EXPLORING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP:
HOW HEADS OF SCHOOL FOSTER AND SUPPORT INNOVATION IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Heads of school are often tasked with a variety of responsibilities to lead their schools; one important responsibility is how they lead the academic program. This research study explored how leaders within independent schools actively fostered and supported cultures of innovation in their schools. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do heads of independent schools think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation in schools?
2. What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources support innovation in schools, as presented by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

This study used a multiple case study design at three independent high schools in New England. The study included interviews with heads of school, focus groups with administrators and faculty members, and document review to triangulate the data. The transformational leadership theory of Bass (1985) was the theoretical lens which guided the study. The study uncovered that heads of independent schools are instructional leaders who strategically develop people, programs, and school cultures supportive of continual growth and change, and heads of independent schools encourage innovation through collaborative long-term planning and providing autonomy, time, and support for new ideas. These findings could help aspiring and current school leaders understand how to foster and support innovation in schools.

Keywords: Innovation, Independent Schools, Heads of School, School Leaders, Transformational Leadership, Leadership, Instructional Leaders, High Schools
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Chapter I: Introduction to the Study

According to Wagner (2008), high school students need to learn additional skills in high school to thrive in the 21st century. These students are entering workplaces where collaboration, critical thinking, and communication skills are essential to be successful (Levy, 2014). As a result of the changing job demands, many high schools are examining how they can change their curriculum to address the needs of 21st century students and increase innovation in their schools. Wagner (2008) discusses the need for seven skills students need to thrive in the 21st century, including critical thinking/problem solving, collaboration, agility/adaptability, initiative/entrepreneurism, oral/written communication skills, ability to assess and analyze information, and curiosity/imagination. These skills connect to the needs of employers and higher education institutions. Zhao (2012) emphasizes the need for many of these same skills especially entrepreneurism, problem solving, and creativity as essential for 21st century students. Zhao ties these student skills to addressing global challenges, strengthening the economy, and creating jobs. The National Education Association (2010) refers to four major 21st century skills: critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. These 21st century skills, however, are generally not part of the curriculum and instruction in high schools in the United States (Kivunja, 2014). By addressing these gaps in the curriculum, schools are able to offer innovative programs which will better prepare students for 21st century challenges (Belland, Ertmer, & Simons, 2006; Har, 2005; Jolly, 2014; Levy, 2014; Thomas, 2000).

High schools nationwide have begun to make curriculum changes to better engage their students and to promote 21st century skills through innovative programming, but some schools face additional obstacles. For example, public high schools have been mandated to implement several recent federal initiatives which consume a considerable amount of their time and
resources. The establishment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, for example, required public schools to raise their standards and provide more accountability measures in order for all students to demonstrate achievement in a variety of content areas (Easley, 2005). As a result, schools began to concentrate more on instructional leadership in order to raise student achievement in their schools (Bendikson, Robinson, & Hattie, 2012). Public schools are also developing new teacher evaluation plans, complying with special education regulations, implementing response to intervention programs, and addressing local and district priorities. Many of these constraints do not exist in independent schools. As a result, this study focused on independent high schools only.

Given their status, independent high schools have more autonomy with curriculum choices. Federal and state governments typically respect the independent nature of these schools and do not impose legislation which affects their curriculum choices. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), 10% of all US students attend independent schools and 24% of the schools in the country are independent. Eighty percent of students enrolled in independent schools attend religiously-affiliated ones. Some independent schools are targeted specifically for students with disabilities; others focus on content areas like the visual and performing arts; and others focus on military practices. The autonomy for independent schools allows the schools to choose their priorities and provide resources to meet institution-driven goals.

Many independent schools are focusing on providing a rigorous, innovative curriculum to their students. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) has embraced the need for curriculum which supports the needs of the 21st century student by facilitating a task force to publish the most essential skills to be taught in independent schools. The group identified seven
essential skills students need to excel in the 21st century: problem solving, communication, teamwork, digital literacy, global understanding, risk-taking, and ethical decision-making (Witt & Orvis, 2010). Independent schools are now determining how to make curriculum changes to address these skills. For example, Phillips Andover Academy, one of the most prestigious independent schools in the country, has created the Tang Institute which addresses these 21st century skills through encouraging design thinking, blended learning, and global competency. Another independent school, Berwick Academy, has developed an innovation center where students and faculty constantly seek new ways to approach questions and problems through the use of 21st century skills. The autonomy available in independent schools has supported the adoption and implementation of these significant academic changes to address the needs of students.

Independent schools are driven by enrollment. Unlike public schools, independent schools have to promote their programs so families choose to send their children to them rather than to local public schools. They must justify the tuition costs and show what the benefit is for students to attend independent schools. One of these benefits is the autonomy with the curriculum. Independent schools are able to make significant academic changes to address student engagement and 21st century skills without many of the obstacles of public schools. Christensen, Johnson, and Horn (2008) discuss the challenges that public schools face in promoting innovation, including frequent changes in school and district leadership, a political climate representing a wide variety of stakeholder interests, and a lack of willingness to take risks within schools. Despite the autonomy available in independent schools, their enrollments declined from 12% of the overall school-aged population to 10% from 1990 to 2012 (National
Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Offering innovative and highly engaging programs for students within independent schools could change this statistic in the future.

In order to support innovation in schools, there must be strong leaders. Independent schools have a variety of leadership structures leading their curricular, pedagogical, and programmatic efforts. The most popular model includes a head of school who acts as the primary leader of the school much like a public school superintendent or principal. Other terms used for heads of school often include executive director, president, or principal. The head of school is often supported by senior administrators with roles such as dean of academics, dean of student life, dean of admission, etc. These senior administrators oversee particular areas of the school and report directly to the head of school. Other popular models include having a director of each level of the school (lower, middle, and upper) for K-12 schools. Regardless of the specific titles given to the school leaders, the head of school is hired by the board of trustees who are responsible for the governance of the school.

In this chapter, the researcher will describe the research problem, discuss the significance of the topic, clarify my positionality with the topic, state the research questions, and then present the theoretical framework that will be used to inform the analysis of this study.

**Research Problem**

With the need for innovation in teaching and learning in schools, school leaders are challenged with the difficult task of understanding how to foster and support innovation in their schools. Although many studies have sought to understand instructional leadership in public high schools, very little research has been conducted examining instructional leadership in independent high schools. Although public school principals have been studied consistently, Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) revealed that the applicability of these findings to
independent schools is not always appropriate. Research has not been conducted to examine how heads of school foster and support innovation in their schools. The purpose of this study was to document what instructional leaders in independent high schools have done to proactively foster and support innovative teaching practices in their schools. The research study examined how heads of school perceived their roles of supporting innovation and what specific strategies, structures, and processes they used to foster and support innovation. This research can possibly inform existing and aspiring school leaders how to actively foster and support innovative teaching practices in their schools.

In order to understand how heads of school are able to foster and support innovation, it is important to understand what makes curriculum and instruction innovative. The word innovation is often a word used to describe new ideas (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006). Wagner (2008) describes innovative curriculum and instruction as educating students to be active citizens and lifelong learners who are prepared for the demands of the workplace because they do not focus exclusively on content or subject-based skills. For this study, innovative teaching and learning included programs addressing the following essential skills as proposed by Wagner (2008): critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, adaptation, initiative, communication, analysis, and imagination. This study examined how heads of school were able to foster and support innovative teaching and learning with these criteria in mind.

Significance of Problem of Practice

This research study will help leaders understand how they can foster and support innovation in their schools to assist high school students struggling to engage in school (Chen, 2010; Rotherham & Willingham, 2009; Torres, 2015). School leaders have the ability to make changes, so students can be more engaged in their high school experiences and acquire skills that
will better prepare them for life after high school (Palmer, 2015). According to a 2014 survey of independent school students, 82% of the students were sometimes or often bored in class (Torres, 2015). In order for students to be motivated to learn, they must be engaged in school (Amabile, 1998). Pink (2009) states that educators can directly affect intrinsic motivation in students by providing them with choices and by helping them find purpose in their work. Purpose can often be found by understanding the connection between high school work and the needs of employers and colleges. Although research has extensively documented the problem high schools have in preparing students for the global world or success in college, Chen (2010) and Wagner (2008) have argued that innovation within schools could make a difference. Torres (2015) found that students are most engaged when working on 21st century skills like discussion and debates, technology projects, and group projects. These skills both engage students and better prepare them for success in the global world (Chen, 2010).

The survival risk for independent schools is significant if they do not prepare students with 21st century skills as part of their curriculum (Chubb, 2014). Independent schools need to constantly demonstrate how their programs are different from competing public and charter schools since these schools are often competing directly through lower costs and even providing free tuition (Davies, 2014). Families are choosing to send their children to independent schools for a variety of reasons related to the academic program and to other aspects of the school. A survey among 2300 independent school families conducted by the Secondary School Admission Test Board (2014) offered the two leading reasons why parents chose independent education for their children: (1) an education which will challenge my child and (2) one that will help my child develop and maintain a love of learning. These two reasons directly relate to the academic program and the school’s ability to both engage and challenge the students. If independent
schools are unable to offer academic programs which increase student engagement and provide meaningful curriculum to challenge students, the future of independent schools could be at risk. For example, charter school enrollment increased from 0.7% to 4.6% from 1999 to 2013, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. This growth rate among students attending non-independent schools could further increase if programmatic changes are not made in independent schools. In order to expand student enrollment in independent schools, results must show that students are excelling in these schools compared to other schools. Heads of school can lead much of this work. In order to understand how heads of school can foster and support innovation at their schools, this study will help identify particular strategies and structures used to encourage innovation within independent schools.

In addition to supporting the work of independent school leaders, public school leaders could also benefit from this particular research study. The study discusses particular leadership strategies used to foster and support innovation, which can assist public school leaders in understanding how they can also implement similar programs in their schools. The decisions about resource allocation, processes used, and structures developed to support innovation can inform public school leaders on how to foster innovation in their schools. It is essential to first discuss my biases and how they might of influenced the research process.

