related to previous research and theory
SIAF Question 2 What is it I want to know?	Lessons learned from the study
	Limitations
SIAF Question 3 What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?	Implications for practice
	Implications for future research
Concluding narrative	Conclusion

Iterative Analysis

SIAF Question 1

SIAF Q1 asks me, as the researcher, to draw a conclusion about what all of the available data are telling me after multiple cycles of research and multiple interpretations. Essentially, what is the synthesis of all of the available information and data? The results and interpretations of the data presented in Chapter 4 were centered on the three research variables highly associated with school environments with high levels of satisfaction, low attrition rates, and transformational leaders. The integration of the quantitative and

qualitative data and the conclusions based on the outcomes of the research are discussed in this section.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative data. There is an innate pressure to form broad group conclusion when attempting to integrate quantitative and qualitative data sets into a cohesive conclusion. This pressure is contrary to the power of hermeneutical research. Hermeneutics exposed the individual actors and experiences composing the larger group. Organizational transformation is only possible through individual transformation. Proving individual transformation, however, is much more difficult. The credibility of evidence at this level is often highly subjective and volatile. This proved to be a research design capable of making a significant contribution to our understanding of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon and to the evidence of PLCs as a transformative innovation.

The qualitative and quantitative data results were interpreted collectively in Chapter 4 through three interpretations (INTs). The iterative analysis seeks to draw together the quantitative and qualitative into a cohesive understanding of what the data means. The relationship between the data sources, the data results, and the INTs was found in the motivating and unifying force of transformational change. The transformational change which occurred at KISS during the SMOOCH innovation was achieved by reducing the distance between the school decision-makers and the teachers.

The process of change, especially for an educational organization, is a constant struggle. The numerous stakeholders, incredible diversity of populations, the sheer size and magnitude of the organization, and the plethora of sometimes contradictory theories

makes change in education more difficult to understand and accomplish. However, this does not and should not prevent us from striving for change. Hargreaves and Fullan (2009) discuss change from two perspectives. First, change could include a top-down approach that incorporates a series of change into a well-designed system. The second way to design change is focused on creating cultures and systems so that they are flexible, self-monitoring and self-developers of change (p. 3). The SMOOCH innovation represented an example of the second change approach. Integration of the quantitative and qualitative data results showed KISS and the SMOOCH innovation created an environment where people worked together as partners to address their individual and collective needs. Through this process, KISS teachers and leaders experienced a growth in their effectiveness, improved relationships, and real professional growth and development.

Outcomes related to research and theory. The key to successful transformational change capable of addressing large-scale organizational problems like the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon required the connection of theory and practice. Action Research Communities (ARCs) and Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) provide an effective framework for international schools to address organizational problems and obstacles.

Organizational leaders have to have established some form of credibility with their constituents in order to have a seat at the leadership table. They have established, with at least some clarity, a personal vision and direction that others are also interested in. However, simply wielding some small level of organizational influence is a vastly

different concept from being a transformational leader. TLT views transformational leaders as those capable of moving beyond "cookie-cutter" ideas and solutions. Their individual experience with and understanding of the organization and its underlying contextual layers provide the leader with an in-depth knowledge critical for transformational change. TLT establishes "what" qualities effective leaders display and even "how" transformational leadership qualities can be measured. TLT, however, does not provide a practical and actionable pathway for existing leaders and organizations to incorporate the tenants and qualities required for change.

Elmore (2009) proposes his way forward for creating change in educational systems. The large educational system is dominated in policy that reduces the ability of the system to actually adopt effective change methodologies. He rightly brings up that there is not a change innovation that a struggling school has not tried to some degree or another. This being the case, then clearly the gap between research, policy, and teaching is so wide that we need a new approach. This difficulty is summarized by Elmore:

> Sometimes the knowledge produced through these relationships happens to match the problems that practitioners are dealing with; however, more often than not, the connections are, at best, distant and problematical. So practitioners, and the people who try to help them, end up fabricating theories and ideas to guide their work - theories that are often schematic and not very well-informed.

In identifying the problem, Elmore (2009) extends this to expanding our understanding of change as improvement and, more importantly, improving over long periods of time.

