

LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS: A NARRATIVE RESEARCH STUDY EXPLORING WOMEN  
SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT'S MEANING-MAKING OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT  
EXPERIENCES

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## Abstract

Literature on women's leadership reveals women are underrepresented in top leadership roles in public education in the U.S. (Skarla, 1999) and superintendency is the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States. The object of this study was to explore the leadership journeys of five women school superintendents from small-midsize school districts in the remote geographic region of U.S (Alaska). This type of school leader may differ from mainland US state Superintendents because of Alaska's "frontier" and "independent" nature. The study used Super's career development theory and Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory as frameworks to uncover meaning-making of leadership development experiences, which are associated with leadership across the lifespan of the five women superintendents. This study employed a qualitative narrative research design. Narrative content was analyzed, using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches.

Seven conclusions emerged from this study. First, experiences and activities that are associated with leadership and that occur in non-formal settings were important for leadership development of these women school superintendents. Second, experiences that gave women school superintendents' opportunities to show leadership and the recognition of their leadership by others helped build their self-concept of being a leader. Third, meaning making is a part of leadership learning of women school superintendents, which can occur in non-formal settings and can begin in early childhood. Fourth, family influenced the development of leadership qualities of women school superintendents, starting from the growth stage. Fifth, the self-concept of being an educational leader, who can make a positive impact or can perform leadership tasks, drove women school superintendents to take educational leadership positions. Sixth, women school superintendents have a supportive network because of the credibility they built over time.

Seventh, women school superintendents have positive attitudes toward being female superintendents.

*Keywords:* female superintendents, leadership development, critical reflection, career development theory, adult learning, transformative learning theory, women leadership

## DEDICATION

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my family. To my grandparents, who supported me emotionally and financially through my primary education and taught me the importance of education and personal integrity. To my family for being supportive and sacrificing time with me so I could achieve my dream.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	5
LIST OF FIGURES .....	11
LIST OF TABLES .....	12
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	13
Statement of the Problem.....	13
Significance of the Problem.....	17
Research Questions.....	19
Positionality Statement .....	19
Conceptual Framework.....	22
Transformative Learning Theory .....	23
Career Development Theory.....	25
Overview of Research Plan.....	29
Research Site.....	30
Research Design.....	30
Limitations .....	31
Summary.....	32

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	34
Leadership Theory .....	34
Trait Approach .....	36
Style Approach.....	37
Contingency Approach .....	38
Transformational Leadership .....	39
Distributed Leadership.....	40
Leadership Development .....	41
A History of Leadership Development .....	42
Current Literature of Leadership Development .....	43
Adult Learning Theory and Leadership Development .....	45
Behaviorism .....	45
Cognitivism.....	46
Social Learning Theory.....	46
Constructivism .....	47
Mezirow’s (1978) Transformative Learning Theory .....	48
Career Development Theories .....	50
Parson’s Trait-Factor Theory .....	51
Holland’s Career Typology Theory .....	52
Super’s (1957) Life-Span/Life Space Theory.....	53

Krumboltz's (1976) Social Learning Theory of Career Choice .....	54
Constructivist Theory.....	56
Women's Leadership in Public Education.....	57
Historical review .....	57
Female Superintendents .....	59
Barriers.....	61
Summary .....	63
<b>CHAPTER 3: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY.....</b>	<b>66</b>
Research Methodology .....	66
Qualitative Research Design.....	67
Narrative Research Tradition.....	67
Researcher's Role .....	69
Sample Design .....	70
Participants.....	71
Sample Size.....	72
Data Collection .....	72
Recruitment and Access.....	73
Pilot.....	73
Individual Interview .....	74
Researcher's Notes and Reflexive Journal .....	78

Data Analysis .....	80
Data Storage, Protection, and Retention .....	82
Trustworthiness.....	83
Credibility .....	85
Transferability.....	88
Dependability .....	89
Confirmability.....	90
Human Participants and Ethical Precautions .....	91
Chapter 3 Summary .....	91
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>94</b>
Participant Profiles.....	94
Individual Profiles.....	96
Lisa.....	96
Midge .....	96
Ann.....	97
Candy .....	97
Marie.....	98
Key Themes .....	99
Theme 1: Career Development .....	101
Theme 2: Self-concept .....	110

Theme 3: Critical Reflection.....	122
Theme 4: Internal Motivation.....	126
Theme 5: Family Influence.....	128
Theme 6: Network.....	131
Theme 7: Glass Ceiling.....	135
Chapter 4 Summary.....	139
<b>CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>144</b>
Interpretation and Conclusion.....	146
Leadership Development across Life Span.....	147
Self-concept of being a leader.....	149
Critical reflection and leadership learning.....	151
Family influence and the development of leadership.....	154
The decision to be a leader.....	156
Network and leadership opportunity.....	157
Glass ceiling and Attitudes of Women Leaders.....	159
Implications for Practice.....	161
Recommendations for Future Research.....	166
Chapter 5 Summary.....	169
References.....	172
Appendix A Email to Potential Participants.....	191

Appendix B Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study .....	193
Appendix C Interview Guide .....	197
Appendix D Thank You Email to Participants .....	201
Appendix E Follow-Up Email to Participants .....	202

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework .....	23
Figure 2. Data Analysis Approaches .....	81
Figure 3. Summary of Participants' Leadership Development.....	162
Figure 4. The Evolution of Leadership Literature and Recommendations.....	167

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Super's (1957) Career Development Stages .....	28
Table 2	Holland's (1985) Six Job Personality and Work Environment Types .....	52
Table 3	Interview Format.....	75
Table 4	Alignment of the Interview Questions to Leadership Development Experiences.....	76
Table 5	Generic Data Collection Schedule .....	78
Table 6	Data Storage, Protection, and Retention .....	83
Table 7	Demographics and Backgrounds Summary.....	95
Table 8	Codes, Categories, and Themes .....	100
Table 9	Individual Career Development Stages: Lisa .....	103
Table 10	Individual Career Development Stages: Midge.....	104
Table 11	Individual Career Development Stages: Ann .....	105
Table 12	Individual Career Development Stages: Candy.....	106
Table 13	Individual Career Development Stages: Marie.....	107
Table 14	Participants' Activities during Growth Stage .....	108
Table 15	Participants' Self-Described Metaphors.....	117
Table 16	Self-Described Headlines .....	121
Table 17	Participants' Self-Described Critical Reflections.....	124
Table 18	Leadership Qualities Gained from Family Activities .....	130
Table 19	Network Influence .....	132
Table 20	Participants' Leadership Journey Summaries.....	142
Table 21	Participants' Perceptions on Gender Discrimination Toward Superintendency and Metaphors .....	161

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

This doctoral thesis centers on the leadership journeys of women school superintendents. Specifically, it seeks to understand meaning-making of their leadership development experiences. This chapter begins with a statement of the research problem, a discussion of the significance of the study, presentation of the research questions, and a positionality statement. Then, the conceptual framework that informs the inquiry is presented, followed by an overview of the research plan and a discussion of the limitations of this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Men are “40 times more likely to advance from teaching to the top leadership role in schools than are women” (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000; Skrla, 2000a, p. 45). Men are overrepresented in superintendency in U.S. public education (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). U.S. Census Bureau data showed superintendency is the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States (Bjork, 2000; Dobie & Hummel, 2001; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000; Skrla, 2000a; Skrla, 2000b). Although the feminist movement during the 1970s and 1980s drew attention to the underrepresentation of women in school administration (Skrla, 2000a), the underrepresentation still continues. As we advance in the 21st century, which was expected to be the “golden age for women in school administration” (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 34), the number of women in senior level leadership positions, such as superintendent, has not greatly increased. Women are forced to learn to adapt and work in a male-dominated leadership culture, where it is difficult for them to break through and succeed (Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010).

There have been attempts to help women succeed in senior leadership positions. Several programs and workshops have been established to assist women in gaining the confidence and skills to succeed in leadership. For example, the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) sponsors conferences and workshops for women seeking leadership positions (Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010). However, these efforts for advancing women into leadership positions have not greatly changed the underrepresentation of women in superintendency. Nationally, only 24 percent of public school superintendent positions are held by females (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000); in Alaska, the figure is even lower, 20.7 percent (Alaska Department of Education, 2014).

Many studies have been conducted to investigate how women become superintendents (FeKula & Roberts, 2005; Kim & Brunner, 2009; Maienza, 1986; McDade & Drake, 1982; Muñoz, Pankake, Ramalho, Mills, & Simonsson, 2014). These studies tried to address career path models for women superintendents (McDade & Drake, 1982), women's barriers in the journey toward superintendency (Muñoz et al., 2014), and gender differences issues (FeKula & Roberts, 2005; Kim & Brunner, 2009; Maienza, 1986). The gender difference aspect of career development toward superintendency has been given much attention by scholars. This topic includes the question of why fewer women than men pursue superintendency (FeKula & Roberts, 2005), a look at gender differences in career development (Kim & Brunner, 2009), and an assessment of the differences in access to superintendency between men and women (Maienza, 1986). While scholars pay attention to comparing men and women, little is known about the strengths and inner abilities that make women superintendents different from other women, particularly with regard to their learning process at the cognitive level along their journeys to leadership positions. Understanding their career paths and the external forces involved is not

enough to understand the phenomenon. The key issue is not about describing their career paths, but about describing what they learn from experiences, activities, or tasks as they follow those paths.

Learning is a multifaceted phenomenon that may include “something as straightforward as memorizing a set of facts or developing a new skill, or as complex as a transformation of one’s personality or worldview” (Courtenay, Merriam, & Reeves, 1998, p. 102). The latter type of learning is the focus of this study. It is known as transformative learning, a type of learning that involves “the process of using a prior interpretation to construct a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). This theory has emerged as a valuable framework for leadership development of women (Debebe, 2009), professional development of educators (Kabakci, Ferhan Odabasi, & Kilicer, 2010; King, 2004), and career development (King, 2002; Kroth & Boverie, 2009). It has gained scholars’ interest and has been used widely in different contexts, because “transformative learning goes to the heart of what people are, how they relate to institutions and society at large, what they should be, and how they can change” (Sands & Tennant, 2010, p. 100). It provides a comprehensive framework of how learners learn from their experiences (Brown & Posner, 2001). The main mechanism of transformative learning is making meaning or interpreting an experience (Mezirow, 1991). In this sense, meaning-making and learning are interrelated, as “learning always involves making a new experience explicit and schematizing, appropriating, and acting upon it” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 11).

A review of the literature shows meaning-making has been used to understand learning and cognitive development of individuals in several contexts, including those involving privileged and disadvantaged students (Barraclough & McMahon, 2013), HIV-positive adults

(Baumgartner, 2005; Courtenay et al., 1998), Vietnam veterans (Liu, 2013), couples expecting their first child (Nataša, 2011), Jewish adults (Schuster, 2005), and women with insulin-dependent diabetes (Stuckey, 2009). In the educational field, meaning-making within a transformative learning framework, in general, has been used to examine learning of educational leaders that takes place in traditional classroom settings, for example, in pre-service administrator training (Brown, 2005), graduate programs designed to prepare teacher leaders (Ross et al., 2011), teacher leadership programs (Harris, Lowery-Moore, & Farrow, 2008), year-long leadership programs for women (Lafreniere & Longman, 2008), and graduate leadership courses (Sullivan & Palmer, 2014). One study investigated the meaning-making of educational leaders that takes place in informal settings. In that study, stories of 23 school principals were captured to examine principals' professional learning (McGough, 2003). Findings showed one factor that influenced their professional learning was impressions of teachers and schooling formed in early childhood.

Although meaning-making and learning of educational leaders has been explored, little is known about meaning-making and learning of women school superintendents. In addition, knowledge about learning of educational leaders is still limited to what takes place in formal settings. The results of these empirical studies do not show a holistic view of the learning process that includes learning in natural settings. They capture only “a single snapshot of their learning experiences” (Baumgartner, 2002, p. 56). There is a mismatch between “the way learning is conceptualized in most school settings and the way learning and meaning-making happens outside of school” (Wildman, 2005, p. 16). Educators in the field of leadership development of women must correct this mismatch and think about an alternative way to look at learning: ongoing cognitive development, occurring in natural settings. The present study explores

meaning-making of five women school superintendents' experiences in the State of Alaska from this perspective. Since the journey to leadership positions is part of career development, this study uses Super's career development theory (1990) to guide an assessment of experiences, relevant to participants' career paths to leadership positions. These career-relevant experiences, suggested by Super (1990), include experiences at different stages of the participants' lives, including growth, exploration, establishment, and maintenance. Super's fifth stage of decline is irrelevant to the purposes of this study. The interviews on which the current study is based were conducted to ask the women school superintendents about their career-relevant experiences associated with their leadership, starting from their childhood.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Several research studies have been conducted on how to advance women into leadership positions (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010; Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Debebe, 2009; Debebe, 2011; Lafreniere & Longman, 2008; Stead, 2014). However, only a few women succeed at breaking the glass ceiling. Educators and career counselors face challenges determining how to help women step into leadership positions. In the educational field, superintendency is identified as the most male-dominated profession (Bjork, 2000; Dobie & Hummel, 2001; Skrla et al., 2000; Skrla, 2000a; Skrla, 2000b). Although many studies have investigated how women become superintendents, they pay little attention to what makes women superintendents different from other women. "What distinguishes the leader from everyone else is that he [or she] takes all of his [or her] life experiences . . . and makes himself [or herself] all new and unique" (Bennis, 2003, p. 62). To gain insights into the underrepresentation of women school superintendents, this

study explores the leadership journey of women school superintendents to understand how they make meaning of their experiences, particularly leadership development experiences.

By examining women school superintendents' subjective meaning of leadership development experiences, researchers can better understand which leadership development experiences are meaningful or relevant to female leaders' leadership, how meaning and knowledge are constructed, how these leaders think for themselves, and what other factors influence leadership development of women leaders. Knowledge about these meaningful experiences, leadership relevant experiences, the meaning-making process, and other factors that influence leadership development of women leaders shed light on the complexity of leadership development of women, as well as why and how they become leaders. This study attempts to provide information useful to parents and educators, supervisors of women, leadership trainers, and institutions that create and manage leadership development programs for women; most importantly, this study offers insights to women who want to pursue leadership positions in educational settings, particularly superintendency. For parents and educators of young girls, this study provides useful information in fostering the development of leadership of young girls. Supervisors of women can also benefit from this study if they use the information as guidance to foster leadership development of female subordinates. For trainers who develop leadership development programs for women, this study provides guidance to improve leadership development training programs for women. For educational institutions, these findings can provide insights for institutions seeking more diversity in leadership positions, particularly superintendency. For women, who want to pursue leadership positions, the findings described here can provide suggestions about useful meaningful experiences and "what distinguishes the leader from everyone else" (Bennis, 2003, p.62).

This study contributes to the literature on women leadership development by adding to the body of research on the developmental process of leadership that occurs in non-formal settings and on the underrepresentation of women among school superintendents. This study also challenges educators and career counselors to look at leadership development in a way that considers experiences not only in formal settings, but also in informal ones, and experiences throughout one's life, including childhood, youth, and adulthood.

### **Research Questions**

The objective of this study is to explore leadership journeys of women school superintendents. Specifically, this study uses Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory as a framework to uncover meaning-making of leadership development experiences in four stages of women's life spans, i.e., the stages of growth, exploration, establishment, and maintenance (Super, 1957, 1990).

The main research question is: *How do women school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?*

### **Positionality Statement**

The research question used to guide this study is exploratory in nature. This study, therefore, is qualitative research in which the primary instrument and the findings rely on how the researcher understands and makes sense of the phenomena from the participants' perspectives (Merriam, 2002). Because the researcher's culture, assumptions, and biases could affect the research findings, this section discusses the researcher's position relative to this study regarding women leadership.

Born and raised in Thailand, a small country in Asia, I grew up with oriental beliefs, values, and cultures. However, my educational career has opened my international eyes. For nearly a decade, I have taught and developed foreign language programs in higher education. My working experiences have provided me with strong background knowledge in education. As a college instructor, who has worked in two parts of the world (Thailand and the United States), I have witnessed differences and similarities in the two educational systems. Although the American system seems to support equal opportunity and offer an inclusive environment in the workplace, challenges that American women face in stepping up as administrators are similar to those of Thai women.

As a woman with a desire to pursue a leadership position, I enrolled in a doctoral program in education at Northeastern University, with a concentration in organizational leadership. During my second year in the program, I took leadership courses and learned about “the glass ceiling,” defined by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) as “the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements” (p. 4). Those courses made me realize that women face many challenges along their paths to leadership positions. When I took courses in adult learning theory, Mezirow’s (1978) transformative learning resonated with me, with regard to the idea that adult learners learn by making meaning of their life experiences. My interest in this cognitive process prompted me to conduct further research on this topic.

When I moved to Anchorage, Alaska, I found that, in the state of Alaska, there are 53 superintendents, and only 11, or 20.7 percent, are female (Alaska Department of Education, 2014). The low percentage of women school superintendents raised my concern about women being underrepresented in superintendent positions. This concern led me to search for insights

into this phenomenon, so I conducted research to explore the experience-based learning of women school superintendents at a cognitive level.

My personal experience regarding gender bias in career advancement has made me critically reflect on my experience when looking for a job after I got married and had a child. I was thinking about applying for my first job in the U.S. as an assistant professor of Thai at the Defense Language Institute. I told my relatives in Thailand about the idea. I was excited about the possibility and expected to hear encouragement, but I was surprised by their reactions. The comments they made included statements, such as: “Why are you looking for a job?” “You are a married woman with a child and you are getting old now.” I was 32, at the time, and I thought to myself, “What is wrong with being 32 years old, married, and having a child?” This experience triggered critical reflection that required me to make meaning of “who I am” and “who I see myself to be as in the future.” I asked myself about career possibilities and my role as a wife and a mother. Through this reflection and careful introspection, I changed my old view from that of a woman born in Thailand, who sees a traditional role of women as stay-at-home-housewives, to a new perspective of one who sees women as having the potential to succeed in a career, while still having a happy family. I finally applied for the job and got a job offer. Everyone in my family was happy and curious to know how I passed the meticulous hiring process. From this experience, I believe women face challenges and biases toward career and career advancement, but women who become successful leaders have an inner strength that makes them different from others, such as the ability to think for themselves and reassess their worldviews to guide their actions. These beliefs and biases shaped my perspectives for this study.

## **Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework explains the focus of any study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The phenomenon of interest for this study was the meaning-making process of women school superintendents' leadership development experiences that occur in four developmental stages from childhood to middle adulthood: growth, exploration, establishment, and maintenance. This study employs transformative learning theory, which provides a comprehensive framework of how women school superintendents learn by interpreting the meaning of their leadership development experiences. Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory is a primary means to look at their meaning-making process, and Super's (1957) career development theory has been adapted for use as a guide for leadership development experiences.

The following figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework that supports this study. The key constructs are presented within a circle of transformational learning, including critical incidents, critical reflection, meaning-making, and new worldviews (Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 2000). The meaning-making process occurs throughout one's career developmental stages (Super, 1957, 1990) as ongoing learning on the career path to leadership positions. The steps in the figure represent career developmental stages and demonstrate, "career decision-making is a lifelong process in which people continually strive to match their ever changing career goals to the realities of the world of work" (Smart & Peterson, 1997, p. 359). Throughout this lifelong process, individuals' self-concepts evolve through engagement in career development stages and tasks. The arrows between the stages represent the "recycling" process that may occur when "social forces as economic downturns, layoffs, computerization, and the advent of new technologies, or new career paths within the organization can all stimulate recycling backward through career stages" (Smart & Peterson, 1997, p. 359).

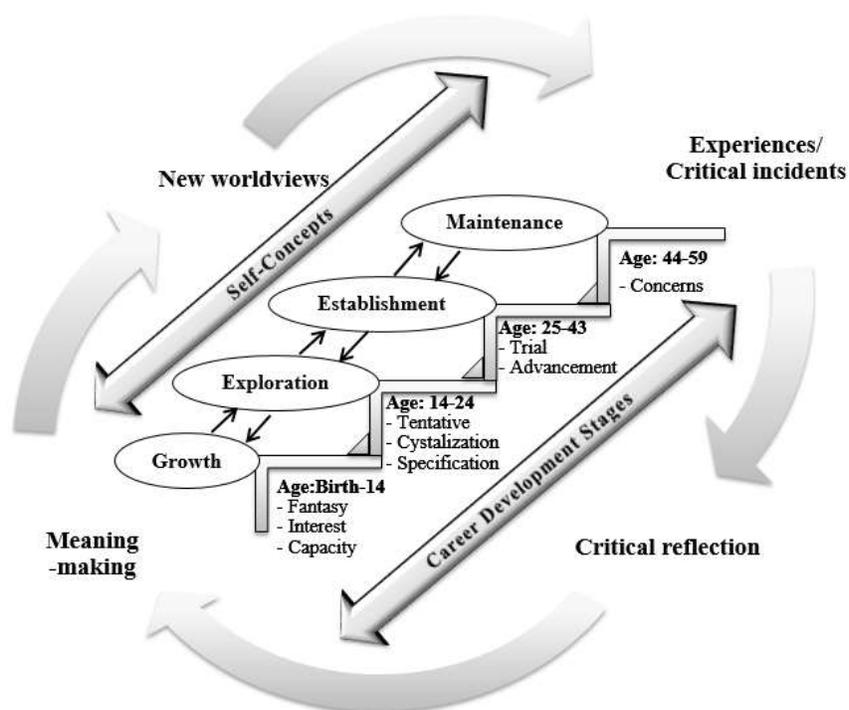


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### Transformative Learning Theory

Many theoretical frameworks of adult learning explain how knowledge is created: behaviorism, cognitivism, social-learning, and constructivism. Learning can result from environmental stimuli, and behaviorists believe these stimuli evoke responses or behavioral changes (Skinner, 1969). However, environmental stimuli are not the only source of learning; as the cognitivists claim, learning comes from the mental capabilities or the cognitive processes of humans that process the information, make sense of the stimuli, and create knowledge (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Besides theories based on the stimuli-response process and the cognitive ability of humans, another theory holds that learning can also be a part of social interaction. Social-learning theories emphasize interaction with and observation of others in the social context as a source of learning, and learning is no longer an individual process (Schwandt,

2005). As the adult learning paradigm expanded, constructivists came to believe that experiences of individuals become a source of learning and knowledge (Mezirow, 1978). The interpretation of one's experiences and the process of critical reflection on those experiences are critical in knowledge creation. This process leads to transformative learning, i.e., learning that transforms or changes one's perspectives.

The concept of transformative learning, or learning by critically reflecting and revising the meaning of one's experiences, results from the evolution of the adult learning paradigm that expands beyond formal instruction (Schwandt, 2005). The adult learning paradigm has shifted the focus from formal learning in specific settings to various forms of learning in various contexts that can occur anytime throughout one's life (Tough, 1967). Learning is now viewed as multidimensional. Knowledge can be acquired not only through study and instruction, but also the meaning-making of experiences (Schwandt, 2005). An understanding of the meaning-making process of educational leaders differentiates reflective and non-reflective action (Schwandt, 2005). Reflective action requires validation of prior knowledge. It is a deep reflection of women leaders as they try to make meaning of their leadership development experiences. The focus of this study is on one's mental processes, rather than on the impact of formal training. The key components of transformative learning theory are "the mental construction of experience, inner meaning, and reflections" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 130).

There are seven lenses through which to view transformative learning (Taylor, 1997). Taylor (1997) divided these lenses into two groups: sociocultural and individual. The sociocultural approaches center on social-emancipatory, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, and planetary approaches. According to Taylor (1997), the sociocultural approaches can be found in the work of Freire's social emancipatory approach, Sheared's cultural-spiritual, Tisdell's

cultural-spiritual approach, and O'Sullivan's planetary approach. The second group, which focuses on individual learning, pays attention to psychocritical, psychodevelopmental, and psychoanalytic perspectives. These individual lenses can be found in the work of Jack Mezirow (1978, 1991, 1994, 1996, 2000), Laurent Daloz, and Robert Boyd.

Of these two groups of lenses, the individual approach seems appropriate to this study, because the main focus of the study is on learning from the inner meaning-making process of each individual. The study aims to explore individual woman school superintendent's meaning-making of the leadership development experiences, which is unique and different. A comprehensive well-known framework for a transformation of an individual's psychocritical perspectives can be found in the work of Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory. The current study employs this individual approach in viewing the meaning-making process.

Mezirow's (1978) theory focuses on the way adults make sense of their life experience through transformation of their worldview. The meaning-making process starts with one's experiences. One must critically self-evaluate one's assumptions and beliefs, until they transform to new meanings in searching for "a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 10). One will evaluate the arguments to reassess assumptions to achieve the best possible judgment and then act on the new perspective (Mezirow, 2000).

### **Career Development Theory**

Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory is used as a primary lens to look at the meaning-making process of female leaders' experiences throughout their paths to leadership positions. Leaders encounter many experiences on their journey to leadership positions. To

narrow the area of interest, career development theory is used to guide experiences that leaders may encounter along their journey.

Learning is a lifelong process. To learn how leaders learn or make meaning from their experiences, one must examine that process throughout the life of the leader. Although there are many career development theories that can help illuminate career choice and development, Super's (1957) life span, life space theory is used in this study, because it is a career development theory that aligns with the concept of the ongoing nature of learning. It provides a comprehensive framework of "the long developmental process which begins in early childhood where children's first career choices are expressed through fantasy and attends to the process of evolving and implementing the vocational self-concept through the exploration of work roles and live experiences" (Grier-Reed & Conkel-Ziebell, 2009, p. 24). Super's (1957) greatest contribution to career development was the recognition that career choice changes and develops throughout one's life as a result of experiences.

Super (1957) proposed five career developmental stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline, the last of which is not relevant to this study. One must successfully complete the vocational developmental tasks in each stage to progress through the developmental stages. In the exploration stage, around age 15 to 24, one must go through a cognitive process, called crystallization, which involves a self-examination of realistic career options and preferences. The summary of Super's (1957) career development stages and vocational developmental tasks is presented in Table 1. The table shows the five career developmental stages, along with their substages. Each shows vocational development tasks socially expected of a person at a chronological age. Although Super's (1957) developmental stages were proposed in a chronological age, in 1990, he recognized development does not

depend upon chronological age, but the individual's personality and life circumstances (Smart & Peterson, 1997). The mini-cycle of the five stages may occur within one stage when one encounters unexpected life circumstances, such as loss of employment. Social forces may stimulate the recycling process and make the development go backward through career stages.

Table 1

*Super's (1957) Career Development Stages*

<b>Super's (1957) Career Development Stages</b>				
<b>Growth</b> <i>Beginning at Birth</i>	<b>Exploration</b> <i>Around age 14</i>	<b>Establishment</b> <i>Around age 25</i>	<b>Maintenance</b> <i>Around age 44</i>	<b>Stage 5: Decline</b> <i>Age 60 and up</i>
<b>Characteristics:</b> Develops self-concepts of who he/she wants to be.	<b>Characteristics:</b> Develops realistic self-concepts, engages in self-examination, and explores careers.	<b>Characteristics:</b> Has found a niche and suitable field of work.	<b>Characteristics:</b> Already has suitable career; concern is how to hold on to it.	<b>Characteristics:</b> Gradually disengages from work and becomes involved in other life roles.
<b>Sub stages:</b> <b><i>Fantasy (age 4-10)</i></b> Needs are priorities; fantasy role play is important. <b><i>Interests (age 11-12)</i></b> Career choices are based on likes and dislikes <b><i>Capacity (age 13-14)</i></b> Connections are made between skills and job requirements.	<b>Sub stages:</b> <b><i>Tentative (age 15-17)</i></b> Tentative choices are made and tried out via, for example, coursework and part-time work. <b><i>Crystallizing a Vocational Preference (age 18-21)</i></b> General choice becomes more specific choice; field of training is chosen. <b><i>Specifying a Vocational Preference (age 22-24)</i></b> An appropriate job has been found; a first job is tried as potential life work.	<b>Sub stages:</b> <b><i>Trial and Stabilization (age 25-30)</i></b> Settles down and make use of abilities and past training. <b><i>Advancement (age 31-43)</i></b> Makes efforts to secure job and advance in career.	<b>Sub stages:</b> <b><i>Concerns</i></b> - about maintaining present status; - about competition from younger workers.	<b>Sub stages</b> <b><i>Disengagement (age 60-64)</i></b> Delegates work to others, becomes more selective in the job, plans to retire.  <b><i>Retirement (age 65 &amp; up)</i></b> Begins to give up career and immerse self in other roles.