**Positionality**

My upbringing connects to my positionality as an educator. I grew up in a rural area of Maine in a single parent home. My mother worked hard, but I grew up poor compared to others in my community. Instead of worrying about what sport I would play next, a great deal of my time was spent focusing on what odd jobs I could do for others which would help pay for necessary items. I learned very quickly that education was my way out of poverty because I
constantly observed others in my community who were successful based on the attainment of a
college degree. As a result, I focused much of my time on succeeding at school. During these
eyears, I began to focus on how teachers were supporting my learning, identifying which ones were able to help me thrive. I worked hard throughout school and was able to receive a significant amount of financial aid to attend college. I pursued a variety of
courses in college and graduate school from math, science, language arts, and political science. I was determined to be a quality educator after graduation.

Upon graduation, I worked as a faculty member at an independent high school. I began as an English Teacher initially and was part of the residential community living with 40 high school boys as a dorm parent. I chose to work at the school because of the collegial environment. There was a central focus on instructional leadership with both the school administrators and the faculty. Faculty discussed great books, shared teaching strategies, and problem-solved difficult situations well beyond the school day. I continued working at the same school, but I transitioned into a college counseling role, and I eventually became the Dean of Academics. This role required me to be responsible for the instructional program at the school and to complete a range of instructional activities including classroom observations, professional development programming, and curriculum development. I worked under three different heads of school. One of the leaders was very involved in the instructional program while the other two leaders were not involved in instructional leadership activities on a daily basis. Despite all three leaders using transformational and transactional leadership strategies to orchestrate change across the school, these changes were not focused on promoting innovation. I aspire to be a head of school one day, so I have become interested in understanding different leadership approaches to the role. Given my positive view of how a head of school can affect academic programming,
it is important to understand my positionality so I may objectively interview heads of school about their viewpoints.

Although I understand that heads of school have a variety of responsibilities, I am biased toward the importance of instructional leadership within leaders of independent schools. I have worked at a school where I wished the head of school was more of an instructional leader because the school was not putting appropriate time and resources into the academic program. It can be very difficult to foster and support innovation without resources and ongoing support from the head of school to support changes. As Academic Dean, I struggled to gain the appropriate support in order to implement major academic reforms. These experiences convinced me how essential it is to have quality instructional leaders who are able to support and build innovative practices at the schools. I am passionate about this topic, and I want to know how current school leaders are able to lead these change efforts at their schools and create and sustain a culture where innovation thrives. I need to be objective during this research and “open to seeing all results of the inquiry” (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p. 7). I have to accept that the results of the study could be unexpected.

Although I am a supporter of heads of school being strong instructional and transformational leaders, I know my role as a researcher is to identify and understand how these heads foster and support a culture where innovative practices can occur. I have never served as this kind of leader, so I am at a disadvantage to fully understand how to lead an independent school with innovative practices. I did not attend independent schools during my youth and have only worked at one independent school. I had to accept that the interviews could result in varying opinions about the value of instructional leadership activities within the role of head of school. Creswell (2012) stated that the data needs to be presented honestly despite the outcome.
I had to accept that I have limited knowledge about independent school education beyond my work experience at one school and my research. In order to compensate for this challenge, I examined a range of perspectives from various heads of school, senior administrators, and faculty in order to understand more about how these heads of school support and foster innovation in the schools.

**Research Questions**

This study explored how leaders within independent schools actively fostered and supported cultures of innovation in their schools. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do heads of independent schools think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation in schools?
2. What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources support innovation in schools, as presented by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

**Theoretical Framework**

In order to understand the complexities of how independent school heads of school supported innovation, it is important to see what kinds of leadership strategies have been used to support and foster innovation in schools. A model of transformational leadership was selected to frame the research. This model was selected because the theoretical framework directly aligns with the research design of this study which will be discussed in this chapter and chapter three. Transformational leadership is a popular model to frame leadership-oriented research studies including studies which focus on leadership strategy, the relationship between leaders and followers, and the ability for leaders to make changes. A simple search for transformational leadership as a theoretical framework results in hundreds of research studies which use this
model to frame their research. Transformational leadership has been the most studied model within leadership studies over the past 30 years (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). The ability to apply transformational leadership to a variety of industries makes the model particularly popular. As opposed to other prominent leadership theories like trait leadership theory or contingency theories, transformational leadership focuses on leaders who are able to encourage their followers to go beyond their normal levels of performance to make mission-driven changes within the organization (Bass, 1985). Organizations across industries are highly interested in increasing follower outcomes and developing strategies to improve organization performance, which has prompted the interest in transformational leadership.

James MacGregor Burns is typically viewed as the theorist who brought transformational leadership to the research community. In 1978, he published a book called Leadership, which distinguished between transformation and transactional leadership. Burns (1978) describes transformational leaders as people who are able to lead their followers to great achievements and actually increase their level of morality. They are able to bring about significant change within their organizations through their own leadership and by promoting leadership among their followers (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). Burns (1978) describes transactional leaders as people who rely on their relationships with their followers to advance goals which promote the needs of the leaders and the followers. The introduction and initial popularity of transformational leadership theory encouraged other theorists to examine the theory and offer alternative perspectives.

A few years later, Bass (1985) posited a transformational leadership theory which built on the ideas of Burns. Bass (1985) states that leaders must use both transformational and transactional leadership in order to effectively lead organizations. Burns (1978) originally stressed only the need for transformational leadership and asserted that transformational
leadership was superior to transactional leadership. Bass (1985) stressed that there are particular times when leaders need to use transformational leadership strategies and other times when leaders need to use transactional leadership strategies. Bass (1985) proposed a four phase model of transformational leadership factors, which include idealized influence, inspiration motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. By using these factors, leaders become people who followers want to support (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). These leaders are often seen as charismatic leaders who are respected by employees within the organization. They communicate the long-term plans for the organization and help build enthusiasm for the direction of the organization (Bass, 1985). To provide intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders often encourage innovation and different approaches to solving problems. They pay close attention to the needs of their employees and help their employees pursue their goals (Bass, 1985). Transactional forms of leadership typically result in “an exchange wherein the leader offers rewards in return for compliance and performance by his or her followers” (Diaz-Saenz, 2011, p. 300). The approach of Bass (1985) is the most appropriate theory to frame this particular research study.

The theoretical assumptions of transformational leadership theory support the qualitative design of this study. The epistemology of the theory is constructivist, which relies on the interpretation of reality. By interviewing school personnel and asking them to reflect on their experiences in schools, the researcher examined different interpretations of reality within the study. The reliance on how transformational and transactional leaders interact with followers supports a constructivist understanding of reality. Using triangulation during the data analysis phase of the research design supported and provided evidence for a variety of interpretations. In order to provide adequate details and represent meanings provided by participants, direct quotes
were used when appropriate. An interpretivist approach guided the theory and the study because the research focused on the social interactions between followers and leaders. The interviews and focus groups supported this dialogue between the participants and researcher in order to create the reality evident in the schools. The researcher understood that meaning was created during the particular interactions with groups as ideas were shared and participants provided feedback. The multiple case study design allowed the researcher to understand both the reality within each school and its context and also to identify patterns across contexts to compare and contrast the interpretations.

The theory of Bass (1985) guided the methodology of this research study because the study focused on the actions and strategies used by the leader to influence others in his or her school. The study collected and analyzed data about how heads of school viewed their roles as instructional leaders within their schools. The study also collected and analyzed data from followers who have been influenced by school leaders to bring about innovation in their schools. This approach directly aligned with the two major parts of the transformational leadership theory by examining both leader and follower actions. By interviewing both heads of schools (the primary leaders at independent schools), and the senior administrators and faculty (both leaders and followers), the dynamics between these two different groups were identified. The study uncovered what leadership strategies the heads of school use to influence a culture of innovation at their schools. These strategies were discussed with groups holding different points of view through interviewing each one of the representative groups at the school. The study determined when the heads of school used transactional and transformational leadership strategies, as well as when senior administrators and faculty member used these leadership strategies to influence others. By using the transformational theory of Bass (1985), the data was arranged to examine
when heads of school used one of the four phases of transformational leadership and when they opted for transactional leadership strategies. Given the multiple case study design, the quantity of data collected assisted in determining which particular strategies influenced followers to consider changing their approaches. The rich details from the data collection provided a thorough understanding of how leaders approached their work to create and sustain innovation efforts in their schools.

In using transformational leadership theory to frame the study, several assumptions were made concerning the interactions between the leaders and followers. The theory assumes that followers will respond to inspirational leaders and that followers were motivated by understanding assigned tasks. Transformational leadership theory supposes that followers will respond to a leader’s passion and energy and that collaboration encourages better work than individual work. The theory assumes followers will be motivated by higher order challenges and the vision of the organization. Taking these assumptions into consideration, transformational leadership theory has been widely used to frame leadership studies offering a variety of reliable and valid contributions to the research community.

Although the theory supports the framework of the study, there are particular phenomena which are not addressed in the theory. Despite Bass (1985) encouraging the need for leaders to use both transactional and transformational leadership strategies, it is not clear when leaders should pursue each type of strategy. The research study uncovered when heads of school and other school leaders engaged in transformational and transactional leadership strategies with their work to support and foster the culture of innovation in teaching and learning in their schools. These findings helped independent school leaders determine when transformational versus transactional leadership strategies were used in their work. The research study also
provided an additional context or setting to examine transformational leadership theory since very little research had been conducted examining this theory in particular kinds of schools and with leaders in varying roles of responsibility.