The existing research cited throughout this paper clearly establishes a high correlation between organizational effectiveness, positive feelings of organizational

satisfaction, and transformational leadership. For educational institutions, this generally means that the most effective schools are led by transformational leaders and are typically schools associated with high levels of student achievement and/or progress. These are also schools with generally lower rates of teacher attrition and high levels of community perceptions of the school climate. The research question and its subsequent inquiry were based on the hypothesis that the ARCs model could serve as the practical extension of TLT, and the implementation of an ARC at KISS, would therefore, hypothetically, improve teacher feelings of job satisfaction, eventually addressing the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon.

When international school teachers across multiple studies were asked why they chose to enter into the international teaching field, they consistently returned a response related to increased teacher autonomy (Mancuso et al., 2010; Griffith, 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). It would seem that one of the main reasons teachers left their home countries and state schools was to escape from the imposed practices which they felt stripped them of their individuality and creativity. International school leaders are blessed with a teaching staff hungry for transformation.

The ARCs model provides a flexibility which allows it to be easily mixed into a context's existing structures and philosophies. There is no time mandate or specific pathway that must be used in order to begin not only implementing but also seeing measurable outcomes. With both practices, action research and professional learning communities, being rooted in the same core concepts (e.g. data-driven student centered, focus on community, cyclical, etc.) schools and school leaders can drive a school's

direction using each concept as the basis for analysis and problem-solving efforts. When I first began this program, I felt very isolated when I tried to discuss my research within my workplace context. What I think PLCs do for action research is they provide the means for which action research becomes a community effort.

ARCs can provide the vehicle from which one person can actually begin driving the change they wish to see in our educational system. What I mean is that without PLCs, or some other similar mechanism, our action research will live and die with "us". PLCs become the manner in which one person's ideas and visions have a chance to catch fire in others who may carry the torch forward.

SIAF Question 2

SIAF Q2 directed me to consider what I wanted to know from the data results. It is a question of what lessons were learned and what obstacles or limitations hampered the investigation. This section draws broad conclusions regarding the lessons learned during the research that may prove to be useful in future cycles of research or for other researchers. This section also seeks to identify the heuristic limitations that existed during the research. The section focuses on drawing out the researcher biases and pre-judgements that contributed to how the data were interpreted.

Lessons learned. The concept of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) is one of the most commonly misunderstood and poorly implemented concepts that I have personally experienced during my time as a professional educator. I had the unfortunate experience of engaging in a professional learning community during my first four years of teaching. It was my introduction to workplace meetings that occurred only for show.

As a “failing” public school, we were required to create a PLC and to hold PLC meetings. I only recall the meetings as being the type of meeting where veteran teachers, coaches, and leaders all miraculously had more important matters to attend to.

Provini (2013) finds five primary reasons PLCs either struggle or fail completely:

- Insufficient access to timely data on which to base instructional decisions;
- Poor infrastructure (especially lack of scheduled time for teachers to meet, or inefficient use of the limited time available);
- Lack of teacher buy-in for the process (perception that the decision to implement a PLC was imposed upon teachers by administrators);
- Lack of teacher ownership of the process (perception that administrators dictate what teachers do during their collaborative time); and
- A building culture in which teachers tend to compete rather than collaborate.

All five reasons are directly related to how school leaders and administrators implement and manage the PLC process. The PLC implementation and change process as implemented in national or state schools is often led using a top-down approach. However, this research has provided evidence that international schools have the independent structures necessary to build and maintain a PLC based on the needs of the community rather than the organization.

The many misconceptions teachers may have and poor previous experiences teachers may have encountered is a major hurdle any school leadership will encounter when implementing an ARC. In this examination of the lessons learned from the study, I establish clear and concise lessons that I learned throughout the action research cycles. I identify the lessons learned from the initial implementation process, to the critical ARC components, and contextual considerations. The lessons learned for this cycle began just before the beginning of the study. Mertler’s (2018) Action Research Communities model

places PLCs at its core, however, in defending the merit of PLCs Mertler only briefly mentions the history of poorly implemented PLCs. He also fails to fully understand how difficult a task it is and was to overcome pessimistic feelings towards participating in a PLC, even when rebranded as an ARC.

Previous cycles of research showed that teachers reacted negatively to any connection made between the innovation and the PLCs. This lesson meant that the SMOOCH innovation was implemented using effective "branding" techniques. SMOOCH meetings were not called PLC or ARC meetings, however, the framework, techniques, and philosophical underpinnings remained. All of the communications and documentations referenced literature and utilized templates from researchers and authors outside of the typical PLCs circle. The SMOOCH meeting minutes and structure cited the Data Wise Improvement Process (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013) as the main source driving the SMOOCH innovation.