Super's (1957, 1990) career development stages offer a comprehensive framework for the development of one's career in five life stages. However, to examine the leadership journey of women school superintendents, only their experiences within the four developmental stages, including growth, exploration, establishment, and maintenance, are investigated. The decline stage, which involves a disengagement from work, has been ignored.

This study builds on the realization that leadership journeys of women school superintendents are a part of their career development. To capture what they learn from their experiences along their way to leadership positions requires a framework from adult learning theory and career development theory. Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory is used as a lens to capture meaning-making of female leaders, and Super's (1957, 1990) career development theory provides the means to look at each life stage that should be investigated. Given the preceding overview of the theoretical framework used to guide this study, the next section broadly discusses the research plan.

### **Overview of Research Plan**

The primary purpose of this study is to understand the cognitive learning process of women school superintendents, specifically the meaning-making of their leadership development experiences. Qualitative research is best suited for this study, because qualitative design allows the researcher to understand the meaning-making of these women school superintendents' experiences (Merriam, 2009). The narrative approach is most appropriate, because this study attempts to capture "the detailed stories or life experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 73) and gather "personal reflections of events and their causes and effects from a single individual or a small number of individuals" (Creswell, 2013, p. 73).

## **Research Site**

This research was conducted within the school districts of the state of Alaska. This setting afforded the researcher the opportunity to arrange and conduct interviews with the women school superintendents in the same state as the researcher. Participants of this study are five women school superintendents from small-midsized school districts and from remote geographic regions of U.S. (Alaska). This type of school leader may be different than mainland U.S. state Superintendents, because the nature of Alaska is more "frontier" and "independent."

## **Research Design**

A narrative research study, using in-depth interviews, with a representative sample of women school superintendents was used. A purposeful sample of five superintendents, who are female and currently a superintendent in a public school system in Alaska was selected. The data collection included three phases: (1) initial interview via phone with each potential participant to gather demographic data, obtain informed consent, schedule a one-on-one interview, and pilot the interview questions; (2) a 40-minute, one-on-one interview either in-person or via phone to explore meaning-making and leadership development experiences; and (3) a follow-up inquiry via email to allow participants to reflect on experiences and other probes. A deductive data analysis approach was used, starting with descriptive coding of the individual stories and then use of Mezirow's (1978) and Super's (1957, 1990) theories for identifying commonalities across all those interviewed. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The code was created and applied to each transcription (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Then the code was classified into themes and categories, based on the framework, using Mezirow's (1978) and Super's (1957, 1990) ideas.

### **Limitations**

This study used an interview method to collect narrative data from five women school superintendents in Alaska. There is no research study without limitations, and “there are no perfect research designs” (Patton, 1990, p. 162). This study has limitations because of its constructivist view, interpretive framework, research site, and small number of participants.

This study primarily followed a constructivist view to explore the meaning-making process of women school superintendents to better understand how they learn from their leadership development experiences. An inherent limitation in this method is that the information depended on the honesty, openness, and willingness of the participants to share their life stories and experiences, and their ability to articulate and recall these stories.

The interpretive frameworks used in this study to understand the subjective meanings of experiences present a second limitation, because choosing one framework over another can be a disadvantage as well as an advantage. Using different interpretive frameworks creates different philosophical assumptions, creating different interpretations of reality (Schwartz & Ogilvy, 1979). The study can be both constrained and enabled by interpretive frameworks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study was constrained in that the framework limited perceptions, but enabled because the framework determined what was important to study. The researcher relied on her ability to interpret these meanings. Such interpretations were shaped by the researcher’s personal, cultural, and historical experiences (Creswell, 2013). Accordingly, the interpretations of the research data were limited by the researcher’s understanding of these experiences.

A third limitation is that the research, conducted in Alaska, was limited to one geographic region and may not represent women school superintendents from other states. This method was likely not as robust as if the data had been collected across the United States.

The final limitation of this study is that it is qualitative research on a small scale. The purpose was to “collect extensive detail about each site or individual studies” (Creswell, 2013, p. 157), not to generalize the results, and the research sample size was limited to only five women school superintendents to keep the amount of data to be explored and analyzed at a manageable level.

Because of the assumptions, delimiters, and limitations noted above, the findings from this study are not generalizable to the larger population of all women school superintendents in the United States. The data collected and the results are limited to the participants in this study and the state of Alaska, as it is not the nature of qualitative research to be generalizable to a larger population (Creswell, 2009). Instead, the results from qualitative inquiry seek to explain meaning from the participants’ perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

### **Summary**

This doctoral thesis aims to explore leadership journeys of women superintendents in the state of Alaska. Specifically, it seeks to understand meaning-making of their leadership development experiences. The study employs Mezirow’s (1978) transformative learning theory and Super’s (1957, 1990) career development theory in examining meaning-making of female leaders in each of their career development stages. The main research question is: *How do women school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?*

This study is qualitative, given the nature of the research question. A narrative research study method was used. The sampling method was a purposeful sample of five superintendents who have been in their role for a minimum of three years. The researcher conducted an initial 15-

minute call to schedule the one-on-one interview and preview the interview question, followed by in-depth interviews within one week after the initial interview.

This study has limitations because of its constructivist view, interpretive framework, research site, and small number of participants. The findings represent only the subjective meaning of a few women school superintendents in Alaska and cannot be transferred to other contexts.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The primary focus of this literature review is to explore leadership theories; adult learning theories, especially Mezirow's (1978) transformational theory; and leadership in education, with an emphasis on female leadership. This chapter summarizes the literature on which the study is based.

The first section of this chapter presents a historical review of five main leadership theories as they evolved over time: trait approach, style approach, contingency approach, transformational leadership approach, and distributed (or post-heroic) leadership approach. Next, leadership development is discussed in terms of its history and current literature. Following that discussion is a summary of four theories of adult learning and their linkages to leadership development: behaviorism, cognitivism, social learning, and constructivism. The concept of Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory and its critiques are then discussed, along with a summary of career development theories, including Super's (1957) career development theory. Mezirow's (1978) and Super's (1957) ideas are especially important, because they are the theoretical framework of this study. The last section of this chapter aims to illuminate the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of women in public school leadership positions by providing a historical review of women's roles in public school administration and the nature of women school superintendents, with a discussion of the challenges and barriers they are facing.

### **Leadership Theory**

Leadership has been examined extensively, and there have been several attempts at defining leadership and its concepts (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Nevertheless, concepts of leadership are viewed as the least understood phenomenon (Rost, 1991). Leadership has been

defined as “traits, behaviors, influence, interaction, patterns, role relationships, and occupation of administrative position” (Yukl, 2010, p. 2). Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that involves an intentional process of leaders who want to “guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization” (Yukl, 2010, p. 3).

Understanding about leadership has developed over time, starting from an understanding of leaders’ characteristic or their personal traits. Then the focus shifted to what leaders actually do, i.e., their behaviors. Later, the situational aspect of leadership was introduced, and in the 1980s, management researchers introduced the concept of transformational leadership with an attempt to understand how leaders influence followers to make self-sacrifices and move toward organizational goals or missions. Understanding of leadership then moved from post-heroic leadership to shared or distributed leadership (Pepper, 2010). Most leadership research during the past half century was conducted in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. However, during the past decade, the increasing globalization of organizations has made researchers concerned about effective leadership in different cultures, so cultural perspective has been added to the study of leadership (Yukl, 2010).

There are also numerous theoretical frameworks about leadership, and many leadership theories have been introduced. However, this review focuses on five approaches: the trait approach, the style approach, the contingency approach, the transformational approach, and the post-heroic leadership approach. Each approach presented in this paper is associated with a time period. The trait approach dominated leadership theory and research in the 1940s; the style approach was used during the 1960s; the contingency approach influenced leadership research from the late 1960s to the early 1980s; the transformational leadership approach was introduced from the early 1980s. These approaches focused on leaders as individuals and can be termed

heroic models. More recently, the post-heroic model of distributive leadership has been presented.

### **Trait Approach**

Trait refers to individual attributes, including personality, needs, motives, and temperament (Yukl, 2010). Trait was one of the earlier approaches to studying leadership. The early trait studies were based on a belief in natural leaders and attempted to identify leaders' physical characteristics and personal traits. Many studies compared leaders to non-leaders or investigated attributes of leaders.

From a review of 124 trait studies during the period from 1904 to 1948, Stogdill (1948) found the most common trait of leaders was the ability to help the group achieve its goals. Samples of traits found were intelligence, understanding of the task, initiative, responsibility, and self-confidence. However, no particular set of traits that ensure leadership success in all situations was found. The findings showed that there was no one pattern of characteristics for leadership success, and personal characteristics of leaders must relate to the activities and goals of the followers (Stogdill, 1948). Stogdill (1948, 1974) reviewed trait studies again in 1974, and, although many of the same traits were found in this review of 163 trait studies during the period 1949-1970, there were no universal leadership traits, and possession of one set of traits did not guarantee effectiveness. However, other researchers argued that some traits related to managerial effectiveness, such as self-confidence (Bass & Stogdill, 1990); internal locus of control, or the belief that individuals make their own destiny, not fate (Rotter, 1966); and emotional maturity (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Despite the disagreement of researchers on traits and their relevance to managerial effectiveness, information about traits is significant in managerial effectiveness

(Yukl, 2010). The knowledge about particular sets of traits needed for leaders has been helpful in recruiting people for managerial positions.

### **Style Approach**

In the 1960s, researchers' focus shifted from personal traits of leaders to their behaviors or styles. The emphasis was on what leaders do, rather than on their characteristics. While the trait approach has implications for selecting individuals for leadership positions, the style approach has implications for training (Parry & Bryman, 2006). Research on styles or behavioral theory aimed to identify the types of leadership behaviors or styles most likely to influence job satisfaction and performance. The methods used for this type of research were behavior description questionnaires, laboratory and field experiments, and critical incidents (Yukl, 2010). Much of the leadership behavior research followed the method used by separate major pioneering studies from Ohio State University and the University of Michigan.

The Ohio State Leadership studies were questionnaire-based research on effective leadership behavior (Yukl, 2010). The researchers' initial tasks were identifying relevant leadership behaviors and developing questionnaires to examine how frequently a leader used these behaviors. From the analysis of leaders' behaviors, questionnaires were developed based on two types of behavior: consideration and initiating structure. The consideration category is an employee-centered base, which refers to a leadership style in which leaders are concerned about their subordinates; initiating structure is task-based, which refers to a leadership style involving leaders' concerns about task accomplishment (Parry & Bryman, 2006). The questionnaires that were developed were the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ), the Supervisory

Behavior Description Questionnaire (SBDQ), the Leader Opinion Questionnaire (LOQ), and the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire, Form XII (LBDQ XII) (Yukl, 2010).

The Michigan leadership studies focused on identifying relationships among leaders' behavior, group process, and group performance. These studies used a different approach from the Ohio studies. As opposed to the sole use of questionnaires, the Michigan studies utilized structured interviews with a managerial behavior questionnaire (Yukl, 2010). The three types of leadership behaviors identified that differentiate effective and ineffective managers were task-oriented behavior, relations-oriented behavior, and participative leadership. Similar to the initiating structure categorized by the Ohio studies, task-oriented behavior included leaders' task-oriented functions with a broader range of behaviors. The relations-oriented behavior was comparable to the consideration category in the Ohio studies. Participative leadership was identified as behaviors involving the ability to remain responsible for all decisions while using a group supervision approach such as using group meetings in decision-making processes (Yukl, 2010).

### **Contingency Approach**

Following research from the 1940s to the early 1960s in which leaders' traits, styles, and behaviors were investigated, in the late 1960s, situational aspects were determined to identify appropriate leadership roles, behaviors, and styles (Yukl, 2010). The contingency theories that grew out of this research include Path-Goal Theory, Situational Leadership Theory, Multiple Linkage Model, LPC Contingency Model, Cognitive Resource Theory, and Normative Decision Theory (Yukl, 2010). One of the earliest examples of contingency thinking is Fiedler's LPC Contingency Model. The measurement instrument used to examine leadership effectiveness was

called the Least Preferred Coworker (LPC) scale (Fiedler, 1964). The LPC score indicates a leader's motive hierarchy (Yukl, 2010). A high LPC leader is primarily motivated to have interpersonal relationships with people and subordinates. The leader has a supportive manner in fostering and improving this relationship. In contrast, a low LPC leader is primarily motivated by task achievement. The relationship between leader LPC score and effectiveness depends on situational variables, a relationship called situational favorability. Situational favorability was divided into three main categories: (a) leader-member relations, the extent to which subordinates are loyal and cooperative; (b) position power, the extent to which the leader has authority; and (c) task structure, the extent to which operating processes are in place to accomplish the tasks. Over the years, the contingency model has become less popular because of its inconsistent results (Parry & Bryman, 2006). Nevertheless, the major contribution of the contingency approach was that it drew researchers' attention to situational factors (Yukl, 2010).

### **Transformational Leadership**

In their review of leadership theory and research, Parry and Bryman (2006) found that various terms were used to describe the new kinds of leadership. Some samples of these types of leadership are transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and charismatic leadership. Transactional leadership refers to an exchange process involving what leaders and followers want from each other (Bass, 1985). Transformational leadership involves encouraging and motivating followers to accomplish tasks. Transformational and transactional behaviors are distinct, but not mutually exclusive (Yukl, 2010). Transformational behaviors include idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation.

Transactional behaviors include contingent reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception (Yukl, 2010).

Many writers interchangeably use the terms transformational and charismatic (Yukl, 2010). These two concepts are similar, but there are some distinctions. While charismatic leaders arouse enthusiasm and commitment of followers through their compelling vision, transformational leaders transform and motivate followers by making them aware of the importance of task outcomes and organizational or group interests.

### **Distributed Leadership**

Recently, the individual-focused or heroic leadership approach has shifted to an alternative post-heroic model that focuses not on one leader, but on collaborative efforts of stakeholders (Oduro, 2004). The heroics of leadership are problematic for two reasons (Spillane, 2005). First, school principals, or administrators, are the only focus of school leadership in the heroic model, while leadership is more than individual efforts. The Distributed Leadership Study showed that leadership could involve multiple leaders (Spillane, 2005). The number of leaders depends on routine. For example, monitoring and evaluating teaching practice generally requires only the principal and assistant principal, while teacher development in literacy may require multiple leaders such as the principal, curriculum specialists, and lead teachers. The number of leaders may also depend on school subjects. For example, in the case of Adams Elementary, literacy instruction needs more participants in executing leadership routines than mathematics instruction (Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003).

Second, the heroic model focuses merely on “what” rather than “how” questions. Its focus is on what leadership structures, functions, routines, and roles are rather than on how

leadership is exercised. Leadership practice must focus not only on what leaders do, but also on how and why they do it. According to Spillane (2005), distributed leadership is an antidote to heroics leadership. “Distributed leadership” has been used interchangeably with “shared leadership,” “team leadership,” and “democratic leadership.” The term “distributed leadership” has been defined in two ways. One is as an expansion of authority or leadership to teachers, and another is as an expansion of leadership work (Firestone & Martinez, 2007). Distributed leadership focus is on an exploration of the spread of leadership among leaders and teachers. Elements of distribution are (a) dispersed, in which leadership is an activity that can be located at different parts of organization; (b) collaborative, in which leadership is through alliance, partnership, or networking; (c) democratic in which leadership is antithetical to hierarchy and delegation; and (d) shared, in which leadership emerges from social process, not from leaders (Oduro, 2004).

### **Leadership Development**

Leader development is the “expansion of a person’s capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes” (McCauley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010, p. 2). Leaders can learn effective leadership behaviors and, with purposeful desire, leadership can be developed (Boyatzis, 2008). Without desire, development can be slow or can cause unwanted outcomes. There are many methods for and elements in leadership development. Leadership development has been commented on since the time of Plato. The following sections will explore the history of leadership development and the current literature on leadership development.

## **A History of Leadership Development**

Discussions of leadership development can be found as far back as Plato (Schwandt, 2005). Plato (1941), writing in about 380 B.C., believes that philosophers should be made kings, but kings should develop the skills and attributes of philosophers:

Unless either philosophers become kings in their countries or those who are called kings and rulers come to be sufficiently inspired with a genuine desire for wisdom; unless, that is to say, political power and philosophy meet together...there can be no rest from trouble. (p. 178)

Plato's (1941) view of leadership implies that a genuine desire to learn is a key element in leadership development. However, his leadership development concepts were limited only to the political context. Modern concepts of leadership development in organizations started to gain interest about 20 years ago. One of the well-known trends over the past 20 years has been development of methods for leadership training. There are various types of leadership training, including primary formal classroom leadership training, and other activities, such as high ropes courses or reflective journaling (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004).

According to Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004), classroom training is necessary for leadership development. Nevertheless, classroom training is not the only thing required for leadership development. Other activities, such as coaching, mentoring, action learning, and 360-degree feedback, have become means of leadership development. In addition, the developmental experiences gained from ongoing work have the greatest impact in leadership development.

Coaching is goal-focused, one-on-one learning, which can be a short- or long-term intervention, aiming to effect behavioral change (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). Mentoring,

on the other hand, is a committed, long-term relationship in which a senior person supports the development of a junior person. This mentoring relationship can be a formal or nonformal process.

Action learning is “a set of organizational development practices in which important real-time organizational problems are tackled” (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004, p.25). There is a wide range of action learning, including tacit, unfacilitated learning at work, and learning projects. Challenging job assignments are also used as leadership development.

Another leadership development method noted as the most remarkable trend in leadership development is the use of 360-degree feedback to assess leader competencies (Chappelow, 2004). The 360-degree feedback assessment is not a method for leadership development by itself. Besides the feedback, an organization must have other developmental plans and follow-up activities.

### **Current Literature of Leadership Development**

Currently, leadership is viewed as a key element for organizational success, and a leadership development program is essential in any organization (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). The leadership development paradigm has shifted from training leaders to be good managers to a more relationship-oriented paradigm between leaders and followers. Leadership development no longer focuses on developing the competencies of a leader, but rather on the “relationships that focus on the interactions of both leaders and collaborators” (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004, p. 27).

According to Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004), leadership development today can be categorized into three themes:

1. Leadership development within the context of work
2. The role of competencies in leadership development
3. The issue of work/life balance

**Leadership development within the context of work.** The goal of leadership development in the context of work today focuses on action and real-world application, not knowledge (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). Development involves learning from work and integrating work experiences with other developmental methods. Leadership is viewed as an essential part of jobs not only at the management level, but at all levels.

**The role of competencies in leadership development.** Leadership development has been moving away from leaders' skills, traits, and attributes. Nevertheless, leadership competencies are still at the core of leadership development (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). Results of a recent study exploring leadership in leading companies showed that these companies still try to define characteristics and qualities of effective leaders to guide leadership development (Barrett & Beeson, 2002). The designated competencies of best-practices organizations are those tied to business strategies and business models (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). Although modern organizations are still trying to define these competencies, each leader is not accountable for the same set of competencies. According to this new perspective on competencies, leaders are not accountable for practicing a certain set of leadership behaviors, but are responsible for desired outcomes, and leadership development is viewed as a process of strengthening leaders' unique strengths and minimizing their weaknesses (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004).

**The issue of work/life balance.** Work/life balance has become an important part of leadership development since leaders' personal stress can decrease their interest in and attention

to their jobs (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). Leadership development is challenged by the idea of work/life balance, which leads to development of resilience (Moxley & Pulley, 2004). Resilience is the ability to recover from hardships by using difficult experiences as opportunities to learn. Developing resilience, in turn, develops leaders' ability to face hardships.

### **Adult Learning Theory and Leadership Development**

There are several theories of adult learning (Merriam et al., 2007). How adult learning theory aligns with leadership development may be found in the work of Allen (2007). According to Allen (2007), adult-learning theory is essential in leadership development, yet the link between adult-learning theory and leadership development is overlooked. In his writing, he explains how the four adult-learning theories—behaviorism, cognitivism, social learning, and constructivism—can be applied to leadership development.

Behaviorism involves behavioral change; cognitivism relates to the development of learners' capacity and skills for learning; social learning focuses on the intersection of social contexts and learners; and constructivism is concerned with the construction of an individual's reality and how he/she makes meaning from experiences (Allen, 2007).

#### **Behaviorism**

Behaviorists believe in stimuli and response. They believe learning is caused by stimuli. Behaviorists are concerned with learners' behaviors, but not their thinking and feeling. They believe that learners' thinking and feeling cannot be measured (Allen, 2007). Three main characteristics of behaviorism are: (a) behaviorists study only current behaviors, not the past; (b) they are concerned only with that which can be measured and observed; and (c) they believe in identifying the desired results of instruction before instruction. Behaviorists also believe in quick

learning reinforcement and immediate correction of undesirable performance. Early behaviorists were Edward Thorndike, Ivan Pavlov, Clark Hull, and B.F. Skinner (Allen, 2007).

Since behaviorism determines the desired results before instruction, it is often used in skills and job training because of its objective-centered instruction (Allen, 2007). The course designer of a leadership development program may utilize behaviorism theory by stating the desired outcomes for leadership courses (Allen, 2007). Instructors may use frequent examinations to provide feedback or provide different variations of the same stimuli (Rothwell & Sredl, 1992).

### **Cognitivism**

While behaviorists are concerned with the external aspect of learning and neglect unobservable mental states, cognitivists focus on internal elements (Deubel, 2003). They are concerned with meaning or semantics (Winn & Snyder, 1996). They believe human behaviors or responses cannot be easily predicted merely by a stimulus (Deubel, 2003). The responses are affected by prior knowledge and mental processes.

Gestalt's experience-centered instruction was driven by the cognitivist belief that instruction must be concerned with learners' understanding, rather than a behavioral change (Rothwell & Sredl, 1992). As it relates to leadership development, a leadership development program may utilize case studies "that encourage learners to move through complex problem-solving activities and challenge them to think in new ways" (Allen, 2007, p.31).

### **Social Learning Theory**

The founder of social learning theory was Albert Bandura (Allen, 2007). He believed "most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one

forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” (Bandura, 1997, p. 22). Learning, therefore, is the interaction between an individual and the environment. People influence the environment and the environment influences their learned behaviors (Bandura, 1997).

According to Allen (2007), social learning theory is important for leadership development because leadership is situational. Leadership practice that works in one situation or culture may not work in another. Leadership development, therefore, depends on cultural context or environment.

### **Constructivism**

Constructivism is concerned with one’s meaning-making system, how individuals make meaning of their experiences, or how they construct their reality (Allen, 2007). A well-known example of constructivism is Mezirow’s (1978) transformative learning theory. The basic concept of transformative learning is that learning occurs when one critically reflects upon one’s experiences and transforms one’s thinking and perspectives of the world (Mezirow, 2000). Transfer of learning can be both planned and unplanned. In terms of leadership development, the transforming of perspectives has an application to leadership development training, as the training can challenge learners to change their distorted perspectives (Caffarella, 2002). It is “the effective application by program participants of what they learned as a result of attending an education or training program” (Caffarella, 2002, p. 204). Because it forms part of the framework for this study, a detailed description of Mezirow’s (1978) transformative learning theory will be provided in the following section.

### **Mezirow's (1978) Transformative Learning Theory**

Mezirow first applied the term “transformation” in 1978 to his study of U.S. women returning to postsecondary study or the workplace after an extended time (Kitchenham, 2008). His qualitative study aimed to find factors that prevent or facilitate women’s progress in the re-entry program (Mezirow, 1978). The subjects of the study were 83 women from different states in 12 re-entry college programs. The findings showed that those women had undergone a personal transformation. Mezirow (1978) and his team concluded that these women may have been through 10 phases in their transformation. The 10 phases are:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective

The re-entry college women revised their perspectives through this 10-phase process. The process began with a triggering event or a disorienting dilemma, which triggered their self-examination with the feeling of guilt or shame. They then conducted a critical assessment of assumptions, which were perceived as distorted, about themselves and others. They recognized

that their discontent was shared with others while others were revising similar views. Then they explored their options and, eventually, acted according to their new assumptions.

The major elements of transformative learning are a disorienting dilemma, meaning scheme, and critical self-reflection. A “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18) is an event or a string of events or a crisis that forces an individual to reflect critically on their “meaning schemes” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18). Meaning schemes are “sets of immediate, specific beliefs, feelings, attitudes and value judgments” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18). As individuals critically reflect on their old views, their meaning-making develops, resulting in a change of their worldviews. The change of meaning schemes may increase self-awareness, which is a major theme in leadership development literature (Allen, 2007).

According to Mezirow (1991), “making meaning is central to what learning is all about... Learning always involves making a new experience explicit and schematizing, appropriating and acting upon it” (p. 11). For him, meaning-making is a significant skill, because learners should have the ability to “negotiate meanings and purposes instead of passively accepting the social realities defined by others” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 226). Meaning-making, therefore, is the process of thinking for oneself, rather than passively receiving what is given. Meaning-making, within the transformative learning framework, has been generally used to examine the learning of educational leaders that takes place in traditional classroom settings, for example, in pre-service administrators training (Brown, 2005), graduate programs designed to prepare teacher leaders (Ross et al., 2011), teacher leadership programs (Harris et al., 2008), year-long leadership programs for women (Lafreniere & Longman, 2008), and graduate leadership courses (Sullivan & Palmer, 2014). One study investigated meaning-making of educational leaders that took place in informal settings. Stories of 23 school principals were captured to examine principals’

professional learning (McGough, 2003). Findings showed one factor that influenced their professional learning was their impressions of teachers and schooling formed in early childhood.

Although scholars have been paying much attention to Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory, and the theory has been extensively explored and discussed, the theory has limitations (Taylor, 1997). Taylor (1997) critiqued that Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory lacks clarification of the definitional outcome of a perspective transformation, and it lacks an in-depth investigation of the varied nature of the disorienting dilemmas and the impact of the learners' context, such as personal and social factors. Taylor (1997) also stated that transformative learning theory pays much attention to the role of critical reflection, but ignores the role of other ways of knowing. Taylor (1997) pointed out other limitations of the theory, including a universal perspective of the theory, which ignores the diversity of learners based on such categories as class, race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Taylor's 1997 and 2007 critiques stated that research in transformative learning pays too much attention to its applications and not enough to its fundamentals, and the theory's fundamentals need to be clarified. Some scholars agree with Taylor (2007) and point out that, even though transformative learning can be applied to a range of situations, that fact is not proof of the model (Gunnlaugson, 2008; Snyder, 2008; Washburn, 2008).

### **Career Development Theories**

As adult learning shifted to the constructivism paradigm, which involves one's meaning-making system, how individuals make meaning of their experiences, or how they construct their reality (Allen, 2007), the post-industrial age or the modern perspective of the development of one's vocation also moved toward the constructivist view of career development (Grier-Reed &

Conkel-Ziebell, 2009). Career development theories have evolved over time. The five major career development theories are: trait-factor theory, career typology theory, life-span/life space theory, social learning theory of career choice, and constructivist theory.

