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HOW DO CHINESE K-12 PRINCIPALS' UNDERSTANDING OF
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP CHANGE AFTER PARTICIPATION IN A
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN THE U.S.

A DISSERTATION

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P-12 Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This study will explore the shifting of Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership after participating in a professional development (PD) program at an American university. China's recent educational reform requires school principals to further develop their instructional leadership skills in order to better implement new policies. A qualitative research method has been used in this study. Pre-program interviews and post-program interviews provided the comparison between participants' baseline understanding and new understanding of instructional leadership. This research is important and will make a significant contribution to educational leadership because there is minimal research that examines PD programs for international participants. This study fills a gap in the literature by exploring Chinese principals' understanding of instructional leadership before and after attending the PD program hosted by an American university. Thus, it will provide suggestions for both Chinese K-12 principals and American universities in terms of the improvement of future PD programs.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Globalization is seen as a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding” (Waters, 1995, p. 3). Globalization is a process which connects people all over the world and changes the way people view their place and meaning on this planet. Thus, it can provide avenues to self-exploration and self-development, as well as have a direct impact on nations, environment, culture, economy, education, etc. (Bottery, 2006). The awareness of globalization can help a nation develop and find its place in the global village.

It is crucial for educators to be aware of the globalization process and to make proper adjustments to educational policy and practice. Globalization has an impact on education in ways that have driven the rapid development of the information network, cultural transformation, and intensive competition in many fields. Quality movements in education have been established by governments under the influence of globalization (Porter & Vidovich, 2000). The development of globalization presents education with new challenges and demands (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002).

In China, educational professionals have noticed this major trend in education, and they understand that education in China should adapt to

globalization. To better understand education in a global setting and prepare students to become qualified global citizens, education reform movements have kept evolving in China during the recent decades (Zhou, 2004). With the progress of the education reform movement in China, there are new requirements and demands on educational leaders. Therefore, educational leaders in China are seeking new approaches to improving the current educational practice in China (Chu & Cravens, 2012). As K-12 education provides Chinese students with a foundation of knowledge and skills, it gains great attention from the whole nation, and K-12 school leaders carry a lot of responsibilities on their shoulders. Their understanding and practice of leadership have a direct impact on how school organization and management influences instructional practice and student achievement (Chu, 2003; Huang, 2004). However, most principals have found themselves ill-prepared to navigate a school-wide transformation of strategies of planning, curriculum, instruction, teacher development, performance review, and other key components of school management (Chu & Fu, 2011). Thus, K-12 leaders in China are searching for quality professional development (PD) programs which will further enhance their leadership skills under the educational reform movement in China.

Although Chinese K-12 principals are excited about attending quality PD programs, Webster-Wright (2009) argues that traditional PD is decontextualized from professionals' daily practice. Professional development programs usually deliver courses on how to develop or/and train professionals, whereas continuing professional learning (CPL) programs focus on moment-to-moment workplace

learning. Professional development typically separates professionals from their daily practice and “has a focus on programs and content rather than on learning experience” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 712). Continuing professional learning provides professionals with the ongoing experience of continuing to learn as a professional within the context of everyday work (Webster-Wright, 2009).

This study will explore the shifting of Chinese K-12 principals’ understanding of instructional leadership after participating in a PD program at an American university. With the globalization of education practice, more and more educators from China come to the United States to learn from and experience a different education system and to access new resources. Many American universities provide different types of programs to international participants to meet their needs (Treat, 2009). The K-12 Chinese principals would like to experience and gain more practical knowledge that they can directly apply in their daily work (Su, Adams, & Mininberg, 2000). Therefore, programs are usually designed to help Chinese K-12 principals better understand the American K-12 educational system as well as school management strategies. This study will focus on the participants’ understanding of instructional leadership.

Background of the Problem

“The primary focus of educational development in China has undergone subtle but important changes over the last two decades” (Chu & Cravens, 2012, p. 178). Education now must serve the overall needs of economic and social development as well as promote equity, justice, and a harmonious society (Zhou, 2004). In the 1990s, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and

the State Council of the Chinese Central Government jointly issued *Guidelines for the Reform and Development of Education in China* and *Decision on the Deepening of Educational Reform and the Full Promotion of Quality-Oriented Education*, clarifying the directions and policies for basic education through the early years of the 21st century (State Council of the Chinese Central Government, 1993, 1999). As a result of the establishment of educational reform policy, implementation of quality-oriented education has been taking place in every segment and at every level of China's educational system (Chu & Cravens, 2012). Educational leadership, which stands at the center of this educational reform, has received significant attention from policymakers and educational administration scholars (Chu, 2003; Huang, 2004). "The role of a school principal in particular has been a key focal point of both discussion and research, especially with regards to principal professional development that seeks to cultivate newer and stronger leadership" (Chu & Cravens, 2012, p. 179).

In response to the implementation of educational reform, principal training in China has received increasing attention. This change is easy to understand since principals have been identified as those who are best placed to implement a range of education reform agendas driven by fundamental changes in governance, curriculum, and management (Yan & Ehrich, 2009). According to Su et al. (2000), unlike their American counterparts, Chinese principals usually are appointed by top leaders. They typically receive just a few months of training before they become school principals. The absence of preservice training before 1990 drew attention from the Chinese National Ministry of Education; therefore,

the Ministry of Education has required all principals to participate in a preservice training program for at least a few months before they take a leadership position.

The comparative absence of preservice training for Chinese principals requires that in-service training be provided to further enhance principals' leadership skills, which will enhance their capabilities in implementing the quality-oriented education program (Su et al., 2000; Chu & Cravens, 2012). According to Su et al. (2000), the United States has a much more established system of principal training than China. The American principal training program also covers a wider range of topics than does the Chinese program. Moreover, the Chinese program focuses more on theory and less on field experiences and practical components. In comparison, Chinese programs place greater emphasis on moral and ethical issues in educational administration than do American programs, which focus more on leadership development for school management and change implementation. Since the responsibilities of Chinese principals have been evolving due to educational reform in China, the need for PD programs has increased in recent years. The limitations of principal training programs in China further raises the need for access to high-quality overseas PD programs for Chinese principals (Su et al., 2000).

The goal of PD programs for Chinese K-12 principals at American universities is to provide knowledge and perspective in the area of K-12 school administration within a local setting. Local educators and school leaders will lead the seminars and introduce participants to the policies and administration of K-12 schools in the United States. The focus of these programs will be on school

leadership, student assessment, teacher assessment, and management.

Academic and cultural field trips to neighboring schools will reinforce the applied concepts of the program topics. Improving field experiences has been recommended as an important measure to improve PD programs for principals (Daresh & Playko, 1993; Schmieder & McGrevin, 1994). Thus, the practical knowledge and firsthand experience of the instructors accompanied with field trips will fulfill the participants' expectation. Chinese principals anticipate more exchange and communication between education administrators in the United States and China through mutually beneficial programs (Su et al., 2000). The goal of this research is to determine Chinese K-12 principals' pre-program and post-program understanding of instructional leadership.

Problem Statement

The importance of principals and principals' PD to successful educational reform and school improvement has been established internationally (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). China's recent educational reform requires school principals to further develop their instructional leadership skills in order to better implement new policies. With the intention of better preparing school principals, policies targeting principal development in the area of instructional leadership in China play a critical role in shaping principal development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Dye, 1998). The increasing number of such policies released by both central and local governments underscore the importance of principals' PD

(Feng, 2003). This study will provide the insight into how overseas PD programs for Chinese K-12 principals impact their understanding of instructional leadership.

The existing literature outlines the current situation and the challenges of principal training programs in China. According to Feng (2003), it is estimated that more than one million school principals have participated in initial and ongoing training programs in China. The teacher training universities are involved in the curriculum design and program delivery of principal training programs. However, the current Chinese principal training programs are more cognitive based and include more theory instruction than hands-on experience (Su et al., 2000). Thus, China has much to gain through cross-cultural learning about what constitutes effective leadership development. It is anticipated that overseas PD programs for Chinese principals will strengthen the understanding of the instructional leadership in a global context (Hallinger, 2003b).

Educational reform in China brings many changes to schools, including shifts in curriculum design and instructional practice, which require principals to have improved understanding of and practice in instructional leadership (Wang, 2002). Twenty-first century principals are considered to be instructional leaders (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). From Wang Gungwu's book (as cited in Rigby, 2014, p.612): "Understanding the multiple ways in which principals are expected to be instructional leaders, then, is essential for both researchers in the field and practitioners, especially principal preparation programs and school district leadership". This study fills a gap in the literature by exploring Chinese principals' understanding of instructional leadership before

and after attending the PD program hosted by an American university. Thus, it will provide suggestions for both Chinese K-12 principals and American universities in terms of the improvement for future PD programs.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to define the shift of Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership after participating in a PD program at an American university.

Research Question

In order to study the shift of Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership after participating in a PD programs at an American university, this research will focus on the following question: How do Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership change, if at all, after participating in a PD program at an American university?