Since Bass (1985) published his research on transformational leadership theory, additional studies have asserted the connection between this construct and followers; researchers have also applied this theory specifically to school leaders. Sarros, Gray, and Densten (2002) found that transformational leadership actually encourages followers to perform to a greater extent than they thought was possible. In order to perform effectively, followers must have their needs satisfied, which in turn increases productivity for themselves and the organization (Bass, 1990; Stone & Patterson, 2005). According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leaders have more satisfied followers than other leaders, and transformational leadership is directly connected to follower satisfaction. In schools, transformational leaders have been found to impact the instructional environment through indirect means by setting the conditions and influencing followers (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Different from instructional leaders, transformational leaders not only influence teaching and learning, but they also understand the complexities of change in and out of school (Eyal & Kark, 2004). These leaders focus on distributed or shared leadership to influence the school’s ability to innovate (Eyal & Kark, 2004; Hallinger, 2003). Leithwood et al. (2008) determined eight tasks transformational leaders in schools often focus on to influence teaching and learning: shared goals, vision, culture building, rigorous expectations, rewards, intellectual stimulation, modeling, and individualized support. The research of Bass (1985) provided a quality framework for this research study to understand how transformational leaders were able to influence followers and how transformational leadership applied specifically to schools.
Summary

The Bass (1985) transformational leadership model was used to analyze how three heads of school sought to foster and support innovation within schools. The emphasis on both transactional and transformational leadership strategies as outlined by Bass (1985) provided a framework to understand what strategies heads of schools used to support innovation in their schools. The dynamic relationship between leaders and followers framed this qualitative study, providing an approach to understand and discuss different ways leaders interacted with others in the schools. With the emphasis on how leaders engaged and influenced followers through charisma, intellect, and individualized attention, the transformational leadership framework supported particular themes across the schools within the study, providing practical application to other school leaders.

In order to better understand how this research study supported other scholar practitioners, it is essential to understand the research and theory which support these topics. To help the reader understand how this study fits into the research community, Chapter II focuses on how other theorists have approached similar problems of practice.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Fostering and supporting innovation in schools is a challenging task for any school leader. In order to understand how heads of school are able to support innovation, it is important to understand what innovation is and is not, to examine the current state of innovation in schools, to review independent school education, and to identify how leaders can foster innovation in schools. This literature review will begin with a review of the varying definitions of innovation, and tracing it through American history. Innovation will be explored throughout a variety of industries, examining how different organizations support innovation within their companies. The second part of the literature review will focus on innovation in schools by exploring the ways schools approach innovation and by examining leading programs addressing student engagement and 21st century skills. The review will continue with an understanding of why innovation is needed in schools, and how school leaders are able to impact innovation in their schools by examining a variety of leadership approaches stemming from instructional leadership theory and transformational leadership theory.

Innovation

Innovation is described based on a wide variety of definitions. Some scholars simply describe the term as something “new or “different” (Clegg, Kohlberger, & Pitsis, 2008; Rogers, 2003). Others focus on innovation as an expected or unexpected change (Cohen & Ball, 2006; Hannan & Silver, 2000). Govindarajan and Trimble (2010) stress that innovations must have uncertain outcomes. Since organizations often seek out innovations to improve practices, Smith (2009) and Washor (2010) focus on innovations as changes that bring about positive results. Innovations are often identified as significantly different ways of approaching problems (Chen, 2010; Washor, 2010). Although employees within organizations frequently offer new ideas,
scholars commonly posit that innovations include both the ideas and the implementation of ideas (Burgelman & Sayles, 1986; MacKenzie, 1996; Fitzgerald, Wankerl, & Schramm, 2011; Govindarajan & Trimble, 2010). There is debate on whether innovation is an abstract idea or a concrete action or program. Lai (2015) describes innovation as a mindset focusing on experimentation and iteration rather than as a defined structure or process within organizations. This prospective contrasts with Owens (2012), who stresses that innovation within organizations includes the strategy, structure, and resources. Although innovation is often connected to advances in technology, Kao (2007) encourages others not to limit innovation as a technology-based phenomenon. Despite differences in the exact definition of innovation, it is one of the most studied concepts in academic and organizational literature due to the significant number of practitioners and scholars seeking to understand how to achieve it (Blackwell & Eilon, 1991).

Scholars have defined different kinds and levels of innovation with a goal of better understanding the concept. Christensen et al. (2008) refer to one kind of innovation as disruptive innovation which changes a complex product or service into a much simpler and more economical solution. Disruptive innovations would include inventions like the personal computer and the steam engine. Other scholars refer to these kinds of innovations as game-changing innovations (Kao, 2007). Blackwell and Eilon (1991) use the term macro-innovation which is an innovation representing a major change from the original approach rather than simply an improvement. Innovations are also referred to as revolutionary or evolutionary. Revolutionary innovation is often characterized as disruptive and new, and evolutionary innovation is characterized as an improvement to the process or product (White, 2013). Despite a range of definitions and kinds of innovation, the term applies to many fields including business, technology, science, education, and the arts.
It is clear theorists have approached innovation in a variety of ways. The consensus is that innovation requires new and different approaches to products, services, and processes in an effort to bring about improvement. The scale of innovation can occur on a variety of different levels and can transform an organization or gradually improve a part of the organization through sustainable changes. In order to understand how to bring about innovation within an organization, it is important to understand the history of innovation in the United States.

**The History of Innovation**

Although innovation is sometimes thought of as a new term, the concept has been explored for hundreds of years in a variety of settings within the United States. Adam Smith published “An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations” in 1776, an economic treatise which encouraged investment in productive processes. This philosophy directly connected to innovation as a process because it encouraged new ideas, new markets, and different ways to approach problems (Fitzgerald et al., 2011). In the years that followed, the United States was known for people working together across industries in search of better or different ways to approach products and services (Fitzgerald et al., 2011). As wealth increased in the 1800’s, investors sought ways to invest their money to obtain further growth through innovation. New products were developed and many of the industries in the United States thrived as a result of this innovation.

As mechanization increased during the mid-1800s, young people sought additional training to thrive in industries. The Morrill Act of 1862 initiated the development of practical colleges across the country focused mostly on agriculture and mechanical arts to address this need (Safransky, n.d.). This significant legislation in American history created many technology-driven schools providing greater access to higher education for students. One of
these colleges, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, employed a very important Dean of Engineering, Vannevar Bush. In 1945, Bush wrote a report called “Science, The Endless Frontier” which outlined how technology innovation helped win World War II. This report helped convince others about the value of investing in innovation within the United States and actually brought about the development of the National Science Foundation and other supporting research groups (Fitzgerald et al., 2011). It was evident that organizations, higher education institutions, and the government were beginning to collaborate to make innovation thrive in the United States. Kao (2007) referred to the United States during this time as “standing atop Mount Innovation” compared to other countries around the world. For example, the invention of the automobile showed how powerful the United States had become in the innovation world. In 1945, only 70,000 automobiles had been sold in the United States but by 1950, six million automobiles had been sold in the United States alone (Martin, 2009). Throughout the 20th century, organizations continued to develop new products and processes supporting innovation in the United States especially as the information age developed and prospered.

Although the United States has produced many great inventions and continues to invest in research and develop programs, there is extensive debate about the future of innovation in schools and organizations. Fitzgerald et al. (2011) stress that innovation within education is at risk due to the tremendous time needed to execute innovations within this system. Schools are limited by the rate at which they are able to implement new ideas. This time restriction is not the same in private industry. As a result, schools and market-driven companies are not working together to promote innovation, a disjuncture which could prove highly detrimental in the future (Fitzgerald et al., 2011). Chesbrough (2011) agrees that collaboration will be essential to the growth of innovation; it will need to occur across companies, industries, and partners. Although
it is unknown how a generation of digital natives will affect innovation both within industry and education, innovation remains a clear priority for all (Johansen, 2012). The question remains regarding how these partners can work together to benefit one another and improve products and services within the United States. Kao (2007) stresses the need for the United States to become an innovation nation which constantly reinvents innovation as a national priority, which he claims is not happening currently in education or industry. The United States could be falling behind other industrial nations with innovation since 51% of United States patents in 2009 were awarded to other countries (Wagner, 2012b). Although there is debate on how the United States should invest in innovation, it is clear from the research how essential this priority is for the 21st century.

The United States has been a leader in producing innovation in a variety of organizations for hundreds of years (Fitzgerald et al., 2011; Martin, 2009). Many researchers trace innovation back to the founding of the United States in 1776 (Fitzgerald et al., 2011). Throughout each major event in American history, innovation has contributed in some minor or major way. Private companies, higher education, and government agencies have each contributed to the history of innovation often working with each other to solve problems and approach situations differently (Fitzgerald et al., 2011). With the growth of the information age, researchers have optimism and skepticism about the future role of innovation (Chesbrough, 2011; Johansen, 2012). There is consensus on the need for innovation to be a significant part of each industry for them to prosper (Kao, 2007; Wagner, 2008). Each industry uses different approaches to seek innovation, which is important to understand in order to determine how best to approach innovation within schools.
Innovation in Industry

A great deal of research has explored innovation within business organizations. A popular approach to innovation within business is to invest in research and development (R&D). Burgelman and Sayles (1986) encourage organizations to design their R&D programs to encompass three essential priorities: technical skills, market needs, and corporate interest. Each of these priorities ensures that teams are producing and implementing ideas which will support the organizations. Estrin (2009) discusses how the company Pixar approaches research and development. The animation teams always work on three projects at the same time. The animators from the current film work with the animators from a future film and exchange ideas, test out new concepts, and provide feedback. Another group of animators works exclusively on future animation tools to be used in upcoming movies. A third group works on long-term projects only. By having groups of employees working on current, future, and R&D projects, the company is able to constantly maintain innovation. The work environment is rich with feedback mechanisms and stresses risk-taking and openness (Estrin, 2009). Pixar embraces a growth mindset within the organization, often using failure as an opportunity to learn and grow (Sims, 2011). Dweck (2006) notes that people with a growth mindset believe that a person’s potential is unknown. The challenge is creating a culture where organizations can fail quickly or fail forward, so that employees are constantly taking risks within the workplace (Kelley & Kelley, 2013; Kelley & Littman, 2001; Sims, 2011).