### **Parson's Trait-Factor Theory**

The societal upheaval that gave birth to career counseling was characterized by the loss of jobs in the agricultural sector, increasing demands for workers in heavy industry, the loss of permanent jobs on the family farm to new emerging technologies such as tractors, the increasing urbanization of the country, and the concomitant calls for services to meet internal migration pattern, all to retool for the new industrial economy. (Pope, 2000, p. 196)

The origin of career development was from the development of career counseling, which was first called vocational guidance (Pope, 2000). According to Schmidt (2003), career counseling was greatly influenced by the work of Parsons, and he is often called the father of career counseling. The focus of Parsons's model is the concept of matching an individual's abilities and interests with available career opportunities. Parsons proposed this model to help young people with job placement (Pope, 2000). At first, his model of career counseling was not a theory, but was later developed into the Trait and Factor Theory of Occupational Choice. He believed the city of the future needed a specially trained professional to help youth make vocational choices (Brewer, 1918). Parsons recognized three factors in making a successful career choice: an understanding of self, a knowledge of job requirements, and an understanding of the relation between self and job (Parsons, 1909). One important tool used in career counseling is psychological assessments to help clients have a better understanding of their

strengths and interests (Patton & McMahon, 2006). The important contribution of the trait-factor theory is vocational testing that makes use of the assessment to produce interest inventories, which, with aptitude test scores, became the foundation for career counseling (Reardon & Burck, 1975). Despite its contributions to career counseling, the trait-factor theory was criticized for its lack of attention to environmental factors, individual development, and labor markets (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

### **Holland's Career Typology Theory**

Similar to trait-factor theory, career typology theory focuses on matching characteristics of individuals to occupational tasks. This theory can be seen in the work of John Holland (1985). He offered a typology framework for career interests by classifying personality into six personality types abbreviated with the acronym RIASEC: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (Holland, 1985). Holland (1985) believed a person's primary interest must be congruent with a work environment. The higher congruence, the more satisfying and stable a person will be in the job. In Holland's (1985) words, individuals look for work that allows them to "exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles" (p. 4). A summary of Holland's (1985) six job personality and work environment types is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

#### *Holland's (1985) Six Job Personality and Work Environment Types*

<b>Personality Types</b>	<b>Preferences</b>	<b>Traits</b>	<b>Occupations</b>
<b>Realistic (Doer)</b>	mechanical, physical activities	masculine, stable, and practical	architect, farmer, and engineer
<b>Investigative (Thinker)</b>	analytical thinking, abstract thinking,	scholarly, intellectual, analytical	scientist, lawyer, professor

	independence		
<b>Artistic (Creator)</b>	expressive, creative, unsystematic activities	imaginative, idealistic, impractical	artist, musician, writer, designer
<b>Social (Helper)</b>	helping and healing others	cooperative, sociable, humanistic	social worker, teacher, doctor
<b>Enterprising (Persuader)</b>	competitive environments, leading, selling	adventurous, ambitious, energetic, highly self-confident, sociable	seller, business executive, politician
<b>Conventional (Organizer)</b>	rule-regulated, orderly, unambiguous activities	inflexible, practical, efficient, well-organized	accountant, clerk

### Super's (1957) Life-Span/Life Space Theory

In the earlier career theories, career counseling was all about career choice and how to match individuals with work. These theories did not really explain the development of career. Super (1957) is a scholar who provided a comprehensive framework of career development as an ongoing developmental process. He proposed that career development is a process of development and implementation of one's self-concept throughout life stages and that career development begins from early childhood. These stages (described earlier, in Table 1) include stage 1, growth (from birth to age 14); stage 2, exploration (age 14-25); stage 3, establishment (age 25-44); stage 4, maintenance (age 44-60); and stage 5, decline (around age 60 and up). Although Super's (1957) developmental stages were proposed in a chronological age, in 1990, he recognized that development does not depend upon chronological age, but rather on the individual's personality and life circumstances (Smart & Peterson, 1997). The mini-cycle of the five stages may occur within one stage when one encounters unexpected life circumstances such as loss of employment.

Super (1990) proposed the three major concepts of "self-concept," "vocational development stages," and "career maturity." According to Super (1990), throughout individuals'

life stages, their self-concepts evolve through engagement in career developmental tasks. The experiences gained from these career developmental tasks, which are expected of persons in the given chronological age, help individuals grow and have a better understanding of themselves; that understanding, in turn, guides their career choices. The degree to which a person can accomplish these developmental tasks within each stage is called “career maturity.” One of his remarkable accomplishments is the Career Development Inventory (CDI) used to assess career development of a person in four dimensions: attitudes toward planning and exploring, and competence in job knowledge and in decision-making (Savickas, 1994). However, some scholars critiqued his self-concept and argued that career choice and development are not merely a product of self-realization. Rather, they are a negotiation of self and the environment in which one belongs, and culture is viewed as an influential factor in career choice (Leung & Chen, 2009).

### **Krumboltz’s (1976) Social Learning Theory of Career Choice**

Originally built on Bandura’s (1997) Social Learning Theory (SLT), Krumboltz (1976) developed the social learning theory of career decision-making (SLTCDM) to help explain why a person pursues a certain job. The theory was later developed into the learning theory of career counseling to provide suggestions to career counselors about career-related problems (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). Social learning theory of career decision-making aims to answer three questions:

1. Why do individuals enter particular educational courses or occupations?
2. Why do individuals change their career plans?
3. Why do job preferences of individuals change at different points of their lives?

Social learning theory of career decision-making identifies four categories of factors that influence the career decision-making of an individual:

1. Genetic endowment and special abilities. Genetically inherited qualities, including race, gender, physical appearance, and characteristics, affect individuals' ability to gain benefits or get access to certain educational and occupational opportunities.
2. Environmental conditions and events. Environmental conditions and events, including social, cultural, political, natural, and economic forces, affect career decisions.
3. Learning experiences. Social learning theory of career decision-making assumes that individuals' personalities, behaviors, and preferences are the results of learning experiences (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1990). Social learning theory recognizes the role of two types of learning: instrumental learning and associative learning. Instrumental learning takes place when an individual is punished or reinforced for behaviors, and associative learning takes place when an individual associates learning with previous experiences. The unique history of individuals' learning experiences influences their occupational choice.
4. Task-approach skills. Task-approach skills are the result of interaction among genetic characteristics, environmental influences, and learning experiences. These skills include personal standards of performance, work habits, and emotional responses.

The major criticisms of Krumboltz's (1976) theory are that it fails to account for job change (Brown, 1990), and the theory pays too much attention to career choice, but not the career adjustment process (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

## **Constructivist Theory**

During the industrial age, career theories helped individuals uncover their traits and abilities and match them with suitable jobs. However, the world of work in the post-industrial age has become more complex, and given that people may be “prepared for jobs that may not even exist yet, developmental and postmodern perspectives that provide young adults with a balanced, comprehensive, and meaningful process for exploring and making sense of the interconnections between identity and vocation seem most relevant” (Grier-Reed & Conkel-Ziebell, 2009, p. 23). Traditional views of career development and choices are being challenged by the constructive view of work. For constructivists, career development is a lifelong, developmental process (Super, 1953). The focus of career development is “on career patterns over time and on process rather than choice” (Hansen, 1976, p. 44).

Constructivism is not only a dominant theory in education, but also in career theory (Larochelle, Bednarz, & Garrison, 1998). Constructivist theory recognizes there is no fixed meaning in the word. Individuals create their own meaning of experiences. They interpret and create meaning of realities through their own unique lens; therefore, there are multiple realities (Peavy, 1996). People are self-organizing and meaning-makers as they construct the world around them through reflective meaning-making of themselves and their life stories. They make constant revisions of these stories, and these stories influence their career choices.

The constructivist approach is about life planning and the search for meaningful work. To find meaningful work, individuals must critically reflect on their life experiences. They need to understand the conceptions they hold of those experiences as they relate to self, life, and work (Peavy, 1996). Constructivist theory emphasizes the meaning-making process and the personal

and unique perceptions of life experiences. Career counselors help their clients search for these meanings through story-telling, narrative, metaphor, mapping, and critical reflection.

### **Women’s Leadership in Public Education**

Women are underrepresented in top leadership roles in public education in the U.S. (Skarla, 1999). Women are sixty times less likely than men to advance from a teaching position to the top leadership role in a school district (Skarla, 1999). Although women are well qualified for administrative positions, they cannot advance to leadership positions due to the “glass ceiling” (Scanlon, 1997, p. 39). The term “glass ceiling” (Scanlon, 1997) was first used in 1991 as part of the Civil Rights Act. Although the civil rights movement aimed to eliminate barriers and discrimination against minorities and women who attempt to advance to leadership positions, these barriers and discrimination still exist and have never been eliminated, so the result has been a limitation of women’s advancement opportunities in the twenty-first century. The superintendent position, in particular, has been the most gender-stratified executive position in the U.S. (Bjork, 2000). Nationally, only 24 percent of Public school superintendent positions are held by females within the United States (Glass et al., 2000); in Alaska, the percentage of women superintendents, 20.7, is even lower (Alaska Department of Education, 2014).

#### **Historical review**

To illuminate the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of women in public school leadership positions, a historical review of women’s roles in public school administration is needed. In the past, women had limited access to educational programs. Before the 1800s, education was a male profession, because women were expected to be wives and mothers (Blount, 1998). Very few women, especially those who were from the upper and middle classes,

had access to formal public schools (Blount, 1998). The demand for women in teaching positions began by the 19<sup>th</sup> century when there was an increased demand for teachers in the United States. Since then, women have increasingly become teachers, and local boards of education hired female teachers, because they could pay compensation lower than they would have to pay to men (Blount, 1998). In addition, women took direction more readily than men (Shakeshaft, 1989). These phenomena changed societal perception of teaching positions, which became seen as feminine and nurturing (Blount, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989).

The shift from the demand for male teachers to the employment of female teachers resulted in a new job for men, called school administrator (Blount, 1998). Military and industrial models, which were used in bureaucratic organizations, were used as models for school administrators. A school administrator was viewed as a person with power and authority and was in charge of managerial duties, such as monitoring female teachers. Administrators did not have to have educational expertise or experience (Blount, 1998). Rural districts called them superintendents.

The number of women in school leadership positions in the United States increased during the women's movement in the late 1800s (Blount, 1998). Women were increasingly elected to be superintendents, a trend that resulted in a campaign run by male superintendent associations to have superintendents appointed rather than elected. This development led to a great decrease in the number of women school superintendents. The number of women school superintendents reached the lowest level after World War II, because the jobs were reserved for returning veterans. In addition, the G.I. Bill limited the number of women admitted to administrative training programs (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 2000a).

According to Glass et al. (2000), the American Association of School Administrators reported that, during the 1990s, the number of women in public school education administrative preparation programs greatly increased. The number of women school superintendents increased from 6.6% to 13.2%. Today, females hold 24 percent of public school superintendent positions. Although the number of women school superintendents has greatly increased, the majority of superintendents continue to be male.

### **Female Superintendents**

Many studies were conducted to investigate how women become superintendents (FeKula & Roberts, 2005; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Maienza, 1986; McDade & Drake, 1982; Muñoz et al., 2014). These studies illuminated aspects of the underrepresentation of women school superintendents. A study on why women have been less likely than men to pursue superintendent positions reported that the interaction among factors of gender, having children, and pursuit of the superintendency did not produce significant results, and family demands may delay, but not prevent, professional development of women (FeKula & Roberts, 2005). Historically, women have lacked access to organizational networks. A study on the access to superintendency of men and women indicated that women lacked professional networks, and their social classes have a strong effect on access to the superintendency (Maienza, 1986). However, recent studies showed that not all women lack professional networks, and some women knew how to take advantage of these networks; for example, a study comparing two female superintendents' first year's challenges and successes indicate the female superintendent knew how to network and gain benefits from professional networks (Isernhagen & Bulkin, 2013).

The career paths to superintendency of women and men are different (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). While women's career experiences include positions, such as elementary teacher, district coordinator, assistant superintendent, and high school teacher, men's experiences include positions, such as high school teacher, junior high or middle school teacher, assistant superintendent, and director or coordinator (Bell & Chase, 1995). Women are reported as spending longer times in teaching positions before they become superintendents (Glass et al., 2000).

As superintendents, women are also reported as having unique traits and skills. Women school superintendents possess traits and skills aligned to the current leadership theories of the time (Bjork, 2000). Many women have leadership skills aligned to femininity, such as communication, collaboration, and relationship building (Grogan, 1999; Schmoker, 1996). Women school superintendents were reported as having open communication and encouraging supportive environments (Brunner, 2000a; Grogan, 1999). They spend more time visiting classrooms than working with paperwork (Brunner, 2000b). They were also reported as spending more time with peers and being more effective change agents (Brunner, 2000b). Women school superintendents view superintendency as an instructional leadership position, because they were teachers and spent more years in the classroom prior to obtaining an administrative position (Snyder & Hoffman, 2002).

Women school superintendents today face many challenges. Recently, there has been a high demand for superintendents who can perform more than just a managerial role (Grogan, 2003) and can work irregular hours, which may cause marital problems. Time demands have been one of the great challenges of the superintendent position. There was evidence of conflict

between job and family commitment. A survey of superintendents who divorced cited one reason for their divorces was lack of support from their spouses (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

Time demands are not the only pressure associated with superintendency. Women school superintendents face conflict with regard to the expectation of their feminine role of caring about staff and students (Noddings, 2002). A survey of 2,232 women school superintendents reported that the conflict of caregiving roles, work pressure, and time demands were among their challenges (Glass et al., 2000).

Besides their many roles, the conflict between job and family commitment, and time demands, women school superintendents face many barriers that exist in society. Superintendency has been “the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States” (Glass et al., 2000, p. 17). Since the women’s rights movement, women continue to be underrepresented in this position for several reasons, such as gender stereotyping and the conflict between career and family.

## **Barriers**

“The situation faced by women public school superintendents remains grossly inequitable, and success for the women who are successful comes at a staggeringly high cost” (Skrla, Scott, & Benestante, 2001, p. 127). Women face challenges on their path to superintendency (Skrla et al., 2001). There are many types of barriers they encounter. Gender biases are expected as they work in a male-dominated profession (Brunner, 2000a). Stereotyping is prevalent in the relationship of women school superintendents to their subordinates, colleagues, peers, and board (Witmer, 2006). There was a report of prejudicial gender stereotyping by school board members in a study conducted by Tallerico (2000). In this study, female candidates gave examples of

prejudicial gender stereotyping, such as the school district was not ready for a woman because of their custom of drinking alcohol together after board meetings. Another example was the questions asked by board members, which showed their concerns about issues not related to the competencies of the superintendent position, such as childcare arrangements (Tallerico, 2000).

Men and women have been reported as having different perspectives about women's barriers in pursuing their leadership careers. While women believe they are facing many barriers in their leadership path, men disagree with this belief. There is evidence of a different perspective on whether women face sex discrimination in advancing their career in administrative positions. In a survey asking superintendents to rate the barriers that limit administrative opportunities for women, the results showed that the majority of male superintendents did not believe discriminatory practices were a factor limiting women's opportunities to pursue administrative positions, while women school superintendents believed discriminatory practices were a factor (Glass et al., 2000).

According to women school superintendents' perspectives, other barriers were also rated in the following order (Glass et al., 2000):

1. Lack of mobility of family members – 88.1%
2. Perception of school board members that women are not strong managers – 81.6%
3. Perception of school board members that women are not qualified for budgeting and finance work – 76.9%
4. Perception that women will allow their emotions to influence administrative decisions – 71.9%
5. School boards do not actively recruit women – 71.4%
6. Lack of mentors / mentoring in school districts – 66.2%

7. Lack of professional networks – 66.1%
8. Mid-management career glass ceiling – 62.8%
9. The nature of superintendent’s work makes it an unattractive career choice – 57.8%
10. Lack of opportunities to gain key experiences prior to pursuing the superintendency – 54.5%

There is evidence that work-family conflict limits women in pursuing an administrative career (Lee, 2000). According to Lee (2000), a survey of all women school superintendents in Virginia reported that 73.7 percent of the superintendents indicated conflicting demands of career and family were the primary barrier. Unlike women school superintendents in Virginia, 69.6 percent of women school superintendents in Illinois, Indiana, and Texas did not feel their spouse’s position or children were a barrier to their leadership path (Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004). However, these superintendents did not have school-aged children at the time of the survey.

### **Summary**

This chapter covered the foundational literature that informs the current study, including theories about leadership, leadership development, adult learning, career development, and women’s leadership, as well as a literature review and empirical studies about women school superintendents.

Leadership theories informed the researcher about leaders’ traits, styles, and behaviors. There are two approaches to viewing leadership: a heroic leadership approach in which the focus is on one leader and a post-heroic approach in which the focus is on the collaborative efforts of stakeholders (Oduro, 2004). Furthermore, leadership can be developed. “Leadership development is viewed as an expansion of a person’s capacity to be effective in leadership roles

and processes” (McCauley et al., 2010, p. 2). Although leadership theories and literature on leadership development provide useful information, they do not provide insights on how one becomes a leader. While the leadership development literature focuses on the development of leadership competencies, career development literature provides richer information on occupational paths and choices.

In the search for how one learns to be a leader, adult theories and career development theories were explored. The literature reveals that current views of both adult learning and career development are congruent. Both are moving toward a constructivist view and pay attention to the unique reflective meaning-making of an individual (Allen, 2007; Laroche et al., 1998). The constructivist view of adult learning and career development recognizes there are multiple realities and people are meaning-makers. People interpret and construct meaning from their experiences. The meaning that one constructs guides one’s actions, particularly in career choice and development (Peavy, 1996). A well-known constructivist theory is Mezirow’s (1978) transformative learning theory. Mezirow (1978) provided a comprehensive framework used as a framework in this study. It helps explain the learning or meaning-making process of adults. Career development theories shed light on career paths and choices. Career choice can result from a match between personal characteristics and job requirement (Parsons, 1909) or work environment (Holland, 1985), or a product of learning experiences (Krumboltz et al., 1976; Peavy, 1996; Super, 1990). Among these career development theories, Super’s (1953) model provides a comprehensive list of career developmental stages used to investigate the career development of women school superintendents in this study.

Literature on women’s leadership reveals women are underrepresented in top leadership roles in public education in the U.S. (Skarla, 1999), and superintendency is the most male-

dominated executive position of any profession in the United States (Bjork, 2000; Dobie & Hummel, 2001; Skrla et al., 2000; Skrla, 2000a; Skrla, 2000b). In light of underrepresentation of women in the superintendency, many studies have been conducted to investigate how women become superintendents (FeKula & Roberts, 2005; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Maienza, 1986; McDade & Drake, 1982; Muñoz et al., 2014). These studies pay attention to the external forces that influence career decision-making of female leaders, but not the learning process of their career-relevant experiences.

Given the preceding review of the literature and current research, the next chapter reviews the methods used to explore women school superintendents' meaning-making of their leadership development experiences. Chapter three discusses the research methodology, population, and data collection and analysis, as well as limitations and ethical guidelines.

### CHAPTER 3: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

The primary research question of this study is: *How do women school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?* Given the decision to investigate this question by using Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory as a framework to uncover meaning-making of women superintendents' leadership development experiences in terms of Super's (1957, 1990) four stages of growth, exploration, establishment, and maintenance, the purpose of this chapter is to describe the details of the processes used in this study.

The first section deals with research methodology and explains the rationale for using a qualitative research design and, specifically, a narrative approach. The next section describes the researcher's role and how it might affect the research. Subsequent sections describe the sample design; the process of data collection; the process of data analysis; and considerations of data storage, protection, and retention. The final section of this chapter is a discussion of the trustworthiness of the study.

#### **Research Methodology**

This research aims to understand women school superintendents' meaning-making on leadership development experiences through the lens of a constructivist framework, which honors multiple realities constructed through life experiences. The researcher used a qualitative research design and a narrative research tradition to capture these experiences and the meaning-making process.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

The key characteristics of qualitative research are: (a) the researcher seeks to understand how people make sense of their experiences; (b) the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection; (c) the process is inductive; and (d) the final product is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2002).

A qualitative researcher attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant's perspective (Merriam, 2002). Since this study seeks to uncover and to describe the meaning women school superintendents give to their experiences and developmental processes in their lives, the study is interpretive and descriptive by nature. Therefore, a qualitative research design is appropriate for this study.

### **Narrative Research Tradition**

A narrative study is a study of "the ways humans experience the world" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 2). It gives researchers insights into the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) noted, "For educators looking for personal experiences in actual school settings, narrative research offers practical, specific insights" (p. 502). The focus of narrative research can be on the experiences of one or more individuals. Since there were thirteen potential participants in the state of Alaska, five subjects were chosen for this study.

In an educational research effort, a narrative study is used to explore the experiences of an individual; the narrative design was most suitable for this study because it allowed the researcher to explore leadership development and the learning process during leadership development as experienced by women superintendents.

Narrative research comprises many procedures, including gathering data through the collection of individuals' stories, reporting their experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2013). There is a wide variety of narrative approaches. The well-known approaches are briefly described below.

- a) A biographical approach is a narrative study in which the researcher writes and records individuals' life experiences.
- b) An autoethnography approach is one in which the subject of the study writes or records her own experiences.
- c) A life history approach explores an individual's entire life in multiple episodes.
- d) An oral history approach gathers personal reflections of events from one or several individuals.

Although there are many narrative approaches, their different elements can be combined (Creswell, 2013), and the combination can cover the entire lives of individuals or specific life events (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). This study uses an oral history approach to gather personal reflections of events, in this case, leadership development experiences.

The model developed by Lieblich et al. (1998) is used in data analysis. The model suggests four types of narrative analysis.

- 1) Holistic-Content focuses on the content derived from the entire narrative.
- 2) Categorical-Content focuses on specific content themes within the narrative.
- 3) Holistic-Form focuses on plots or the structural components of the entire narrative.
- 4) Categorical-Form focuses on specific forms of linguistics, such as metaphors used in discrete sections of the narrative.

This study employs Categorical-Content to focus on specific content themes within the narrative.

### **Researcher's Role**

The researcher plays an important role in qualitative research methodology because the researcher is the primary data gatherer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2013) noted the researcher is a “key instrument” (p.45). In his words,

The qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. They may use an instrument, but it is one designed by the researcher using open-ended questions. They do not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers. (p. 45)

Since a researcher is a primary data collector, developing a bond with the participant becomes an inevitable task. For this study, the researcher did “establish a close bond with the participants” (Creswell, 2012, p. 502). With the researcher’s background in education and her experiences from her professional role as instructor in many educational institutions, the researcher could relate to the participants’ stories, establish credibility with participants, and understand the context when interpreting data. The researcher informed participants of her background and introduced herself as a female in the education field before the interview.

Collaboration between researcher and participants is also critical in collecting and analyzing narrative data (Creswell, 2012). The researcher actively collaborated with participants and carefully listened to their stories not only hoping to make them feel their stories were important and they were being heard (Creswell, 2012), but also to work with the participants to reduce the gap between the stories told and the narrative reported (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The researcher collaborated with the participants throughout the process of research from “formulating the central phenomenon to deciding which types of field texts will yield helpful information to writing the final restored story of individual experiences” (Creswell, 2012, p. 512).

Although bonding and collaborating with participants are essential in qualitative research, the researcher needed to be cautious about the authenticity of the data. Data distortion may occur when the participants do not tell the real story for one or more reasons such as fear of telling the true story or simply because of memory errors (Creswell, 2012). The researcher’s goal was to uncover stories told, but the researcher had to be careful about the possibility of data distortion. To establish a relationship with participants, so they provided authentic and truthful responses, the researcher set up an initial fifteen-minute interview prior to the actual interview to have a casual conversation with each participant. During the initial interview, the researcher explained participants’ right to refuse to answer questions during the actual interview, the right to withdraw at any time during the study, and the anonymity of their identities; and informed participants about the usefulness of the research findings to other women who want to step up to leadership position.

### **Sample Design**

When designing sampling approaches, a researcher must remember, unlike quantitative research, qualitative research normally studies a few individuals or a few cases, because the purpose of a qualitative research is to gain an in-depth picture of each individual or site (Creswell, 2012). The intention is “not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). Sampling approaches between quantitative and qualitative research are different in the sense that quantitative sampling approaches focus on random sampling, selecting representative individuals, and generalizing to

population, while qualitative sampling approaches focus on understanding insights and learning from individuals (Creswell, 2012). Accordingly, purposeful sampling was used and the number of participants was small to gain insights into the phenomena under investigation.

### **Participants**

There are two types of sampling: probability and nonprobability (Merriam, 2009). While probability sampling employs randomizing techniques to generalize the results to the larger population, nonprobability sampling employs purposeful sampling techniques to select participants who are “information rich” (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

The sampling technique to use in the study depends on the research problem and questions of the study (Creswell, 2012). Since this study aims to understand meaning-making of leadership development experiences of women school superintendents in the state of Alaska, a nonprobability sampling and purposive sampling were most suitable as they allowed the researcher to gain insights and learn about the phenomenon. The population being studied comprised women school superintendents in the state of Alaska. The main criterion for the sampling was the participant was female and was currently a superintendent in a public school system in Alaska. These women leaders, from small-midsize school districts from the remote geographic region of U.S (Alaska), differ from main-land US state Superintendents, because Alaska has a more "frontier" and "independent" nature.

Given this description of the participants and the purposeful sampling criteria, the next section describes the process the researcher used to solicit volunteers for this study.

## **Sample Size**

The number of participants for qualitative studies is generally much smaller than that of quantitative studies because the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize the results (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). Collecting and analyzing qualitative data is a labor-intensive task. Using a large sample in qualitative study is time consuming, costly, and impractical. In determining sample sizes, some scholars provided guidelines for the sample size (Bertaux, 1981; Creswell, 2013; Morse, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). Since the potential participants of this study were thirteen, the sample size of this study was five, dependent on the number of women school superintendents who met the criteria described in the recruitment process.

## **Data Collection**

In a data collection process, a researcher should identify the types of data that will address research questions. The aim of the research question of this study was to explore leadership journeys of women school superintendents. Specifically, this study uses Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory as a framework to uncover meaning-making of leadership development experiences in four stages of the participants' life spans, including the growth, exploration, establishment, and maintenance stages (Super, 1957, 1990). The narrative design was most suitable for this study as it allowed the researcher to gather personal reflections of leadership development experiences. With this in mind, the interview method was used to collect narrative data. Since an interview of underrepresented women school superintendents may comprise sensitive questions, data distortion may occur when the participants fear to tell the true story (Creswell, 2012). To help alleviate this problem, this study used only a personal interview, not a focus group interview.

## **Recruitment and Access**

The researcher applied to the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board for permission to study women school superintendents using proper protocols for protection of human subjects. Once approved, a pool of potential candidates for interview was created using the following criteria:

- The potential participant is female.
- The potential participant is currently a superintendent in a public school system in Alaska.

The researcher checked the educational and professional background of the participants through the school district website before the actual interview to ensure the accuracy of the information. The invitation email (Appendix A), accompanied by the informed consent form (Appendix B), which explained the participant's right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time during the study, was sent to the potential participants.

After the potential participants responded to the invitation email and agreed to participate in the study, the researcher conducted a fifteen-minute initial interview via telephone with each potential participant to ensure that the participant understood the research procedure. The researcher explained an overview of the study, verified participants' qualifications to be included in the study, clarified the interview process, obtained the consent form, verified that the candidate did not have difficulties articulating her experiences, and set interview dates.