Significance of the Study

This research is important and will make a significant contribution to educational leadership because there is minimal research that examines the PD programs for international participants. Attending a PD program is a common way to improve and enhance professional knowledge and practical skills. With the development of globalization, more and more interaction and communication between different countries has taken place in many fields, including education (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). Globalization brings new challenges and opportunities for educators (Bottery, 2006). Educators are seeking new ideas with the intention of better preparing their students for a global society and market. It is not

surprising that educational leaders from different countries are eager to attend international conferences, education fairs, PD programs, and many other activities to enrich their global views (Porter & Vidovich, 2000).

In China, “quality-oriented education” is the main theme for education reform recently (Zhou, 2004). Educators are searching, gathering, and borrowing ideas, practices, experience, and resources from their international peers. During the implementation of new educational practice and policy, school principals shoulder important responsibilities. Therefore, their participation in PD programs at an American university will help them conceptualize their ideas and expand their understanding of new meanings and demands of instructional leadership. This study will identify how Chinese K-12 principals shift their understanding of instructional leadership after participating in a PD program abroad. The research result will help principals and other practitioners to choose suitable PD programs based on their needs and expectations. It will also help PD program providers better understand Chinese K-12 principals’ needs and expectations towards PD programs.

Scope of the Study

This research focused on one group of 10 Chinese K-12 principals who were participating in an international PD program provided by an American university. The study did not include other programs at other campuses. This study included pre-program interviews and post-program interviews to collect narrative responses from program participants. The study only concentrated on the change of participants’ understanding of instructional leadership, if at all, after

finishing the program. The study will not continue studying participants' practice after they return to China.

Assumptions of the Study

This study selected a group of Chinese K-12 principals who are attending an international PD program at an American university. An assumption is they are all school leaders seeking to enhance their leadership skills and enrich their understanding of leadership. Another key assumption is that they provided honest responses and shared their true feelings regarding their experience during the PD program. Their reflections on PD programs may be similar since they share similar backgrounds and working environments. The narrative response provided by the group of Chinese K-12 principals showed how the shift of their understanding of instructional leadership took place. It provides evidence of how a PD program influences principals' understanding of instructional leadership.

Study Delimitations

This study only selected one group of Chinese K-12 principals participating in the same PD program at a single American university. This group of principals is from a single region in China. The study's focus on one selected group at a single campus allowed me to interact with the participants on a more frequent basis. The small number of participants ensured that pre-program and post-program interviews, class observations, and informal conversations, could be completed to provide an in-depth understanding of the participants' perception of instructional leadership.

Study Limitations

This research was limited to studying one selected group of Chinese K-12 principals from the same region in China. The specially tailored international PD program in which they participated is provided by one particular American university and is designed based upon their special needs. This study did not further explore other programs and participants at this university or at other campuses. This study took an in-depth look at the selected group's reaction and reflection on the PD program. The focus on one group provided more detailed information from each participant's perspective. Although they are from the same region with similar experience, the individual participants still had different points of view about leadership. A study of one selected group is most likely provide more in-depth information from each individual participant.

Another limitation of this study is that the findings of research studying one particular group of Chinese K-12 principals from the same region participating in one international PD program at one particular American university will not necessarily apply to other principals and other international PD programs. Principals from other regions in China may have completely different perspectives and understanding of instructional leadership. International PD programs at other campuses may have a different nature from the one provided by the selected university. The goal of this study was to find out how the understanding of instructional leadership of the selected group of Chinese K-12 principals changed after their participation in PD program at this selected American university. The result will provide a basis for principals from this

particular region to reform their education as well as improve their leadership skills. On the other hand, the study will also help program developers at American universities to better understand this group of participants' needs for future improvement in program design and developing.

Definitions of Key Terms

Instructional leadership. Effective instructional leaders are intensely involved in curricular and instructional issues that directly affect student achievement (Cotton, 2003). Teaching and learning must be at the top of the priority list on a consistent basis. Leadership is a balance of management and vision (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001).

International professional development program. "In education, the term professional development may be used in reference to a wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness", mentioned in *The Glossary of Education Reform* (Professional Development, 2013). The international PD program discussed in this study refers to the PD program that has been provided under an international setting.

Quality-oriented education reform movement. The quality-oriented education reform movement aims at developing students' qualities in China. In June 1999, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council of the Chinese Central Government jointly promulgated the *Decision on the Deepening of Educational Reform and the Full Promotion of*

Quality-Oriented Education, further clarifying what it claimed as the direction for the establishment of “a vital socialistic education with Chinese characteristics” (State Council of the Chinese Central Government, 1999) in the 21st century. The term *qualities* covers the domain of well-rounded development in four main areas: morality, intellect, physical health, and artistic attainment (Chu & Cravens, 2012).

Organization of the Dissertation

This study sought to discover the shift of Chinese K-12 principals’ understanding of instructional leadership after participating in the PD program at an American university. This research is important and will make a significant contribution to educational leadership because there is little recent research that studies PD programs for international participants. This research will focus on one particular group of Chinese K-12 principals who are from the same region in China and participate in an international PD program provided by a single American university. The key terms discussed and explored in this study are *quality-oriented education reform movement*, *instructional leadership*, and *international professional development program*.

Chapter 1 provided a context of the background of the study and then defined the problem and purpose of this study. Further discussion was provided on the significance and scope of the study, and definitions of key terms was provided. Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature pertaining to the research question. Chapter 3 contains the research design, including data collection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 presents the study’s findings, and in

Chapter 5, conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations for policy and practice are presented.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter begins with a review of the historical foundation of the study and a brief introduction of PD programs and current education reform in China. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical foundations of this study and an extensive review of the empirical research related to the dissertation topic. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Historical and Theoretical Foundations

Historical Foundation

Prior to 1980, PD options for educational leaders were very limited, expectations for administrator involvement were often low, and participation by school leaders in ongoing professional training was rare (Wimpelberg, 1990). “For many administrators, professional development consisted of attendance at the annual meeting of their professional organization” (Hallinger & Wimplberg, 1992, p. 2). The awareness of the importance of PD for administrators and the expectations of school leaders’ ongoing professional growth had not yet been established (Barth, 1986; Miles & Passow, 1957; Wimpelberg, 1990). In China, before 1990, preservice training for school principals was almost nonexistent. “Once they were identified and appointed to the position by higher authorities, they would usually receive a few months of in-service training or adult education” (Su et al., 2000, p.467). Since 1995, the Chinese National Ministry of Education

has required principals to obtain certificates of preservice training, as well as actively participate in ongoing in-service training, before they move into the principal position (Su et al., 2000).

In the ensuing decades, governments around the world, including China, have noticed the importance of principals' ongoing PD (Zheng, Walker, & Chen 2013). In China, the form of PD programs for principals is determined by government funding, regulation, and provision (Dale, 1997). In the 1990s, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council of the Chinese Central Government jointly issued the *Guidelines for the Reform and Development of Education in China*, and *Decision on the Deepening of Educational Reform and the Full Promotion of Quality-Oriented Education*, clarifying the directions and basic policies for basic education through the early years of the 21st century (State Council of the Chinese Central Government, 1993, 1999). Since then, the policies released for principals' PD were framed within the national educational reform strategy (Lo, Chen, & Zheng, 2010). Principals in China have minimal influence on the form or content of their development programs (Chu & Yang, 2009). In the late 1990s, the focus of PD programs for principals in China was to consolidate the importance of principal certification and to scale up the quality and quantity of higher level training and certification (State of Education Commission, 1995). Aligned with the quality education reform goals, advanced high-quality training for Chinese principals was highlighted as important in leader development in China (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2001). In the current period, the state emphasized that the main goal of

principal PD is to facilitate the implementation of quality education with a focus on the training of rural school principals, principals in areas serving ethnic minorities, and leaders of disadvantaged urban schools (Zheng, Walker, & Chen 2013). Principal development in China been adapted to help educational leaders develop skills and competencies for effective leadership within a complex reform environment (Feng, 2003).

Theoretical Foundation

This study focused on two main aspects: PD and instructional leadership, which will be further presented in the empirical literature review. Professional development is a method through which principals, as adults, pursue life-long learning, since “lifelong learning is embedded in education” (Allmendinger et al, 2011, p.285).

“Adult education includes labels and approaches such as training, continuing education, vocational education, social movement learning, popular education, action learning, critical pedagogy, lifelong learning/education, trade union education, organizational learning, community education, transformative learning, and workplace learning, to name but a few” (Clover, 2014, p. 25). Principals’ PD is considered one common form of adult education. School principals as experts in their own field will be able to identify their problems and concerns during the learning process and actively engage with the program design towards the end of program (Clover, 2014). Compared with a younger group of learners, adult learners participate in the learning process more consciously with clear intention and learning objectives (McGivney, 2004). The

adult learning process can be directed to address different levels (McGivney, 1999):

- *Upwards*. Continue gaining higher level skills and qualifications.
- *Sideways*. Maintain at the same level, however deepen and consolidate knowledge or learn something new without pressure.
- *Downwards*. Learning at a lower level but broaden the scope of knowledge to enhance skills.
- *Zigzag*. Move between lower and higher level learning.