An administrative action, such as the SMOOCH innovation, occurs within the same contextual environment as a phenomenon, like the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. The "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon was guided by experiences, and as such, was examined as something experienced in our social interactions; something experienced in the both the rational and romantic worlds. As a lesson learned, the depth of information collected proved the validity and reliability of phenomenological studies and their ability to illuminate the connections of subject experiences. Mixed-methods research, in general, and action research, in particular, is guided by a methodological theoretical perspective or

framework, which empowers the contextually-embedded researcher to understand the influence of an innovation in a scientifically reliable and valid manner.

Additionally, the flexibility and utility of hermeneutic constructs and action research for gathering and interpreting information from a multiplicity of data collection sources was a powerful combination for researching the real and lived experiences of KISS teachers and leaders. The research methodologies used in this study connected the gap between theory and practice and the application of qualitative and quantitative research approaches provided a more complete understanding of the research question and research inquiries than either approach alone.

Limitations. In order to examine the limitations of the study I employed a method of discovery called heuristics. Psychologists use heuristic strategies in tandem with the intuitions of the inquirer. Heuristics allows researchers to "take multiple perspectives on the questions they are pursuing, to break out of conceptual ruts, and to forge new associations in order to trigger possible new understandings" (Lauer, 2004, pp. 8–9). There is a distinct difference between
"hermeneutics" and "heuristics". It is an important distinction. Hermeneutics is a process for guiding interpretation through explanation. Heuristics pushes beyond the interpretive nature of hermeneutics towards a practical process for finding solutions for problems with no solution.

Heuristics are the methods employed by both laymen and scientific researchers for making judgements about events or data where the outcome is uncertain or even unknowable. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) refer to the heuristics employed for

understanding uncertain situations as “judged probabilities”. For judged probabilities to be considered accurate then they must be compatible with the entire “web of beliefs held by the individual” (p. 1130). Therefore, the researcher achieves compatibility and consistency by making clear the connections between the conclusions and his own judgmental heuristics and biases.

A better understanding of my personal heuristics and the biases they may have led to will improve the judgements and decisions in future cycles of research into Action Research Communities and the “I’m Leaving!” phenomenon (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). The entire process of researching, developing, and implementing SMOOCH represents one the most difficult and demanding things I have ever done. I have no doubt that my efforts were rewarded by the quality, effectiveness, and long-term viability of SMOOCH at KISS.

People employ heuristic methods of thinking every day in order to makes sense of their world. Rules, generalizations, thoughts such as “don’t judge a book by its cover”, are consciously and unconsciously influencing many of our most important life decisions. This synthesis considers two common heuristics that when applied to my study would result in dramatically different views and conclusions.

Effort heuristic refers to the common human tendency to value something based on the actual or perceived effort put into its production. The more time invested into the innovation the more likely we are to judge its effectiveness positively. People must use whatever information is available to them when attempting to determine the value of something unquantifiable. Effort, therefore, is generally considered to be a reliable

measure for judging the quality of the innovation (Kruger, Wirtz, Boven, & Altermatt, 2004). A limitation of this cycle of research was limited by the effort heuristic. I invested an incredible amount of time, energy, and money into this study and into the Educational Doctoral Degree (Ed.D.), so therefore it makes sense to conclude that I found "success" with the SMOOCH innovation or that I viewed the SMOOCH innovation as a positive contributor to the school climate at KISS.

The escalation of commitment heuristic describes the common human behavior or tendency to continue pursuing an action despite evidence showing negative outcomes. This heuristic thought occurs when groups or individuals expect a certain result, thereby believing that increasing commitment to the innovation or action will eventually solve the problem. This line of thinking forces me to confront the view that my research and my conclusions result directly from this line of thinking.

I work at KISS. They pay my salary. It would be easy to assume, or for me to brush over data contrary to my expectations. Perhaps, what matters most to me is assuring KISS leadership that they made the right choice when they supported me, regardless of the final outcome. I need people to believe in me and my research so I have made decisions, interpretations, and conclusions to match what others believed in or expected of me and of SMOOCH. Completing this dissertation required me to commit to a research project. The SMOOCH innovation was backed by escalating commitment. I needed an innovation for this study. My commitment to the the Ed.D. program and to KISS required me to "put on blinders" and move forward.