## **Pilot**

A pilot test is an important part of interview preparation (Turner, 2010). The pilot interview helps the researcher identify flaws, limitations, and weaknesses in the interview design. In the pilot process, the researcher tested the interview protocol with a female colleague. The

interview protocol followed the same process as the actual research interviews. The pilot interview assisted the researcher in determining the time needed for each participant, tested the interview questions, tested the recording device, assisted the researcher in preparing for the real interview, and verified the accuracy and clarity of the interview questions. The researcher reviewed and refined the interview questions after the pilot test.

### **Individual Interview**

The interview method was best suited for this research inquiry and was the main method of data collection because it allowed the researcher to capture what was on the participants' minds and because it enabled access to phenomena that could not be observed, such as thoughts, feelings, intentions, perspectives, experiences, and meanings (Patton, 1990). An interview method does not involve only the design of interview questions. It also involves many procedures, including identifying interviewees who can best answer the questions, determining which type of interview is practical (telephone, focus group, or one-on-one interview), establishing a recording procedure, and designing the interview protocol (Creswell, 2013). In addition to these interview processes, when conducting an interview, the researcher should also pay attention to the three levels of listening. The researcher should listen to what is being said, as well as the "inner voice" of the participants. The researcher should also filter out unguarded responses that are irrelevant, remain aware of the overall interview process, and be sensitive to nonverbal cues (Seidman, 2006).

Depending on the availability and preference of participants, the researcher set the date for a one-on-one, 40-60 minute interview either in-person or via video conference. The

researcher used Google Hangouts as a video conference method. As shown in Table 3, the interview formats were determined based on participants' preference.

Table 3

*Interview Format*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Interview format</b>
Lisa	video conference
Midge	video conference
Ann	video conference
Candy	phone call
Marie	phone call

Before conducting the interview, the researcher reminded the participants about the statement on recording the interview in the consent form and asked the individual for permission to record the interview digitally via an application on the researcher's cell phone. The researcher also reminded participants that they could make a request to stop the interview at any time.

Interview questions can be structured and unstructured (Merriam, 2009). While a structured interview comprises predetermined questions and leaves little room for the respondents to deviate from the answers, an unstructured interview comprises open-ended questions because the researcher does not know enough about the phenomenon to ask good questions (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions in this study were semi-structured and guided by Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory and Super's (1957) career development theory.

The interview questions aimed to answer the main research question: *How do women*

*school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?*

The interview questions sought to elicit meaning-making of leadership development experiences of women school superintendents. Table 4 shows the alignment of the interview questions to leadership development experiences that may occur in each career developmental stage.

Table 4

*Alignment of the Interview Questions to Leadership Development Experiences*

<b>Interview Questions to obtain meaning-making on each leadership development experiences</b>	
<b>Part 1: Growth Stage (Birth to Age 14)</b>	
<b>Characteristics: Development of self-concept of who one wants to be</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Fantasy (Age 4-10)</b> Needs are a priority; fantasy role play is important.</li> </ul>	1) When you were a child about 10 years old or younger, did you ever role-play? Who were you? What skills did you learn in relation to leadership?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interests (Age 11-12)</b> Basis for career choice is based on likes and dislikes.</li> </ul>	2) Think back when you were about 11 or 12 years old. What was your understanding about career? 3) What was your dream job? Why?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Capacity (Age 13-14)</b> Connections are made between skills and job requirements.</li> </ul>	4) When you were about 13-14 years old, what did you like to do? What were you good at doing? 5) What were the leadership qualities (if any) that you gained from these activities?
<b>Part 2: Exploration Stage (Age 14-24)</b>	
<b>Characteristics: Development of realistic self-concept, self-examination, and exploration of careers</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tentative (Age 15-17)</b> - Tentative choices are made and tried out via, for example, coursework and part-time work.</li> </ul>	6) When you were about 15-17 years old, what were your career goals? 7) Describe key experiences from school activities, leisure activities, or part-time work associated with your leadership and may have led you to your decision to pursue a leadership position.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Crystallization (Age 18-21)</b> - General choices become more specific choices; field of training is chosen.</li> </ul>	8) When you were about 18-21 years old, did you still have the same career goals? 9) Did you have any career plans? Did you follow your plan? 10) What was the field or area study you chose?

	Did you engage in any types of career training? Describe the key experiences from the career training or education in relation to leadership.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Specification (Age 22-24) -</b> An appropriate job has been found, a first job is tried as potential life work.</li> </ul>	11) After you graduated, what was the first job that made you feel it could be your potential life work? Did experiences gained from this job enhance your leadership qualities?
<b>Part 3: Establishment Stage (Age 25-43)</b> <b>Characteristics:</b> The individual has found a permanent and appropriate field of work.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Trial (Age 25-30)</b> The individual settles down and makes use of their abilities and past training.</li> </ul>	12) When you were about 25-30 years old, did you change your career goals and plans? 13) Describe key experiences that altered/supported your goals and plans.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Advancement (Age 31-43)</b> Efforts are made to secure the job and advance in career.</li> </ul>	14) What was your job when you were about 31-34? What are significant experiences, work related or otherwise, that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position? 15) From the reflection on your career development today, when did think you started seeing yourself as a leader? 16) When did you start your career as a superintendent?
<b>Part 4: Maintenance Stage (Age 44-59)</b> <b>Characteristics:</b> The individual already has a suitable career. The concern is how to hold on to it.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Concerns-</b> The individual is concerned about maintaining present status and competition from younger workers.</li> </ul>	17) Can you describe what it feels like to be a superintendent? Please use a metaphor to describe your feeling—for example, being a superintendent feels like.... 18) Can you describe what it feels like to be a <u>female</u> superintendent? Please use a metaphor to describe your feeling. 19) Look ahead 5-10 years from now. If someone wrote about you, what would the headline be? 20) What advice do you have for women who want to become superintendents? Why do you want to give them such advice?

Once the interviews were completed, the researcher sent a thank-you email to the participants within 24 hours after the interview. The interview was transcribed by a professional

transcription service. The transcription process was completed within three days. Within one week after the interview, the researcher emailed the transcripts to the participants to give them an opportunity to check the accuracy of the content.

### **Researcher's Notes and Reflexive Journal**

During the interviews, the researcher wrote notes about her observations and interpretation of the story told. The notes helped the researcher keep a record of the participant profile and prevent distorted information, which could have occurred if the researcher relied only on the researcher's memory (Saldaña, 2009).

In addition, the researcher helped prevent the influence of the researcher's biases by using reflexive journals that helped reflect the researcher's assumptions and biases on the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). A reflexive journal is the researcher's personal reflections on "assumptions, worldview biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation" (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). Writing a reflexive journal was an ongoing process to ensure that the findings resulted from the experiences and the participants' worldviews, not the preferences of the researcher.

Table 5 below depicts the generic data collection process for this study.

Table 5

#### *Generic Data Collection Schedule*

<b>Apply for IRB Permission</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applied for permission from Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to study women school superintendents.</li> <li>• Once approved, a pool of candidates was created.</li> </ul>
<b>Create a Pool of Candidates and an Invitation Email</b>

- Created a pool of candidates for interviewing using the following criteria: a female superintendent, currently in the superintendent role in a public school system in Alaska
- Checked the educational and professional background of the participants through the school district website to ensure the accuracy of the information.
- Sent invitation email and the informed consent form.

#### **Conduct a 15-minute Initial Interview**

- Once the potential participants responded to the invitation email and agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to provide their resume prior to the interview.
- The researcher conducted a fifteen-minute initial interview via telephone.
 

Purposes:

  - to ensure the participant understood the research procedure
  - to provide an overview of the study
  - to verify participants' qualifications to be included in the study
  - to clarify the interview process
  - to obtain the consent form
  - to verify that the candidate did not have difficulties articulating her experiences
  - to set interview dates.

#### **Pilot the Interview Questions**

- Piloted the interview protocol with a female colleague.
 

Purposes:

  - to determine the time required for the interview
  - to test the interview questions and recording device
  - to prepare the researcher for the real interviews
  - to refine interview questions after the pilot test.

#### **Conduct a One-on-One 40-60 Minute Interview**

- The interview questions were sent 3-7 days prior to the actual interview to help the participants prepare for reflective questions about childhood
- A one-on-one, 40-60 minute interview either in-person or via phone or video conference was conducted. During the interview, the researcher wrote notes about her observations and interpretation of the story told.
- The interview was digitally recorded via a phone application.
- Thank you email was sent within 24 hours after the interview.

#### **Transcribe Interviews**

- The interviews were professionally transcribed.

#### **Send Follow-up Emails**

- The follow-up inquiries and the transcriptions were emailed to the participants to give them an opportunity to check the accuracy of the content.

### **Data Analysis**

The analyzed data was primarily from the transcriptions of the interviews . Additional data came from the researcher's notes and reflexive journal. In examining the data, the researcher looked for themes from the content at both manifest and latent levels, themes that could be directly observed in the narrative and the themes lying beneath the narrative (Boyatzis, 2008).

To conduct narrative analysis, data can be analyzed through deductive or inductive thematic analysis approaches (Bruner, 1986). For this study, the researcher employed both deductive and inductive approaches. Deductively, the researcher, following the guidelines inherent in theory-driven thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), analyzed meaning-making of leadership development experiences of all participants based on predetermined themes. Themes were based on Super's (1957, 1990) career development theory and Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory. Inductively, the study also allowed for new themes to emerge. Figure 2 shows the data analysis approaches of this study.

### Theory-Driven Thematic Analysis (Boyatzis, 1998)

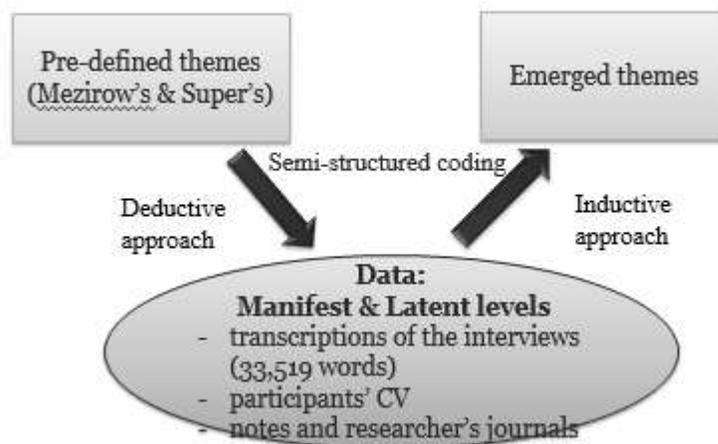


Figure 2. Data Analysis Approaches

The researcher completed all the interviews and transcription before analyzing the data to avoid imposing meaning from one interview onto the next interview (Seidman, 2006). The researcher began the data analysis process by creating a profile for each participant to present participants in context (Seidman, 2006). Demographic data of all participants were combined into a descriptive statistical format. The data to be analyzed were from stories told by the participants, which included 33,519 words of transcribed interviews. Additional data came from the researcher's reflexive journals and notes.

The deductive part of the analysis proceeded with a search in the raw data for the presence or absence of the predetermined themes described first in Super's (1957, 1990) and then in Mezirow's (1978) theories (Boyatzis, 1998). The tables of each individual participant's career development stages (Tables 9 through 13) based on Super's (1957) model were created. Deductively, the analysis of participants' leadership development experiences focused on the development of participants' self-concepts and the activities they engaged in during the four career developmental stages described by Super (1957, 1990). Key themes derived from Super's

(1957) theory included the major career development stages (e.g., growth, exploration, establishment), plus the career development sub-stages (e.g. fantasy, interests, capacity, tentative, crystallization), and self-concept. An additional predefined theme from Mezirow's (1978) theory was critical reflection. This theme was based on Mezirow's (1978) critical incidents, meaning making, and learning.

The current study also allows new themes to emerge inductively. After the transcripts were examined for the presence or absence of the predetermined themes, the researcher used iterative processes, which included re-reading the transcripts, re-listening to the audio, and re-examining the researchers' notes and journals, to determine potential themes. Cross-case analysis was used to compare similarities and differences among the participants to identify common themes. Four themes, based on leadership development experiences, emerged from this inductive analysis of the data: internal motivation, family influence, network, and glass ceiling.

### **Data Storage, Protection, and Retention**

This section concerns data storage, protection, and retention. Data storage has to do with the amount of data and how it should be stored; data protection refers to protecting data from physical damage and tampering, and data retention relates to the length of time the researcher must keep the research data (Steneck, 2007).

All of the data were kept in digital format. The recordings of the interviews of this study were transferred from the researcher's cell phone in MP3 format to a laptop computer. The researcher used a professional transcription service to transcribe the interviews in Word format, which were then converted to PDF format. The signed consent forms and the researcher's notes

were scanned and converted to PDF format. Once converted to digital format, all paper documents were subsequently destroyed.

All digital files, both audio and PDF, were saved and kept on password-protected (secure) USB flash drive in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home for double protection, i.e., to protect the data from physical damage and from tampering, loss, and theft.

The retention period for research data varies, depending on the sponsor institutions and funding agencies. This study was an unfunded study and the data of this study have been retained and will be destroyed per the schedule in Table 6.

Table 6

*Data Storage, Protection, and Retention*

<b>Data Types</b>	<b>Data Format</b>	<b>Retention Period</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Final Disposition</b>
Recordings of interviews	mp3	Until final approval of thesis	Password protected (secure) USB flash drive in locked cabinet at researcher's home	Destroy
Transcriptions of interview	PDF	5 years after final thesis approval	Password protected (secure) USB flash drive in locked cabinet at researcher's home	Destroy
Signed participant consent forms	PDF	5 years after final thesis approval	Password protected (secure) USB flash drive in locked cabinet at researcher's home	Destroy
Researcher's notes	PDF	5 years after final thesis approval	Password protected (secure) USB flash drive in locked cabinet at researcher's home	Destroy

### **Trustworthiness**

There are many critics of the trustworthiness of qualitative research because its validity and reliability cannot be established in the same way as quantitative research (Shenton, 2004).

The concept of trustworthiness differs between quantitative and qualitative research because the researcher views trustworthiness from a different framework or paradigm.

Quantitative researchers employ the quantitative method to test hypotheses, determine cause and effect, and generalize the results. Therefore, the reliability of a quantitative study involves whether the result is replicable, and the validity involves whether the means of measurement or the instrument is accurate and measure what they are supposed to measure (Golafshani, 2003). However, the concepts of reliability and validity for qualitative researchers are different. Qualitative researchers aim to understand the phenomena of interest and thus do not need to establish reliability, i.e., the result can be replicated or applied to other cases or populations. In terms of validity of instruments, the qualitative researcher is the instrument; therefore, the validity for qualitative research refers to the ability and effort of the researcher to ensure that the findings are congruent with reality (Golafshani, 2003). Qualitative researchers avoid using the terms reliability and validity. Reliability and validity are not treated separately in qualitative studies, and the researchers prefer to use different terms, such as credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness (Golafshani, 2003).

In addressing this terminology, Guba (1981) proposed four terms, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, to be used instead of the terms internal validity, external validity or generalisability, reliability, and objectivity.

Given this review of the concepts and terminology used in addressing trustworthiness of quantitative and qualitative research, the next section discusses the four aspects of the trustworthiness in this study, i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

## **Credibility**

While the internal validity of quantitative research involves whether researchers measure what they intend to measure, the credibility of qualitative research involves the question, “How congruent are the findings with reality?” (Merriam, 1998). Credibility is a vital component of a study. It is the most important factor in ensuring trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish credibility of this study, many relevant issues have been identified from others’ research. Those issues are discussed in the paragraphs below.

**Utilization of the appropriate methodology for the inquiry.** Adopting the correct method for the research problems is very important (Yin, 1994). The methodologies employed in this study were clearly stated and explained in the research methodology sections. An extensive literature review was conducted to ensure that the methods used in this study were utilized in previous comparable studies.

**Prolonged engagement.** Prolonged engagement between the researcher and the participants was established to allow the researcher to understand the culture of the context, to develop a relationship with the participants, and to gain their trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The relationships were developed via email, telephone conversation, and video conferences. The researcher introduced herself first via email. During the recruiting process, the researcher conducted an initial interview to engage in casual conversation and answer the questions of the potential participants before the actual interview took place. The researcher was careful about such communication and did not attempt too much contact with the participants as the researcher knew of the “danger” of frequent contact, which may have deterred the participants from cooperation (Shenton, 2004, p. 65). The researcher was careful to keep the contact at a

professional level as the relationship between the participants and the researcher could have biased her professional judgment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Selection of participants.** In selection of participants, a random sampling approach is commonly used to prevent bias in the participant selection process. This study, however, used a purposeful sampling method to select participants who were “information rich” (Patton, 1990, p. 169), which was an appropriate method for the research inquiry. Although a random sampling is a good method to ensure that the sample is a representation of the population, a representative sample was not the purpose of this study (Bouma, Dixon, & Atkinson, 1995). Using a random sampling in this study could have resulted in a negative effect, since a disadvantage of this method is that “it is possible that quiet, uncooperative or inarticulate individuals may be selected” (Shenton, 2001, p.65). The researcher tried to establish credibility in the selection process by selecting participants who best suited the nature of the study. The participants had to be willing and able to articulate and share their life experiences. They had to be information-rich participants who met the criteria established for this study. The researcher selected the participants based on these guidelines and tried to prevent any bias in the selection of the participants.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation involves the use of different methods and data sources or collection of data from informants from different organizations (Shenton, 2004). The individual interview, however, was the main method used in this study because the study aimed to elicit the reflection or the thinking process of the participants that could not be uncovered by observation or other methods. However, in terms of data sources, the researcher collected data from multiple sources, including interview recordings, transcripts, and the researcher’s notes and journal. Regarding participants’ educational and professional background, the researcher also checked

this information via the school district website before the actual interview to help ensure the accuracy of the information.

Site triangulation was achieved by collecting data from informants from different organizations. The participants were from different school districts enabling the researcher to obtain different perspectives and a better and more accurate view of reality (Dervin, 1983).

**Authenticity of the story told.** To obtain the authentic story, the researcher needed to ensure that the participants “are genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer data freely” (Shenton, 2004, p.66). All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time so that the data collection process involved only the participants who were willing to participate. The researcher also informed the participants that there was no right or wrong answer, and that the researcher held an independent status. Additionally, the researcher encouraged the participants to be honest and tried to reduce their fear of telling stories in the study by ensuring that their responses were confidential and that they would be identified only by pseudonyms.

Besides the above techniques, to ensure the authenticity of the data, probes and iterative questions were used to uncover the story (Shenton, 2004). When discrepancies in the data emerged, the researcher discarded the suspect data.

**Advisor and peer scrutiny.** The researcher had ongoing contact and discussion with her advisor, who provided feedback and enabled the researcher to recognize the flaws of the study and her biases (Shenton, 2004). Similarly, the researcher’s colleagues and peers were always welcome to provide feedback, which brought different perspectives to the study and helped the researcher develop a better study.

**Member check.** Besides receiving feedback from peers and advisor, member check, also known as participant verification, was used in this study (Rager, 2005). Member check is “the

most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). The participants were asked to validate the data and provide feedback both on the spot and after the data collection was completed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The transcript of each interview was shared with the participant. The researcher also asked each participant to validate the accuracy of the transcript. When appropriate, the participant was asked to validate the emerging theories and inferences made by the researcher (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Reflective commentary.** Besides taking advantage of outside scrutiny, the researcher critically reflected on her own work to monitor developing constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Writing a reflective journal was an ongoing process. The researcher ensured that the findings resulted from the participants’ experiences and worldviews, not the preferences of the researcher. The preliminary assumptions that did not emerge from the study were acknowledged and eliminated.

### **Transferability**

For quantitative research, external validity or generalizability is “the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam, 1998, p. 207). Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, investigate the phenomenon within a specific context, thus, it is impossible to generalize (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993), although some scholars may disagree and argue that the transferability interference can be made to some extent (Denscombe, 1998; Stake, 1994). With a thick description of the phenomenon provided in a study, readers may make such transfer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Before any transferences, however, additional information, including the number and location of the sites, information about participants, data collection method, the length of data collection sessions, and the period

of time when the data is collected, should be reported in the study (Shenton, 2004). The researcher strictly followed these guidelines, and all of the information mentioned above is included in this chapter. The researcher, however, did not provide this information intending to make such transference. Instead, the researcher intended to report the information of the context in which the study was conducted to provide a better understanding of the results. Since there were only five informants and the data were collected in a short period of time, to determine whether the results of the study applied to other situations seemed improper. Even though the results of this study cannot be proved transferable, this does not imply that the study is untrustworthy. Instead, it “simply reflects multiple realities” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71).

### **Dependability**

To gain dependability, or reliability, in quantitative research, the researcher must show that “if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). For qualitative research, to show that using the same method will gain the same results can be problematic, because the nature of qualitative research is context specific. The qualitative researcher, however, can address the dependability issue by reporting the process in detail, “thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). This study provides detailed information about the research design, its implementation, participant recruitment and access, the data collection process, and the reflective journals of the researcher. In addition, the researcher’s advisor and the doctoral thesis committee assisted the researcher in examining the methodologies to ensure the dependability of the methods used in this study.

## **Confirmability**

The concept of confirmability can be associated with the concept of objectivity in a quantitative study in which a quantitative researcher uses instruments, such as tests or questionnaires, to ensure that the instruments “are not dependent on human skill and perception” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72) and are free from researchers’ biases (Shenton, 2004). Since a researcher is a key instrument in qualitative research, the concept of confirmability differs from that concept in quantitative research. Although it is impossible for a qualitative researcher to prove that the findings do not depend on a researcher’s skills or perception, a qualitative researcher must ensure the confirmability of the findings by showing that the findings emerge from the participants of the study rather than from the researcher’s preferences (Shenton, 2004). To address this issue, triangulation plays a role in ensuring the confirmability of the study, in addition to ensuring its credibility (Shenton, 2004). In this study, the researcher used a triangulation of data sources, collecting data from multiple informants and multiple sites (Shenton, 2004).

Additionally, any decisions made and any methods adopted by the researcher are made explicit in the report; the strength and weakness of the approach used are explained; and the preliminary assumptions that did not emerge from the participants are discussed (Shenton, 2004). This process of detailed methodological description that enables the reader to trace how the data eventually leads to the finding is called an audit trail (Merriam, 2009). The researcher utilized the audit trail approach by collecting the important data as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The six categories of information collected to inform the audit process were: raw data; data reduction and analysis notes; data reconstruction and synthesis products; process notes; materials related to intentions and dispositions; and preliminary development information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **Human Participants and Ethical Precautions**

As previously mentioned, this study used one-on-one interviews in the data collection process. When a study involves human participants, researchers are required to have their proposals reviewed by their college's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which will ensure that human subjects are protected and that vulnerable populations are not involved (Creswell, 2009). Since this study was conducted as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Northeastern University, the researcher submitted the research protocol and all communication materials for the review and approval to Northeastern University's IRB. Since the sample was drawn from school superintendents, the sample did not include vulnerable subjects.

The recruiting process for this study was conducted to keep the participants' responses as confidential as possible. The participants were identified by pseudonyms. They were informed about the right to refuse to participate and to withdraw from the study at any time, and their consent was obtained in writing before engaging in this study (see Appendix A) (Creswell, 2009). The consent form explained to the participants how their information would be used and protected (Light, Singer, & Willett, 1990). The research protocol, instrument, and communication materials were reviewed and approved by the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Lastly, a final publication copy of this study and any subsequent related publications are to be provided to the participants for review to ensure that their confidentiality is protected.

## **Chapter 3 Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed description of the methodology for the conduct of the study. The purpose of this research was to explore leadership journeys of women school superintendents. Specifically, this study used Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory as

a framework to uncover meaning-making of leadership development experiences of the superintendents' life spans in Super's four stages: growth, exploration, establishment, and maintenance stage (Super, 1957, 1990).

The main research question was: *How do women school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?*

The research site was school districts in the state of Alaska. The participants of this study were five women school superintendents from two school districts in the state of Alaska. The criteria for selecting the participants were that they must (1) be female and (2) be currently a superintendent in a public school system in Alaska.

This study employed a qualitative narrative research design and used both deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis. The data collection began with a 15-minute initial interview via telephone with each potential participant to ensure that the participant understood the research procedure. The researcher then set up an actual interview date at the participant's convenience. A 40-minute, semi-structured, one-on-one interview with each participant either in-person or via phone was conducted later. The interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed.

For data analysis, the deductive approach following the guidelines inherent in theory-driven thematic analysis was used (Boyatzis, 1998). Deductively, the analysis focused on meaning-making of leadership development experiences of all participants based on predetermined themes. Themes were based on Super's (1957, 1990) career development theory and Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory. The study also allowed for new themes that emerged from an inductive analysis that was based on additional reviews of all research materials produced and that used cross-case analysis.

In addressing the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher employed multiple methods. These included utilizing appropriate methodology; providing detailed explanations of the methodology used, as well as any decisions made in this study; maintaining prolonged engagement with participants; utilizing an unbiased participant selection process, triangulation of data, and multiple informants and sites; ensuring the authenticity of the story told; welcoming outside scrutiny and member check; and utilizing reflective commentary.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this study, five women school superintendents in Alaska shared their meaning-making of their career developmental experiences throughout their life span, including stages of growth, exploration, establishment, and maintenance (Super, 1957, 1990). The stories told provided personal experiences as perceived by each superintendent. The perspectives were from women school superintendents from small-midsize school districts in Alaska. Because Alaska is more "frontier" and "independent," this type of school leader may be different than the main-land US state Superintendents. A narrative of each woman school superintendent's experiences unfolded the subjective meaning of her career development stages and tasks. Each story also described critical incidents and the development of each superintendent's leadership.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings related to the main research question: *How do women school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?* Findings are organized by the career development stages and tasks and transformative learning-related themes. This organizing method is a systematic way to help reveal personal insights of each superintendent's meaning-making experiences. Table 6 outlined the key themes, which will be discussed in this chapter.

### Participant Profiles

Five women school superintendents in public schools in the state of Alaska participated in this study. Each participant provided her resume and participated in a 40-60 minute interview. Participant demographic and background information follows, with a brief profile of each participant.

Participants' resumes provided educational and professional history information. The interviews elicited more detail on their background, including their educational background, ethnicity, country of birth, the first language used, and marital status. This information is listed in Table 7. All five interviewees have graduate degrees. Four have doctoral degrees in the educational field, and one holds a master degree in the educational field. All were born in the U.S. Four are Caucasian, and English is their first language. One participant is Asian, and her first language is Japanese. Their marital status varies. One participant is single, two are divorced, and two are married.

Table 7

*Demographics and Backgrounds Summary*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years in the Position</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Country of Birth</b>	<b>First Language</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Highest Degree Obtained</b>
Lisa	46	2	Caucasian	U.S.A	English	Single	Doctorate in Educational Leadership
Midge	52	2	Caucasian	U.S.A	English	Divorced	Doctorate in Educational Technology
Ann	56	3	Asian	U.S.A	Japanese	Married	Masters in Educational Administration
Candy	62	4	Caucasian	U.S.A	English	Married	Doctorate in Educational Leadership
Marie	45	5	Caucasian	U.S.A	English	Divorced	Doctorate in Learning Assessment and System Performance

## Individual Profiles

### Lisa

Lisa is 46 years old. She has been in her current position for about two years. She loves challenges and is a goal-driven person. She always wanted to be the top and wanted to be a leader in any activities in which she engaged. She has a strong sense of competition and loves to compete, especially in sports. She likes individual sports, especially cross-country skiing. Her dream was to be an Air Force pilot, but because of a problem with her vision, she changed her goal and continued her education in public speaking with a major in English, and then got a teaching certificate. She started her first job as a middle school teacher, and then became a high school teacher. She started her leadership role as a principal of one high school when she was 37 and became superintendent when she was 44 years old.