School principals are powerful players who can affect school improvement and bring change (Stoll & Fink, 1996; West, Jackson, Harris, & Hopkins, 2000); therefore, their development is a critical factor in school effectiveness. By noticing this fact, China's Central Government and Ministry of Education, besides continuing to use standards and competency frameworks in leadership development and assessment, started to focus on principals' preparation and ongoing training and development (Yan & Ehrich, 2009). According to Yan and Ehrich (2009), currently there are three kinds of basic training programs for school principals in China. These are (a) qualification training for new principals, (b) improving training for certified principals, and (c) advanced training for selected principals. In addition, in advanced training, many times overseas training has been taken into consideration.

Current literature describes instructional leadership as the integration of the tasks of direct assistance to teachers, group development, staff development, curriculum development, and action research (Blase & Blase, 1999). Instructional

leaders are expected to be able to manage and lead instructional changes and work directly with teachers on this improvement process (Neumerski, 2013).

Early definitions of instructional leadership focused on characteristics of successful leaders (Elmore, 2000). Later research focused on general behaviors of principals in effective schools. Instructional leadership includes working directly with teachers through visiting classes and observing teaching.

Instructional leaders are expected to be experts in curricular development and student assessment as well as in instruction delivery (Neumerski, 2013). More recently, the definition of instructional leadership is no longer limited to a trait approach but encompasses a complex list, including leadership traits, behaviors and actions, concepts and understandings, and more (Portin et al., 2009). The emerging definition of instructional leadership requires relevant ongoing PD programs to help principals become better instructional leaders.

Review of the Scholarly Empirical Literature

The focus of this dissertation is the shift of Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership after participating in a PD program at a single American university. The goal is to examine Chinese K-12 principals' perceptions of instructional leadership and how they understand instructional leadership after finishing the PD program at an American university.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in two broad concepts. The first of these is research that has addressed PD programs for principals with a focus on Chinese K-12 principals. The second is research

related to instructional leadership in terms of principals' professional growth in this particular trait.

Ronald Edmonds (1979) argued that effective schools almost always have leaders focused on instruction. Therefore, in order to effectively carry on school reform, instructional leadership is one of the key components. The ongoing educational reform in China has one focus on curriculum reform which requires school leaders to further develop their instructional leadership (Sargent, Chen, Wu, & Chen, 2011; Qian & Walker, 2013). In order to enhance school leaders' instructional leadership skill, PD programs are considered an effective method. The PD programs for principals with a focus on instructional leadership is essential since proper training increases principals' ability and expertise in school management (Shah, Sultana, Hassain, & Ali, 2011). In China, under the influence of educational reform, the desire for PD programs with a focus on instructional leadership for principals has increased rapidly (Keith, 2011; Qian & Walker, 2013). Schools under the guidance of principals with high instructional leadership skills are more likely to better adapt to changes and implement new initiatives (Neumerski, 2013).

The relationship between educational reform, PD programs for principals, and instructional leadership can be portrayed in the following figure.

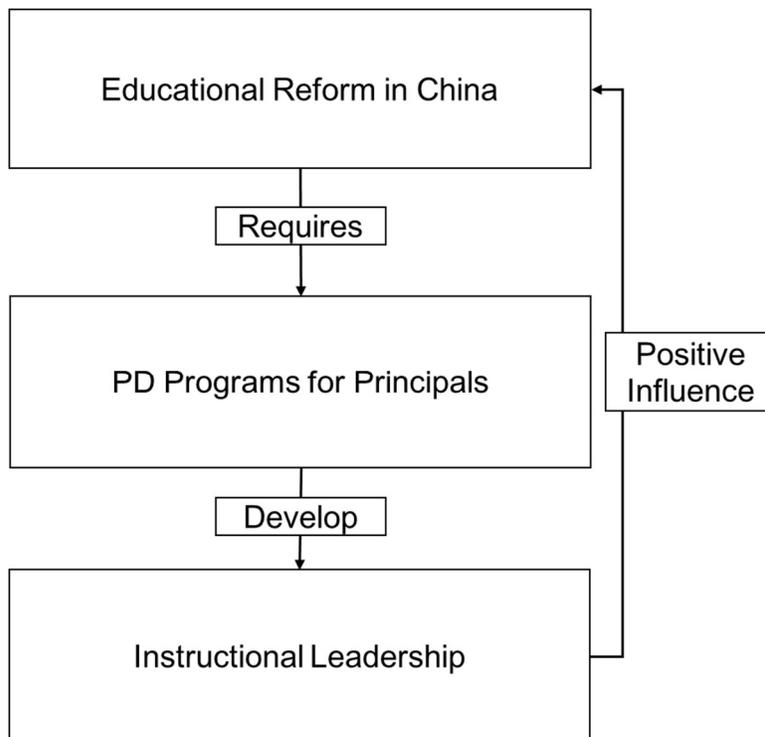


Figure 1. Educational reform in China.

Professional Development for Principals in China

Current research shows that at no other time in history has PD for principals in China been more important than it is today. Since the principalship has been identified as a key factor in the success of school change and improvement efforts, educational leaders must regularly engage in some type of formal PD (Guskey, 1991; Haar, 2004).

Over the last few decades, an increasingly strong educational reform movement has emerged (Chu & Cravens, 2012; Keith, 2011). In addition to changing operational demands, principals also need to cultivate special capabilities for leadership (Cohen, 2001; Fink & Resnick, 2001). Major objectives for PD for principals should include developing individual leadership

effectiveness; enhancing career transition into leadership position; instilling the vision, values, and mission of organizations; and developing skills and knowledge to implement long-term strategic objectives (Conger & Benjamin, 1999).

Peterson (2002) argues that, as educational reform is taking place all over the world, PD for school leaders should provide relevant content addressing school reform. Professional development must address the needs of school leaders who want to deepen their skills in instructional leadership. “With carefully designed and implemented professional development that is linked to preparation, principals and schools will benefit—principals by having a seamless, cumulative learning experience over their careers and schools by having the quality of leaders they deserve” (Peterson, 2002, p. 232).

Within the school system, the principal can determine whether change can happen or not (Barth, 1991). Professional development gives principals the opportunity to reflect on their work, analyze the work they do, clarify their thinking, interact and communicate with their colleagues, and get a better understanding of their schools, responsibilities and their own leadership style (Barth, 1991). Professional development for principals may further enhance their leadership qualities as well as professional capabilities (Shah et al., 2011). Ongoing PD for principals is necessary and crucial in terms of a principal’s self-growth as well as school improvement and development.

In response to globalization, a range of educational reforms have taken place all over the world, including China (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Leithwood &

Menzies, 1998; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). According to Beare (1991, 2006), many of these reforms have had significant implications for school leadership, especially in instructional leadership. In response to these changes and new demands, China joins nations around the world that have started paying close attention to the initial preparation and ongoing PD of school leaders (Feng, 2003; Hallinger, 2003b).

History of professional development in China. Principal training in China did not become systematic until the late 1980s. Since then, it has developed and integrated in many ways. The key outcomes of the expansion of PD include the release of increasingly relevant policies, the increasing number of principals who receive training, the increasing involvement of universities, and growing interest in overseas training (Faculty of Education Administration, 2002; Feng, 2003; Hallinger, 2003b; Yan & Ehrich, 2009).

Based on recent studies, although principal PD in China has been developing rapidly in the past few decades, many challenges remain. Because of significant population diversity and uneven social, economic, and educational development in China, the equal distribution of training can be very challenging (Li & Feng, 2001). Although new methods and approaches have been implemented in principal training programs in China, many old-fashioned methods are still being used in the training, such as written papers and exams (Feng, 2003).

Current PD programs Webster-Wright (2009) argues that current PD practice has a focus on context and knowledge regarding the development and

training of professionals rather than providing professionals with ongoing learning experience which is embedded in their daily practice. In addition, the majority of the current literature of PD is evaluative, which often examines the delivery of PD rather than questions assumptions about learning. Webster-Wright (2009) mentions the importance of shifting the focus of PD from development to learning. Current PD practice often separates professionals from their experience and learning in the workplace. A focus on shifting passive PD to active CPL is very much needed. Continuing professional learning provides professionals opportunities to reflect on and learn from their daily practice at the workplace. Webster-Wright (2009) emphasizes that while reframing PD to enhance professionals' learning experience we should understand how professionals learn. Professional development is an ongoing process not an event (Loucks-Horsley et al., 1987). Stakeholders often mistakenly believe that PD and CPL are the same. In fact, CPL is an ongoing learning experience which happens during the on-site daily practice. However, a well-designed quality PD program will lead to CPL and improvements in practice. Webster-Wright (2009) promotes the shift from PD to CPL, which means the transfer of a decontextualized workshop to an on-site ongoing learning experience. Historically, there is a considerable gap in PD between China and the United States. Initial principal preparation is required in the United States while it was absent in China until early 1980s (Bush, 1998; Su et al., 2000). Although principal preparation and PD in China have developed rapidly recently, there are still challenges and room for improvement for PD in China (Feng, 2003; Li & Feng, 2001). Global sharing and cooperation within PD

for principals would strengthen the understanding of leadership in a different context (Yan & Ehrich, 2009). Therefore, Chinese K-12 principals still desire to learn from their American peers.