Although Pixar is able to devote considerable resources to innovation, Pink (2009) and Owens (2012) stress how smaller organizations can invest in research and development, with leaders offering smaller opportunities for employees to autonomously focus on innovative projects. Pink (2009) emphasizes how accountability is important during this change process
with employees encouraged to use the time wisely while trust builds across the organization. Despite differences in how companies organize their R&D programs, it is clear this is one part of organizations which often develop innovation.

To encourage collaboration and idea generation, many companies encourage employees to work together in teams across departments to promote new ways of thinking. Burgelman and Sayles (1986) explain how low-level employees often produce more innovative ideas than high-level employees, which is why creating diverse teams is an important aspect of inspiring innovation within organizations, reaching beyond assigned roles. Employees are typically either analytical thinkers or intuitive thinkers, so creating teams is one way to integrate different viewpoints and approaches to inspire creativity (Martin, 2009). Kanter (1983) and Kelley and Littman (2001) encourage leaders to support employees working together by reducing the hierarchy within organizations and by improving communication across departments. Kelley and Kelley (2013) encourage leaders to bring diverse people together, to have fun as a team and to focus on the relationships between team members. Other leader priorities include making the right employee-to-team fit (Amabile, 1998), setting clear goals and aggressive timelines (Kelley & Littman, 2001), and attracting the best talent for each team by creating ways to challenge all involved (Kelley & Kelley, 2013). At General Electric Company, the employees are organized in cross-functional teams to focus on projects, a strategy that eliminates barriers between departments (Edelheit, 1997). This approach has contributed to GE’s success with innovation. Bringing people together to collaborate is one of the most popular strategies researchers list as an effective way to promote innovation.

In addition to collaboration to promote innovation, organizational leaders can significantly impact innovation within organizations in other ways (Kouzes & Posner, 2002;
Smith, 2011). Kanter (1983) encourages leaders to provide resources for innovative problem solving and to better communicate the long-term plans of the organization. These strategies support employees and allow them to support the future of the organization. Coyne (1997) describes how the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company considers it essential to hire creative and hard-working people to promote the organization’s innovative culture. Miller (1997) stresses that leaders need to maintain a culture where employees can thrive and feel comfortable taking risks. Although this work can be challenging for leaders of dynamic organizations, leadership support for innovation has shown to significantly impact the innovative behavior of employees (Scott & Bruce, 1994). The role of the leader is essential in innovative organizations.

Many leaders foster and support innovation as part of their organizational priorities. Significant research exists supporting the relationship between organizational culture and innovation. Organizational culture can encourage innovation within organizations (Abbey & Dickson, 1983; Ekvall, 1996; Paolillo & Brown, 1978; Ren & Zhang, 2015; Siegel & Kaemmerer, 1978). Organizational culture can also significantly impact the ability for an organization to change (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Louis & Miles, 1990). Innovative companies often describe their cultures as open, creative, communicative, and trusting (Coyne, 1997; Johnson, 2010; Kelley & Kelley, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Sutton, 2002). Ahmed (1998) shares four additional characteristics important to the creation of innovative cultures: balanced autonomy for employees, personalized recognition for innovators, integrated technology systems, and a balance of trust and accountability between managers and employees. Sutton (2002) adds additional priorities for leaders including promoting innovative ideas to others in order to implement the changes and embracing the idea that organizational conditions are
temporary and need to be constantly evaluated to adapt to changes internally and externally. These priorities create urgency within organizations. Creating a culture which supports innovation is an integral part of a leader’s role in many organizations.

A variety of companies encourage innovation by using a method called design thinking. Roth (2015) describes the principles of design thinking which include five steps. The first step is to empathize, which is to understand the user’s experience. The second step is to define the problem which needs to be addressed. The third step is to generate possible solutions to the problem through a range of brainstorming strategies. The fourth step is to construct prototypes to test out ideas. The last step is to test out the prototypes, make adjustments, and collect feedback. Although these steps are listed in order, Roth (2015) emphasizes that the principles are not linear and often occur in a different order depending on the situation. Kelley and Littman (2001) emphasize how essential it is to observe and speak to real people in this design process rather than to simply move ahead with ideas. Kelley and Kelley (2013) state that this design thinking approach allows companies to focus on the problem and to find new approaches to the problem, which often encourages innovation. Companies who use design thinking are often said to have a competitive edge in terms of innovation because the companies are constantly redesigning themselves (Martin, 2009). Design thinking is one approach used in industry to solve problems and support a culture of innovation within organizations.

Fostering and supporting innovation within organizations is challenging work. Blackwell and Eilon (1991) refer to this work as “the management of creative disorder.” There are many obstacles facing leaders which impact this important work. According to a survey of 3200 executives by General Electric (2014), 59% of companies surveyed believe that generating innovative ideas was very difficult and often prevented innovation within their companies.
Richards (2014) describes a variety of ways innovation cannot thrive in organizations including the lack of a clear purpose, ineffective leadership, miscommunication, lack of creativity, an inappropriate vision, disengagement, and unmotivated employees. Businesses are often designed for ongoing operations rather than for innovation which makes the sustainability of innovation difficult (Govindarajan & Trimble, 2010). Despite the obstacles, Lawler (2006) encourages businesses to accept that continuous change is way they should do business. Burkus (2013) surveyed hundreds of innovative companies to determine what practices impacted innovation within their organizations. The list included using technology to collaborate, building innovation into their core values, developing programs to uncover new ideas, and creating training for creativity (Burkus, 2013). By following many of these practices, businesses could preserve innovation within their organizations and potentially thrive as a result.

Businesses often invest in quality R&D programs to promote innovation within their organizations (Burgelman & Sayles, 1986; Estrin, 2009; Owens, 2012; Pink, 2009). They value teamwork and often encourage employees from different departments to work together on ideas (Burgelman & Sayles, 1986; Edelheit, 1997; Kanter, 1983; Martin, 2009). Leaders within innovative organizations are often charged with bringing in talented and creative people and maintaining a climate which supports innovation (Coyne, 1997; Kelley & Kelley, 2013). The organizational culture of innovative organizations encourages risk-taking and is open and trusting of new ideas (Kelley & Kelley, 2013; Kelley & Littman, 2001; Sims, 2011). Businesses often identify innovation as a central priority and clearly communicate this value to all supporters (Burkus, 2013).
Innovation in Education

Much like other industries, the field of education has sought to understand how innovation applies to its organizations, schools. Zimmerman (2015) sums up the role of education which “isn’t to teach innovation but rather it’s to educate students in a manner that maximizes their chances, over the course of their lives, both to be open to innovation and to understand how to solve problems in a manner that may lead to innovative solutions (p. 25).” Wagner (2012a) encourages schools to educate innovators by focusing on the following goals: build collaboration, make multidisciplinary teams, encourage risk-taking, promote the creation of learning, and emphasize intrinsic motivation. Much like other organizations, schools need to invest in research and development to invest in new learning opportunities and to take risks with teaching and learning (Christensen et al., 2008; Wagner, 2008). Teacher leadership, Frost (2008) stresses, is key to the growth of innovation in schools. Trilling and Fadel (2009) encourage faculty members to consider spending 50 percent of their time focusing on problem solving and inquiry and 50 percent of their time on teaching content as a way to start making the change to more innovative teaching and learning practices while respecting the current structure of schools. It is clear that schools have the capabilities to be innovative through curriculum changes, resource allocation, and teacher leadership.

Much like other industries, school culture directly impacts the ability for schools to promote innovation (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Waller (1932) discusses that each school has a unique culture which must be understood. A positive school culture can improve student motivation and student achievement (Peterson & Deal, 2009). School culture can also emphasize what is important to the organization and support commitment to the core values of the school (Peterson & Deal, 2009). Kanter (2000) and Trilling and Fadel (2009) emphasize that
there is a direct link between school culture and innovation stating that innovation flourishes in a flexible environment which is responsive and which allows for collaboration. Corbett, Firestone, and Rossman (1987) stress that most implemented changes impact the culture of the school. It is clear school culture relates to the ability for schools to be innovative.

Schools have transitioned to a variety of innovative programs to increase student engagement and to better support the development of 21st century skills. According to the National Education Association (2010), 21st century skills fit into four categories: critical thinking, communication, creativity, and collaboration. Many schools have adopted a student-centered approach to learning to address 21st century skills, shifting the focus of teaching from the teacher to the student thus allowing students to drive their education. The teacher acts as a coach or facilitator to support teaching and learning. Freire (1970) discusses that schools often treat students as “piggybanks” who need their “empty vessels” filled with learning. Freire (1970) advocates that students should be active in knowledge creation and should significantly facilitate the learning process. This student-centered model of education allows students to connect their learning to their lives and often leads to increased student engagement (Levy, 2014). Another learner-centered approach to teaching and learning is project-based learning, which aligns closely with many of ideas of Dewey (1938). Thomas (2000) describes project-based learning as an approach which requires students to complete thought-provoking tasks based on questions or problems that require students to use design skills, problem-solving skills, collaboration, and presentations over an extended period of time. Students gain skills and knowledge through exploring and solving the problem or questions which are often meaningful to the student or school. This approach to teaching and learning has shown to improve student engagement (Belland, Ertmer, & Simons, 2006; Thomas, 2000). Both student-centered learning
and project-based learning are new or are considered innovative approaches to teaching and learning in schools.