The researcher positionality and bias inherent in this action research project has been openly discussed and was used as a contributing force in the research. The researcher positionality and bias does not distract from the results and findings. Clearly identifying the sample, sources, and the research procedure enhanced the reliability and validity of this study. Member-checking served as another technique for self-checking my own assumptions. Member-checking is the continual reiteration, or summarization, of statements made by participants during an interview (Creswell, 2015). Effectively using follow-up questions and making transcriptions of interviews available to participants allows participants (members) to confirm (check) their accuracy and replicability.

SIAF Question 3

SIAF Q3 asks me to consider the relationship that exists between what the data is telling me and what I actually set out to know or understand. It is a description of the tension and contradictions that exist between the data results and the research intentions. It is a question that required the data to be considered from multiple perspectives, seeking a common ground or understanding between what I wanted to know and what I wanted to know. Dialectical methods seek to find a common ground, a relative truth, between contradictory viewpoints. My personal growth as a leader has led to my belief that any opportunity to look at other situations and draw new understandings is vitally important to creating clear visions, strategies and, more importantly, for answering the question of "why".

Implications for practice. Prior to this cycle of research KISS teachers, predominantly KISS secondary school teachers, described less than desirable feelings and

perspectives of KISS leadership. These feeling were attributed to low teacher satisfaction and a primary contributor to the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon at KISS. The SMOOCH innovation was deployed to join the fragmented practices of the KISS primary and KISS secondary schools. The SMOOCH innovation incorporated Mertler's (2018) ARCs model to transform the culture and leadership style of KISS leaders and effectively address KISS teacher retention and attrition rates.

The results, interpretations, and findings of this research cycle contribute to the understanding of how an action research community provides a credible and effective innovation model for addressing a myriad of phenomenological problems facing educational institutions around the world. This study found several positive implications for my personal practice and KISS practices more generally. These outcomes include: (1) KISS leadership increased use of transformational leadership techniques and strategies when implementing an action research communities model, (2) ARCs promoted growth in community relationships, professional growth opportunities, and views of leadership effectiveness, and (3) community satisfaction rates improved after participation in the ARC.

Given these three outcomes, the SMOOCH innovation will continue to be the primary mechanism driving the collaborative and professional development environment at KISS. The KISS leadership team has committed to continuing the SMOOCH innovation and using the Panorama Teacher School Climate Survey (PTSCS) during the 2018–2019 KISS academic school year. KISS leadership has committed their full energy

to the SMOOCH innovation, thus allowing me to pursue my educational leadership passions.

I believe that my research and experience with ARCs has implications for educational contexts facing phenomenological problems outside of the KISS context. Mertler (2018) provides evidence supporting the effectiveness of ARCs in addressing school problems concerned with community engagement, student achievement, and teacher development, in addition to the evidence from this research study supporting its use as an transformational innovation capable of addressing school culture concerns, feelings of job satisfaction, and issues related to employee retention and attrition.

Implications for future research. The data results have now been reported, understood, and interpreted multiple times from various perspectives and viewpoints. The accumulated knowledge that I have gained, combined with the depth of understanding obtained through each cycle of research, confirm my ability to provide credible recommendations for future research and for other researchers to consider. Based on my findings, I have identified the topic of communication style(s) as a critical area for future research, both at KISS and other institutions. Examining the communication structures and techniques in connection with an ARC model matches directly with this current research cycle's guiding research questions and inquiries.

Leadership is performed largely through communication. The communication competence, quality, and styles of a leader can influence the attitude and behavior of employees. Men's (2014) empirical study investigated the relationship between transformational leadership, communication styles, and employee satisfaction. The results

showed that transformational leadership positively influences the organization's internal communication and employee relational satisfaction. Transformational leaders most often use information-rich face-to-face channels to communicate with followers. Specifically, leaders' use of face-to-face channels was positively associated with employee satisfaction.

Future cycles of research should focus on examining the communication style and strategies of school leadership, identifying areas of improvement, and investigating the relationship between transformational leadership communication styles, teacher satisfaction, and action research communities. The communication style is a critical component of transformational leadership and transformational leadership is necessary for developing an organization where "people work together as partners around shared and compelling purposes" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2009, p. 22). Well-developed communication systems create school climates where stakeholders become partners in improving the educational environment.

Reeves (2009) proposes in *Change Wars* that the educational system is currently failing to create improvement and implement change because of structural deficiencies related to poor communication networks. The way information is communicated and policy is implemented is fundamentally flawed and contrary to the real way that change is implemented. Reeves (2009) believes that creating networked structures where people (i.e. policy-makers and teachers) collaborate to bring new ideas and innovations to the network and where these are people and ideas are valued and nurtured is the most vital component of change capable of transforming a school's climate.