Instructional Leadership

A significant body of research has addressed the importance of being an instructional leader. Accordingly, instructional leadership is one of the significant leadership traits for school principals. In the 21st century, school leaders are considered instructional leaders (Louis et al., 2010). In this section, research is reviewed that addresses the following two aspects of instructional leadership: instructional leadership and school effectiveness and the characteristics of instructional leadership.

Instructional leadership and school effectiveness. Effective instructional leaders are intensely involved in curricular and instructional issues that directly affect student achievement (Cotton, 2003). Teaching and learning must be at the top of the priority list on a consistent basis. Leadership is a balance of management and vision (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001). Effective instructional leaders have a positive influence on teachers' instructional practice, thereby influencing student achievement. Instructional leaders should be able to analyze the classroom climate as well as assess the readiness of students and teachers (Chamberlin & Sommerville, 1991).

The primary role of a principal is to be an instructional leader. Although only a few reviewed studies focus on principals' impact, school principals

influence, or at least have the potential to influence, student achievement (Donmoyer, Yennie-Donmoyer & Galloway, 2012). Thus, studies of principal preparation practice should focus on how preparation experience correlates to effective leadership practice as well as how principal behavior influences school conditions, which, in turn, shape school and student outcomes (Pounder, 2012). Recent research show that principals have significant influence on student achievement, and instructional leadership is more important than transformational leadership in promoting student learning (Donmoyer et al., 2012). “The more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater influence on student [learning] outcomes” (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008, p. 636). As a result, it is not surprising that the goal of principal preparation should be linked with student achievement. However, recent research suggests that principal preparation programs do not adequately prepare future principals to be instructional leaders or to influence student achievement. Orr and Orphanos (2011) argue that exemplary principal preparation programs should have the following features:

- A well-defined theory,
- a coherent curriculum,
- active learning strategies,
- quality internship,
- knowledge,
- social and professional support, and
- the use of standards-based assessments.

Quality principal preparation programs play a role in principals' choosing principalship as a career and in their actual career advancement (Orr & Orphanos, 2011).

Principals' leadership influences school effectiveness (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Riedlinger, Bauer & Jantzi, 2003). Effective school leadership should place an emphasis on instruction, climate, high expectations, and continuous monitoring of progress, which will improve students' achievement (Chamberlin & Sommerville, 1991). Thus, effective instructional practice plays a significant role in improving students' success as well as closing achievement gaps. Being able to demonstrate strong instructional leadership contributes to effective schools and student performance (Eldredge, 2008). As a result, principals are accountable for providing strong instructional leadership in their schools to enhance the learning outcomes of students (Zhong & Ehrich, 2010).

Instructional leaders are the key to ensuring that effective teaching takes place in the school site. Over time, the configuration of instructional leadership has broadened. Today it includes leadership practices aimed at enhancing teachers' professional learning and growth (talking and collegial dialogues) and various mediating educational and organizational practices (missions, goals, school climate, curriculum, etc.) by which principals are able to support successful teaching practices and share the responsibilities of instruction (Robinson et al., 2008; Southworth, 2002). Wang Gungwu stated in his book (as cited by Rigby, 2014) "Understanding the multiple ways in which principals are expected to be instructional leaders, then, is essential for both researchers in the

field and practitioners, especially principal preparation programs and school district leadership”.

The characteristics of instructional leadership. Many research studies have informed the characteristics of instructional leadership that involve principals’ supervision of instructional practice in classrooms, such as overseeing implementation of quality instruction, supervising and assessing teachers, setting high expectations for teachers and students, promoting teacher PD, communicating school goals and strategic plan with teachers and staff, aiming to improve student learning, and creating a collaborative learning community to enhance the learning of all members in the school (Eldredge, 2008).

Based on Hopkins and Jackson’s (2003) study, instructional leaders’ practices can be synthesized into three broad domains. They are (a) to define the values and purposes of the school, (b) to manage the program of teaching and curriculum, and (c) to establish school as a professional learning community. No matter the approach through which instructional leadership has been conducted, its ultimate goal is to improve the capacity for learning, teaching, and promoting student achievement (Zhong & Ehrich, 2010).

A recent survey instrument that is available for use by principal preparation programs, the *School Leadership Preparation and Practice Survey* (SLPPS), includes questions on different aspects. In the SLPPS School Leadership Survey instrument, there is a session that indicates the practice of instructional leadership which will reflect principals’ leadership behaviors as instructional leaders (Pounder, 2012):

- Create a coherent educational program across the school.
- Evaluate the curriculum for its use and effectiveness.
- Work with teachers to change content and instructional methods if students are not doing well.
- Plan and implement PD activities for teachers.
- Redesign the school's organization to enhance teaching and learning.
- Understand how to effectively teach different types of learners.
- Facilitate students learning by eliminating barriers and establishing high expectations.

The instructional leadership session in SLPPS school leader survey well defines the desired on-site practice as an instructional leadership. School leaders can use these indicators to evaluate their leadership behaviors or practice (Pounder, 2012).

Instructional leadership is a concept which well describes the role of a school principal in helping to create a culture of instruction in a school, puts student learning as the central goal of a school, and promotes the PD of teachers (Fowler & Walter, 2003). Therefore, it is essential to pay close attention to the development of principals' instructional leadership while they are receiving the professional training.

Chapter Summary

Attending international PD programs is a relatively recent trend among K12 principals in China. The quality-oriented education reform movement drives

school leaders to a new direction in school management. The school leaders are facing many new challenges and requests. Thus, participating in high-quality international PD programs and absorbing new perspectives and concepts from colleagues in the United States becomes one way for Chinese principals to better prepare themselves. There will be more research and studies based on this new tendency in the near future. Instructional leadership is the main focus of this study. The shift of principals' understanding about instructional leadership as well as new knowledge developed from PD programs will further improve and speed the education reform movement in China.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The background and daily practice of K-12 principals in China deeply influences their understanding of instructional leadership as well as their leadership style. After participating in a U.S. PD program, experiencing American education and observing American K-12 schools, Chinese K-12 principals develop new insights and understanding about instructional leadership. In order to study the shift of Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership after participating in a PD program at an American university, this research focused on the following question: How do Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership change, if at all, after participating in a PD program at an American university?

This chapter will discuss and explain the research methodology and design of this study. The chapter begins with a description of the methodology for this study, including a brief literature review that explains the qualitative approach. Next, a description of the research design will be provided within the selected methodological approach, followed by further discussion of the specific research methods used in this study. This includes information about the research setting; sample selection and description; data collection, including instrumentation and procedure; and data analysis, including the validity of the

data and the trustworthiness and role of the researcher. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Qualitative Method Research

This study is focused on Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership, which is based on a narrative perspective that varies from individual to individual. Therefore, a qualitative approach is most suitable for this study. "Qualitative researchers are interested not in prediction and control but in understanding" (Clandinin, 2007, p. 4). Qualitative research helps people understand phenomena, meanings, ideas, etc. In qualitative research, the researcher has the opportunity to interact with subjects in depth in order to collect the narrative perspectives of the research questions. "In some qualitative approaches, engaging participants in the change process is a desirable outcome" (Hatch, 2002, p.1).

Qualitative research aims at understanding how individuals make sense of their everyday lives (Hatch, 2002). Qualitative researchers "are interested in describing the meanings individuals used to understand social circumstances" (Hatch, 1985, p. 143). In this study, a qualitative approach will help determine how Chinese K-12 principals shift their understanding of instructional leadership, and how they describe the meaning of instructional leadership.

Qualitative researchers using observation, questioning, and description are called naturalists (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Naturalists "accept there is a reality but argue that it cannot be measured directly, only perceived by people, each of whom views it through the lens of his or her prior experience, knowledge, and

expectations” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 15). In this study, Chinese K-12 principals’ understanding of instructional leadership cannot be directly measured by statistics. In addition, each principal’s understanding will vary based on that individual’s own background, experience, and knowledge. Therefore, qualitative research methods will be a better fit for this study in terms of measuring the participants’ pre-program and post-program understanding of instructional leadership.

Research Design

In order to better understand how Chinese K-12 principals’ understanding of instructional leadership changes after participating in a PD program at an American university, this study used qualitative interviews, observations, and informal conversations to collect narrative responses from program participants.

Qualitative interviews gather rich and detailed information rather than simple yes or no responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2002). In this study, through pre-program interview and post-program interviews, the participants’ understanding of instructional leadership before and after program have been collected. The data helped find out what is the difference between pre- and post-program understanding as well as how the shift has taken place. The response from different individuals varied, which reflected each individual’s prior experience and existing knowledge.

Observation helps the researcher step back and watch participants’ activities and reactions. “Participant observation extends this ordinary activity by meticulously recording what is seen and heard for a later, more formal analysis of

patterns of action and behavior” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 26). In this study, observations played an important role in discovering how participants react to the lectures, instructors, and new contents of an American K-12 system.

Informal conversations provide a way to approach participants in a more natural setting. Conversational data explore participants' thoughts and feelings in a casual way. In some cases, participants may feel more comfortable sharing their true feelings during an informal conversation than during a formal interview. Since I interacted with participants on a daily basis, informal conversations were another effective method to collect data for the research purpose.