Much like student-centered learning and project-based learning, authentic learning and STEM or STEAM learning connects students with real world applications to engage them. Authentic learning emphasizes the ability for students to change their communities. The learning approach challenges students to construct a product or report which will inform and cause change. Much of the focus is on real world learning by encouraging students to explore and use inquiry approaches to learn. Since the learning is often connected to students’ lives outside of school, student engagement often improves using this approach to teaching and learning (Har, 2005). Given the significant growth in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) jobs in the future (Wagner, 2008), many schools are responding with programs targeted toward teaching these skills in high school as an innovative approach to teaching and learning. The STEM method often uses interdisciplinary, inquiry-based, and collaborative approaches to engage students and develop their critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Many schools have also added the arts to this approach and emphasize creativity and design as part of the interdisciplinary approach (Glancy et al., 2014; Jolly 2014). This approach often involves working with industry leaders and higher education as partners to support the real-world applications for the students (Elgart, 2015). Many schools are initiating a variety of approaches to improve student engagement, support a more student-centered approach to learning, and consider which skills are the most essential for both higher education and the workforce in the 21st century.

Although there are many schools developing innovative programs, there are still many obstacles for schools to sustain innovation. Smith (2009) discusses that the current political
realities do not promote innovation in schools; instead, the focus is on accountability through standardized testing. Dlugash (2014) outlines additional obstacles facing schools including a higher education focus on traditional approaches; this belief holds that traditional education has worked for generations. Others claim that innovation is already happening in the majority of schools. Smith (2009) cites a lack of R&D programs in schools and a de-emphasis on creativity which prevents innovation. Genovese (2005) cautions that many educational innovations only work for some students, so any educational innovation programs must differentiate for a variety of student needs. If schools can overcome many of the obstacles, they could create innovative programs.

The future of innovation in education is a well-discussed subject. Kumar (2012) asserts that technology innovation and the open education movement will significantly impact educational innovation. The National Association of Independent Schools (2015) encourages independent schools to adopt blended learning and potentially develop separate online programs to stay competitive with the rise of innovation in other competitive schools. Washor (2010) states that “equally important is creating in each and every school in the country a faculty that is skilled in and committed to relentless innovation –edgy as well as sustaining in the interest of student learning (para. 7).” These strategies, it is claimed, will support future innovation in schools and avoid the fears of some scholars who voice concerns over the number of priorities focused on time-consuming activities in schools (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). Despite the differences in how schools will approach innovation in the future, the research shows significant interest in supporting innovation in schools.

Schools need to promote innovation to better prepare their students. Instead of only focusing on innovative programs in schools, leaders need to help students become innovators
who are open to new experiences (Christensen et al., 2008; Wagner, 2012). By building a culture which supports innovation, schools can better prepare students for the demands of the 21st century (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Although there are obstacles to overcome within each school to make these curriculum changes, the need for change in schools is significant (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Smith, 2009). Scholars and educational leaders offer a variety of different ways to increase innovation in schools, and it is clear each school needs to determine what works best for them (Genovese, 2005; Waller, 1932). Students need innovation in their schools; this aspect will be examined in detail in the next section.

**The Need for Innovation**

Schools need to adopt innovation practices in order to prepare students for jobs of the 21st century. This discussion began with the publication of a *Time* magazine cover story in 2006 which focused on what schools could do to prepare students for the 21st century. This article emphasized the need for a global approach to learning that incorporates more creativity, better use of technology, and strong communication skills (Wallis & Steptoe, 2006). The article described the work of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, an entity that published a report outlining how the United States needs to change to better compete with other industries globally. The focus of this report was on changing the educational system to better support creativity and innovation in schools (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007). Wagner (2008) states that students need new skills in order to succeed in the global world. Employers want students who are strong communicators, who are able to collaborate, and who exhibit their creative and critical thinking skills (Moore, 2015). In order for employees to have these skills and to be successful in the workforce, these skills must be taught in schools.
Schools need to find new ways to engage students in school. One study showed that as high as 63% of high school students were not engaged in school (Robinson & Aronica, 2015). In order to increase student engagement, schools need to create environments where students want to learn (Robinson & Aronica, 2015). Educators often try to determine what motivates students in order to improve student engagement in school. Christensen et al. (2008) state that student motivation must be high in order for educational innovation to be successful. Students are usually intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Pink (2009) refers to extrinsically motivated individuals as having Type X behavior and intrinsically motivated individuals as having Type I behavior. Pink (2009) stresses that educators need to help students exhibit Type I behavior which often requires supporting autonomy, supporting student practice, and helping students find purpose in schools. Amabile (1998) also emphasizes the need for intrinsic motivation and asserts that school leaders need to understand what drives students to pursue challenging work in order to create an environment which increases intrinsic motivation. Many educational initiatives have successfully understood this goal. Student-centered learning, project-based learning, authentic learning, and STEAM programs have all shown to increase student engagement in school (Belland et al., 2006; Har, 2005; Jolly, 2014; Levy, 2014; Thomas, 2000).

Each generation of students are different, and their education needs to reflect the differences. Students no longer need to rely on recall for information because technology allows them ready access to ample information (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Wagner, 2008). Several researchers propose new competencies for students to reflect both the needs of the workforce but also the needs of students. Robinson and Aronica (2015) state that the following core competencies must be included in all education: curiosity, creativity, criticism, communication, collaboration, compassion, composure, and citizenship. Johansen (2012) adds another skill,
which is being able to thrive in uncomfortable environments. Robinson and Aronica (2015) agree that risk taking is an essential skill for all students given the way the world has changed.

Despite differences in the research regarding which skills are most important for students to learn, consensus is clear that change is needed within schools to improve student engagement. High school students are not prepared for success in the 21st century according to many employers and higher education institutions (Moore, 2015). A majority of students are not engaged in school and are not motivated for success (Pink, 2009; Robinson & Aronica, 2015). They are extrinsically motivated and are spending much of their time engaged in technology outside of school (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Wagner, 2008). Schools need to promote innovation and better prepare students for success in the global world (Wagner, 2008; Wallis & Steptoe, 2006). Independent schools have the opportunity to make many of these changes quickly given their curriculum autonomy.

**Education in Independent Schools**

Much like their public and charter school counterparts, independent schools struggle to engage students and prepare them for success in college and in the workforce. Since this study is focused only on independent schools, this section will provide an understanding of the current state of independent schools. A survey among 2300 independent school families conducted by the Secondary School Admission Test Board (2014) offered the two leading reasons why parents chose independent education for their children: an education which will challenge my child and one that will help my child develop and maintain a love of learning. These two priorities directly connect to academic programs at independent schools. Since independent school families are able to select which high school to send their child to, it is essential for schools to develop and maintain innovative academic programs which engage students and prepare them for life after
high school. Unfortunately, according to a 2014 survey of independent school students, 82% of the students were sometimes or often bored in class (Torres, 2015). The challenge for independent schools is significant.

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) formed a committee of educators from across the country to work together and identify what the needs are for students and schools in the 21st century as a way to address student engagement and support independent schools in the future. The group identified seven essential skills for students to excel in the 21st century which included problem solving, communication, teamwork, digital literacy, global understanding, risk-taking, and ethical decision-making (Witt & Orvis, 2010). Although the committee respected the way independent schools approached each one of these skills, there was consensus on the value of these skills as part of the high school curriculum in all independent schools. In a 2014 survey of independent school students, the top three school activities which engaged students the most were identified as 21st century skill-based activities including discussion and debates, technology projects, and group projects (Torres, 2015). Some schools approach these skills through problem-based learning projects which combine a real-world problem, collaboration and interdisciplinary learning, and a presentation about the process (Witt & Orvis, 2010). Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, Massachusetts provides students complete control over their learning, which encourages many of the 21st century skills to prosper (Pink, 2009). Puget Sound Community School personalizes each student’s experience to include independent projects and classroom instruction facilitated by the student and an advisor (Pink, 2009). These are just a few examples of schools addressing both student engagement and 21st century learning.
Addressing many of the challenges independent schools face takes strong leadership from the head of school. John Chubb (2014), the President of the National Association of Independent Schools, recognizes that independent schools need transformational leaders who can support and inspire followership to change the direction of independent schools. Without the need to follow federal accountability standards, independent schools have an opportunity to make curriculum decisions which will better engage students, teach them 21st century skills, and strengthen their academic programs.

**Independent School Leaders**

Research shows that school leaders must provide pivotal support to foster a school climate which supports innovation (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Transformational leadership is one approach school leaders use to foster innovation in their schools. Innovation is directly tied to transformational leadership in a variety of studies (Bass, 1985, Bass & Avolio, 1994; Howell & Avolio, 1993; Howell & Higgins, 1990; Oberg, 1972; Spreitzer, De Janasz, & Quinn, 1999). Innovation is also linked to a variety of behaviors exhibited by transformational leaders. Jung, Chow, and Wu (2003) demonstrate that transformational leadership connects to empowerment and innovation. Chang, Hsiao, and Tu (2011) found that transformational leadership is significantly related to support for innovation, organizational learning, and organizational innovation. Brand (2005) found that one of the qualities evident in innovative schools they visited was that the school leaders had high expectations for students and teachers.

Strategic theorists approach transformational leadership and innovation with a slightly different perspective emphasizing leader adaptability. Evans (1996) sees transformational leadership in a strategic-systemic view which balances the need for being a strong leader with clear direction and the complexity of a systems perspective. Evans (1996) approaches
transformational leadership as a craft rather than a science. Evans (1996) discusses how strategic theorists oppose the long-term planning of leaders and encourage leaders to adapt and respond to needs in order to promote innovation. Despite differences in defining transformational leadership, the connection between innovation and transformational leadership is widely documented in the research.

**Instructional Leadership.** Transformational leaders often demonstrate instructional leadership qualities in their roles as school leaders. Bendikson et al. (2012) distinguish between direct instructional leadership (focused on improving teaching) and indirect instructional leadership (focused on creating conditions to improve teaching and learning). Bendikson et al. (2012) share that in many high schools, the direct instructional leadership is done by a department head rather than the primary school leader. Their study found that school leaders are most likely to set goals (direct instructional leadership) and ensure a safe environment, provide appropriate resources, and solve complex problems (indirect instructional leadership) (Bendikson et al., 2012). Witt and Orvis (2010) agree that the school leaders often support indirect instructional leadership which creates conditions where innovation occurs. Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, and Sleegers (2012) also found that school leaders can influence student achievement through indirect instructional leadership strategies.