The process of change, especially for an educational organization, is a constant struggle. The numerous stakeholders, incredible diversity of populations, the sheer size and magnitude of the organization, and the plethora of sometimes contradictory theories make change in education more difficult to understand and accomplish. However, this does not and should not prevent us from striving for change. Hargreaves and Fullan (2009) discuss change from two perspectives: First, change could include a top-down approach that incorporates a series of change into a well-designed system. The second way to design change is to focus on creating cultures and systems so that they are flexible, self-monitoring self-developers of change (p. 3).

Conclusions

An iterative analysis is a personal analysis of the research. It is the result of a reflective and reflexive process. The conclusion of the iterative analysis presented in this section, therefore, represents a move into the personal reflections resulting from the SIAF process. This section is based on three personal experiences I encountered during the research study, which represent how this study served as a personal learning process. The change in school ownership, the study timeline, and the procedures were three areas where I felt let down, emotionally drained, and doubtful. I struggled to adapt, at times, to the shifting research focus and the balance between work and study.

I have deliberately refrained from specifically reporting on or examining the communication variable in the research results and analysis. This paper has clearly established the important role bias can and should play in the research methods of a hermeneutical study. The communication variable represents, for me, the area most

susceptible to a misrepresentation and misinterpretation. KISS is an amazing institution, worthy of all praise and success displayed within this dissertation. Yet, I entered into this cycle of research with a wholly negative view of the communication style and procedures of KISS leadership. I felt their general support for me and my research, but I knew, based on previous experiences, the study was in a tenable position.

The change in school ownership two years ago was attended with a directive to change my research focus. New school ownership was understandably worried about research involving students. In reflection, I clearly see the reasoning behind the decision. The new ownership did not know me. They purchased a school, but as a private institution, KISS was a business. The potential of negative results would most certainly jeopardize their new investment. At the time, the decision blindsided me. After the transfer of ownership, I continued pursuing my previous research topic. It took nearly four months for leadership to communicate their changed position. I felt powerless and drained.

As I coalesced a new research focus, my doctoral program continued to progress. KISS leadership dragged its feet in committing to core components of this study and the implementation of the ARCs model. As my timeline was delayed, the timeline for this study shortened. The shortened timeline increased pressure and made the task of properly measuring the effects of SMOOCH more difficult. I felt that I had clearly communicated my intention to begin the study in January of 2018 to school leadership and that they had assured me of their mutual intention. Six weeks after the intended start date we finally began. No one from KISS leadership seemed to care. I felt powerless and drained.

I was hopeful as I moved from my dissertation into the beginning of the actual study. However, my hopes were short lived. Prior to my proposal defense I sat with the core members of the KISS leadership team. I laid out as clearly as possible each aspect and procedure for this cycle of research. School leaders chose to use the PTSCS and the PLSCS to quantifiably measure the views and perceptions of both data sources. The study opened with administration of the PTSCS. Two days later, I received this email:

> Bret,
>
> The leadership team has decided that we will not be taking the survey [PLSCS]. We agree that the results would not serve the best interests of the school. Please adapt your study as necessary.

I was once again blindsided. The lack of communication and the manner in which the news was delivered left a bitter taste in my mouth. I felt powerless and drained.

These are three examples where, from my perspective, KISS leadership failed to communicate their intentions and/or failed to follow through with their message. In retrospect, I understand the reasoning behind each decision; however, I still feel that KISS leadership approached many situations with a blasé attitude. The email above exemplifies the almost robotic approach KISS leadership assumed when communicating with teachers electronically. KISS leaders often forward emails to relevant staff members without ever adding a note or a short guiding thought. A quick search of my school email account returned eighty-seven "blank" forwarded emails from KISS leaders from the 2017–2018 school year. This "habit" does not prove the existence of ineffective

communication approaches, but it does illustrate the types of interactions and communication breakdowns, which I was convinced were a core indicator of a poorly developed school climate.