Research Methods

Based on the nature of this study, a qualitative approach has been carried out in terms of data collection and analysis. This section describes the specific research methods that were utilized to apply qualitative methods in this study. Specifically, the setting, sample, data collection, data analysis, and steps taken to ensure validity are presented.

Setting

This study was carried out at an American regional public university. The university provides approximately 20 PD programs to professionals from China, including 3 PD programs for Chinese K-12 principals. The university has maintained a very positive partnership with China. During the past few years, the exchange between administrators, faculty, and students continue developing. Each year, more than 20 PD programs are delivered to Chinese participants and more than 200 Chinese international students come to pursue language training

or/and degrees. This university has expertise in K-12 education and works with local K-12 schools and districts very closely, which provides a very strong support and resources to PD programs for Chinese K-12 principals.

The education reform movement in China motivates Chinese K-12 principals to come to the U.S. to participate in the PD programs. They are seeking new ideas and approaches that can assist them in developing and improving their own school sites. Their ultimate goal is to strengthen their leadership skills in order to enhance instructional practice and improve student achievement. The PD programs for Chinese K-12 principals at American universities provide knowledge and perspective in the area of K-12 school administration within a local setting. Local educators and school leaders lead the seminars and introduce participants to the policies and administration of K-12 schools in the U.S. The focus of this program is on school leadership, student assessment, teacher assessment and management, etc. Academic and cultural field trips to neighboring schools, combined with exposure to practical knowledge and firsthand experience from instructors, reinforce the applied concepts of the program topics.

Sample

Qualitative researchers argue that there is no direct connection between the number of samples and the quality of research (Hatch, 1985). “The purposeful sampling strategies offer a useful framework for thinking about whom to interview” (Hatch, 1985, p. 98). The sample of this study was one particular group of Chinese K-12 principals who attended the PD program at a specific

American university. The participants all came from Jiangsu Province in China, one of the leading provinces in economics, education, culture and historical heritage with high GDP in China. They were selected by the Jiangsu (JS) Provincial Education Department (JSPED) in China. Before the program, JSPED proposed a PD training plan and selected an overseas training channel. After the proposal had been approved by the local State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs office, they started the participant selection process. Most of the participants are K-12 school principals, vice principals, and district administrators with more than 15 years' experience working within the educational field. They are hand-picked educational leaders who play an important role in local educational practice. Their leadership skills and daily practices have significant influence on local districts and schools.

The Chinese K-12 principal group arrived at the American university on May 9, 2016, and stayed on campus for five days. The whole group was selected and sent by JSPED. Before the actual data collection, I distributed a writing prompt to the whole group asking them to describe their understanding of instructional leadership in one or two sentences. Based on their responses, position, and year of experience, I was able to select 10 participants to voluntarily participate in both pre-program and post-program interviews. The selected 10 participants are all school principals with experience leading all levels of schools through K-12, allowing me to collect data from different perspectives.

In order to better differentiate the program participants, the study will group the participants as below.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

	Gender	Age	School	Years of experience
Principal 1	Female	43	Primary school	24
Principal 2	Male	44	High school	23
Principal 3	Female	45	High school	27
Principal 4	Female	50	Kindergarten	33
Principal 5	Male	50	Middle school	30
Principal 6	Male	47	Junior middle school	28
Principal 7	Male	50	High school	28
Principal 8	Male	46	Primary school	27
Principal 9	Female	47	Middle school	28
Principal 10	Male	55	Primary school	36

Data Collection and Management

The goal of conducting interviews is to collect information from people who have knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In order to answer the research questions in this study, pre-program interviews and post-program interviews have been carried out to collect data. On the first day, a writing prompt was given to all 27 program participants to determine 10 interviewees. The length of the PD program for Chinese K-12 principals, which has been studied in this research, was one week with five days of training. Therefore, the pre-program interviews were launched at the second day, the post-program interviews were finished on the very last day of the training. The program interviews were aimed at assessing participants' baseline

knowledge and understanding of instructional leadership while the post-program interviews helped collect participants' new knowledge and understanding of instructional leadership after finishing the PD program.

The three observations were conducted during the program sessions on the third, fourth, and fifth days. The lectures and workshops closely related to instructional leadership were targeted sessions to conduct the observations. Observations notes have been taken during the observation. The purpose of conducting class observations was to record participants' direct reactions to instructional leadership during the lectures and/or workshops. Class observations also helped me to understand the level of the participants' engagement during the PD program, which may influence their understanding of instructional leadership upon the completion of the program.

The 10 informal conversations happened on a daily basis. The purpose of conducting informal conversations was to effectively collect information from these conversations. Since informal conversations were embedded in the daily interaction with participants, no recording for the ten conversations. However, the researcher kept immediate notes for each day's conversation.

Table 2. Number and Length of Data Collection

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Writing prompt	27				
Pre-program interview		10			
Class observation			1	1	1
Informal conversation	2	2	2	2	2
Post-program interview					10

Procedures. In this study, 10 pre-program interviews were conducted on the first day of class. Each interview was approximately 15 to 20 minutes. During the program, three class observations were conducted. In the day-to-day interaction with participants, 10 informal conversations were conducted on a daily basis. On the last day of the program, post-program interviews were held. The interviewees were exactly the same group of interviewees who received the pre-program interviews at the beginning of the PD program. The length of each interview was similar to that of the pre-program interview.

During the data collection process, all interviews were recorded. The class observations were recorded with field notes. The informal conversations were recorded by immediate field notes. After all on-site data collection had been finished, the next step was translating and transcribing interviews and writing up the field notes. Since all data collection methods were conducted in Chinese, the translation was a very important step before data analysis.

Data management and analysis. During the data collection process, a digital recorder and iPhone were used as the recording instruments. Class observations and informal conversations notes were used as research data as well. In order to keep track of observations and informal conversations, a notebook was used to keep field notes. A data log helped to better manage data and record the process of data collection and data analysis.

After being translated, transcribed, and cleaned up, all clean data were uploaded to Dedoose. Dedoose is a software which helps the qualitative researcher keep and analyze the data. The next step after uploading data to

Dedoose was data coding. By coding the data, I was able to find same patterns, similarities, and differences which helped to develop findings and conclusions from the data.

Role of the researcher. The role of the researcher in this study was a qualitative researcher, interviewer, and observer. My educational and professional background had a significant impact on this research. As a former high school teacher in China and a current international program manager at an American university, my professional experience determined my interest in K-12 education in China as well as in the development of international PD programs at American universities. My educational background is directly related to K-12 education, and I have experienced both Chinese and American education systems.

My educational and professional experience further enhanced my personal understanding of instructional leadership. In this case, during the study, I tried to avoid influencing the participants' responses to interview questions by adding personal understanding, which might have misled participants in their responses to interview questions.

Procedures to ensure validity and/or trustworthiness. My educational and professional experience could have possibly influenced the participants' responses, which could raise the concern of trustworthiness of the study. In addition, my personal background and experience may have also impacted my understanding and interpretation of participants' responses. In order to minimize

these concerns regarding trustworthiness and to maximize the validity of the data, several procedures were followed in the course of the study.

First, I recorded all interviews to make sure that the first-hand information was maintained. Second, the transcriptions of all interviews were sent to interviewees for their review so that they could make sure they agree with what has been transcribed based on the interviews in which they participated. Third, a bilingual translator was invited to review all translations and provide feedback, ensuring that the translation was accurate and did not reflect my own biases.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the rationale and theoretical foundation of choosing the qualitative research method for the study has been discussed. Further, research design and research methods have been described. Followed by a detailed description of the research setting, sample, data collection and management, data analysis and interpretation. At the end of this chapter, a possible concern of trustworthiness of the study was discussed and possible solutions were provided to ensure validity. The research findings are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

As discussed earlier, the purpose of this research was to examine the shift of Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership after participating in a PD program at an American university. In order to study this shift, a qualitative method was used to collect and analyze data. This study focused on Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership and is based on a narrative perspective that varies from individual to individual. Therefore, a pre-program interview, a post-program interview, class observations, and informal conversations were carried out to collect data from participants. Since the participants' first language is Chinese, all interviews and informal conversations were in Chinese. After being translated, transcribed, and cleaned up data, all data was uploaded to Dedoose for data coding. By coding the data, I was able to develop findings and conclusions. This chapter will first briefly discuss participants' demographics and the data collection process. Then it will focus on discussing the findings of the research question.

Research Question

The goal of this study was to answer the following research question: How do Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership change, if at all, after participating in a PD program at an American university?

All 10 participants in the study fully engaged in pre-program and post-program interviews. In addition to conducting interviews, I also undertook three class observations and 10 informal conversations to collect supporting data. After carefully analyzing existing data, the findings are presented below.

Pre-program Understanding of Instructional Leadership

Since all participants are K-12 school principals with more than 15 years of experience in the educational field, they all had heard about instructional leadership before entering the PD program. In addition, they all have done some research and study on instructional leadership during their career. Four out of 10 had been to America before and three out of four had attended PD programs in the United States before. As a result, they had already developed a certain level of understanding of instructional leadership. Pre-program interviews revealed several important components of their existing understanding at the start of the study.