### Midge

Midge is 52 years old. She has been in her current position for about two years. She believes in bringing humanity into leadership. For her, relationships are important. When she was young, she liked to role-play as a teacher. She struggled with a hearing impairment and a speech impediment until she went to high school, which had a great impact on her life. She taught herself to read lips and had to overcome her problems to prove she was not developmentally disabled. In school, she enjoyed socialization. She had no clear idea of her dream job. She did not have a specific interest in any extracurricular activities, except charity work, which helped develop her people skills. She changed her career goal often from florist, to photographer, to special educational needs teacher, to pilot in the Blue Angels (the U.S. Navy flying aerobatic team). She started working as a manager in a group, then took a break and

worked in a food store. She started working in the educational field as a substitute teacher and became a teacher. She then got a job offer as an assistant superintendent. When the former superintendent left the school district, she got an offer to be the superintendent. She was 50 years old at the time.

### **Ann**

Ann is 56 years old. She has been in her current position for about three years. She sees herself as a hardworking woman. When she was young, she enjoyed reading. Her dream job was a marine biologist because she was interested in whales and enjoyed science class. She engaged in many extracurricular activities that helped develop her leadership skills. Her part-time job, during high school, was as a salesperson at Nordstrom. Ann graduated with a major in English, but did not work after she graduated. She got married and lived in Spain for two years. When she came back to the U.S., she took her first leadership role as a manager in different departments at Nordstrom. For her, working at the department store was not fulfilling, so she decided to follow her father's footsteps and become a teacher. She got a teaching credential, but did not teach right away as she had to take care of her three children. She was a stay-at-home mother and opened a daycare operation to take care of her own and other people's children for a while before starting work as a teacher. After 5 years of teaching, she became a principal. After 10 years, she became a superintendent. She was about 53 years old at the time.

### **Candy**

Candy is 62 years old. She has been in her current position for 4 years. She sees herself as a woman who is trustworthy and conducts her affairs with integrity. She took a leadership role in

her family from the time she was young. She was the oldest of six children, and being the oldest child gave her opportunities to lead her siblings and make decisions for them. She always led leisure activities with siblings, especially outdoor activities. She also led a group of children in the area to a park or a river. She liked to be outside; therefore, her career goal was to work outside and be a recreational program director. She wanted to work for the U.S. Department of Natural Resources and went to school for a year, but when she realized that she loved working with children, she changed her career goal to be a teacher. After she got a degree in education, she started her first job as a teacher. She wanted to be an educational leader because she believed that she could make an impact on a great number of students. When she was 44 years old, she participated in a superintendent internship, and then became a superintendent.

### **Marie**

Marie is 45 years old. When she was young, she liked to role-play as a teacher. Her dream job was professional, office, or business oriented. She was good in sports and engaged in leadership roles in sport teams, such as softball, soccer, and basketball. In high school, she took a Spanish class and went to a bilingual school to work in the classrooms. This experience made her want to become a teacher. When she was 14 years old, she told the manager that she was 16, because she wanted to work at a Dairy Queen. She got the job and became a night manager. After she graduated, she got her teaching position. She started her role as an educational leader when she worked as an assistant principle when she was 26. Then, when a new school opened, the principal of the school asked her to help open the new school. Later, she was asked by the principal of the school to take his place as principal. After she got her doctoral degree in

education, she got a job offer to be an assistant superintendent, and then she became a superintendent when she was 40 years old.

### **Key Themes**

The following themes were developed from the interview transcriptions based on the research question, “*How do women school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?*” Three pre-defined themes provided the foundation for the analysis of participants’ narratives. First was the theme of career development, as suggested by Super’s (1990) career development theory. This theme revealed the participants’ leadership journeys and career-relevant tasks associated with the participants’ leadership. Second, findings related to Super’s (1990) self-concept explain the development of participants’ perceptions of career, being a leader, being an educational leader, and current self. Third, Mezirow’s (1978) critical reflection illuminated how participants learned leadership traits and skills from their life or work dilemmas. Besides these pre-determined themes, four additional themes emerged from this study through inductive analysis: internal motivation, family influence, network, and glass ceiling. Table 8 shows categories, themes, and example codes.

Table 8

*Codes, Categories, and Themes*

<b>Example Codes</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Growth, exploration, establishment, concerns. (Each stage contains sub-stage coding, e.g., fantasy, interest, capacity for growth.)	Stages	Career development (deductive)
Individual sport, team sport, chore	Leadership tasks	
Teacher, lawyer, role-play, professional	Career	Self-concept (deductive)
Team leader, manager, sport team manager	Leader	
School administrator, principal, temporary leadership role	Educational leader	
Trait, ability	Current self	
Career dilemma, personal life dilemma	Critical incident	Critical reflection (deductive)
Revising, challenging, evaluating	Reflection process	
New worldview, old worldview	Learning	Internal motivation (inductive)
Challenge, goal driven	Competitive drive	
Desire to change the system, desire to make a greater impact	Desire for change	
Father as a career role-model, mother as a career role-model, relatives as a career role-model	Influence on self-concept of career	Family influence (inductive)
Instilling of leadership qualities, examples of subcode are hard-working, creativity, sense of competition, organizational skills, decision-making skills	Influence on leadership qualities	
Father influence, sibling influence, relative influence	Influence on career choice	
Certificate, degree	Educational opportunity	Network (inductive)
Temporary leadership role, principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent	Leadership opportunity	
Stereotyping, wage-gap, perception of being a superintendent versus being a female superintendent	Gender discrimination	Glass ceiling (inductive)
Being persistent, taking opportunity to demonstrate leadership, taking advantage of women's leadership styles	Advice for women	

## **Theme 1: Career Development**

The findings confirm Super's (1957, 1990) Life-Span/Life-Space theory that career development is an ongoing development process, not a linear process. Super's (1957, 1990) career development stages and tasks provide guidance for understanding how participants' activities helped shape their leadership traits or qualities.

**Career development: stages.** The participants' career developmental stages are displayed in Tables 9 through 13. Although Super's career development stages suggest useful guidelines for analyzing vocational developmental tasks socially expected of an individual, some participants did not follow the stages and engage in the suggested tasks (Candy, Ann). During the growth stage, there are three sub-stages: fantasy, interests, and capacity, which Super suggests are vocational development tasks, such as role-playing; making basic career choices, based on likes and dislikes; and making connections between skills and job requirements. Ann only enjoyed reading and never did role-play. She recalled, "I read a lot of books. I had some dolls that I played with and maybe that would be considered roleplaying, but I don't remember anything in particular."

Ann and Candy had no dream job and had no clear idea about career. Candy talked about how she always thought about what she would do in the future, but she never came up with anything in particular:

I really didn't have an understanding about career. But I really wasn't thinking of a dream job... I'd try to think of what I would be doing...but it never really fleshed out what that would look like.

Ann had interest in whales in her science class and was interested in being a marine biologist, but she did not think about it as a job. She explained,

I didn't even think of it as a job. I was just interested in that particular thing. And I think my 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher was a very good science teacher. And we had different animals in the classroom. And I think I just became interested in that and then I liked whales.

Table 9

*Individual Career Development Stages: Lisa*

Stages	Tasks	Lisa
<b>Growth (birth to age14)</b>	• Fantasy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Different leading female roles in local drama group.</li> <li>- Leadership qualities: comfortable to be on stage or speak in front of many people or camera.</li> </ul>
	• Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Related career with education. Saw education as a key to career success.</li> <li>- Dream jobs: pilot, astronaut (because of environmental influences, living in Alaska, which has the highest per capita number of pilots in the States, and because of a sense of adventure and freedom to go where few people went).</li> </ul>
	• Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excelled in individual sports. Competed cross country skiing in the National Junior Olympics.</li> <li>Leadership qualities gained: goal oriented, the drive to push herself to achieve and overcome physical and mental challenges.</li> <li>- Parents fostered a sense of competition.</li> </ul>
<b>Exploration (age 14-24)</b>	• Tentative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Career goal: go to the Air Force Academy and be an Air Force pilot.</li> <li>- Did not work during high school.</li> <li>- Still dedicated to sports.</li> <li>- Experiences gained by helping her father shaped her characteristics; helped building fences and a house. She learned life skills: be a hardworking person, have creativity and “do it yourself” attitude.</li> </ul>
	• Crystallization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Because of her problem with vision, career goal shifted from being a pilot. Pursued a degree in public speaking with a minor in English, then got a teaching certificate.</li> </ul>
	• Specification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Earned an M.Ed. in special education and started her first job as a teacher.</li> </ul>
<b>Establishment (age 25-43)</b>	• Trial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Was a classroom teacher at middle school and high school</li> </ul>
	• Advancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Earned an administrative certificate and Master’s degree in administration.</li> </ul>
<b>Maintenance (age 44-59)</b>	• Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Was asked to be a superintendent when the former superintendent left the job. She was 44 at the time.</li> <li>- No concern about gender discrimination: “That thought has never entered my mind that, ‘Oh, I’m a woman in this job.’ Until other people bring it up.” “It has never cross my mind as being a barrier.”</li> <li>- Concerned about great responsibilities as a superintendent. “It felt like I jumped into the deep end of the pool.”</li> </ul>

Table 10

*Individual Career Development Stages: Midge*

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Midge</b>
<b>Growth (birth to age14)</b>	• Fantasy	- Role-played as a teacher.
	• Interests	- Related career with professional type job, e.g., lawyer, teacher (influenced by the careers of family members). - Dream job: no clear idea about her dream job, but did not want to be a teacher like her mother, aunts, or grandmother.
	• Capacity	- Took no leadership roles, but engaged in activities that instill leadership qualities; involved in Job's Daughter, a service organization for women that helped her with people skills, interpersonal skills, and learning how to read, inspire, and persuade people.
<b>Exploration (age 14-24)</b>	• Tentative	- Career goal: a business owner who runs a photo shop or florist shop.
	• Crystallization	- Studied in the speech language pathology field because she was not good at math and it was something she thought she could do. - Work with special-needs people made her see humanity in all people; saw speech-pathologist as potential work.
	• Specification	- Worked for group home then became a program manager and the founding administrator for the first off-reservation Native American group home. - Passed administrator certificate without citation.
<b>Establishment (age 25-43)</b>	• Trial	- Changed her plan and wanted to be a pilot or a Blue Angel. - Took a break and worked at the health food store for a while. - Started substitute teaching in Alaska, then became a teacher.
	• Advancement	- Realized she could be a leader when she found that her voice and ideas mattered when she worked as a paraprofessional in a classroom. - Got a job offer to be an assistant superintendent and then became a superintendent. - Decided to be a school leader because the former superintendent left and she wanted to fight for the projects that the districts had at the time.
<b>Maintenance (age 44-59)</b>	• Concerns	- No concern about gender discrimination. Positive about being female

Table 11

*Individual Career Development Stages: Ann*

Stages	Tasks	Ann
<b>Growth (birth to age14)</b>	• Fantasy	- Didn't do any role-playing. Enjoyed reading.
	• Interests	- Had no clear idea about career. - Had no dream job, but interested in being a marine-biologist because she likes whales.
	• Capacity	- Loved reading; leadership qualities gained from reading biographies of female leaders, e.g., presidential wives.
<b>Exploration (age 14-24)</b>	• Tentative	- Career goal: Did not have a clear goal but related career with college degree. - "...my father was a teacher when I was older. He was in the military and he had become a teacher, and at that time that was the only career I knew I didn't want to do."
	• Crystallization	- "Started to find ways to be very active in organizations": engaged in many high school clubs and student council; managed sport teams.
	• Specification	- Earned a B.A. in English as she loved reading. - Took leadership role as a store manager at Nordstrom, but did not feel it was fulfilling.
<b>Establishment (age 25-43)</b>	• Trial	- Working in a department store and just working with clothes was the turning point as she wanted to do something more worthwhile. - Changed her career goal to education field just like her father. - Got teaching credential.
	• Advancement	- Got a job offer as a principal after the former principal had a heart attack. She was 42 at the time.
<b>Maintenance (age 44-59)</b>	• Concerns	- Became a superintendent when she was about 53. "It was just a natural progression from one task to another." - No concern about gender discrimination; "I never felt that being a female is, you know, made it different or worse.

Table 12

*Individual Career Development Stages: Candy*

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Candy</b>
<b>Growth (birth to age 14)</b>	• Fantasy	- Role-played as a house builder. Qualities gained: learned to like to organize and think about the future of how things would look.
	• Interests	- Had no clear idea about career. - Had no dream job.
	• Capacity	- Loved reading. - Recalled no activities that helped her gain leadership qualities at this age.
<b>Exploration (age 14-24)</b>	• Tentative	- Career goal: wanted to work outside and wanted to be a recreational leader or a recreational program director. - Experiences gained from being the oldest of six children and always made decisions for siblings, and leading siblings made her want to be in a leadership position.
	• Crystallization	- Loved to work outside; therefore, wanted to be a national forest or a forest person. - Enrolled in a program to study to become certified in civil culture for a year. Then her career goal shifted from being a forest person to being in an educational field as she missed working with children. - Pursued a degree in education.
	• Specification	- Started her first job as a teacher
<b>Establishment (age 25-43)</b>	• Trial	- Was a classroom teacher. Enjoyed designing instructional programs based on the objectives.
	• Advancement	- Earned an M.Ed. in curriculum and instruction. - Pursued a doctoral degree majoring in educational leadership. - Wanted to pursue leadership positions because of the belief she can make an impact on a greater number of students.
<b>Maintenance (age 44-59)</b>	• Concerns	- Acknowledged gender discrimination; “It is a challenge for a female administrator in a male-dominated field.” “There is a misconception that a female superintendent would not be as tough or as consistent or as reliable.”

Table 13

*Individual Career Development Stages: Marie*

Stages	Tasks	Marie
<b>Growth (birth to age 14)</b>	• Fantasy	- Role played as a teacher.
	• Interests	- Related career with college degree, academic, executive, or professional type job. - Dream job: professional, office oriented, business oriented. - Role models for blue collar type job are parents.
	• Capacity	- Took leadership roles in sport teams: captain of basketball and soccer team. - Leadership qualities: team player and leader, the ability to motivate people.
<b>Exploration (age 14-24)</b>	• Tentative	- Career goal: get teaching degree and be a teacher.
	• Crystallization	- Working in a classroom in a bilingual school during Spanish class in high school confirmed her desire to be in academic field.
	• Specification	- Enjoyed leadership roles during her part-time job when she was promoted to be a manager at Dairy Queen. Leadership qualities gained: people skills, decision making, emotional intelligence. - Chose to get teaching education in bilingual endorsement. - Got a job as a teacher after graduation.
<b>Establishment (age 25-43)</b>	• Trial	- Became an assistant principal after she earned an M.Ed. in Public School Administration.
	• Advancement	- Decided to be a school leader because of the desire to make changes in schools or in classrooms. - Got a job offer as a principal at an elementary school. - Got a job offer as a superintendent after the former superintendent passed away. She was 40 at the time.
<b>Maintenance (age 44-59)</b>	• Concerns	- No concern about gender discrimination, "I don't see it as a man's world that I had to break into", and "being a female leader feels empowering." - Concerned about great responsibilities as a superintendent.

**Career development: leadership tasks.** Besides suggesting useful guidelines for analysis of vocational developmental tasks, Super's (1957, 1990) vocational stages and tasks provide a comprehensive framework that helps reveal activities the women leaders had been engaged in from their childhood. All participants revealed they engaged in activities that helped shape their leadership traits or qualities, especially in the growth stage, as presented in Table 14.

Table 14

*Participants' Activities during Growth Stage*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Leadership Qualities</b>
<b>Lisa</b>	- local drama group - individual sport: skiing, cross country running - helping her father build and remodel house	- be comfortable on stage in front of media, public speaking - hard working, creativity
<b>Midge</b>	- charity work	- people skills
<b>Ann</b>	- reading biographies of female leaders such as presidential wives - managing of sports teams.	- leadership traits, inspiration - team player
<b>Candy</b>	- leading siblings to the parks or in family activities	- decision making, building confidence
<b>Marie</b>	- team captains in sport teams - organizing a house and chores	- team player - organizing skills

Lisa, Ann, and Marie reflected that they gained leadership qualities from their leisure activities and hobbies, like sports.

Lisa revealed she learned to be comfortable on stage and to speak in front of many people or in front of a camera because of her involvement in a local drama group during the growth stage. She thought that public speaking and being in front of many people could be a difficult task for a superintendent:

I feel very comfortable in front of the camera, and in front of media. And I think it started then - when you start performing on stage and in front of audiences. So as a

Superintendent, you have to be comfortable with the media... I sometimes hear Superintendents say that's been the hardest thing for them—being in front of people and having to speak to so many audiences.

Lisa, Ann, and Marie learned leadership qualities from sports. While Lisa learned to be a goal-driven person from individual sports, like skiing, a sport in which she competed at the national level in the National Junior Olympics, Ann and Marie took leadership in sports teams and learned to work in a team.

I think this comes from the piece of-- Or excelling at an individual sport, it truly is all internal. On self - not only motivation, but perseverance and overcoming both physical and mental challenges. Push yourself - and so pushing yourself to achieve. You set your own goals, and then you work to achieve them. (Lisa)

...in high school I did do a lot of; I was in a lot of clubs. I did a lot of managing of sports teams. And I was in the student council. So I do know that at that time I started to find ways to be very active in organizations. (Ann)

I was very good in sports and I really took leadership roles on team; you know I was team captains... I wasn't necessarily always the best person on the team but I was the one who could get people to play together, to work together ... I did have the availability or the ability if you will to just you know be spirited and get a team to work together. (Marie)

The findings provide evidence that activities with family helped instill participants' leadership qualities (Lisa, Candy, and Marie). Lisa learned to be hardworking and creative from helping her father with construction work. She explained,

I have to attribute a lot of my work ethic to my dad. Just, I mean that he, he-- Yeah he believed in hard work, he thought his kids should work hard." And "there's a creativity

piece, and I learned to appreciate that - because he designed it (the house) himself, and I got to be there and watch and be part of that.

Simple activities, such as making decisions for siblings and leading them to the park, helped Candy learned to be a leader:

I'm the oldest of 6 children. And so I think by that time I was really much a typical oldest child. And making those decisions about how to have; we had really good parks in our area and we always go down to the park and play. So leading activities with the family, with my siblings...

Daily routines, like organizing house and chores during the growth stage, helped Marie learn organizing skills. She thought she was viewed by her family members as a person who can get things done.

I did care about more things than my siblings you know...before my parents got home from work, I want to make sure that we got all of our chores done so that things would be good and I mean they arrive . . . You know I'm an adult now and they may all laugh...they knew that I would be the one to organize something or get it done.

Besides sports and family activities, this study's findings reveal other activities that helped shape leadership of participants. Charity work helped Midge learn people skills, and reading biographies of female leaders inspired Ann and helped her learn leadership traits.

## **Theme 2: Self-concept**

Although many factors influence careers and decisions to pursue leadership positions, these findings confirm the value of self-concept (Super, 1957, 1990). Narratives of all five participants showed their choices and decisions resulted from self-realization and their self-

concept evolved over time. Self-concept of career and leadership of participants are explored in the following sections.

**Self-concept: career.** Findings provide evidence that participants developed self-concepts about career at a very young age. Some participants developed this concept during the growth stage (Lisa, Midge, Marie). Although their concepts were not clear, narratives showed they related education to being successful in a career or profession. Lisa described she understood that education was the key to success. She recalled, “I was thinking more about education than I was career...this just was a family value that an education was going to be key to getting a successful career.”

Midge indicated she wanted to be a professional because her family members were professionals. They had careers as lawyers or teachers. She explained,

I just assumed that the whole world was full of these professionals because that’s what everybody in my world was. Mostly lawyers and teachers. So my definition of career at that time was like lawyer or a teacher . . .

Marie also recalled that she wanted a professional type job. She did role-play as a person who worked in the office. She also related career to education or college degree. She explained,

I get to see something like you know you play office until I wasn’t really a job or credit we would think of that I was you know I would think about dressing up and in professional so I wouldn’t really have a name of the job but I knew that it would be like office oriented or business oriented . . . That’s what you did when you went to college that when you went to go as you were then a professional.

During the growth stage, Candy and Ann still had not identified their dream jobs. Candy indicated she “didn’t have an understanding about career” and “wasn’t thinking of dream job.” Ann also said, “I just didn’t have a clear view of what I wanted to do.” Findings also showed evidence that participants who might not have identified a dream job or had no clear idea of what they wanted to do, developed a concept of what they did not want to be. Ann, whose father was military and became a teacher, had no idea of her future career; however, she recalled that she did not want to be in the military like her father. She said being a teacher was “the only career I knew I didn’t want to do.” Similarly, Midge stated she didn’t want to be a teacher. She stated, “I didn’t want to be a teacher, no matter what.” Without knowing what their future careers would be, findings showed two participants did role-play in roles of their future careers. Midge and Marie role-played as teachers. Midge, who indicated her career goal was definitely not a teacher, gave this rationale for role-playing a teacher:

In regards to role playing, I was often the teacher in the situation and in retrospect I don’t know if it was because I was the oldest but I also think that I got frustrated being the student when they didn’t know what to do as a teacher, and it just got frustrating to like sit there and have them not be organized and I could kind of like see exactly what needed to happen.

While Midge expressed her frustration of her role as a teacher, Marie expressed her joys: “I did that role-play and a lot of them was...played teacher, and I was the teacher you know but I appreciated you know setting up classrooms.”

**Self-concept: leader.** Findings show that four participants developed their self- concept as a leader starting from the growth stage (Ann, Candy, Marie, and Lisa). Candy related her leadership experience with her experience as an oldest child who led family activities and led siblings to the park. Ann and Marie saw themselves as leaders when they took leadership roles in sports teams at school. Ann was a team manager, and Marie was a sports team captain. Lisa was not involved in a team sport, but she saw herself as a leader in the sense of someone who wanted to excel and be the best, starting when she was about 10 years old. She competed in individual sports, like cross-country skiing and cross country running. She explained, “I just have always driven myself to be at the top and be not only the best I can be, but just to be the best. And so that, that competitive piece. . .”

Midge engaged in many social organizations. She engaged in a lot of charity work and school activities, such as being a member of the student council, that instilled leadership skills in her, but she did not recall seeing herself as a leader during those times. She recalled,

I got student council member of the year, so I started to see myself as the worker bee or the person who could do all the work that everybody liked but not the person they saw as the leader.

Participants’ leadership skills developed over time. Their leadership became more concrete during the exploration stage, especially when they engaged in activities that gave them the opportunities to show their abilities and skills; and when their abilities and skills were recognized, they saw themselves as leaders. During their high school years, Candy and Marie took leadership roles in their part-time jobs. They were promoted to leadership roles, and at that time, they thought of themselves as leaders. Candy indicated that her part-time job during

summer break was the first time she saw herself as a leader. She was promoted to be the head of a crew of housekeepers.

The summer when I was about 18 years old, 19 years old...I was working for a Hills resort. And so my first time I was at Hills Resort they put me in this position and I did everything and kind of just start taking the initiative and doing other things. And then the next summer they gave me a crew. And they made me responsible for a crew to go around and get things done...just managing a crew of housekeepers.

Marie indicated her part-time job as a night manager at Dairy Queen was the time she saw herself as a leader. She became a manager at the age of 16.

I... kind of lied about my age, you know back then I was 14, but I said I was 16 just to work, I mean I just like to work and take care of things and make sure things flow nicely. But by the time I was 16, I was like a night manager you know...I just worked there for 2 years and you know you always do the best you can ...you wanted them to believe that you were the best person for that... there were people in their twenties and thirties that work there but you know the youngest person was manager but you know it was an experience.

Two participants who mentioned no significant leadership experiences during their part-time jobs, took their leadership roles after high school during the exploration stage. Midge became a program manager, then a founding administrator of a group home. Ann became a store manager at a department store.

Midge, who had already developed her leadership skills working with social service organizations and on the student council and who never looked at herself as a leader before high

school, stated she first saw herself as a leader when she got a job as an administrative position when she was promoted to be a program manager.

I worked in group homes with adults who tested IQ of 11, whatever that is in somebody with, you know, significant challenges and I was a staff. Nothing too fancy. I became a program manager pretty quickly but about a year and a half after doing that, all of sudden they had a need. I was 24 years old at the time and they had a need for somebody to open—be the founding administrator for the first off-reservation Native American group home in the country for adults with developmental disabilities. . . And I was 24 years old. So that was the first job that I realized that I was. . . I was going to be good at this and that I had leadership.”

Ann’s leadership gradually developed. She mentioned no significant leadership role during high school, but indicated her leadership skills were developed from engaging in high school clubs and student councils. She reflected that she “started to find ways to be very active in organizations.” She later started her leadership role as a store manager at Nordstrom.

In high school I did do a lot of; I was in a lot of clubs. I did a lot of managing of sports teams. And I was in the student council. So I do know that at that time I started to find ways to be very active in organizations.

**Self-concept: female leader .** To illuminate their perceptions on being a female superintendent, the researcher asked participants to think about a metaphor to describe “being a superintendent” and later asked them to think about the metaphor again to describe “being a female superintendent.” The two interview questions used to elicit these perceptions are:

1) Can you describe what it feels like to be a superintendent? Please use a metaphor to describe your feeling—for example, being a superintendent feels like....

2) Can you describe what it feels like to be a female superintendent? Please use a metaphor to describe your feeling—for example, being a female superintendent feels like....

The two metaphors helped the researcher compare participants' perceptions of being a leader and being a female leader, specifically a superintendent. Findings revealed no significant difference between general-leader and female-leader metaphors, and no negative attitude was found in the female superintendent metaphor.

Lisa and Ann used the same metaphor, as they did not see the difference between being a superintendent and being a female superintendent. Lisa indicated that being a superintendent felt like "jumping into the deep end of the pool" whereas Ann indicated being a superintendent felt like a "structure."

Midge, Candy, and Marie used different metaphors to describe "being a superintendent" and "a female superintendent." Their metaphors did not reflect negative attitudes toward being a female superintendent. While Midge and Candy's metaphors reflected the uniqueness of a female superintendent, Marie's metaphor reflected her positive attitude toward being a female superintendent. Midge used a metaphor of a "cedar tree" to represent strong, durable, stable qualities of a superintendent and a metaphor of "lava lamp" to represent "the flow of the life force inside of a lava lamp" and the unique ability of women that women know how to work with this life force and know how to make things happen. She also reflected her idea of the unseen power of women that women power was similar to the lava lamp that needed to be turned on in order to see the light.

Candy's metaphors also reflect the uniqueness of being a female superintendent. She stated that a successful superintendent feels like a "conductor at the orchestra" who can make the orchestra play melodically with feeling and joy, while a female superintendent, for her, feels like a music instructor. She indicated the unique qualities of a music instructor as persistence, intelligence, and assertiveness. She also mentioned that to be a female superintendent, women must be "bossy" like a music instructor. She explained that "being bossy" meant, "You have to have your players doing their job in order for the entire composition to come alive."

Marie used different metaphors for superintendent and female superintendent. Her metaphors reflected her positive feelings toward being a female superintendent, as she indicated that being a female superintendent felt "empowering." She indicated that she "feel lucky to be a female superintendent." Participants' metaphors and their descriptions follow in Table 15.