Instructional leadership was first introduced in the 1970’s when researchers were trying to understand what made some schools effective and others ineffective. Edmonds (1979) conducted one of the earliest studies to demonstrate that a principal’s ability to lead the academic program made a difference in effective schools. The improving schools in the study had principals who were very involved in the academic program and who ensured all students were able and expected to learn. Edmonds (1979) described how the schools showing the most
improvement paid very close attention to how the students were performing academically and set particular goals for students to perform better. This study helped open up the discussion among researchers about what activities constitute instructional leadership in schools and which staff is involved in instructional leadership activities. Greater reliance was put on how schools were performing academically and how to improve failing schools.

Many researchers have offered varying definitions of instructional leadership. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) introduce the most popular model used in empirical studies. The model uses three areas to describe the instructional leadership of principals including defining the school’s mission, overseeing the instructional program, and supporting a positive school climate. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) further divide instructional leadership into ten tasks. These ten tasks were split up between the three areas of a principal’s instructional leadership ability. In order to define the school’s mission, a principal must frame and simultaneously communicate the school’s goals. In order to manage the instructional program, a principal must monitor student outcomes, coordinate curriculum, and oversee instructional staff. In order to support a positive school climate, a principal must promote professional development, ensure adequate instructional time, maintain physical presence, protect academic standards, and provide incentives to students and teachers. These ten tasks were used in countless studies after 1985 to determine the effect of principals on the instructional programs of schools.

In contrast to Hallinger’s instructional leadership model, Rigby (2014) uses a contemporary approach to discuss three logics of instructional leadership. The broadest logic is called prevailing logic which described the role of the principal as an instructional leader and manager. This logic was very popular in research studies in the 1980s and 1990s. This logic incorporated the majority of the research studies. The second kind of logic is referred to as
entrepreneurial logic which emphasizes actionable steps to improve student outcomes through instructional leadership activities. Rigby (2014) presented this logic in contrast to the often broad topics covered in Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) model. The third logic referred to is one of social justice which was “focused on the experiences and inequitable outcomes of marginalized groups” (Rigby, 2014, p. 618). This logic looked at specific populations and how instructional leadership activities can support particular groups of students rather than proposing an approach for all students. Although these logics of instructional leadership defer from Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) definition, clearly overlap exists within the overall model which is based on how to bring about successful schools based on positive student outcomes. Although some of the models are very task-oriented and specific, others are more broad, and each model was helpful in the development of the concept of instructional leadership.

School leaders often use transformational leadership approaches to seek out innovative practices. Although there is debate on how much school leaders should use long-term planning to promote innovation (Evans, 1996), it is clear the transformational leaders use instructional leadership approaches to seek out ways to improve student engagement (Witt & Orvis, 2010). School leaders approach this work through direct and indirect instructional leadership strategies (Bendikson et al., 2012). There is a variety of research about the history of instructional leadership and what particular strategies relate to instructional leadership (Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Rigby, 2014). The understanding of instructional leadership tasks will help with understanding how heads of school are able to act as transformational leaders facilitating many instructional leadership tasks.
Summary

Innovation is often defined as a new or different approach to improve a product, service, or process (Clegg et al., 2008; Rogers, 2003). Despite differences in how researchers define and understand the scale of innovations, there is agreement on the need for industries to constantly seek out innovation in order to thrive (Burgelman & Sayles, 1986; Kelley & Kelley, 2013; Sims, 2001). The pursuit of innovation has long been a part of American history (Fitzgerald et al., 2011; Kao, 2007). Industries use a variety of different ways to ensure innovation within their organizations but there are several similarities across organizations. These similarities include a culture which supports risk-taking and openness, leaders who hire talented and creative employees, teams working together on projects, and a core value that innovation is a central part of each organization (Burgelman & Sayles, 1986; Kelley & Kelley, 2013; Sims, 2011). Many of these similarities can apply to educational innovation (Zimmerman, 2015). High school students are struggling to remain engaged and committed to school, and research documents that students are not prepared for success in the global world (Pink, 2009; Robinson & Aronica, 2015). Independent school students face many of these same challenges (Torres, 2015). The difference is that independent school leaders are not confined by many of the accountability measures of public schools and can therefore make significant academic changes to foster and support innovation in their schools. In order to build communities where innovation is valued, independent school leaders need to use both direct and indirect instructional leadership strategies as part of their work as transformational leaders to improve student engagement in high school (Bendikson et al., 2012). Despite the tremendous amount of research about transformational leadership and innovation, there is a gap in the literature regarding how independent school heads of school can support innovation in schools. This study will help address this gap,
providing an understanding of what particular strategies, structures, and processes heads of school can use to support innovative teaching and learning.

Conclusion

This literature review has shown how innovation is understood by a variety of scholars. The history of innovation helps emphasize that innovation is not a new idea but instead one that has been a central part of American history. Analyzing how innovation applies and is embraced by other industries can lead to a clear understanding of how innovation applies to schools. A variety of studies indicate how students are not engaged or excelling in high school, and changes need to be made to better support student success. Scholars assert that students are not learning the skills needed to thrive in the 21st century. Educational innovation is one way to make positive changes to improve student engagement in independent schools. This approach requires creating schools where students can take risks, explore global issues, connect with technology, and take control of their education. In order to facilitate this change in independent schools, heads of school must act as transformational leaders to directly and indirectly affect changes in the instructional program.

In order to address the gap in the literature and provide scholar practitioners with meaningful feedback on how to foster and support innovative teaching and learning, the next chapter will address the research design of the study. By using a qualitative study with a multiple case study design, the next chapter will present the rationale for the current research design as well as the details regarding sampling, data collection, data analysis, ways to ensure protection of human subjects, and ways to increase the trustworthiness of the results.
Chapter III: Research Design

This study focused on how school leaders were able to foster and support instructional innovation in their schools. In this chapter, the selection of a qualitative research approach will be discussed as well as details of the methodology, research design, and research tradition. In the second part of the chapter, the supporting details regarding participants, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness will be discussed in order to understand the approach to the research study.

Methodology

The study was guided by two primary research questions:

1. How do heads of independent schools think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation in the schools?

2. What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources actively support innovation in schools, as presented by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

In order to effectively pursue the research questions, it is important to examine the research paradigm guiding the study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain that a paradigm is the basic world view including the relationship between the individual and the world. Ponterotto (2005) describes paradigms as the philosophical assumptions used in the research study. This study approached the research with a constructivist paradigm. Constructivism embraces ontology through a relativist reality where reality is defined through “mental constructions, [and is] socially and experimentally based” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). According to Schwandt (1994), constructivism supports multiple realities which are equally valued and socially constructed. The epistemology of constructivism is transactional and dependent on the
relationship between the researcher and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Reality is constructed by the researcher and actually deepens with additional interactions between the researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005). The methodology is hermeneutical, and the researcher creates multiple social realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The relationship between the researcher and data collection was intertwined, and the researcher impacted each phase of the research study through their construction of reality. These philosophical assumptions guided the study and informed the data collection, data analysis, and other details of the study.

**Research Design**

Using a qualitative research study to approach this problem of practice was appropriate for a variety of reasons. This study explored how heads of school fostered and supported innovative practices. Although much of this work was focused on what strategies, structures, and practices the heads of school used in their schools, the experiences offered by administrators and faculty were essential to this study because the study sought to understand how heads of school fostered and supported instructional innovation for all faculty and students rather than for particular faculty or students within a department, program, or category. Marshall and Rossman (2015) describe how qualitative research emphasizes that “because thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptions are involved, the researcher needs to understand the deeper perspectives that can be captured through face-to-face interaction and observation in the natural setting” (p. 101). This study was interested in exploring the experiences of the heads of the school, which were best done through a qualitative approach to uncover details about how they fostered innovations at their schools. By using a qualitative research design, the descriptive data emphasized “the importance of context, setting, and participants’ frames of reference” (Marshall
Since the research study focused on independent schools specifically, a qualitative study examined the problem of practice within this particular setting (Creswell, 2013).

The qualitative approach of this study supported the link to practice better than a quantitative approach. The results of the study included particular themes which better inform school leaders how they can support innovative teaching and learning practices within their schools. With the qualitative approach within the study, practitioners were able to learn about particular successes and challenges occurring in similar independent schools with innovation efforts. Since there was a significant range of viewpoints about how heads of school supported and fostered innovation in their schools, the qualitative study allowed rich details to be shared with the reader.

**Research Tradition**

The research design was a multiple case study. There are three widely accepted researchers who have authored seminal studies regarding the case study as a method for qualitative research design. Stake (1995), Yin (2003), and Merriam (1998) are often studied by modern researchers as pioneers with case study method use. Although Merriam (1998) is focused on educational research using case studies as the primary research design, Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) are more accepted by a variety of disciplines. All three researchers provide appropriate frameworks to discuss best practices for case studies. Yin (2003) described a case study as an inquiry that explores a phenomenon within context. A case study often answers the “how” and “why” research questions through an ongoing and robust process of data collection and analysis. A case study examines a case within a contemporary setting through real world approaches (Creswell, 2013). Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) presented constructivist
paradigms for their case study approaches. With constructivism, “truth is relative and that it is dependent on one’s perspective” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). This approach emphasizes the relationship between the researcher and the participants in order for rich details to be shared for the reader.