They value student and teacher involvement in curriculum design and development. All 10 participants mentioned the importance of student and teacher involvement in curriculum design and development during their interviews, evidenced by such comments as, “School-based curriculum means both students and teachers are actively engaged in the curriculum design and development,” and “Good curriculum should meet the needs of your students and teachers. Their involvement plays a significant role in curriculum reform.”

As mentioned earlier, the ongoing educational reform in China has one focus: curriculum reform (Qian & Walker, 2013; Sargent et al., 2011). Therefore,

one of the most important responsibilities for school principals in China is to develop and implement new curriculum at their school sites to meet the needs of educational reform in China. According to this study's interviews, Chinese principals believe instructional leaders' getting students and teachers involved in developing new curriculum is essential. Teachers are the one who will teach the curriculum. They must be comfortable with what they are going to teach. One principal mentioned in his interview: "I used to be a classroom teacher before I became a principal. I knew how important it is that teachers can be involved in curriculum development process." At the same time, students are the center of a school. School is a place to provide the best educational experience and service to students. The curriculum should be suitable to the students. One principal mentioned in his pre-program interview, "Curriculum should serve students' needs and help provide best practice in educating our students." Thus, students and teachers should be actively involved in the process to ensure the quality and effectiveness of curriculum development.

They seek to establish a fair and high-quality assessment system.

Since the 1970s, the college entrance exam (Chinese Gao Kao) is the only summative assessment of students' K-12 learning outcomes in China. Although implementation of quality-oriented education has been taking place in every segment and at every level of the nation's educational system in China (Chu & Cravens, 2012), Gao Kao is still the main focus of K-12 education in China. Under this background, principals in China need to balance the formative and summative assessment. All 10 study participants expressed their concern in how

to better balance these two types of assessment. As one principal expressed it, “As long as Gao Kao is still existing, it is difficult to ignore the power of this summative assessment.” Other principals also brought up a similar point: “The only way to examine students’ learning outcomes for 12 years in school is Gao Kao. We’d love to highly promote formative assessment at our school; however, we can’t run from Gao Kao.” The Chinese principals have already noticed the importance of formative assessment; however, “Formative assessment requires a long-term commitment and a systematic practice. Only when Gao Kao is not existing anymore can we fully carry out formative assessment,” asserted one Chinese principal.

The study participants strongly believe that, in order to achieve quality-oriented education, it is essential to develop students’ learning abilities, problem-solving skills, and team work skills, along with other life-long beneficial skills. At the same time, preparing students for Gao Kao remains an important goal. Hence, developing a fair and quality assessment system through K-12 education is necessary and extremely important. Formative assessment can help evaluate students’ learning process and progress; therefore, it can help teachers reflect and adjust their teaching practice. Summative assessment can help evaluate students’ periodic learning outcomes; thus, help teacher reflect and adjust periodic goals and objectives.

They seek to provide instructional support and resources to teachers. Instructional leadership requires school leaders to work directly with teachers on the improvement of instructional practice (Neumerski, 2013). All 10

study participants agreed that instructional leaders should provide support and resources to teachers in their instructional practice. They also discussed some common practices on their school sites in terms of providing support and resources to teachers:

- Sharing clear expectations and standards with teachers;
- promoting open and timely communication;
- encouraging teachers to express their thoughts, ideas, problems and concerns;
- developing teachers' self-motivation;
- providing PD sessions and workshops; and
- developing teachers' professional knowledge, abilities and value.

The Chinese principals understood that support from leadership plays a very important role in school's daily practice. Noted one principal, "The quality of instruction is the most important focus of a school. A good instructional leader usually provides support to his/her teachers. As an instructional leader, one of the priorities is to provide teachers with support and resources in instruction."

One principal mentioned, "As a school leader, it is very important to let your teachers know your expectation towards instructional practice at your school site. At the same time, give your teachers the opportunity to openly express their thoughts and concerns."

Most of these Chinese principals believe that developing teachers' self-motivation can better promote instructional practice; one commented, "Self-motivation makes my teachers go extra miles." Giving teachers more PD

opportunities is another effective method for improving instructional practice. One principal said, “Teachers value and enjoy periodic PD opportunities.”

They all agree that supporting teachers and providing instructional resources are among the most significant responsibilities of instructional leaders. The quality of instructional practice best indicates the quality of education a school offers to students. Therefore, how well a school leader supports the classroom teachers to improve their instructional practice directly reflects the school leader’s instructional leadership skills.

In addition to the common understanding of instructional leadership, some participants also expressed unique understandings. One of the participants voiced the opinion that instructional leadership is more about demonstration than leading. Many of the Chinese principals believe a leader should demonstrate the best practices in teaching and help teachers improving their practice. One noted, “What makes an instructional leader? First, you need to be a qualified classroom teacher. Only when a school leader knows how to teach and what is a high-quality teacher, can the leader better service the school.”

One high school principal argued that the college entrance rate and result of Gao Kao are the best indicators of instructional leadership. These two sets of data are the most direct quantitative data to reflect the outcomes of instructional practice. Thus, an instructional leader should pay great attention to increasing college entrance rates and Gao Kao scores. “What is a good high school? If only 10% of your graduates enter college each year, do you think this is a high-quality school? Do you feel you are a qualified principal? Of course not.”

In conclusion, all 10 participants already had a high level of understanding of instructional leadership. All of them are exemplary K-12 school principals; therefore, their rich experience as school leaders had established a solid foundation of their understanding in instructional leadership.

Post-program Understanding of Instructional Leadership

The participants stayed at the American university for one week, attended seven seminars and visited three local schools. After the PD program, I conducted post-program interviews with the 10 participants. All participants expressed their satisfaction with the PD program. They all agreed that, although one week is a relatively short period of time, this PD program was very informative, productive, and beneficial. They liked the school visits most, which gave them an in-depth look at American K-12 schools. During the PD program, instructional leadership has been mentioned by almost every instructor as well as by local school principals whom they have visited with. Participants asserted that, no matter which country are you from, education around the world has a lot in common. In addition, they firmly believe their baseline understanding of instructional leadership also has a lot in common with that of their American peers. They experienced and observed similar ideas and practice here in the United States. The PD program actually enhanced their confidence in their existing understanding of instructional leadership.

Participants also established and developed some new points of view about instructional leadership.

Leadership versus power. The push for quality-oriented education reform has been taking place in China for several decades (Chu & Cravens, 2012). Chinese instructional leaders are expected to be able to manage and lead instructional changes and to work directly with teachers on this improvement process (Neumerski, 2013). Study participants agreed that to carry out a new policy, implement a new change, develop a new curriculum, or establish a new assessment system does not mean to use your power to push the process. An effective leader should know how to use leadership to influence the whole school so that the whole school can actively move the process forward. After interacting with instructors and American peers, all 10 participants felt American school leaders are influencing their schools.

During their participation in the PD program, the 10 Chinese principals went on several field trips and toured local K-12 schools. They found out that “American schools are more like working families. In China, we see more power and hierarchy. Actually, influence is more powerful than order.”

A school principal usually determines a school climate. The Chinese principals were amazed that principals at local schools were able to recognize each student and teacher on campus. Local principals know the students’ names and even their birthdays. This was seen as an example of instructional leaders offering positive influence to the whole school, which can effectively improve instructional practice. These school leaders seemed to view themselves as one of the team members within the school family not a boss with great power.

The importance of teachers' professional development. All 10 participants agreed that instructional leaders should provide instructional support and resources to their teachers. They expressed approval of the way American school leaders offer PD opportunities to their teachers. After completing the PD program, study participants had a better idea of how to provide support and resources to their teachers. Several mentioned in their interviews that they really like some current practices in American K-12 schools that support teachers and help them improve instruction, such as:

- Providing systematic training program for new teachers,
- conducting periodic formal and informal class observations with timely and authentic feedbacks to new teachers,
- assigning experienced well-performing teachers to new teachers as their mentor,
- bringing in teaching experts and instructional coach to provide PD workshops and trainings, and
- forming Professional Learning Committees (PLC) to enhance on-site PD and promote collaboration.

Teacher-owned curriculum. With the implementation of quality-oriented education programs in China, school principals are responsible for some fundamental changes in governance, curriculum, and management (Yan & Ehrich, 2009). Curriculum reform is a main focus of current K-12 education in China. After attending the PD program, all participants noted that American schools are experiencing the similar situation due to the implementation of

Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Under the CCSS requirement, districts and school sites are working to develop and adjust their curriculum. Teachers play a very important role in this process. The study participants felt that U.S. teachers display very strong ownership of their curriculum. The teacher-owned curriculum gives teachers rooms for creation and innovation. In addition, teachers can develop and adjust their curriculum based on students' needs.

One principal stated in the interview, "I was amazed by the curriculum ownership that American teacher carried on when they were implementing CCSS. I feel this practice increased teachers' self-motivation dramatically." The Chinese principals would like to bring back and promote this idea at their own school sites.