*Table 15*

Participants' Self-Described Metaphors

	<b>Metaphor Being a superintendent feels like...</b>	<b>Metaphor Being a female superintendent feels like...</b>
Lisa	<b>Jumping into the deep end of the pool</b> "Kind of that sports situation that sports analogy. There's all these people around watching me. And for the entire next year, which would have been the next couple of months and all of last year, watching me, if I was going to swim or drown. And of course, me being me, there was never a question that I would swim."	<b>Same metaphor</b>
Midge	<b>A cedar tree</b> "Cedar trees are really strong, durable, stable things...It's always growing up, always trying to get better, always trying to improve, always in essence fighting for its spot on the Earth... But they're long, stable, sturdy, durable."	<b>A lava lamp</b> "Because a lava lamp, it's easy not to see the power of a female superintendent when the light's off...because a woman of my age...I grew up to be a wife and a mother and I rejected that. And so, I needed somebody to turn the light on for me to see my own

		power . . . But yeah, I also know how to work within in and that's kind of like the flow of the life force inside of a lava lamp, you learn how to work with it and how to make things happen."
Ann	<p><b>A structure</b>          "As a superintendent, it's more the people are part of it. So it's like; I guess the easiest way to look at it is that you're the structure. You're a building; you're a house. You're an office building, whatever; and you're the structure. And the things that are going on, you're protecting that structure to keep things so that people within the structure can do what they need to do."</p>	<p><b>Same metaphor</b>          "Well I think it's the same. Alaska's unique and I've never felt that being a female is you know made it different or worse. I was lucky because throughout my principalship I met with different superintendents. I went to conferences . . . ."</p>
Candy	<p><b>The conductor at the orchestra</b>          ". . . when everything is working; so feeling being a successful superintendent feels like the conductor at the orchestra. And the orchestra is playing melodically with feeling and joy."</p>	<p><b>A music instructor</b>          "As a female superintendent sometimes you have to be; in the beginning you need to be persistent, intelligent, and assertive. For some people in order to be a female superintendent you know sometimes you have to be kind of bossy. But you know that's okay. Like being bossy like a music instructor you know. You have to have your players doing their job in order for the entire composition to come alive."</p>
Marie	<p><b>As light as a feather and like a heavy weight at the same time</b>          "It feels like a heavy weight because I know I'm so responsible for 18000 kids in 2004 and then about 20000 people that my decision affects. So it feels umm, really sometimes because it is such a great job and then it feels like a red bulb sometimes when you realize the responsibilities. So day to day, I love it but at night . . . if . . . um . . . you know . . . when I'm thinking about budgets or people or this or that, I don't sleep because a fact of how big of an influence it is."</p>	<p><b>Empowering</b>          "Being a female superintendent does make you feel empowering . . . I feel lucky to be a female superintendent."</p>

**Self-concept: educational leader.** Participants perceived themselves as educational leaders at different points in time, mainly in the establishment and maintenance stages, and for different reasons. Lisa, who is a goal-driven person, talked about the perception of her leadership that she always wanted to be the top and to be the best of anything she got involved with; therefore, her thoughts about being a leader started “from the moment I thought about any job that I wanted to have.” When she started her teaching career, she wanted to be “a terrific teacher.” And when she took temporary leadership roles, she thought about being a principal.” She said, those thoughts began,

When I started to have the opportunity to spend time down in the (administrative) office. Sort of temporary leadership roles. And I, then I knew that I wanted to be a brilliant principal and beyond that.

There is evidence that the realization that participants could make a positive impact drove them to leadership positions. Midge defined the moment that she looked at herself as an educational leader as, “It was during this time when I realized that my voice mattered.” She realized that she could make changes when she suggested creative practices while she worked as a paraprofessional in a teacher’s room. Candy reflected on her desire to be a leader that she wanted to have “an impact on a greater number of kids”:

The key question that provided the reason for me to pause and consider this is you know in a leadership position I can have an impact on a greater number of kids. . . Sometimes you need to have people in positions of authority who can make good decisions for kids for more children. And so that’s the question that prompted me to consider, “Well yes I do make good decisions for kids so I can do this.”

Similarly, Marie talked about the reason she wanted to pursue an M.Ed. in Public School Administration. She wanted to have “a bigger influence.” She reflected,

I started my master’s degree to get a leadership; administrative leadership degree so that I could be a principal. If you are a principal though, you could have that effect on lots of people. You can help lots of classes, lots of teachers get better . . . It motivates. In fact, it is this idea that I could help out our school, I could make the school better if I could be in a leadership role and so you know I didn’t go tell people that but that was in my mind you know I just want to have a bigger influence.

Besides the realization that they could make a greater impact being a leader, their belief in their abilities and skills was one factor that drove them to seek leadership positions. When Ann was asked why she wanted to be a principal, she mentioned her good organizational and collaboration skills as her strengths, and she believed she could perform leadership functions well, so it was, to her, a natural fit. She explained,

I felt like one of my strengths was that I could organize things very well. When I was teaching I; when you’re in a faculty there are different events and things that happen and I found that I really enjoyed organizing things and helping people to do what they needed to do in their classrooms. And I enjoyed the collaboration. So it just seemed like a natural fit when the principal left that when they asked me to take over I had those skills and I was able to takeover.

Similarly, when Lisa was asked about the reasons she had for stepping into an educational leader position, she explained that she believed in her abilities, that she felt confident that she could do the job, and that she could find a different and better way to do the job. She said,

Certainly I felt confident that I could do the job. I always saw ways...I saw ways where I thought it could be done differently or better. And so-- But I wanted to do it, I wasn't just telling people how to do it. I wanted to be part of that. And I had a - I felt comfortable working with people, working with adults. And I don't know, I seem to just have - have an ability to (do the job). . . .

**Self-concept: current perception of self.** To illuminate the current concept of self to see how participant's self-concepts developed and how women leaders perceived themselves, the researcher asked participants to think about the headline that someone would write about them. Findings reveal that their headlines reflect either their traits (Midge, Ann, Candy) or abilities (Lisa, Marie). The traits mentioned were being passionate, hardworking, honorable, trustworthy, and being people of integrity. Some headlines reflected their abilities, which included "Makes sweeping reforms", "What is she doing now?" Some headlines included words or a sentence that reflected their thoughts for the future, like reform, future, and "What is she going to do?" (Lisa, Midge, Marie). Each participant's self-described headlines follow in Table 16.

Table 16

*Self-Described Headlines*

	<b>Headline</b>
Lisa	<b>Superintendent who makes sweeping reforms</b> "Finds opportunity in crisis. Pulls school district out of a very different spot, and - and makes sweeping reforms." "Something along those lines."
Midge	<b>Passionate advocate for our future.</b> "I helped people blossom, not only students but staff, that's really important to me, and also families. And that they're really honored in the process that in this bureaucratic system, accountability and regulations and checkboxes that I bring humanity to ... And I hope they also say that I was a strong advocate for public education and fought for it and that families always felt welcome."
Ann	<b>A hardworking woman.</b> "I look more as a facilitator rather than a leader. I look at my job as one to make sure

	that the teachers have what they need so that they can do the best job for our students.” “I don’t expect people to follow me; I expect to follow them.”
Candy	<b>Ms...is honorable, trustworthy, and conducts her affairs with integrity.</b> “. . . just in regards to the position and what I do is that, “Ms. . . . is honorable, trustworthy and conducts her affairs with integrity”
Marie	<b>What is she doing now? Or What is she going to do?</b> “. . . I like to do different things like last year I shared with a staff and like you know I learn how to jump out of an airplane, parachute off airplanes. This year I learned how to wake surf...I just like to try something new and do new things.”

### Theme 3: Critical Reflection

Findings confirm the values of Mezirow’s (1978) transformative learning model, which helped reveal participants’ learning in a natural environment. Narratives showed that all participants faced critical incidents in both personal life and career at different stages. They learned from these incidents and gained new worldviews that have helped them in their leadership roles. Their critical incidents included dilemmas in making career choices and in leadership decision-making. These incidents and the reflection process helped them develop leadership traits and skills and helped them understand the impermanence of leadership and the intrinsic value of their work.

Lisa learned to look at a barrier as a challenge. That gave her the drive to overcome the barrier by reflecting on the time she competed in individual sports when she was young.

Midge gained knowledge from overcoming her speech impediment, since she could teach herself or to figure out the system of the job or anything in which she was involved. She also took a move in her leadership position and got rid of the fear of rejection by reflecting on the time she went out to dance with a popular boy who did not want to go out with her. She evaluated her fear of rejection. She then understood that accepting rejection or an honest answer is better than being where she was not supposed to be. She narrated, “In leadership you have to be willing to move, you have to know when it’s time and when it’s not time.” She also learned

the impermanence of leadership by reflecting on the experience when she had to leave the board of directors because she did not want to be associated with the misconduct of one director.

Ann learned to redefine her self-concept and tried to understand who she was or wanted to be in relation to work values and job satisfaction when she worked as a store manager. As she reflected on her work conditions at the department store, she gained a new worldview that work value is as critical as working conditions. Working at a department store and teaching are both hard work, but teaching would bring her job satisfaction as it was a more worthwhile and fulfilling job.

Candy learned to make a career choice based on her true passion. She changed her career goal from being a forest person to a teacher when she reflected on her childhood experiences. She realized that she enjoyed working with children.

Marie learned leadership traits when she was 16 by challenging her old perception about leadership and developed a new perception of leadership. She learned that leadership is not about having authority, but the authority given by team members. Leadership is also about having the availability to perform the tasks or be there for the team. She also recognized a leader-follower relationship and understood that leadership is not a standalone position.

The critical reflection process cited by participants included comparing previous experiences with new experiences (Lisa), deciding which action to take (Midge), revising the meaning of experiences (Midge), self-evaluating (Midge), and challenging their old worldviews (Ann, Marie, Candy). Each participant described critical reflections in Table 17.

Table 17

*Participants' Self-Described Critical Reflections*

	<b>Critical Incidents</b>	<b>Reflection Process</b>	<b>Their learning</b>
<b>Lisa</b>	Dealing with barriers in the jobs	Comparing barriers in the job with those of individual sports that she was involved in. Her perception of a barrier is a challenge.	<b>Learn to look at a barrier as a challenge.</b> “In cross country skiing when the weather’s really cold. I mean it’s a challenge. And I have always used those situations to my advantage. Like I have fed off other people’s perceptions of barriers, and used it to my advantage. So I just always - so yeah, so if anybody else threw up a barrier or a road block or suggested that maybe I for some reason shouldn’t be where I was or doing what I was - that just fed me. And yeah, so it fed me in sports and it’s fed me in my career.”
<b>Midge</b>	1) Her parents thought she was developmentally disabled.	Deciding what action to take; whether to be viewed as a disabled child or to prove herself.	<b>Learn to be a self-taught/self-directed learner.</b> “. . . my parents actually thought I was developmentally disabled. And so that fact has really influenced a lot of who I am and my own confidence in being a leader, my whole career trajectory because I had to prove to myself that I wasn’t developmentally disabled and I had a lisp.”  “. . . One of the things that I thought about in regards to how that experience helped shape me as a leader is that I learned that I could figure things out. I mean, what toddler teaches themselves to read by lip reading? . . . I was always figuring out the system and I think that’s something that’s carried me through and was the early start of some of my leadership traits.”

	<p>2) An awkward feeling to go out to a dance with a boy who did not want to go with her</p> <p>3) The decision to leave her work because she did not want to be involved in misconduct</p>	<p>Self-evaluating a fear of rejection and receiving an honest answer</p> <p>Revising the meaning of experience</p>	<p><b>Learn to accept rejection or an honest answer.</b></p> <p>“I asked the popular boy to the dance that the girl asked the boy to, called Sadie Hawkins. And he agreed to go with me but then was really awkward, like he didn’t really want to go with me and I decided at that point I didn’t like that feeling. And I never wanted to feel that again and that actually-- that fear of rejection or that dislike for not wanting to be where I’m not welcome . . .”</p> <p>“I look at all of my career moves, there are many times in my career where I take that lesson that I learned at that time and I’m like hey, you know what? If what I have to offer isn’t what you’re looking for? No hard feelings . . . I will go . . . And so that kind of was a big leadership thing because I think in leadership you have to be willing to move, you have to know when it’s time and when it’s not time and that’s something I learned during that period of time.”</p> <p>“I learned that leadership isn’t permanent. There’s no permanence when it comes to leadership and that sometimes you have to do what’s right for the organization and for the people involved.”</p>
<b>Ann</b>	Working hard with clothes at the department store	Challenged her old worldview that teaching is hard work and not a desirable job	<p><b>Learn to redefine her self-concept and related work value with job satisfaction.</b></p> <p>Her view changed from “I didn’t want to work as hard as my dad did as a teacher” to “I was working in a department store just working with clothes and it just didn’t fulfill me. I thought that was the turning point.”</p>
<b>Candy</b>	Changing her career goal after going to college for a year	Challenged her old self-concept	<p><b>Learn to redefine her self-concept and make career choice based on her true passion.</b></p> <p>“I enrolled in a program to study to become certified in civil culture to look at working outside in the forest for the U.S. Department of Natural Resources and so probably went to school for a year. But then I changed my mind and started something different.” “I think what I realized is that I missed working with kids.” She indicated that reflecting back to the time</p>

			she worked with her siblings made her realize that she wanted to work in the educational field. She said, “I really did enjoy working with my siblings.”
<b>Marie</b>	Became a night manager when she was 16 years old	Challenged her old view about leadership	<p><b>Learn a follower-leader relationship.</b></p> <p>“I . . . kind of lied about my age, you know back then I was 14, but I said I was 16 just to work, I mean I just like to work and take care of things and make sure things flow nicely. But by the time I was 16, I was like a night manager you know.”</p> <p>“There were people in their twenties and thirties that work there but you know the youngest person was manager.”</p> <p>“. . . When people perceive leadership . . . from afar . . . they just see the outward maybe influence of power that that person has, but when you’re in the leadership job you know that you’re only given the availability to do what you want to do if people give you that power . . . You can lead if you have followers. . . people that believe in what you’re doing and so you have to take care of . . . that they’ll take your leadership.”</p>

#### **Theme 4: Internal Motivation**

One common theme among the five women superintendents’ narratives is internal motivation. All participants mentioned internal motivation in pursuing leadership positions. These motivations included challenge (Lisa), desire to change the system (Midge), belief in projects (Midge), enjoyment in helping people (Ann), and desire to make an impact on students (Candy).

Lisa mentioned challenge as motivation for her career choices. She said, “Teaching is a challenge. Special education is a challenge. And then the leadership administration piece was a huge challenge, and I just embraced it.”

Midge talked about her move to different positions; she wanted to be in the right place where her skills and abilities were needed because she could then change the system. She stated, "It's okay if I'm not the right leader for you at this point in time. But where I'm right is where I want to be because that's when the systems are going to embrace what I have and I'm going to really be able to change a system. And that's what I want to do, *I want to change systems.*"

The desire to change the system was the only internal motivation that she had when accepting the leadership position. When the previous superintendent left her position, Midge, who was the assistant superintendent at the time, reflected on her rationale in applying for the superintendent position. She wanted to continue to work on the project she believed in. She could not leave the project, even though she got a job offer from another organization . Superintendency was the only job she had to fight for because she was committed to current projects:

The superintendent was leaving . . . I had to be superintendent because our projects were multi-year projects and they are good projects and they would all go away... There's no other people to keep things going so if we're both gone, we're gone. The projects die and I couldn't do that to our projects and I had to fight for the job... that's saying something about the projects that I believe in.

Ann shared her motivation to be in a leadership position; she "enjoyed organizing things and *helping people* to do what they needed to do in their classrooms." Candy indicated that she wanted to make an impact on students. She reflected, "The key question that provided the reason for me to pause and consider this is you know in a leadership position I can have an impact on a greater number of kids."

## **Theme 5: Family Influence**

Another theme emerged from participants' reflection on their career developmental stages. Findings showed evidence that family had a strong influence on various aspects of their career paths, including influence on their self-concept, their leadership qualities, and their career choices.

**Family influence: self-concept.** Findings showed that family had a strong influence on participants' concept of career during growth stage. Lisa did not think about any careers in particular, but mentioned her family values and her mother as a person who was the strongest role model as a college educated woman. She said,

This just was a family value that an education was going to be key to getting a successful career. And probably my mother was the strongest role model in that, that she was college educated.

Similar to Lisa, Marie developed no clear understanding about career at that stage and did not think about any job she wanted to have, but she indicated that she wanted to be a professional because of the influence from her parents. Her parents were blue collar. She indicated that her family was in the middle class. Her father was a mechanic and made good money, but her parents always wanted her to go to college so she could become a professional.

Unlike Lisa and Marie, Midge and Ann did not want to have the same career as their parents. Ann mentioned that her father was a military member who became a teacher. From her experience observing her father, she perceived teaching jobs as hard work. She said that a teacher was "the only career I knew I didn't want to do."

Midge developed her understanding about career self-concept from her family members who are professional, mostly lawyers and teachers, but she indicated she did not want to be a teacher, like her female relatives or her mother. She looked at teaching as a side job, not as a career, because she thought all of her female relatives became teachers for financial reasons and were not committed to teaching. They usually quit their job after they had children. She gave this rationale:

All of the teachers were females and my mom, my grandma, my two aunts, and they all quit working as soon as they had kids, or they only worked to put my dad or my grandpa, whatever, through college and then they stopped working. So my definition of career at that time was like lawyer or a teacher and I didn't want to be a teacher no matter what . . . Because all the females that were in my life who were teachers were not committed to being a teacher. It was a side job that made some money that got them to go to college where they met their spouse but it wasn't a passion and a career.

Siblings were an influence in Candy's career choice. She changed her career goal as she realized she missed the time when she played with her siblings. She expressed her joy in leading their activities and leading them to the park occasionally. She emphasized she "really did enjoy working with my siblings." She described the point where she changed her career goal:

I think what I realized is that I missed working with kids. So then I was thinking about having a career goal in education. So then I went ahead and started my undergraduate work.

**Family influence: leadership qualities.** Findings showed evidence that activities with family during participants' growth stage shaped their leadership qualities. These activities were

helping a father build and remodel a house (Lisa), participating in sports (Lisa), going to church (Ann), leading family activities (Candy), and organizing the house (Marie). The qualities gained included a work ethic, creativity, a sense of competition, the willingness and the availability to work, capability to make decisions, and organizational skills. Participants' narratives and the leadership qualities gained are presented in Table 18.

Table 18

*Leadership Qualities Gained from Family Activities*

	<b>Leadership Qualities</b>	<b>Narratives</b>
<b>Lisa</b>	Hard-working	"I have to attribute a lot of my work ethic to my dad. Just, I mean he, he-- Yeah he believed in hard work,
	Creativity	Talking to and helping her dad build and remodel houses: "There's a creativity piece, and I learned to appreciate that - because he designed it himself . . . I think that instilled a characteristic in me.
	Sense of competition	"My parents certainly supported me. They also – they fostered a sense of competition."
<b>Ann</b>	Willingness and availability to do the work	"They (my parents) are devoted Catholics and they didn't do a lot in the church . . . I did see them taking not so much leadership roles but they were always willing to jump in and do things. And that's pretty much what I do. I just had opportunities open up for me because I was so willing to just do things that others may not have wanted to do."
<b>Candy</b>	Decision-making	Made decisions for siblings: "I'm the oldest of 6 children. And so I think by that time I was really much a typical oldest child. And making those decisions . . ."  Talked about leisure activities associated with her leadership: "I guess those leisure activities . . . going back to leading groups in the park or leading siblings.
<b>Marie</b>	Organizational skills	Talked about her organizational skills: "Systems of order really came from my mom."

**Family influence: career choice.** Findings also showed the direct and indirect influence of family in leading participants toward career choices in the educational field. Although Ann resisted being a teacher like her father as she did not want to work as hard as he did, she later realized what he did was worthwhile and more fulfilling. She recalled,

When we came back from Spain, we had a son and at that time, I went back to work at Nordstrom's. And I found that I could do the job but I wasn't fulfilling. And so then I started thinking about education and what my dad did.

Family had an indirect influence on Candy's career choice. She shared the point that when she decided to change her career goal, it was because she missed the time when she worked with her siblings. She realized her love for working with children came from home. She said, "I really think a lot from home. I really did enjoy working with my siblings." Family also had an indirect influence in Lisa's career choice and leadership. She never realized this influence until she reflected on her experience during the interview. She said,

My grandmother had been in education. She was the first female Dean at Oregon Institute of Technology. My mom was a teacher and was the first female Principal at her school. So I mean all these things now make sense, but at the time I just did not want to be in education.

### **Theme 6: Network**

Besides family influence, findings showed evidence that participants' networks had an influence on either their education or their career. Three participants indicated their networks encouraged them to advance in their education, and four participants indicated their leadership opportunities came from their networks. Table 19 summarizes what resulted from the support that participants received from their networks.

Table 19

*Network Influence*

	<b>Education</b>	<b>Career</b>
<b>Lisa</b>	- Administrative certificate - Master's degree in administration	- Temporary assistant principal role - Assistant principal - Principal - Superintendent
<b>Midge</b>	-	- Founding administer at a group home - Executive director for two group home - Assistant superintendent
<b>Ann</b>	-	Principal
<b>Candy</b>	Degree in educational leadership	-
<b>Marie</b>	Degree in public school administration	- Assistant superintendent - Superintendent

**Network: education.** Lisa, Candy, and Marie were advised by their supportive networks to advance their education. They mentioned that their networks made those suggestions because they saw that the participants had the qualities and the abilities to be in particular leadership positions.

After she helped the Principal and the Assistant Principal in the office while they were absent for a while, they encouraged Lisa to apply for an administrative certificate. She said, "They both, after a few experiences with that, encouraged me to apply for my administrative certificate. So then I got a second Master's degree in administration."

Candy and Marie had similar experiences. They had supportive networks whose members saw their abilities and encouraged them to advance their education in the educational leadership and administrative fields. In their own words:

Initially I started my graduate work again in Early Childhood Education. But then after visiting with a building administrator they recommended that I would go into educational leadership because of my ability. So I did. And I haven't looked back. (Candy)

I had a very supportive principal at the time who encouraged me, said you know . . . you have the qualities you should do that (pursuing a Master degree in education with a major in public school administration). (Marie)

**Network: leadership opportunities.** In addition to getting the suggestions to advance in their education, networks were found to be a source of opportunities for participants. Lisa, Midge, Ann, and Marie reflected that they were given leadership positions by their supervisors. Lisa was given opportunities to be in all of the administrative positions, including the temporary assistant principal role, assistant principal, principal, and superintendent by her network. She stated,

Every administrative position - I've never interviewed for an administrator position. They have all, I've been in the right place at the right time, and I've been asked to move up and fill in.

Midge got many leadership positions through her network. Some examples of these positions include a founding administrator at a group home, an executive director for two group homes, and an assistant superintendent. She mentioned that throughout her leadership experiences, she never had to apply for a job. She said that it was as if she would "rise up in leadership positions."

Ann got offers to be a principal and superintendent. She explained that the transition from one position to another seemed like "a natural progression from one task to another." She explained when she got into principalship, "The principal I was working for had a heart attack. . .

He left me in charge of the building. And after that they asked me to take over for him because he did not return.” When she worked as a principal, her duties were increased every year by the district, so later, she was asked to be a superintendent.

Marie was asked to step into a leadership position by her network. She was asked to apply for the principal position. She said, “I became a principal of my own school probably when I was about 33, 34 about that same time. I never really applied for a job and I was always asked to apply.”

Marie was also asked by the superintendent to be an assistant superintendent, and later was asked by the board to be a superintendent when the former superintendent passed away.

These opportunities were not just given because of personal preferences. Their abilities and skills had been demonstrated in their jobs and were recognized by their supervisors. All participants noted that their networks gave them the opportunities because of their abilities and skills. They were good at what they were doing and were trusted to be in the leadership positions.

Lisa gave the rationale for the job offer she got, saying she gave “tons of suggestions about how they (the current leaders) should be doing their jobs,” and she got “a lot of positive feedback all along the way” about her skills and abilities. She also mentioned that leadership is about building credibility over time. She said,

There is no circumventing or shortcut in credibility. You have to build credibility. And I think that’s why I’ve been successful in this district. Because I’ve built credibility in every position up to this point.

Midge mentioned, “I have been thrust into leadership positions.” Ann gave this rationale for her job offer: “Any tasks they gave me I was able to do.” Marie indicated that she was asked to apply for many leadership positions. She explained, “I was very good at activities and

organization and making. You know I worked hard. I work hard at getting on the school to be noticed and just have the good things happening.”

### **Theme 7: Glass Ceiling**

All participants acknowledged that superintendent is a male-dominated position, especially in Alaska, where there are many male superintendents. Some participants recognized gender biases, and most participants thought being female was a barrier in stepping into the superintendent position.

**Gender discrimination.** Gender biases are expected when women work in a male-dominated profession (Brunner, 2000a). Midge and Candy were the two participants who experienced gender biases. They also experienced prejudicial gender stereotyping, which is prevalent in the relationship of women school superintendents to their subordinates, colleagues, peers, and board (Witmer, 2006).

Midge experienced a gender wage gap, and a stereotypical belief about women’s capabilities in leadership positions. She explained,

I also think that it’s a bit of a glass bubble in that everybody looks at you (women) because nobody really thinks you can do it . . . the fact that I got less money than they would have paid for the male, and they would have paid moving expenses for the male, and they required that even though I have a doctorate, no superintendent has had a doctorate before, they required that I get an endorsement in two years, even though it’s not required by the state. But because I’m a woman, they didn’t have confidence in me. So it is a little bit of that glass ceiling that you have to burst and at times I feel like you have to burst it.

Candy talked about prejudicial female stereotyping, saying,

There's a misperception that female superintendents would not be as tough or as consistent or as reliable. And actually it's - they're just as intelligent, just as committed, and just as proficient.

Although two participants confirmed that a glass ceiling exists, the narratives of the other participants did not align with the literature about the glass ceiling and gender bias. Findings did not support the idea in the literature that women who are well-qualified for administrative positions cannot advance to leadership positions due to the glass ceiling (Scanlon, 1997). Marie, Ann, and Lisa did not experience the glass ceiling or face barriers of being female in stepping into the leadership position. Marie mentioned that she did not see that superintendency is "a man's world that I had to break into." She thought that the difference of being a women was an advantage. She explained,

I don't see it as a man's world that I had to break into. I see it as, you know, I am different in a man's work and then what we do is noticed more because of the differences. So I never feel like it's a bad thing or that I'm held back or I just think I can do more because of being a female superintendent.

Ann acknowledged that superintendency is a male-dominated position in Alaska. She stated, "Alaska is unique," but she did not think that being female was a barrier. She noted, "I've never felt that being a female is you know made it different or worse." She mentioned that having a network in the field may have helped her with the barrier issues because she already knew most superintendents before she became a superintendent: "When I became a superintendent I already knew most of the superintendents. So it didn't have any real effect being a woman. Yeah I don't see any difference."

Similar to Ann, Lisa was well aware that superintendency is a male-dominated position in Alaska. She said, “It is a good old boy superintendent, sort of culture in Alaska.” However, Lisa stated she did not experience gender discrimination. She said people “never explicitly asked me about gender.” She also indicated, “It has never crossed my mind as being a barrier.”

Lisa noted that the fact people were fascinated with her being a superintendent who is single and young might link her situation to the gender issue. She shared her experiences that people always said to her she was “so young,” and she wondered whether a man would be asked the same question about his age. She said,

They all said, at every step of leadership, “You’re so young,” but I suspect that actually that age question is also linked to gender, because I don’t know that a man would get that question.

She also suspected her marital status could be another factor that led to her personal life being scrutinized. She said, “I don’t know if my personal life is scrutinized more than a man would be and the fact that I am single, I think, makes me that much more fascinating to some people.”