In this study, the researcher explored multiple bounded systems or cases of similar experiences at difference research sites. This in-depth data collection resulted in three different case descriptions outlining themes within each case as well as across the cases (Creswell, 2013). Although there is debate on whether a case study is a methodology or a research strategy, the case study was defined as a methodology for this study (Creswell, 2013). The multiple case study design was used to explore similarities and differences between different related cases. The selection of cases was particularly important in this kind of research design. In this study, the case was defined as how the head of school fostered and supported innovation at each of the school sites. This particular topic was bound by place (at each one of the research sites) and by definition (details relating to innovation at the research sites) (Baxter & Jack, 2008). These boundaries helped ensure the study is connected to the research questions and did not become too broad through the in-depth data collection.

A multiple case study design was chosen for a variety of reasons. A case study allowed the researcher to pursue an in-depth study of a problem of practice. Since fostering and supporting innovation is a significant task within a school, a case study was able to delve into the intricate details of this process through the variety of data collected for the study. It would be challenging to fully understand the strategies, structures, and processes used by heads of school and other school leaders by only collecting one form of data. Since much of the study is focused on school leadership, it was also important to understand how senior administrators and faculty
perceived the head of school’s role in fostering and supporting innovation. The multiple case study design was essential in order to discern commonalities and differences across a number of schools in which leaders actively fostered and supported innovation. If only one case study was conducted, it would be very difficult to apply the themes to other similar schools. With a multiple case study design, cases can be analyzed to see if particular patterns exist across the cases (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). By using multiple cases in similar settings, themes across cases could also be explored, given the replication of approaches for each research site (Yin, 2009). As the number of case studies increased, the generalizability of the themes became more appropriate (Miles et al., 2014). Since additional data was collected with multiple case studies, it was easier to uncover themes through the amount of evidence acquired across three research sites.

This study most closely followed the approach of Merriam (1998), a constructivist perspective on research through which the case is clearly defined rather than integrated. The case was bounded, embedded with thick description, and included interviews, focus groups, and document review as the data collection methods. The researcher made meaning out of data by “consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). The internal validity, external validity, and reliability strategies in this study are similar to the approaches of Merriam (1998).

**Participants**

Qualitative research required access to the research site to attain in-depth information to explore the problem of practice. Baxter and Jack (2008) discussed the variety of data that can be collected for case studies as explored by Yin which can include “documentation, archival
records, interviews, physical artifacts, direct observations, and participant-observation” (p. 554). Yazan (2015) emphasized Merriam and Stake’s approaches which only include interviews, observations, and document review (p. 149). In this study, the researcher visited three different schools, conducted interviews and focus groups, and reviewed documents. The number of participants and number of sites are important in a multiple site case study. Creswell (2012) shares that qualitative studies typically include only a small number of people or sites in order to go in-depth with the study (p. 209). In this study, participants were selected representing a variety of roles including heads of school, senior administrators, and faculty members. Three different research sites were chosen in order to delve in-depth into the nuances of the responses from participants. In order to compare individual case profiles, it was important to visit multiple research sites.

The participants were selected for the study based on a list of very specific criteria. Both the heads of school and the schools had to match particular criteria for inclusion in the study. The heads of school had to be actively involved with fostering and supporting innovation. The schools had to be located in New England for researcher access, and the schools needed to educate high school students. The schools were boarding and day schools since the focus was on the instructional program. In order to correctly identify schools which matched this criterion, it was important to reach out to experts within independent school education. Representatives from the Independent Schools Association of Northern New England and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges were asked to highlight particular schools and heads of school who matched the participant criteria. The list was then narrowed down to three participating schools willing to be part of the study.
Sampling Procedures

Participants were recruited through a purposeful sampling approach in order to ensure the participating schools met the appropriate criteria to address the research questions. The sampling selection was essential for a quality research study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Creswell (2013) states that sampling for qualitative studies should seek participants who are able to “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 156). The sampling strategy was homogeneous sampling because the participating schools and leaders shared very specific criteria. Participants were recruited using the following steps:

1. An initial email was sent to heads of school who were identified by the Independent Schools Association of Northern New England staff or the New England Association of Schools and Colleges staff who matched the sampling criteria.
2. The researcher met with the heads of school to discuss the potential study and to see if the schools and school leaders matched the sampling criteria. The schools who matched the requirements of the study were then sent a follow up email after IRB approval for potential inclusion in the research study.
3. The schools who met the sampling criteria and were potentially interested in participating in the study were then sent emails requesting site permission and interview permission. A copy of the consent form and the interview guide (Appendix A) were attached. The email asked for a list of administrators and faculty involved in innovative practices. The researcher offered to answer any questions the heads of school had about the study or the process.
4. A follow up email was sent to heads of school who had not responded after one week.
5. The researcher sent an email to the identified administrators and faculty to describe the study. If the staff members were interested in participating, then they were asked to respond by email.

6. If the staff members were interested in participating, an email was sent with additional details about the study, a consent form, and a copy of the focus group guide (Appendix B). The researcher answered any questions the staff had about the study or process.

The researcher took several steps to ensure protection of research participants. Upon appropriate approval from Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and support from the principal investigator, the data collection steps began. Consent forms with participant signatures were collected from each participant prior to the data collection process. The researcher provided the participants with a detailed overview of the study and identified potential risks and benefits of the study, provided contact information for the researcher, and ways to opt in or out of the study, as part of the informed consent procedures. This process allowed the participants to fully understand the study prior to participation since inclusion was voluntary. The researcher made sure participants understood their ability to opt out of specific interview questions and the study as a whole. This procedure was followed for both the interviews with the heads of school as well as the focus groups of senior administrators and faculty. Although the potential risks and harm to participants were very limited, the researcher informed the participants about the risks of sharing information about how the schools went about the changes to become communities which support instructional innovation. This process made sure the researcher followed all appropriate ethical considerations to protect participants and maintained professionalism throughout the entire data collection and data analysis phases.
After the interviews and focus groups were completed and supporting documents were collected, the researcher took several steps to maintain confidentiality of identities and participant responses. All participants were assigned pseudonyms as part of the data analysis process. A key with the participant names and pseudonyms was locked separately from the other sources of data. The data was locked in a file cabinet and kept in a secure, password-protected file on the researcher’s computer. After the research study finished, all of the electronic and hard copy participant data including notes and supporting documents were destroyed to protect participants.

The selected research sites included three independent high schools in New England. Each one of the schools was endorsed and recommended based on set criteria by a staff member of the Independent Schools Association of Northern New England or the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. The schools were identified as a result of their support for instructional innovation. The schools were selected because of the leadership of the head of school in fostering and supporting instructional innovation. The schools had to have innovative teaching and learning practices identified within their strategic or long-term planning documents, provided professional development for faculty on instructional innovation practices, and offered student opportunities to learn 21st century skills in a variety of different ways. Each of the schools included a senior leadership team to support the work of the head of school. This was important for a multiple case study with many different forms of data collection.

**Data Collection**

The researcher pursued approval from Northeastern’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to study subjects. After the approval from IRB, the researcher followed the approach of Creswell (2013) to collect data. Stake (1995) explained that case study data collection begins
after research approval through both informal and formal data collection methods (p. 49). Data collected came from interviews, focus groups, and document review. By using multiple kinds of data, the findings are strengthened because the data is “braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554). The participants assisted in identifying documents related to instructional innovation at the schools. These documents were identified prior to the site visits, during the interviews and focus groups, and following the site visits.

The researcher developed a schedule for each of the three site visits. In anticipation of the visit, the head of school identified the senior administrators and faculty members who had been actively involved in instructional innovation practices. The researcher began with an interview with the head of school. The next meeting was a focus group with senior administrators. The last meeting at the research site was with a group of faculty assembled for a focus group. At the time of the interviews and the focus groups, the researcher provided all participants with the consent forms and discussed the interview process so that they understood the expectations. In order to understand how the heads of school were able to foster and support innovation, it was important to collect data from a variety of school personnel with varying perspectives. By interviewing different educators at each school, it was easier to determine which activities were delegated to particular staff members and which responsibilities the heads of school prioritized relating to instructional innovation in the school.

The interview and focus groups were recorded using two different recording devices (a primary and back up recording tool), and the researcher also took notes during this process. The researcher used the interview guide (Appendix A) to facilitate the interviews, which lasted between 50 and 75 minutes. The interview guide included a variety of open-ended questions
about how the head of school supported and fostered innovative instructional practices and what particular strategies were used to support these practices. The researcher asked follow up questions in order to understand in-depth details about the content. In order to attain more detailed information, the head of school was asked to supply any documents about the innovative teaching and learning community in preparation for the interview. The researcher closed the interview detailing the process for data storage, follow up for clarification, and transcript review.

After completing the interview with the head of school, the researcher then proceeded with two focus groups—one for senior administrators and one for faculty. Focus groups were used to understand details about participants’ experiences and to make sense of a collective experiences (Morgan, 1998). Focus groups were selected instead of individual interviews because it was important to understand if the support for instructional innovation occurred across the school. Focus groups allowed participants to agree and disagree with one another and collectively share their experiences of how the heads of school led the change process at the schools. Participants could discontinue their participation in the focus group at any time or choose not to respond to particular questions. The focus group lasted between 50-75 minutes. Participants were asked a variety of open-ended and follow up questions about the research questions using the focus group guide (Appendix B). The focus group were recorded using two electronic recorders. In order to attain more detailed information, the faculty and senior administrators were asked to supply any documents about innovative teaching and learning practices in preparation of the focus group. The researcher closed the interview detailing the process for data storage and follow up for clarification.

Document review was the next step in the data collection process. The researcher collected documents which directly related to innovation. These documents included course
catalogs, admissions materials, and other materials which demonstrated the parts of the change process. These documents were collected from each of the participants in the interviews and focus groups. Materials were also accessed electronically through each school’s website. Any documents referenced during the interviews or focus groups were gathered as well. The documents were kept confidential; all names and other school identifiers were edited. Each school’s documents were filed separately along with the transcripts from the interviews and focus groups to create three separate storage places to assist with data analysis.