Teacher assessments. School principals are powerful players who can affect school improvement and bring change (Stoll & Fink, 1996; West et al., 2000). Effective instructional leaders have a positive influence on teachers' instructional practice, and they can influence student achievement. Instructional leaders should be able to analyze the classroom climate as well as assess the readiness of students and teachers (Chamberlin & Sommerville, 1991). Therefore, besides assessing students' learning outcomes, an instructional leader should also be able to assess teachers' performance. All 10 participants expressed their interest in learning the teacher assessment system in American K-12 schools. They mentioned that in China, public schools only hire teachers with teaching credentials. Once they schools have hired the certified teacher, the teacher automatically becomes tenured. "Teachers are locked to the school

district once they have been hired.” Although they also have teacher evaluations periodically, it is very difficult to get rid of ineffective teachers. As an instructional leader, to ensure the quality of teachers and instructional practice is essential. An effective teacher assessment system is extremely important. There are many good practices they have seen and learned from their American peers, such as self-evaluation and reflection, peer evaluation and work in PLCs, student anonymous evaluation as well as administrator formal evaluation. Usually formative assessment practices are aimed at supporting teachers to improve practice, while summative assessment practices are for the purpose of personnel decisions. The 10 Chinese principals all agreed that an instructional leader should have the ability to establish and implement an effective teacher assessment system at the school site to ensure the quality of teachers and instructional practice.

All in all, the participants’ understanding of instructional leadership shifted from a theoretical approach to more practical approach. They mentioned and discussed many current practices of instructional leadership in American K-12 schools in their post-program interviews. They report that they will pay more attention to practical experience after having participated in the program.

Chapter Summary

After carefully analyzing the data collected from interviews, class observations, and informal conversations, I found that the 10 study participants had a high level of understanding in instructional leadership before entering the PD program. After finishing the program, the 10 participants reported enhanced

confidence in their existing understanding of instructional leadership. In addition, they shifted their focus from a theoretical approach to a practical approach. They developed more understanding of how to practice and carry out instructional leadership at their daily work.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

China is recently experiencing quality-oriented education reform (Chu & Cravens, 2012), which requires school principals to further develop their instructional leadership skills in order to better implement new policies. With the intention of better preparing school principals, policies targeting principal development in the area of instructional leadership in China play a critical role in shaping principal development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Dye, 1998). China has much to gain through cross-cultural learning and sharing about what constitutes effective leadership development. It is anticipated the overseas PD programs for Chinese principals will strengthen the understanding of the instructional leadership in a global context (Hallinger, 2003a). This study fills a gap in the literature by exploring Chinese principals' understanding of instructional leadership before and after attending a PD program hosted by an American university. The purpose of this research is to define the shift of Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership after participating in a PD program at an American university. The research focused on the question of how Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership changes, if at all, after participating in a PD program at an American university.

This study is focused on Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership, which is based on a narrative perspective that varies

from individual to individual. Therefore, qualitative approaches have been used for this study. I selected 10 participants from a group of Chinese K-12 principals sent by JSPEd. Pre-program and post-program interviews, three class observations, and several informal conversations were conducted to collect narrative data.

This chapter will first discuss the conclusions of this study, then provide implications and recommendations. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the dissertation.

Conclusions

This study found out that the selected 10 Chinese principals already had a high level of understanding in instructional leadership before they participated in the PD program, but that understanding was mainly focused on a theoretical approach. This is not surprising since in China the form of PD programs for principals is determined by government funding, regulation, and provision (Dale, 1997). Principals in China have minimal influence on the form or content of their development programs (Chu & Yang, 2009). The current Chinese principal training programs are more cognitive based, which include more theory than hands-on experience (Su et al., 2000).

The 10 participants' understanding and knowledge about instructional leadership were closely related to teachers, students, and instruction since effective instructional leaders are intensely involved in curricular and instructional issues that directly affect student achievement (Cotton, 2003). Teaching and learning must be at the top of the priority list on a consistent basis (National

Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001). Thus, in their baseline understanding of instructional leadership, the Chinese principals in this study discussed students and teachers' involvement in curriculum design and development as well as assessment of students' learning outcomes. Recent research results show that principals have significant influence on student achievement and instructional leadership is more important than transformational leadership in promoting student learning (Donmoyer et al., 2012). "The more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater influence on student [learning] outcomes" (Robinson et al, 2008, p. 636). As a result, it is not surprising that the 10 participants considered establishing a fair and quality students' learning outcome assessment system as one important characteristic of instructional leadership.

Instructional leaders are the key to ensuring that effective teaching takes place in their school site. One of the key characteristics of an instructional leader is providing teachers with sufficient instructional support and resources. Instructional leaders are expected to be able to manage and lead instructional changes and work directly with teachers on this improvement process (Neumerski, 2013). Thus, the 10 participants shared some common practices on their school sites in terms of providing support and resources to teachers in the pre-program interviews.

Historically, there is a considerable gap in PD between China and the United States. The initial principal preparation is required in the U.S. while it was

absent in China until the early 1980s (Bush, 1998; Su et al., 2000). Although principal preparation and PD in China have recently developed rapidly, there are still challenges and room for improvement for PD in China (Feng, 2003; Li & Feng, 2001). Hence, after participating in the PD program, the 10 study participants shifted their understanding of instructional leadership from a theoretical approach to a practical approach. Seminars and field trips provided them a more in-depth understanding of how to demonstrate instructional leadership rather than simply the theory of instructional leadership. They shared a lot more about practicing instructional leadership in post-program interviews compared with pre-program interviews. According to the 10 principals, they believe as instructional leaders the main focuses are still students, teachers, curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Effective instructional leadership practices aim at enhancing teachers' professional learning and growth (talking and collegial dialogues) and include various mediating educational and organizational practices (missions, goals, school climate, curriculum, etc.) by which principals support successful teaching practices and share the responsibilities of instruction (Robinson et al., 2008; Southworth, 2002). Thus, instructional leaders should pay great attention to teachers' ongoing PD and always support and provide opportunities for teachers to participate in PD sessions.

Effective instructional leaders have a positive influence on teachers' instructional practice and influence student achievement. Instructional leaders should be able to analyze the classroom climate as well as assess the readiness

of students and teachers (Chamberlin & Sommerville, 1991). Therefore, effective school leadership should have an emphasis on instruction, climate, high expectations, the and continuous monitoring of progress, which will ensure students' achievement (Chamberlin & Sommerville, 1991). In order to promote students' learning and achievement, designing and developing effective curriculum and ensuring high quality instruction are essential. At the same time, fair and effective teachers' assessment system also plays a significant role in ensuring students' achievement.

Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of this research is to define the shift of Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership after participating in a PD program at an American university. This study fills a gap in the literature by exploring Chinese principals' understanding of instructional leadership before and after attending a PD program hosted by an American university. The implication and recommendations that are made to Ministry of Education in China and Chinese K-12 principals are aimed at helping develop new policies to improve Chinese K-12 principals' leadership skills. The implications and recommendations that are made to American universities are aimed at helping design and develop high quality international PD programs to better meet international professionals' needs.

Implications and Recommendations for Chinese Policy

This section aims at providing implications and recommendations for Chinese government policy in the K-12 education field.

Shift from summative assessment (Gao Kao) to formative

assessment. Since the 1970s, the College Entrance Exam (Chinese Gao Kao) has been the only summative assessment of students' K-12 learning outcomes in China. Although implementation of quality-oriented education reforms have been taking place in every segment and every level of the nation's educational system in China (Chu & Cravens, 2012), Gao Kao is still the main focus of K-12 education in China. Students, teachers, principals, and parents struggle with balancing formative assessment and summative assessment. In the future, summative assessment Gao Kao should not be the only way to determine if a student should receive higher education or not. The assessment system in China should shift from summative to formative progressively. All 10 interviewees in this study expressed their concerns on how to balance formative assessment and summative assessment. They all know that formative assessment can evaluate students' learning from multiple perspectives. In addition, it offers periodic reports on students' progress which help teachers adjust their instruction accordingly. Summative assessment like Gao Kao only provides students one opportunity to prove their learning outcomes. With the implementation of quality-oriented education, formative assessment should be in place to support the process. Otherwise, students and teachers will struggle to find the balance between developing qualities and preparing for Gao Kao.

Institute high-quality PD programs for Chinese K-12 principals.

Principal development in China has been slowly improved to help educational leaders develop skills and competencies for effective leadership within a complex

reform environment (Feng, 2003). In order to better prepare school principals in China, more high-quality principal preparations programs as well as PD programs should be developed in China. School principals are powerful players who can affect school improvement and bring change (Stoll & Fink, 1996; West et al., 2000). Therefore, their development is a critical factor in school effectiveness. More than half of interviewees in this study emphasized the importance of ongoing principal development during their interviews.

Implications and Recommendations for Chinese and American Practice

This section provides implications and recommendations for Chinese K-12 principals in improving their daily practice and implications and recommendations for American universities that are interested in offering PD programs to international participants.