**Advice for women.** The participants, regardless of their opinions of the glass ceiling, had specific advice for women pursuing careers in educational leadership. Midge thought the balance of men and women in superintendency was critical because there are roles for both men and women. She said,

My advice is that the population is about split male/female and yet the number of female superintendents are quite small...So I would say to women that we need to have a balance (the number of male and female superintendents). There’s a role for male

superintendents, there's a role for female superintendents and the right person needs to be in the role at the right time for the district, depending on what they need.

Midge also thought women do not have the same skill set that men do. Although not all female superintendents have these skills, Midge thought skills such as an intuitive nature and people skills, are women's strengths, and women should look at these characteristics as their strengths.

Lisa thought the strength of women lies in the female leadership style, i.e., the collaborative leadership style. Lisa thought that women pay attention to relationships among people. She explained,

I think the strength in female leadership style is - is exactly that. I mean the things that perhaps gender lend themselves to in terms of us being people based. Relationship, the importance of relationship in the workplace . . .

For the advice for women who want to step up into superintendent positions, Lisa and Marie emphasized taking opportunities and building credibility with people they work with. Marie explained that even the tasks or additional jobs as a teacher can be a way to show leadership. She said,

Although they seem like tasks or additional jobs, to me it was a way to show that I can lead. And so set yourself up and take the opportunities that are provided to you to demonstrate leadership . . . of course always prepare yourself to self-education.

Marie also suggested that besides taking opportunities to demonstrate leadership, women needed to prepare for the opportunities by being educated. She said,

Always prepare yourself to self-education like to read read read read journals, go to school learn what you can be prepared because it's not about somebody giving you a job or an opportunity, it's really about you preparing for the opportunity that's going to come

to your door and, you know, is I think we're in charge of it I don't think anybody can you know is going to hold me back or push me through unless I do what I need to do first.

Candy suggested that women needed to be goal-oriented, to be persistent in pursuing their goals, and not to be distracted by gender discrimination and personal accusations. She said, You have a clear goal; I'm very goal oriented. I had a plan and I knew what I wanted to do. I mean so you cannot be swayed if someone is going to denigrate your gender. You cannot have somebody make an influence upon you because they are going to make a personal accusation, which of course is totally foundless. You just need to make sure that they (women) are true advocates; that they have a clear purpose. And that they are persistent in pursuing it [a leadership position].

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

This chapter presented findings from leadership development in relation to the career development narratives of five participants who answered the research question: *How do women school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?* Content was deductively analyzed to determine the presence of the pre-defined elements of Super's (1957, 1990) career development theory and Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory. The pre-determined themes were career development, self-concept, and critical reflection. Inductive analysis was also conducted and revealed seven themes from the narratives: career development, self-concept, critical reflection, internal motivation, family influence, networks, and glass ceiling.

The findings from this study support Super's (1957, 1990) career development theory that career development is an ongoing, lifelong process. Although Super's (1957, 1990) career development stages propose useful guidelines for vocational developmental tasks that are socially expected of an individual, some participants did not follow all stages; for example, some

participants did not develop their self-concept in the growth stage and some did not engage in the typical tasks.

Findings showed that all participants faced critical incidents in both personal life and career at different stages. They learned from these incidents and gained new knowledge that has helped them in their leadership. Their critical incidents included dilemmas in making career choices and in leadership decision-making. These incidents and the reflection process helped them learn leadership traits and skills, understand the impermanence of leadership, and see the intrinsic value of their work.

Internal motivation emerged as one common theme. All participants mentioned internal motivation as an influential factor in pursuing leadership positions. These motivations included challenge (Lisa), desire to change the system (Midge), belief in specific projects (Midge), enjoyment in helping people (Ann), and a desire to make an impact on students (Candy).

Other influential factors of career choice and decision to pursue leadership position are revealed in this study. Findings confirmed the value of self-concept. Narratives of all five participants showed that their choices and decisions resulted from self-realization and that their self-concept evolved over time. Another theme, family, emerged from participants' reflection on their career developmental stages. Findings showed evidence that family had a strong influence on the individuals' career paths in different ways, including influence on their self-concept, on their leadership qualities, and on their career choices. Furthermore, findings showed evidence that participants' networks had an influence on either their education or their career. Four participants indicated that their leadership opportunities came from their networks. These opportunities were not given because of personal preferences. All participants noted that people in their networks gave them opportunities because the people saw their abilities and skills and

trusted that they could do the jobs. One participant mentioned that leadership was about building credibility over time.

Although participants acknowledged that superintendency is a male-dominated position, not all thought gender is a barrier. One participant mentioned that no one asked her about gender, but instead, they asked questions about her age and her marital status. She suspected that people might have paid attention to her young age and single status because she was a woman. Three participants did not see gender as a barrier. One participant mentioned having a good network or building a network as a way to prevent gender discrimination, and one participant thought gender difference was good for a workplace and that being female was an advantage.

All participants also gave advice for women who want to step up to leadership positions. Some participants thought that women have different skills and leadership styles that differ from men's, and women should use these skills and leadership styles as their strengths. Some participants suggested women must take additional tasks or roles as opportunities to gain experience, demonstrate their leadership, and establish credibility among colleagues. One participant stated women needed to be goal oriented and persistent and not to let others or gender influence their decision to pursue leadership positions. A summary of chapter 4 is presented in Table 20.

Table 19

*Participants' Leadership Journey Summaries*

	<b>Lisa</b>	<b>Midge</b>	<b>Ann</b>	<b>Candy</b>	<b>Marie</b>
Leadership activities during growth stage	- drama group - sport - work with dad	- charity work - student council	- reading - sports team manager - school clubs	- leading activities with family and siblings	- sports team captain - night manager at Dairy Queen - leading sibling in organizing the house and chores
Self-concept: leader	individual sports (all stages)	program manager (exploration)	sports team manager (exploration)	- oldest child (growth) - summer job as a head of a crew of housekeepers (exploration)	- sports team captains (growth) - part-time job as night manager
Self-concept: educational leader	started when she was a teacher	when she realized that her voice matters in the classroom	5 to 7 years into her principalship	when she realized she would have an impact on a greater number of kids if she were in a leadership position	when she realized she could make the school better if she could get into a leadership role
Critical reflection	work dilemma	- personal dilemma - work dilemma	work dilemma	work dilemma	work dilemma
Internal motivation to be a leader	- positive feedback on her abilities and skills - challenge of the job	- want to make a difference/eff ect change - fight for good projects	- want to use strength in organizing to help people do what they need to do in class	- have an impact on a greater number of kids	- want to have a bigger influence
Family influence	mother a college graduate	family members all professionals	father a teacher	enjoyed working with siblings	parents blue-collar workers

Network influence	-administrative certificate - principal -superintendent	- admin job	- principal -superintendent	- graduate degree	- graduate degree - assistant superintendent -superintendent
Glass ceiling	- scrutinized about age and marital status rather than gender - gender not a barrier	- experienced gender bias - was discriminated against because of educational background	- gender not a barrier as she had already built a network before she took leadership role	- experienced perception that women are not as tough as men	- gender not a barrier - being a female superintendent is an advantage

## CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This doctoral thesis aimed to explore leadership journeys of women superintendents in the state of Alaska. Specifically, it sought to understand meaning-making of their leadership development experiences. The study employed Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory and Super's (1957, 1990) career development theory in examining meaning-making of female leaders in each of their career development stages. The main research question was: *How do women school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?*

This study was qualitative by nature of the research question. A narrative research study was used. The sampling method was a purposeful sample of five superintendents who have been in their role for a minimum of three years. The researcher conducted an initial 15-minute call to schedule the one-on-one interview and go over the interview questions, followed by in-depth interviews within one week after the initial interview. This study had limitations because of its constructivist view, interpretive framework, research site, and small number of participants. In addition, the findings represent only the subjective meaning of a few women school superintendents in Alaska and cannot be transferred to other contexts. The perspectives were from small-midsize school districts in the remote geographic region of U.S (Alaska). Female superintendents in this setting may differ from US state Superintendents because Alaska is more "frontier" and "independent." This chapter covers the current study, as well as interpretations and conclusions of the findings. It includes recommendations for application and future research.

Leadership theories informed the researcher about leaders' traits, styles, and behaviors. Although leadership theories and literature on leadership development provided useful information, they do not provide insights on how one becomes a leader. While the leadership development literature focuses on the development of leadership competencies, career

development literature provides richer information on occupational paths and choices. In the search for how one learns to be a leader, adult theories and career development theories are explored. The literature revealed that current views of both adult learning and career development are congruent. Both are moving toward a constructivist view and pay attention to the unique reflective meaning-making of an individual. A well-known constructivist theory is Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory. Mezirow (1978) provides a comprehensive framework used as a framework in this study. The theory helps explain the learning or meaning-making process of adults. Career development theories also shed light on career paths and choices. Among these career development theories, Super's (1957, 1990) model provides a comprehensive list of career developmental stages used in this study to investigate the career development of women school superintendents.

Literature on women's leadership revealed women are underrepresented in top leadership roles in public education in the U.S. (Skarla, 1999), and superintendency is the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States (Bjork, 2000; Dobie & Hummel, 2001; Skrla et al., 2000; Skrla, 2000a; Skrla, 2000b). In light of this underrepresentation of women in the superintendency, many studies have been conducted to investigate how women become superintendents (FeKula & Roberts, 2005; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Maienza, 1986; McDade & Drake, 1982; Muñoz et al., 2014). These studies pay attention to the external forces that influence career decision-making of female leaders, but not the learning process of their leadership-relevant experiences.

Findings from leadership development in relation to the career development narratives of the five participants in this study revealed answers to the question: *How do women school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?* Content was

deductively analyzed to determine the presence of the pre-defined elements of Super's (1990) career development theory and Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory. The pre-determined themes were career development, self-concept, and critical reflection. Inductive analysis was also conducted. Four themes emerged from the narratives: internal motivation, family influence, network, and glass ceiling.

### **Interpretation and Conclusion**

Seven conclusions emerged from the findings of this study on meaning-making in career development tasks of five women school superintendents. The evidence to support these conclusions came directly from stories told by the five participants about their leadership development experiences. Conclusions were linked to the conceptual framework, theories, and research that informed this study.

First, by using Super's (1990) career development theory as a framework, this study revealed experiences and activities associated with leadership and occur in non-formal settings were important for leadership development of these women school superintendents. Second, experiences that gave women school superintendents' opportunities to show leadership and the recognition of their leadership by others helped build their self-concept of being a leader.

Third, meaning making is a part of leadership learning of women school superintendents, which can occur in non-formal settings and can begin in early childhood. Fourth, family influenced the development of leadership qualities of women school superintendents starting from the growth stage. Fifth, the self-concept of being an educational leader who can make a positive impact or can perform leadership tasks, drove women school superintendents to take educational leadership positions. These self-concepts reflected that internal motivation was one

of the influential factors in the decision to step into leadership positions. These motivations included challenges (Lisa), a desire to change the system (Midge), a belief in ongoing projects (Midge), enjoyment in helping people (Ann), and a desire to affect students (Candy). Sixth, women school superintendents have supportive networks because of the credibility they built over time. Seventh, women school superintendents have positive attitudes toward being female superintendents.

### **Leadership Development across Life Span**

Findings from this study showed leadership development is an ongoing process that can occur in non-formal settings. Super's (1990) career development theory was adapted to use a guide for leadership development experiences in this study. By using Super's (1990) career development stages and tasks as a framework to explore meaning-making of leadership development experiences of women leaders, findings revealed non-formal settings can provide opportunities for the ongoing process of leadership development and leadership development is not a linear process. This finding aligned with Super's career development theory (Super, 1990). Super's (1957) developmental stages were proposed according to chronological age. His model explains how individuals' self-concepts evolve through engagement in career development stages and tasks. However, in 1990, he recognized the development stages are not a linear process. Not every individual follows these stages, and the developmental process does not merely depend upon the chronological age, but rather on the individual's personality and life circumstances (Smart & Peterson, 1997). Findings of this study also confirmed this premise. Participants' career development was an ongoing process starting from the growth stage. Participants had ideas of what they wanted to be or did not want to be. Three participants

reflected on their career aspiration to be teachers or to hold other professional jobs during this stage, while two participants did not have concrete ideas about career until the exploration stage. After the growth and exploration stages, participants' career development continued over time. The development was not a linear process. Not all participants followed the developmental stages and sub-stages. Ann and Candy had no dream job or a clear idea about career during the growth stage. Midge changed her career goal and took a break from professional jobs during the establishment stage, during which time individuals are expected to settle down and make use of their abilities and past training. No participants showed concerns about maintaining present status and competition from younger workers in the maintenance stage.

Super's (1990) career development framework also helped reveal leadership development was an ongoing process. In contrast with the modern concepts of leadership development over the past 20 years, which emphasize only adult learning and formal classroom leadership development (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004), it was evident from the findings of this study that leadership development of women leaders is an ongoing process that may occur in non-formal settings. By using Super's (1990) suggested career development tasks as guidelines to track participants' activities related to their leadership, findings of this study showed these women leaders encountered many experiences associated with their leadership. These activities helped shape and instill their leadership traits and qualities. They encountered these activities during and after their early childhood.

Lisa believed she was comfortable in front of media during her superintendency because she was trained to be comfortable on stage and in front of the camera when she joined the local drama group during her growth stage. She mentioned that joining the drama club helped build her confidence in front of media and build her confidence in public speaking. Midge believed

participation in many social services, such as charity work, helped shape her persuasion skills and people skills. Ann and Marie mentioned managing school sports teams as experiences that helped them learn decision making and how to be a good team player. Candy mentioned simple activities like leading family activities, organizing the house, and taking siblings to the park, as experiences that built her organizing and decision-making skills.

This study uncovered childhood activities that helped shape and instill leadership qualities and traits of five women leaders. These activities included joining a drama group; engaging in individual sports; leading team sports; engaging in family activities, such as helping father remodel and build houses; leading family activities, such as organizing houses and leading sibling activities; participating in charity work; participating in student council; and reading biographies of female leaders such as the presidential wives. A summary of these activities and leadership qualities gained from these activities was presented in Table 12. One conclusion was drawn from the career development theme.

**Conclusion One: Experiences and Activities Associated with Leadership and Occur in Non-Formal Settings Were Important for Leadership Development of These Women School Superintendents**

**Self-concept of being a leader.** It was evident that self-concept of being a leader starting to develop in the growth stage, but participants did not see themselves as leaders until their leadership was recognized by others. Four participants mentioned the growth stage as the time when they started to develop their leadership qualities (Ann, Candy, Marie, and Lisa). Candy mentioned being an oldest child who led family activities and led siblings to the park as the first time she recalled being a leader, whereas Ann and Marie engaged in leadership activities when

they took leadership roles in sports teams at school. Ann was a team manager, and Marie was a sports team captain. Ann also mentioned gaining leadership experiences by joining high school clubs and the student council. She thought it was when she “started to find ways to be very active in organizations.” Lisa was not involved in a team sport, but she saw herself as a leader in the sense of someone who wanted to excel and be the best in an individual sport, starting when she was about 10 years old. Midge engaged in a lot of work and school activities, such as being a member of the student council, which instilled leadership skills in her. Although participants engaged in activities that helped them gain leadership qualities beginning from the growth stage, they did not see themselves as leaders until their leadership was recognized, mostly during exploration stage. During the exploration stage, participants mentioned they saw themselves as leaders when they engaged in activities that gave them the opportunities to show their leadership abilities and skills and when their abilities and skills were recognized. Two participants saw themselves as leaders when they worked part-time during their high school years, whereas two other participants saw themselves as leaders after they graduated. Candy and Marie took leadership roles in their part-time jobs. They were promoted to leadership roles, and at that time, they thought of themselves as leaders. Candy was promoted to be the head of a crew of housekeepers, and Marie was promoted to be a night manager at the age of 16.

Two participants, who mentioned no significant leadership experiences during their part-time jobs, took their leadership roles during the exploration stage. Ann saw herself as a leader when she was promoted to be a store manager at a department store. Midge, who had already developed her leadership skills working with social service organizations and on the student council and never looked at herself as a leader before high school, stated she first saw herself as

a leader when she got a job offer to take an administrative position after she got promoted to be a program manager.

Participants' experiences associated with leadership contrasted with Super's idea of self-concept, which explains that individuals' self-concepts evolve through engagement in career development tasks because participants' self-concepts of being a leader do not depend only on self-realization or self-recognition. Findings provided evidence to support the idea in the literature, introduced in Chapter 2, that career choice and development are not merely products of self-realization, but a negotiation of self and the environment in which one belongs (Leung & Chen, 2009).

Two conclusions can be drawn from these two sub-themes: self-concept of career and self-concept of being a leader.

**Conclusion Two: Experiences that Gave Women School Superintendents Opportunities to Show Leadership and the Recognition of Their Leadership by Others Helped Build Their Self-concept of Being a Leader**

**Critical reflection and leadership learning.** This study supported the idea from Mezirow's (1978, 1991) transformative learning theory that meaning making within the critical reflection process is a part of knowledge creation. All participants faced dilemmas in making career choices and in making leadership decisions. These dilemmas helped them learn leadership skills and acquire leadership traits. They employed different strategies in the critical reflection process.

Meaning-making has been widely used to examine the learning of educational leaders that takes place in traditional classroom settings, for example, in pre-service administrators

training (Brown, 2005), graduate programs designed to prepare teacher leaders (Ross et al., 2011), teacher leadership programs (Harris et al., 2008), year-long leadership programs for women (Lafreniere & Longman, 2008), and graduate leadership courses (Sullivan & Palmer, 2014). Only one study investigated meaning-making of educational leaders that took place in informal settings. That study explored meaning-making of 23 school principals' professional learning (McGough, 2003). Findings of the current study add to the current literature by exploring meaning-making of women school superintendents across their life span in informal settings. Findings supported McGough's (2003) study presented in Chapter 2 that meaning-making is a part of professional learning, which can occur in a non-formal setting and can take place beginning in early childhood.

The meaning-making process of participants of the current study aligned with Mezirow's (1978) critical reflection process, which involve old worldviews, critical incidents, critical reflection or meaning-making process, and new worldviews. The findings of this study support this premise, as participants faced both personal and work dilemmas and these dilemmas stimulated the meaning-making process of participants. The findings also align with the major theme in leadership development, i.e., the change of one's worldview increases self-awareness as part of leadership development (Allen, 2007).

Findings show participants' critical incidents included the dilemmas of making career choices and leadership decision-making. These incidents and the reflection process helped them learn leadership skills and acquire leadership traits, see the impermanence of leadership, and understand the values of their leadership roles. Lisa made meaning of her career difficulties by reflecting on the time she competed in individual sports when she was young. She changed her old views of looking at career difficulties as barriers to seeing them as challenges. Midge took a

move in her leadership position and got rid of the fear of rejection by reflecting on the time she went out to dance with a popular boy, who did not want to go out with her. She evaluated her fear of rejection. She then understood that accepting rejection or an honest answer is better than being where she was not supposed to be. Ann faced a critical juncture when she made her career choice. She learned to redefine her self-concept and tried to understand who she was or wanted to be in relation to work values and job satisfaction when she worked as a store manager. As she reflected on her work conditions at the department store, she gained a new worldview that work value is as critical as working conditions. Working at a department store and teaching are both hard work, but teaching would bring her job satisfaction, as it was a more worthwhile and fulfilling job. Candy made a career choice based on her true passion. She changed her career goal from being a forest person to a teacher when she reflected on her childhood experiences. She realized she enjoyed working with children. Marie learned leadership traits when she was 16 by challenging her old perception about leadership and arriving at new perceptions about leadership. She learned that leadership was not about having authority, but about having the capability to perform the tasks, and then the power was given. She also recognized a leader-follower relationship and understood leadership was not a standalone position.

The reflection process cited by participants included comparing previous experience with the new experience (Lisa), deciding which action to take (Midge), revising the meaning of experience (Midge), self-evaluating (Midge), and challenging their old worldviews (Ann, Marie, Candy). Each participant self-described critical reflections were presented in Table 14.

From the findings of the current study, a conclusion can be drawn from the critical reflection theme.

### **Conclusion Three: Meaning Making is a Part of Leadership Learning of Women School Superintendents, which Can Occur in Non-Formal Settings and Can Begin in Early Childhood**

**Family influence and the development of leadership.** Participants' narratives provided evidence that family had a strong influence on participants' self-concept, career choices in the educational field, and leadership qualities. The influence of family on self-concept during the growth stage included a perception of being a college graduate like her mother (Lisa), being a professional like her parents (Marie), or being someone who works with children because she enjoyed leading siblings' activities (Candy). Some participants indicated what they did not want to be because of family influence; for example, Midge and Ann did not want to have the same career as their parents. Ann did not want to be a teacher like her father because she perceived teaching as a job that required lots of hard work. She indicated that a teacher was "the only career I knew I didn't want to do." Similarly, Midge learned from her experience observing career paths of her female relatives and decided, at a very young age, she did not want to be a teacher. She developed negative perceptions about being a teacher because she learned at a very young age that her female relatives became teachers for financial reasons and were not committed to teaching. Her relatives quit their teaching jobs after they got married and had children. She said, "It was a side job that made some money that got them to go to college where they met their spouse, but it wasn't a passion and a career." During the exploration stage, family was found to have both direct and indirect influences on participants' career choices in the educational field. Although Ann resisted being a teacher, like her father, as she did not want to work as hard as he did, she later realized that what he did was a worthwhile and fulfilling career.

When she was not satisfied working as a store manager, she recalled her father's teaching job as a job that could be her potential life work. She then decided to work in the educational field.

Candy made her career choice based on the memorable time she had with her siblings. She changed her career goal and decided to be a teacher because she missed working with children.

Lisa admitted that, although she did not want to be a teacher like her female relatives, being surrounded by these relatives had subconsciously influenced her decision to be a teacher.

Findings also revealed family had an influence in instilling and shaping participants' leadership qualities beginning with the growth stage. It was evident from the interviews that activities with family in informal settings helped develop participants' leadership qualities. Participants learned leadership qualities, like a strong work ethic, creativity, sense of competition, willingness and the availability to do the work, decision-making, and organizational skills, from casual activities, including helping a father build and remodel houses (Lisa), participating in sports (Lisa), going to church (Ann), leading family activities (Candy), and organizing the house (Marie).

Participants' narratives and leadership qualities gained are presented in Table 14. The evidence of family influence, on meaning-making of participants' self-concept, career choice in the educational field, and leadership qualities supported learning theory, specifically Bandura's (1997) social learning theory in Chapter 2. According to this theory, learning is not merely a mental process; learning is the interaction between the individual and the environment.

Leadership development depends on environment (Allen, 2007). The findings supported the premise that environment influenced participants' meaning-making of self, career, and leadership qualities. They learned from observing others and through modeling (Allen, 2007). A conclusion can be drawn from the theme of family influence.

#### **Conclusion Four: Family Had Influence on the Development of Leadership Qualities of Women School Superintendents Starting from the Growth Stage**

**The decision to be a leader.** Findings revealed that the realization the participant was someone who can make a positive impact or can perform leadership tasks drove them to take educational leadership positions. The findings add to the literature that internal motivation is one of the influential factors for women pursuing superintendent positions. Current studies on underrepresentation of women school superintendents shed light on how women become superintendents (FeKula & Roberts, 2005; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Maienza, 1986; McDade & Drake, 1982; Muñoz et al., 2014). It was reported that women have been less likely than men to pursue superintendent positions because of influential factors such as gender and having children (FeKula & Roberts, 2005). Findings of this study provided evidence that, while family was an influence in participants' self-concept of career, career choices, and developing leadership qualities, internal motivation was an influential factor in the decision to step into leadership positions. All participants mentioned internal motivation in pursuing leadership positions. These motivations included being challenged (Lisa), the desire to change the system (Midge), belief in the value of ongoing projects (Midge), enjoyment in helping people (Ann), and the desire to make an impact on students (Candy). Lisa stated leadership was "a huge challenge" for her, and she wanted to "change the system." Midge talked about her move into a leadership position saying that she wanted to "change the system." She added the desire to continue to work on the projects she believed in drove her to apply for the superintendent position. Ann mentioned that her motivation to be in leadership position was that she "enjoyed organizing things and helping people to do what they needed to do in their classrooms," while Candy wanted to "have an impact on a greater number of kids." The findings were consistent with leadership theory

presented in Chapter 2. Leadership theory explains definitions of leadership as involving an intentional process of leaders who want to “guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization” (Yukl, 2010, p.3). The findings also aligned with the trait approach, which explains physical characteristics and personal traits of leaders. Findings supported the idea found in the literature that one common trait of leaders was the ability to help the group to achieve its goals (Stogdill, 1948). A conclusion can be drawn from the two themes of self-concept of being an educational leader and internal motivation.

**Conclusion Five: The Self-concept of Being an Educational Leader Who Can Make a Positive Impact or Can Perform Leadership Tasks Drove Women School Superintendents to Take Educational Leadership Positions**

**Network and leadership opportunity.** It is evident women school superintendents have supportive networks. The study supported a recent study that showed not all women lack professional networks, and some women know how to take advantage of these networks (Isernhagen & Bulkin, 2013). Participants’ networks were their source of educational and leadership opportunities. Findings also revealed these opportunities were not given to the participants because of personal preferences, but rather because of the credibility they built over time.

Lisa, Candy, and Marie were advised by their supportive networks to advance their education. Lisa pursued an administrative certificate and a degree in administration, Candy pursued a degree in educational leadership, and Marie pursued a degree in public school administration. They all mentioned that people in their networks made those suggestions because they saw the participants had the qualities and the abilities to be in a leadership position.

Similarly, because of participants' abilities and skills, participants were offered the leadership positions. Four participants indicated they were given leadership positions by their supervisors (Lisa, Midge, Ann, and Marie). People in Lisa's network gave her opportunities to be in all of the administrative positions, including a temporary assistant principal role, assistant principal, principal, and superintendent. Midge was offered many positions including a founding administrator at a group home, an executive director for two group homes, and an assistant superintendent. Ann got offers to be a principal and superintendent. She was asked to apply for positions as principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent.

The participants' career advancement can be explained as they "rise up in leadership positions" (Midge). However, narratives showed that they received such opportunities not because of the personal preference of their supervisors. They were offered the positions because they had demonstrated their qualities, abilities, and skills in the job and were trusted enough to deserve to be in the leadership positions. With regard to her path to leadership positions, Lisa concluded that leadership is about building credibility over time. Narratives revealed that participants were good at what they were doing. Their abilities and leadership were recognized, and when the leadership opportunities came, they were selected to apply for the positions. Midge mentioned that she had been thrust into leadership positions. Participants' supervisors were confident that they could perform the tasks because the participants had built credibility in every position they had. Ann gave the rationale for the job offer she got, saying that she could perform any task her supervisors gave her. Marie indicated that she worked hard and was good at organizing. She then got a job offer because her qualities were noticed by her supervisors.

A conclusion can be drawn from the network theme.

## **Conclusion Six: Women School Superintendents Have Supportive Networks Because of the Credibility They Built Over Time**

**Glass ceiling and Attitudes of Women Leaders.** This study supported the claim that women are underrepresented in top leadership roles in public education in the U.S. (Skarla, 1999), particularly in the superintendent position (Bjork, 2000). Some participants experienced discriminatory practices, but all participants have positive attitudes toward being female superintendents.

A review of the literature suggests that gender biases are expected when women work in a male-dominated profession (Brunner, 2000a). Participants acknowledged that superintendency is a male-dominated position, and some participants experienced gender biases. Midge and Candy were the two participants who experienced gender biases. Midge experienced a gender wage gap and a stereotypical belief about women's capabilities in leadership positions. She explained that the board did not have confidence in her in the superintendent position, even though she had earned a doctoral degree, when no previous superintendent in the district had earned a doctorate. The board also required her to get an endorsement within two years when it was not a requirement by the state. Candy faced prejudicial female stereotyping that women superintendents would not be as tough, as consistent, or as reliable as men. While Midge and Candy experienced gender biases, Marie, Ann, and Lisa did not experience discrimination.