Early drafts of this results section were heavily centered on reporting data based in the communication variable. As previously established, researcher bias can provide a valuable view in certain circumstances, but my bias in this case disregarded the fact that KISS leaders, in person, are not cold or distant, as they may appear in their email communication. My face-to-face interactions with KISS leaders has always been jovial and lively. My qualitative data results introduced multiple pieces of data where KISS leaders displayed a lighthearted, understanding, and warm communication style. I brought up the dichotomy of leadership communication styles and approaches during my final interview with Steve. Steve was a veteran KISS teacher with a knack for providing unique and insightful views and responses. Steve viewed the situation like this:

> Here is what happened, Bret. When we went crazy with the this whole MacBook, Google, internet focused education we all slowly became little robots. We all just forward shit to each other all of the time. It is really easy to just pass the buck now. Don't forget something very important, Bret. Everything you write down especially on an email - 'Can and will be used against you'. Don't get me wrong. I understand what you are saying. I could go months without ever actually speaking to almost every member of the SLT (Senior Leadership Team), you know what I mean?, like they let me be. These people have teachers and god knows how many parents and students . . . God damn . . . I mean really . . .

> Actually, now that I think about it, maybe teachers like you and me should see those impersonal forwarded emails as a sign of respect. They get the email, see that you are the guy, forwarded it on. They know you are going to take care of it. They trust you.

Maybe Steve is right. I do not need, nor do I want a leadership that micromanages me. Maybe what I saw and felt in regards to poor communication from KISS leadership was a reflection of the increased degree to which leadership decisions and communications directly impacted me. In these cases, any change leadership made in regards to the study directly affected me, and only me. I saw communication as an organizational problem. I was tired and perhaps a bit bitter. My stance was made clear in this excerpt from my reflective journal taken the day KISS leadership informed me that teachers not returning for the next school year would be excluded from taking the second administration of the TSCS:

> Fear. KISS leaders are so afraid. Of what? They do not know. It is a fear of the unknown. They know, full well, that they have the power to control the data results. I am an employee first and foremost. I should have figured that they were going to pull something like this. Taking away every person that is leaving means that any TSCS comparison results are pure gibberish. If you take out everyone who is leaving then what good are the results? . . . poor communication is often not what is said, it is in what is not said. But for these guys it is more about just

not doing what you said you were going to do. I just feel like this thing is such a farce.

I saw poor communication as the primary organizational deficiency contributing to teacher feelings of disconnection from the decision-making process. However, as Steve pointed out, communication was a two-way street. My negative interpretations of the communication structure at KISS excluded much of the relevant information for assessing the effects of the ARCs model on organizational communication networks. Men (2014) proposes transformational leaders are:

> Characterized by their interactive, visionary, creative, inspiring, and empowering communication behaviors. Transformational leaders care about the welfare, concerns, and personal growth and development of their teachers. Transformational leaders listen to the feedback and opinions of employees. Such leaders often practice "management by walking around workspaces" and interact with employees face-to-face . . . transformational leaders are tolerant of individual differences and value different opinions. They also delegate power and tasks as a means of developing followers. Thus, by listening effectively to employees, responding to employees' higher order needs, caring about employees' interests, and empowering employees, transformational leadership communication balances of organizational power and creates an environment where teachers feel cared for.

Mertler (2018) sees ARC implementation as a process. It is a commitment that requires the entire organization to engage in a reflective practice. The conclusions,

understandings, and interpretations of this research study indicated a primary need for future research to be conducted examining the communication styles and channels used in effective ARCs by transformational leaders. Research into the communication aspects, using similar research methods and methodologies as presented here, will prove to be valuable for understanding the social aspects affecting the communication networks creating the dialogue between teachers and school leaders.

Concluding Personal Narrative

Phenomenology, the scientific study of a phenomenon, examines the structure of our experiences, specifically, the appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things. Thus, the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first-person point of view (Stanford Encyclopedia). The "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon was first identified through my own personal experiences and was the product of social processes that influenced me at an individual level.

In the opening vignette I told the story of my friend Dan informing me that he was leaving the school where we both taught. Dan was certainly not the first co-worker or friend to utter those words to me, and frankly, the moment was not in any way a momentous occasion in my life. After all, Dan was and still is my friend. He lives not far from where I currently live. I see his new baby boy and have dinner with Dan and his wife as often as I can. Dan's story simply aligned with the timeframe and opportunities in my own life. The truth is, I was happy for Dan to explore his new opportunities. It was me that I felt sorry for.

Any teacher, in any country, will probably agree that a teacher of students with disabilities is only as effective as their ability to form strong relationships with the other teachers. I worked with nearly every single teacher at KISS. It is not uncommon for me to move from providing small group support in an advanced physics class to co-teaching a group of six year olds. With Dan's departure I knew I would once again have to adjust to another new teacher. The reality is that Dan left KISS because he was offered a job at a larger international school in Singapore. With the offer came a salary increase—a really, really, large increase. Of course he left. His motivations were clear and precise. I didn't need to do a study to figure it out.