Chinese K-12 principals. Chinese principals can bring many ideas and practices back to their school sites that can help with the quality-oriented education reform implementation. According to the 10 participating Chinese principals, in order to improve teachers' instructional practice, schools can provide periodical PD training for teachers, establish PLCs, develop and implement teachers' assessment system, provide timely and authentic feedback on teachers' instruction, and much more.

The 10 principals mentioned that, since teachers in China achieved tenure at the time of hire, subsequent ongoing PD for those teachers is the most important tool for ensuring the quality of instruction. Therefore, establishing PLCs should be a good approach for schools in China. At least five principals

mentioned in the informal conversations that they would like to borrow the PLC model to promote collaboration among their teachers. Some of the principals already had similar practice at their school sites. At the same time, implementing a teachers' assessment system is another effective method to improve the quality of instruction. The assessment system usually includes both formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment helps make progress and improvement, while summative assessment helps make personnel decisions.

Following are some recommended practices:

- Formal and informal class observations by school administrators.
- Class observations by peers.
- Evaluation and feedback by students.
- Evaluation and feedback by peers.
- Self-reflection and evaluation.

American universities. In the post-program interviews, all participants noted that their favorite parts during the PD program were the field trips to local K-12 schools. These trips provided them with an opportunity to take a close look at U.S. K-12 schools. They were able to observe the daily practice and operation of local K-12 schools. During these trips, they observed classroom instructions, faculty meetings, student activities, and school assemblies. They had the opportunity to interact with local school principals, teacher, students, and staff members. They were amazed and impressed by many practices in local schools. American universities that provide international PD programs can add more practical components to the program. Arranging more field trips during the PD

program can be a very good approach to attract and international audience. PD programs should provide ongoing learning process in an actual workplace (Webster-Wright, 2009). This idea also applies to international PD programs. Field trips can offer international program participants more opportunities to actually observe and experience their American peers' practices.

Implications and Recommendations for Theory

School principals need ongoing development as adults. "Adult education includes labels and approaches such as training, continuing education, vocational education, social movement learning, popular education, Action Learning, critical pedagogy, lifelong learning/education, trade union education, organizational learning, community education, transformative learning and workplace learning, to name but a few" (Clover, 2014, p. 25). Ongoing PD for school principals will help develop individual leadership effectiveness; enhance career transition into leadership position; instill the vision, values, and mission of the organization; and develop skills and knowledge to implement long-term strategic objectives (Conger & Benjamin, 1999). A focus on shifting passive PD to active CPL is very much needed. Continuing professional learning provides professionals with an an opportunity to reflect and learn within their daily practice at the workplace. However, a well-designed quality PD will lead to CPL and improvements in practice. Webster-Wright (2009) promotes the shift of PD to CPL, which means the transfer of a decontextualized workshop to an on-site ongoing learning experience.

The primary role of a principal is to be an instructional leader. School principals influence, or at least have the potential to influence, student achievement (Donmoyer et al., 2012). Recent research results showed that principals have significant influence on student achievement, and instructional leadership is more important than transformational leadership in promoting student learning (Donmoyer et al., 2012). The ultimate goal of an instructional leader is to promote students' learning outcomes and achievements. Professional development programs can further develop leaders' leadership skills, which will positively influence students' achievement. School is the place to provide students with high-quality education. School leaders are the persons who ensure that students receive best practice of instruction and who produce the best learning outcomes.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

This research is limited to studying one selected group of Chinese K-12 principals from JS province in China, which is one the most well-developed provinces in China with high GDP, outstanding economy, and education. Therefore, exemplary K-12 principals from JS province usually bring rich experience and outstanding leadership skills. There are huge gaps between principals from JS province and other, less well-developed, provinces. Future research can focus on principals from other region of China.

This study included a PD program that was relatively short: only five days of training. Future research can focus on a longer, more extensive PD program; the result might be different.

Summary of the Dissertation

The purpose of this research was to examine the shift of Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership after participating in a PD program at an American university. The 10 participants included brought a high level of understanding in instructional leadership to the program. After finishing the program, all 10 participants reported enhanced confidence in their existing understanding. In addition, they shifted their focus from a predominantly theoretical approach to a more practical approach. They developed more understanding of how to practice and carry out instructional leadership strategies in their daily practice.

School principals' primary responsibility is to promote and maximize students' positive learning outcomes. Professional development programs for K-12 principals are aimed at better preparing principals and further developing their leadership skills. Field trips offer program participants hands-on and practical experience. Globalization is a process which connects people all over the world and changes the way people view their place and meaning on this planet (Bottery, 2006), and international PD programs and interaction with global peers are growing trends in education. More interaction between Chinese and American school principals will take place in the near future to benefit both parties. The result of this study will provide some useful information for future practice in international PD programs.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participants Selection Prompt

Did you hear about instructional leadership before?

Yes No

(If yes, please briefly share your understanding of instructional leadership. If no, based on the phrase “instructional leadership”, what come to your mind?)

Pre-program Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Research objective: This interview is aimed to find out how Chinese K-12 principals understand instructional leadership when they first arrive at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (CPP).

Introduction: This interview is for my Ed.D program and aims in understanding and collecting qualitative data for my dissertation. Your participation will be highly appreciated. Please feel free to let me know if you are not comfortable with any questions.

Main Questions:

Would you please briefly introduce yourself? (Name, position, education background, anything about yourself)

- Is this the first time you come to the U.S.?

Yes No

(If yes, what motivates you to travel overseas to participate in this PD program? If no, when was your last visit and for what purpose?)

- What does it mean to you to be an “instructional leader” and what do you think is the most powerful strategy to improve teaching and student learning?
- How do you establish and implement academic standards at your school?
- How do you provide instructional support and resources to your teachers?

Closing:

Thank you very much for your time and participation. If I have any further questions, can I talk to you again? Would you like a copy of your interview transcript? Thank you very much!

Post-program Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Research objective: This interview is aimed to find out how Chinese K-12 principals understand instructional leadership after finishing the PD program at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (CPP).

Introduction: This interview is for my Ed.D program and aims in understanding and collecting qualitative data for my dissertation. Your participation will be highly appreciated. Please feel free to let me know if you are not comfortable with any questions.

Main Questions:

- How long have you been here and what is your favorite part in the PD program?
- Did you hear instructional leadership a lot during the program?
 Yes No
 (If yes, based on instructors' inputs about instructional leadership, what's your understanding about instructional leadership now?
 If no, based on your experience during the program, what's your understanding about instructional leadership now?)
- Upon the completion of the PD program, what does it mean to you to be an "instructional leader" and what do you think is the most powerful strategy to improve teaching and student learning?
- Upon the completion of the PD program, what strategies can you think to establish and implement academic standards at your school?
- Upon the completion of the PD program, how do you think you can better provide instructional support and resources to your teachers?

Closing:

Thank you very much for your time and participation. If I have any further questions, can I talk to you again? Would you like a copy of your interview transcript? Thank you very much!

APPENDIX B
ADULT CONSENT FORM

Dear: [Recipient's name]:

My name is Candy (Ying) Tan. I am a Program Manager of Global Education Institute at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, as well as a candidate of Doctoral Program at California State University, Fullerton.

The Study

I am conducting a study to learn the shift of Chinese K-12 principals' understanding of instructional leadership after participating in the professional development (PD) program at an American university. The research is important and will make contribution to educational leadership and international PD programs since there is not much research examining the PD programs for international participants.

Benefits/Risks

Your participation will involve a pre-program interview which will help understand your existing knowledge about instructional leadership; and a post-program interview which will exam your understanding of instructional leadership after participating in the PD program. Each interview includes three to five questions. The length of interview will be approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The benefit of your participation is to contribute information about your understanding of instructional leadership as a school leader. This may assist current development of international PD programs for K-12 school leaders in developing

their instructional leadership. In addition, I anticipate that the interviews will help you to reflect on your learning in this program.

Confidentiality

Research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. The researcher will not identify you by name in any reports using information obtained from the interview, and that your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. The digital copy of research data will be stored in a password protected laptop and a password protected desktop. The hard copy of research data will be stored in a locked cabinet. Both digital copy and hard copy of research data can only be accessed by the researcher. The data will be kept for five years and will be destroyed after five years.

Right to Refuse

Your participation in the interview is voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, you have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

Contact Information

If you have additional questions please contact Candy (Ying) Tan at (626) 652-9699 or candyt859@hotmail.com. Dr. Jennifer Goldstein at (675)278-3963 or jengoldstein@fullerton.edu.

If you have questions about the rights of human research participants contact the CSUF IRB Office at (657) 278-7640 or irb@fullerton.edu

Conflict of Interest

There will not be any conflict of interest relating to results of this study. The design, conduct and reporting of the research will not be affected by any conflicting interests.

Consent Clause

I have carefully read and/or I have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By signing below, I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this project. You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Your signature below indicates that you are giving permission to audio/video tape your responses.

Signature of Participant

Date

All California State University employees are mandated reporters under California's Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act ("CANRA"). Whenever a CSU employee, in his/her professional capacity or within the scope of his/her employment, has knowledge of or observes a person under the age of 18 years whom the employee knows, or reasonably suspects, to have been the victim of child abuse or neglect, the employee must report the incident to the appropriate authorities.