Regardless of participants' gender discrimination experiences, participants' narratives did not show negativity toward being female superintendents. Marie did not perceive superintendency as "a man's world that I had to break into." She did not think she was "held back" because of her gender. Instead, she thought that being a woman was an advantage for this

position, and she could do more as a woman. Ann did not think being a female made it different or worse.

When the participants were asked to come up with a metaphor to describe the feeling of “being a superintendent” and “being a female superintendent,” participants’ metaphors did not show negative perceptions toward being a female superintendent. Ann and Lisa use the same metaphors to describe the feeling of “being a superintendent” and “being a female superintendent.” Lisa indicated that being a superintendent felt like “jumping into the deep end of the pool” whereas Ann indicated being a superintendent felt like a “structure.”

Midge, Candy, and Marie used different metaphors to describe “being a superintendent” and “a female superintendent.” Their metaphors did not reflect negative attitudes toward being a female superintendent. While Midge and Candy’s metaphors reflected the uniqueness of a female superintendent, Marie’s metaphor reflected her positive attitude toward a female superintendent. Marie indicated that being a female superintendent felt “empowering.”

The summary of participants’ perception of gender discrimination issues and metaphors are summarized in Table 21.

Table 20

*Participants' Perceptions on Gender Discrimination Toward Superintendency and Metaphors*

<b>Perceptions</b> <b>Participants</b>	<b>Superintendent is a male-dominated job</b>	<b>Gender is a barrier in leadership</b>	<b>Metaphor of being a superintendent and being a female superintendent</b>
Lisa	Yes	No	Same
Midge	Yes	Yes - stereotyping - wage gap	Different - Female superintendents have unique abilities
Ann	Yes	No - was scrutinized about age, marital status	Same
Candy	Yes	Yes - stereotyping	Different - Female superintendents have unique abilities
Marie	Yes	No	Different - It is empowering to be a female superintendent

A conclusion can be drawn from the glass ceiling theme and the self-concept: female leader theme.

**Conclusion Seven: Women School Superintendents Have Positive Attitudes Toward Being Female Superintendents.**

**Implications for Practice**

The conclusion can be drawn from the findings of this study that leadership development is an ongoing process that can occur in non-formal settings. The summary of this development is presented in Figure 3.

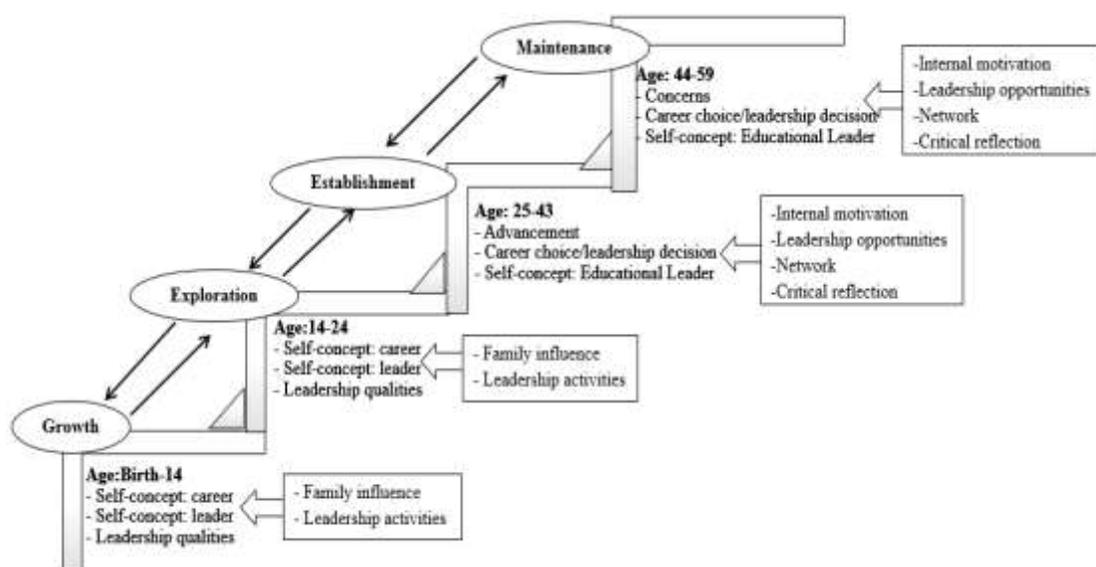


Figure 3. Summary of Participants' Leadership Development

Findings revealed leadership development, which occurs in natural settings, involves influence of family and engagement in leadership activities during the growth and exploration stage. Other influences can be internal motivation, leadership opportunities, supportive network, and critical reflection during establishment and maintenance stage.

During the growth and exploration stages, family influenced development with regard to leadership qualities. Leisure activities, as well as activities with family, also helped shape leadership qualities. Findings of this study suggest samples of leisure activities and activities with family that can help shape the leadership qualities of young girls. These activities included joining a drama group; engaging in individual sports or leading team sports; engaging in family activities such as helping her father remodel and build houses; leading family activities such as organizing houses, leading sibling activities; or participating in charity work. Participating in student council and reading biographies of female leaders such as the presidential wives, also contribute to leadership qualities. The summary of these activities and leadership qualities gained from these activities were presented in Chapter 5.

The implication for practice from this conclusion is that means of leadership development should not be limited to formal classroom training or other adult learning activities such as coaching, mentoring, action learning, and 360-degree feedback (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). These findings provide useful information for parents, educators and counselors; and show that waiting until young girls are grown up and providing leadership training to them only as grown women may not be enough to increase the number of female leaders. Families can and should take an active role in developing leadership qualities in young girls because leadership can be developed from a young age.

During the exploration and maintenance stages, findings revealed the development of leadership involves internal motivation, leadership opportunities, supportive network, and critical reflection as part of leadership learning. Findings indicate that the belief that being a leader gave participants opportunities to change or make a positive impact on a greater number of people drove them to take leadership positions. The findings inform educators and trainers in the field of leadership development that internal motivations have a strong influence on people's decisions to take leadership positions. In the educational field, besides skills, traits, attributes, and leadership competencies, building internal motivation can be a part of leadership training. Showing women the benefits of leadership positions can be used as a strategy in building motivation for women to pursue leadership positions. Given the rationale for why women should step into leadership positions and how taking leadership roles can change the educational system or have a greater impact on a greater number of students, teachers, and schools may encourage women to step into educational leadership positions, particularly that of superintendent.

In addition to knowledge about why women should be leaders and how women leaders could make changes or impact the educational system, this study revealed that the belief they

could perform leadership tasks influenced women's decision to step into leadership positions. The opportunities to demonstrate leadership abilities and the recognition of these abilities help women build the self-concept of being a leader. Participants' self-concept of being a leader became more concrete when they engaged in activities to demonstrate their leadership abilities, such as taking leadership roles in part-time jobs where their leadership was recognized. This finding informs parents and educators that, in addition to encouraging young girls to participate in activities that help shape their leadership qualities, giving them opportunities to show their leadership abilities and skills, and the recognition of these abilities and skills, are critical in building a young girl's self-concept of being a leader. This finding also informs leadership educators and supervisors of women that offering women leadership tasks, such as temporary leadership roles, to demonstrate leadership abilities and skills and the recognition of these abilities and skills, help build their self-concept of being a leader.

Opportunities to demonstrate leadership abilities came from the supportive networks of participants. Networks were found to be a source of educational and leadership opportunities for these women. These opportunities were not given to the participants because of personal preferences, but rather because of the credibility they built over time. This finding provides incentive for educators and trainers, who develop leadership development programs, to include in those programs knowledge about how to create a supportive network. , besides creating networks, building credibility in their current roles is as important for women as leadership competency training. It is useful for the educators and trainers to inform women they build credibility by being responsible and good at what they are doing in their current position. The practical implication for women, who want to step into leadership positions, is they should pay attention to building a supportive network and creating credibility in their job.

Critical reflection was found to be a part of the knowledge creation of participants. Participants used critical reflection in leadership decision making. This finding may be useful for educators and trainers, who develop leadership-training programs, which include critical reflection activities, such as comparing previous experience with new experience (Lisa), deciding which action to take (Midge), revising the meaning of experience (Midge), self-evaluation (Midge), and challenging their old worldviews (Ann, Marie, Candy).

Although it is evident from this study that gender discrimination does exist, it is important for educators and trainers, who develop leadership training for women, to inform women that women leaders have positive attitudes toward being women. During critical reflection training, educators and trainers may provide examples of successful women leaders who do not let discriminatory practices limit them from advancing to leadership positions. Training women to have the right attitudes and providing them with the strategies to deal with gender discrimination may be useful for women who want to advance into leadership roles. This study suggests that building credibility and creating networks can help alleviate discrimination encountered along the way to leadership positions.

This study provides recommendations at five levels; policy level, state level, school district level, school level, and family level. At the policy level, it is recommended to integrate leadership development curriculum into career development curriculum and provide curriculum that integrates activities that support leadership development, e.g., leadership roles in school activities, reading biographies of female leaders, stage performance, and public speaking. Policy should foster supportive networks for women and support long-term leadership development program for women. States should provide funding for schools that integrate leadership activities in the curriculum. Women should be provided with leadership development programs that help

build internal motivation, positive attitude toward being female, and critical reflection. Funding for outreach programs that educate parents about leadership development of their children will help develop future women leaders. Schools and school districts can find ways to monitor leadership development through curriculum, program, and school activities. Schools should set up a culture, where everyone can be a leader, including teacher leaders and student leaders, in order to foster leadership skills.

Providing students with opportunities to be in leadership roles will foster a self-concept of being a leader. Families can adopt a holistic approach by fostering leadership development of children through activities with family and leadership roles at home, and participating in outreach programs, which inform parents about leadership development of children.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Leadership has been widely examined, and there have been several attempts at defining leadership and its concepts (Bass & Stogdill, 1990), but leadership is still the least understood phenomenon (Rost, 1991). An understanding about leadership has evolved overtime. Literature about leadership started from an understanding of leaders' characteristic or their personal traits. Then, attention shifted to leaders' behaviors or what they do. Later, understanding how leadership is exercised was extensively examined. There were attempts to understand how leaders influence followers and how leadership can be distributed. Leadership studies then moved from post-heroic leadership to shared or distributed leadership (Pepper, 2010). In the past 20 years, the focus of leadership has been on the development of methods for leadership training. There are various types of leadership training, particularly formal classroom leadership training (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). From a review of the literature, the focus of leadership

development is limited to the learning of adults and leadership learning in formal settings. The evolution of leadership literature is presented in Figure 4.

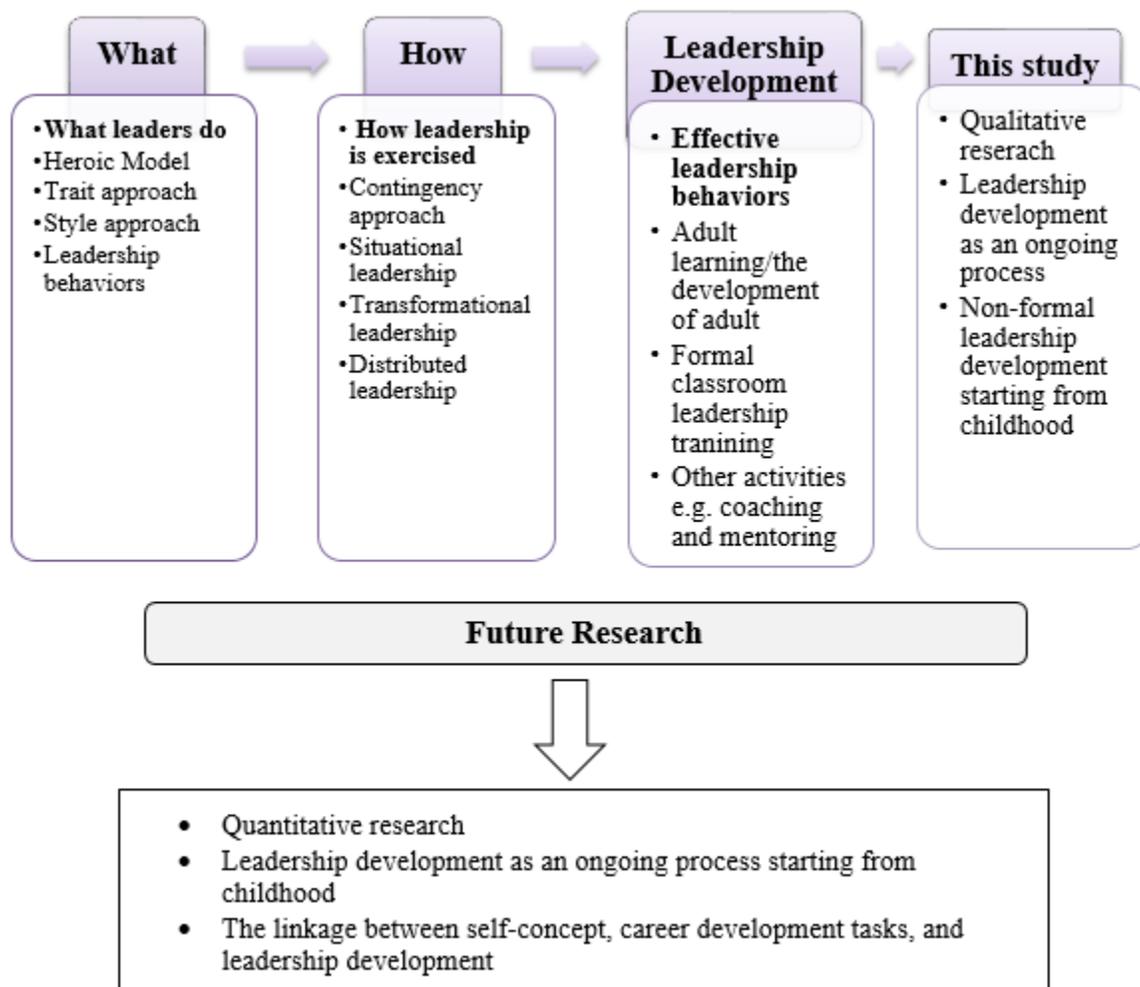


Figure 4. The Evolution of Leadership Literature and Recommendations

The gender aspect of leadership was brought to light beginning with the civil rights movement, which aimed to eliminate barriers and discrimination against minorities and women who attempted to advance to leadership positions. In the educational field, women are sixty times less likely than men to advance from the teaching position to the top leadership role in a school district (Skarla, 1999). Superintendent, in particular, is the most male-dominated position in the

United States (Bjork, 2000; Dobie & Hummel, 2001; Skrla et al., 2000; Skrla, 2000a; Skrla, 2000b). With regard to the underrepresentation of women among school superintendents, this study contributed to the literature on the development of leadership, specifically leadership of women as school superintendents, by adding to the body of research an alternative way of viewing leadership development: an ongoing developmental process that occurs in informal settings.

This study used career development tasks, guided by career development theory (Super, 1990) to track activities, starting from childhood, associated with leadership of women school superintendents in Alaska; this study also used Mezirow's (1978) critical reflection theory as a framework to look at meaning that participants made from those activities. Study results revealed activities, tasks, and factors outside of the classroom that affect leadership development of women leaders. However, the results of the study are not generalizable because of the small number of participants.

Regarding efforts for advancing women into superintendent positions, future research should be conducted with a larger number of women school superintendents, using a quantitative research design to better understand the phenomenon. Future research could further examine the ongoing developmental processes of leadership development of female leaders. Consideration should be given to comparing differences and similarities of women leaders' experiences starting from childhood to identify activities and factors associated with leadership development of young girls and women outside of classroom settings. Consideration should also be given to linkages involving self-concept, career development tasks, and leadership development. Such research could provide useful insights and implications for leadership development programs for

young girls and women and might suggest activities relevant to the development of women at different life stages.

### **Chapter 5 Summary**

This study presented seven conclusions relative to leadership of five women school superintendents in Alaska. Leadership development of the participants was found to be an ongoing process that can occur in non-formal settings.

Leadership qualities and self-concept of a leader can start as early as the growth stage. Family and leisure activities were an influence in the development of participants' leadership qualities during the growth and exploration stages. This study described samples of leisure activities and activities with family that can help shape leadership qualities of young girls and provided useful information for parents, educators, and counselors how leadership can be developed from early childhood by encouraging girls to participate in such activities.

The exploration and maintenance stages are the times when participants started to develop their self-concept of being a leader. Opportunities to demonstrate leadership abilities, such as taking leadership roles in part-time jobs, and the recognition of these abilities helped shape participants' concepts of a leader. This finding informs parents and educators that, besides encouraging young girls to participate in activities relevant to leadership development, giving young girls opportunities to show their leadership abilities and skills and the recognition of these abilities and skills, are critical in building a young girl's self-concept of a leader.

As for the decision to advance to leadership positions, findings revealed the two factors that drove participants to take leadership positions were: a) the belief that being a leader gives participants opportunities to change or have positive impact on a greater number of people, and

b) the belief that one can perform leadership tasks. The implication for educators and trainers in leadership development of women is that leadership development should include building internal motivation for women to take leadership roles. This internal motivation can be built by providing women the rationale for why women should step up into leadership positions and information about how leadership roles can change the educational system or make a greater impact on a greater number of students, teachers, and schools. In addition, this study also informs educators in the field of leadership development of women and the supervisors of women that offering women leadership tasks such as temporary leadership roles to demonstrate leadership abilities and skills, and the recognition of these abilities and skills help build their self-concept of being a leader.

Findings also revealed that the opportunities to demonstrate leadership abilities came from the participants' supportive networks and that their networks provided them with such opportunities because of their abilities and skills. Participants emphasized the importance of building credibility over time. The implication for women, who want to advance in leadership positions, is that they need to be good at any tasks they are given. The study also suggests that educators and trainers, who develop leadership development programs for women, should teach that leadership involves building credibility over time and that providing women with training to help them better perform in their current positions is equally good as providing them with leadership training.

The study also suggests that educators and trainers, who develop leadership-training programs, should include critical reflection activities, such as comparing previous experience with the new experience, deciding which action to take, revising the meaning of experience, self-evaluating, and challenging their old worldviews in those programs.

Most importantly, this study reveals, although gender discrimination exists, women's attitudes toward discrimination need not be negative. It is evident from the findings, regardless of their experiences with discrimination practices, participants in this study had positive attitudes toward being women, and they did not let discriminatory practices limit them from stepping into leadership positions. This finding provides useful information for women and educators on the importance of positive attitudes toward gender discrimination.

In the last section of this chapter, the researcher provided recommendations for future research. Although the current study provides useful information about an ongoing developmental process relevant to participants' leadership, the study was exploratory, qualitative research, which is limited by the small number of participants. The results of this study cannot be generalized. A quantitative approach is suggested for future research to compare differences and similarities of women leaders' experiences starting from childhood so that it might be possible to identify generalizable activities and factors associated with leadership development of young girls and women outside of classroom settings and generalizable linkages involving self-concept, career development tasks, and leadership development.

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## Appendix A

### Email to Potential Participants

My name is Malisa Komolthiti. I am a student at Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, where I am completing requirements for a Doctor of Education majoring in Organizational Leadership. I am seeking participants for my qualitative study of leadership journey of women school superintendents. Specifically, the purpose of my research is to explore your experiences in relations to the career and leadership starting from your childhood. As a female who wants to advance in a career, this topic is of personal and professional interest to me.

The main research question was: *How do women school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?*

Participation in this study will be in the form of two interviews. The first interview is preliminary, up to 15 minutes in duration by telephone. This will be our opportunity to get to know each other briefly and to establish your understanding about participation. I will answer any questions you might have, ask demographic information, and ask if you feel comfortable in telling your career-relevant and leadership-relevant experiences. Another interview will follow; this interview will last approximately forty minutes. If available, it is voluntary to provide your resume prior to the interview. The interview will be recorded. The recording will be transcribed by professional transcription service ([www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com)). Subsequent communication to verify the accuracy of transcription will be via email.

Participation is voluntary, confidential, and there will be no personally identifying information about you in the study. Even if you agree to participate, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide to participate, please send an email to me at . If you have any questions about

my study or would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you,

Sincerely Yours,

Malisa Komolthiti

Email:

Telephone: 562-265-8222

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

**Institution:** Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

**Investigators:** Malisa Komolthiti - Doctoral Candidate, Dr. Margaret Gorman Kirchoff -  
Principal Investigator

**Title of Project:** Leadership Journeys: A Narrative Research Study Exploring Women School Superintendents' Meaning-making of Leadership Development Experiences

I invite you to take part in a qualitative research study. The object of this study is to explore leadership journeys of women school superintendents. Specifically, this study aims to explore your experiences in relation to the developmental path to a leadership position starting from your childhood.

**Participation process:**

This letter will explain what participation in the study means, but if you have further questions, please ask. Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to participate if you do not want to. After you have read this document, and made a decision, please advise me. If you choose to participate, I will ask you to sign this statement. I will provide you a signed copy for your records.

I am asking you to be in this study because you meet the following criteria:

- You are female.
- You are currently a superintendent in a public school system in Alaska.

If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in a 40-minute oral interview, conducted either in person, via a teleconferencing medium using video and audio elements (e.g. Skype, Face-Time), or via a standard telephone interview. If we are meeting face-

to-face, the interview will take place at a public meeting location that is comfortable for you. If by teleconference or telephone, I will ask you to choose a quiet location, where you are comfortable and can speak freely and uninterrupted during the interview. If available, it is voluntary to provide your resume prior to the interview. The interview will be recorded. The recording will be transcribed by professional transcription service ([www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com)).

Once a text transcript is made of the recorded interview, I will provide a copy to you so you may review and add any additional comments.

The following actions will maintain confidentiality of your responses:

- Pseudonyms will be used.
- The interview recordings and transcription will be saved in a password protected (secure) USB flash drive in locked cabinet at researcher's home
- A separate, locked file cabinet (in a different location) will hold the list of participants' names, their pseudonyms, and their signed consent forms.
- At the conclusion of the study, all digital recordings of the interviews will be destroyed.

The possible risk, harm, discomfort, or inconvenience to you from participating in this study is minimal. Personal reflection, when thinking about and answering interview questions about the career-relevant and leadership-relevant experiences may cause some slight discomfort. Your personal identity as a participant in this study protected. Your part in this study will be confidential, and only the researcher on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. You may refuse to answer any question. There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study; however, the

information learned from this study may provide valuable information for women who want to become superintendents and may provide insights for the Department of Education in developing gender-diversity among superintendents. The results of the study may also expand and strengthen existing research regarding the inequitable representation of women in superintendent positions.

If you have questions or problems, please contact Malisa Komolthiti at 562-265-8222 (voice mail is confidential) or by email at [komolthiti.m@husky.neu.edu](mailto:komolthiti.m@husky.neu.edu) You may also contact Dr. Margaret Gorman Kirchoff at [M.Kirchoff@neu.edu](mailto:M.Kirchoff@neu.edu)

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617-373-4588, email: [irb@neu.edu](mailto:irb@neu.edu). You may call anonymously if you wish.

Sincerely Yours,

Malisa Komolthiti

If you agree to participate in this study, please read, initial directly below, and sign at the bottom of the page.

### Documentation of Informed Consent

Read the statements that follow and place your initials in the box to the right of the statement, then proceed to the signature area further below	
I understand the information presented on this form.	
I have discussed this study, its risks and potential benefits, and other options with the researcher, Malisa Komolthiti.	
I have received answers to the questions I have asked up to this point.	

**My signature below indicates my willingness to participate in this study. My signature below affirms my understanding that I can withdraw from the study at any time.**

---

**Signature of participant**

---

**Date**

---

**Printed name of person above**

---

**Signature of person obtaining consent**

---

**Date**

---

**Printed name of person above**

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide

The researcher will introduce herself, thank the participant for agreeing to take part in the study, and then ask the participant to choose a pseudonym to use for the study.

#### *Script*

My name is Malisa Komolthiti. I am a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this doctoral thesis research. The purpose of my research is to explore the leadership journeys of women school superintendents. Specifically, this study will focus on your experiences in relation to the developmental path to a leadership position starting from your childhood. I am hoping the study will provide me greater insight into how women learn to be leaders.

All information is (and will be kept) anonymous and confidential, with no personally identifying information used. Throughout the interviews, I will refer to you by your chosen pseudonym. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. With your permission, I will record this session. Afterward, I will provide you a copy of the transcript for your review. May I proceed?

After obtaining the participant's agreement to continue, the researcher will address the participant by his or her pseudonym, beginning the formal interview process as follows:

#### ***Background Questions:***

We will not start the actual interview just yet; however, I would like to start by asking you for some background information that will help me understand your experiences. This part should

take no more than 5 minutes, so please provide brief answers.

- Would you tell me briefly about your educational background and professional background?
- How long have you been in your position?
- What is your race/ethnicity?
- What is your country of birth?
- What is your first language?
- What is your marital status?

After asking the background (warm-up) questions, the researcher will begin the formal interview,

### ***Interview Questions***

The interview questions aim to answer the main research question:

*How do women school superintendents make meaning of their leadership development experiences?*

The interview questions seek to elicit meaning-making of women school superintendents during each career development stage leading to their leadership positions. The table below shows the alignment of the interview questions to leadership development experiences that may occur in each career developmental stage.

<b>Interview Questions to obtain meaning-making on each leadership development experiences</b>
<b><u>Part 1: Growth Stage (Birth-14 years of Age)</u></b>
1) When you were a child about 10 years old or younger, did you ever role-play? Who were you? What skills did you learn in relation to leadership?
2) Think back when you were about 11 or 12 years old. What was your understanding about career?
3) What was your dream job? Why?
4) Where you were about 13-14 years old, what did you like to do? What were you good at doing?
5) What were the leadership qualities (if any) that you gain from these activities?
<b><u>Part 2: Exploration Stage (14-24 years old)</u></b>
6) When you were about 15-17 years old, what were your career goals?
7) Describe key experiences from school activities, leisure activities, or part-time work that are associated with your leadership and may lead you to your decision to pursue a leadership position.
8) When you were about 18-21 years old? Did you still have the same career goals?
9) Did you have any career plans? Did you follow your plan?
10) What was the field or study did you choose? Did you engage in any types of career training? Describe the key experiences from the career training or education in relations to leadership.
11) After you graduated, what was the first job that makes you feel that could be your potential life work? Did experiences gain from this job enhance your leadership qualities?
<b><u>Part 3: Establishment Stage (Age 25-43)</u></b>
12) When you were about 25-30 years old, did you change your career goals and plans?
13) Describe key experiences that alter/support your goals and plans.
14) What was your job when you were about 31-34? What are significant experiences, work related or otherwise— that influenced your decision to pursue a leadership position?
15) From the reflection on your career development today, when did think you start seeing yourself as leaders?
16) When did you start your career as a superintendent?
<b><u>Part 4: Maintenance Stage (Age 44-59)</u></b>
17) Can you describe what it felt like to be a superintendent? Please use a metaphor to describe your feeling—for example, being a superintendent feels like....
18) Can you describe what it felt like to be a <u>female</u> superintendent? Please use a metaphor to describe your feeling
19) Look head 5-10 years from now, if someone wrote about you, what would the headline

be?

20) What advice do you have for women who want to become superintendents? Why do you want to give them such advice?

Thank you for your participation. I will contact you afterward to obtain additional information as needed. I will also send you the transcription of this interview and verify the accuracy of the information.

Malisa Komolthiti