I am reflecting on the opening story because I think I need to replace it. I wrote most of that story almost three years ago. It is funny because that story used to have so much meaning. It was my "purpose". At least, it was. I see now that Dan's story cannot provide purpose for this study because Dan's story, or at least its effect on me, faded away within the first month of the new school year. Dan's teaching position was filled. Everyone moved on. There is no purpose in studying something which does not actually affect us. Dan's replacement is amazing. She brings a whole different style and life to her teaching. Everyone who is blessed to work with her would confirm this.

Dan was a good teacher. Dan left. Dan was replaced by a good teacher. Attrition is a fact of organizational life. There is no doubt that organizations and leaders will only see systemic benefits from the application of the retention research and theory. But in the three years since I first wrote Dan's story I find myself with a very different perspective. Teachers "leave" all of the time. Some leave the profession, but in my experience,

teachers often leave because the act of teaching, good teaching, requires an element of challenge. Teachers need to leave their positions. New experiences and new environments reinvigorate the passion. It is in a challenge that a teacher finds purpose.

In February of 2018 I began this cycle of research. I was guided in my data collection and research methods by a research question based on measuring the effects of the SMOOCH innovation on the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon at KISS. This was the research purpose. Yet, I struggled to find the challenge in the purpose. I felt my study was not putting forth new knowledge or new understanding. I was merely confirming what was already proven. I forged ahead with the plan, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I was failing to capture the "real" story.

Early drafts of this dissertation could easily be seen as the work of an undisciplined novice researcher with a weak research question, an elementary understanding of theory or methodology, who fumbled his way through a research study and then composed a dissertation of questionable quality, yet had the sheer audacity to, at times, be highly critical of the people and institutions supporting him. So after all of this time, all of this effort, all of this growth, I am left typing the last few pages. What is the conclusion?

I decided to take a short holiday over the summer break. I was mentally and emotionally drained. I took my favorite book to the beach and left the study behind. For three years, my life was working and university. Little time ever existed for binge-watching a TV series or reading a novel. As I laid in my self-strung hammock on a nearly deserted beach on the island of Phuket I found the inspiration I lost. Inside the pages of

Robert Pirsig's classic, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, I was reminded of the "romantic" world I lost because I was tied to my laptop.

Pirsig narrates a motorcycle journey taken between a boy and his father. The father embraces both the rational world through his meticulous maintenance of his motorcycle and the *romantic* world associated with the freedom and beauty of riding a motorcycle on the open road. The boy doesn't care about motorcycle maintenance and dreams of being inside the cars of those they pass by. With the father's patience at an end, he finally agrees to let his boy ride without his helmet for the first time. Instantly the rumble of the engine takes on a new sound with his ears clear of the helmet padding. As the wind begins to blow through his hair, his eyes are opened to the beauty normally blocked by the visor of his helmet. And for the first time he can connect the rational and the romantic.

I shed my singular rational worldview took on the challenge of redefining my research purpose. My challenge was to connect the rational world I thought I was studying with the romantic world that I was living in. The rational world associated with reason and science cannot fully explain the actions and feelings of people. The romantic world is full of art and creativity and multiple interpretations. I was interested in the real experiences and the real interactions, which occurred when an evidence-based and practical PLC was introduced into the KISS community. The purpose was to connect the romantic world (phenomenon) with the rational (innovation) by telling the story of what we experienced together, not just by summarizing numbers.

I spent a large amount of time discussing the first administration of the PTSCS. The PTSCS represented one of the first examples of KISS leadership directly responding to KISS teacher feedback. Teachers felt good about being able to express themselves and see their collective results. Teachers want and need to feel that they are not alone. They need a leadership that listens and is responsive. The goal is not agreement; rather, it is commonality. Small movements from the organizational context can result in huge differences in the perceptions and feelings of teachers. Yet I, personally, was struggling to reconcile the positive feelings associated with the PTSCS and the fact that KISS leadership abruptly decided they would no longer take the leadership school climate survey.

When KISS leadership decided not to do the LSCS I was angry, irritated, and disappointed. The decision quickly made me aware of the fact that I was not in complete control of my study. In my proposal, I said that the survey would be a part of the study and now it wasn't. Leadership is faced with the undeniable fact that their actions can and will cause hardship on members of their community. Leadership is often faced with an impossible decision. I have no real evidence, but I have no doubt that the decision to cancel to the LSCS was a compromise. It was no secret that the new owners of KISS were deeply worried about my study revealing some negative qualities about the school. It is likely that one of the school heads, or all of them, agreed to focus school climate data on KISS teachers. I certainly felt after the results of the TSCS were returned the leadership was determined to respond to the needs of their community.

For months my anger grew. Every "writer's block" moment I experienced was matched with an increase in my belief that if I had the leadership survey data results then my study would be "better". However, as a more romantic view of the study took hold in me, I was able to move towards a deeper understanding of decision-making process. With or without the leadership survey data, SMOOCH was still implemented. A true and honest research study was conducted to measure and monitor the innovation. It was in the romantic world that I found my inspiration in the most desperate and darkest times and it was in the romantic world that I found my conclusion. The rational world of research is hundreds of thousands of studies and millions of pages of research forming a web of confusion and contradiction. The romantic world of research is hundreds of thousands of studies and millions of pages of research forming a web of people and organizations all connected by their joint commitment to improving our world.

I cannot really say I succeeded at answering the RQ or RIs—but I did address or illuminate these issues in the context of this work. I cannot prove that SMOOCH was successful or that it will continue to be successful, but the future of any institutions, big or small, are rarely clear or predictable in the complex landscape of educational practice. I have no way of knowing if I contributed to our overall understanding of the "I'm Leaving!" phenomenon. However, the immediate significance of any work of educational research is often unclear until it finds its way into public discourse over time. However, I can draw a romantic conclusion. TLT, PLCs, AR, ARCs, and the ARHAF are just cogs in the romantic wheel.

Three years ago, KISS opened its doors to me and supported my fumbling research cycles. Three years ago, KISS announced, with one voice, our belief in transformation and our commitment to being and creating lifelong learners. We worked together to create something. It was bigger than SMOOCH or the results of some school climate survey. The whole community supported me, just a regular teacher, for years. They let me poke and prod and annoy them without any incentives. I don't know if SMOOCH will be successful, but I do know that KISS will be. I know that when we opened the door of change we found **transformation**. After all, action research teaches us transformation lies not in the result, rather in the process. Education is a journey, not a destination. Our journey has just begun.

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APPENDIX A

GOOD SMOOCHING GUIDE

Good "SMOOCHing" Guide				
	Guiding Questions	Yes	No	Evidence
Purpose	Have we identified clear and important meeting objectives that contribute to the goal of improving learning?	□	□	
	Have we established the connection between the work of this and other meetings in the series?	□	□	
Process	Have we incorporated feedback from previous meetings?	□	□	
	Have we chosen challenging activities that advance the meeting objectives and engage all participants?	□	□	
	Have we assigned roles, including facilitator, timekeeper, and note taker?	□	□	
	Have we built in time to identify and commit to next steps?	□	□	
	Have we built in time for assessment of what worked and what didn't in the meeting?	□	□	
Preparation	Have we gathered or developed materials (drafts, charts, etc.) that will help to focus and advance the meeting objectives?	□	□	
	Have we determined what, if any, pre-work we will ask participants to do before the meeting?	□	□	
Pacing	Have we put time allocations to each activity on the agenda?	□	□	
	Have we ensured that we will address the primary objective early in the meeting?	□	□	
	Is it realistic that we could get through our agenda in the time allocated?	□	□	

APPENDIX B

SMOOCH MEETING MINUTES

Task/Time	Guiding Question	Background/ Process	Notes
Purpose 5 mins	What is the purpose of this DDD?	This DDD will:	
Predict 5 mins	What do we predict we will see in the data?	The data we will be looking at today is:	
Visualize 5 mins	What do we see at a quick glance from the data?	Look at the data and share what you notice about the colors.	
Observe 10 mins	What do we notice about the data?	Look at the data for trends, outliers, correlations, conflicts, etc.	
Questions/ Inferences 20 mins	What questions do we have about this data? What inferences can we make?	What questions does the data bring up about learners and learning?	
Next Steps 20 mins	Who benefits from further dialogue about this topic? How are the next steps related to the purpose of this DDD?	Individually, or with your support teacher, brainstorm immediate next steps.	Immediate next steps include, but are not limited to:
Reflection and Closing 5 Min	How will we remain mindful of our next steps? What key takeaways do we have from our work today?	A new realization or an "A-Ha" moment…	

Parking Lot Additional questions you may have	