By following the listed procedures, the researcher followed best practices of several scholars focusing on case study research. Yin (2003) encouraged researchers to embrace three principles: “use multiple sources of evidence, create a case study database, and maintain a chain of evidence” (p. 114-122). These practices were supported through the variety of data collection methods, the organization of the data, and the forms and journal used to provide accountability with the data collection process. Stake (1995) explained the steps in the data collection phase of case studies to include gathering data, keeping records, adjusting case boundaries, and gathering more data or triangulating the data (p. 53). These approaches were integrated into the procedures during both the data collection and data analysis phases.

**Data Storage**

After the interviews, focus groups, and document collection, the audio files were transcribed using a reliable and confidential transcription service. The audio files were kept electronically on the researcher’s computer in a specific folder, which was protected by a password. The researcher reviewed the transcripts for any errors as well as checked with each head of school for member checking of their individual interview transcript only. A separate log was kept with the participant names and pseudonyms, which was locked in a cabinet and kept
confidential. This location was kept separately from the other data. The audio files, written notes, and documentation were stored securely with the researcher and principal investigator being the only two people with access. The documentation and notes were kept in a locked cabinet. Stake (1995) encouraged a data collection form to help the researcher organize data related to the research questions (p. 50), which will be used as part of the data collection process. The researcher also kept a reflective journal outlining any additional thoughts and processes; this journal was used during the data analysis phase. All of the data including documents, transcripts, reflective logs, and other supporting documents were destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

**Data Analysis**

After verifying the interview and focus group transcripts, and after assembling related documents, the researcher undertook a formal analysis of the data. Although the researcher began to contemplate potential themes throughout the data collection process, the data analysis process supported the generation and formalization of themes. In order to organize the transcript data appropriately, the researcher used Excel to highlight the coding and data analysis work after receiving the transcripts from the contracted service. By analyzing the data step by step using Excel, the researcher was able to particularly focus on theme development. The researcher concentrated on data which addressed the research questions in order to understand the complexity of the case (Creswell, 2013). The approach provided an in-depth description of each case, themes within each case, and then a cross-case analysis examining all of the cases (Creswell, 2013). In order to accomplish these goals, the researcher conducted the following steps:
1. In order to understand each case separately, interviews, focus groups, and document reviews needed to be split up by school. To understand the variety of data collected from each school, the researcher began with coding the interview and focus group transcripts using a first coding strategy called descriptive coding. This strategy helped the researcher understand the contents of each data collection method by case and identified particular words or phrases used to summarize parts of the transcripts.

2. The next step was to use a first coding strategy called In Vivo, which highlighted particular words used by participants to describe their experiences. The value of this coding strategy was to understand the words used by participants and how the words selected related to culture (Miles et al., 2014).

3. The researcher continued with second cycle coding to condense the codes to categories. These categories were generated by examining the transcripts and first cycle codes. Miles et al. (2014) discuss the challenge in identifying categories too quickly based on the data which often results in lost themes, so it was important to move through this process thoughtfully and repeat the process as needed.

4. The next phase was to analyze the documents to consider how this data related to the categories generated during the second cycle coding strategies. The documents were able to provide evidence for the different categories identified in the data analysis process.

5. After careful review of the documents and several different coding cycles, the researcher identified themes apparent in the data by combining multiple concepts within the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The documents and transcripts were able to provide evidence for these themes and provided details for the in-depth review of
each case. This process was done both inductively and deductively using the codes, potential themes, and other data to go back and forth to form comprehensive themes (Creswell, 2013).

6. A case profile was written for each research site based on the data analysis strategies reviewed. Creswell (2013) identifies a separate case profile as an essential part of the data analysis process for a multiple site case study.

7. After each case profile was written, the researcher then examined patterns, themes, and explanations across the cases (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Using a table to view the data from each case, the researcher examined similarities and differences between each of the cases (Yin, 2009). From this analysis, the researcher was able to make “naturalistic generalizations” based on the cases (Creswell, 2013, p. 200).

**Trustworthiness**

In order to ensure validity with the data collected, it was important to include particular steps to increase the trustworthiness of the study. A quality study can be constructed in many different ways based on the constructivist approach to the research (Seale, 1999). As a qualitative study, the in-depth study of the phenomenon supports the validity of the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The various data (documents, interviews, and focus groups) collected assured a variety of different perspectives of the phenomenon. Reflecting on field notes enhanced the credibility of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Using triangulation to analyze the data was a pivotal approach within this study. Miles et al. (2014) discussed the process of triangulation which supports converging conclusions as an essential part of the data analysis process. Creswell (2013) emphasized that triangulation uses different forms of evidence to support observations and interpretations. Triangulation can be used to enhance case studies by searching
for deeper meaning and presenting multiple realities (Seale, 1999). The researcher used member checking with the heads of school to verify the responses included on their interview transcripts only. These steps increased the trustworthiness of the study.

In chapter one, researcher bias was explored as part of the introduction to the study. With previous experience working as an academic dean in charge of supporting significant changes within the community to support instructional innovation, it was essential for the researcher to separate this experience from the data collection and analysis process. The researcher did not have experience as a head of school and has not held many of the responsibilities of this role. The researcher believes in the ability of heads of school to support and foster innovation in schools. These biases were minimized during the data collection and analysis phases. The researcher used his independent school experience to help build rapport with participants because trust was very important to attain honest and detailed responses from participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher took steps to protect himself including writing reflective memos to help process the information since, in this study, the researcher was the instrument collecting data (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). These steps helped limit bias and supported an effective research study.

The researcher took several steps to minimize threats to the validity of the collected data. Although the researcher had experience working with a variety of school administrators, the research sites chosen did not include any staff or faculty who had worked with the researcher in the past. This decision limited any researcher bias and supported honest responses by the participants. The researcher emphasized during each interaction with participants how the study sought to attain information rather than pass any judgment on responses. By using the same interview and focus group guides at each research site and by replicating many of the same
details at each research site, the validity of the data was preserved (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Both of the guides included follow up questions to encourage specific responses in order to increase the richness of the data, which provided a better understanding of the phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Since the research study focused on independent high school leaders, the generalizability beyond this setting is not appropriate given the research design (Creswell, 2012).

The study had several limitations to consider. Although the study included data from three different independent high schools in New England, the patterns identified between these schools regarding innovation were not able to be generalized to other schools. The schools were selected because they were identified as schools where the head of school supported and fostered innovation, but they only represented a small group of schools across the country focusing on this work. Secondly, the schools selected were independent schools which were not required to follow many of the federal and state laws affecting charter and public schools. The independent schools have greater autonomy with curriculum, hiring, and resources. Although the schools offered a variety of strategies and structures to support innovation, these strategies did not represent the only ways to accomplish innovative teaching and learning across schools.

Summary

The study sought to understand how heads of school were able to foster and support instructional innovation in their schools. Through a multiple case study design, the researcher collected data to inform this topic by interviewing heads of school, facilitating focus groups with senior administrators and faculty members, and reviewing supporting documents. The interviews, focus groups, and document analysis were used to create a profile of each school.
The three cases were compared and contrasted to determine patterns, themes, and explanations to inform practitioners interested in innovative practices.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

The purpose of the study was to understand how heads of school view their roles as leaders in supporting innovation and understand how innovation was supported in schools as shared by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty. The transformational leadership model was appropriate to understand how heads of school are able to foster and support innovation in their schools. The emphasis on both transactional and transformational leadership strategies as outlined by Bass (1985) further provided a framework to understand what strategies heads of schools used to support innovation in their schools. Based on this theoretical framework, the study examined these two research questions:

1. How do heads of independent schools think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation in schools?
2. What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources support innovation in schools, as presented perceived by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

This chapter examines each one of the study sites, summarizes the demographics of the participants, discusses the data collected, and then presents the themes for each research question.

Summary of Study Sites, Participants, and Data Collected

The participants for this study were heads of school, administrators, and faculty members from three coed independent New England high schools. Each one of the schools served students from the local community, other states, and other countries. The schools were similar in size, student population, and revenue. The participants of the focus groups were selected based on their ability to discuss innovation at their respective schools. An administrative assistant at
each school helped facilitate the scheduling of the focus groups based on a mutually convenient time for the faculty members, the administrators, and the researcher. The administrative assistants had access to all of the schedules for the faculty members and administrators, and scheduled the focus groups when all of the participants could attend.

The participants of the focus groups and individual interviews had a range of years of experience in their roles. Each of the heads of school had been working at their respective school for more than three years as head, and each was hired as a head coming from another independent school. Each head of school brought experience as a teacher and school administrator to his or her role. At each school site, senior administrators participated in focus groups with one another, and faculty participated in focus groups with one another. Table 1 provides an overview of the senior administrators, their gender, and their departments. Table 2 provides an overview of the faculty members, their gender, and their departments.
Table 1

*School, Gender, Departments*

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### Table 2

**School, Gender, Departments**

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At each one of the three school sites, a variety of data was collected. Each head of school was interviewed individually with a series of open-ended questions addressing both of the research questions. A focus group was held for administrators and another focus group was held for faculty members at each school site to discuss the second research question. Each focus group was asked open-ended questions, and they had an opportunity to build on one another’s responses during the conversation. After the interviews and focus groups, the researcher had the audio recordings transcribed. Each head of school reviewed his or her individual transcript for any discrepancies. The researcher then began reflecting on the transcripts and noted particular concepts which emerged from data. The researcher proceeded with a multiple-step coding
process which included descriptive coding, in vivo coding, category grouping, and theme development.

In order to better understand the appropriate details for each site visited, the researcher collected a variety of documents about innovation at each one of the schools. These documents included course catalogs, admissions publications, and website content. The written documents allowed the researcher to triangulate the data which supported appropriate themes based on the data analysis. In order to better understand the school culture at each of the research sites, below is a short summary of each school.

**School A.** The school has a significant history of innovation. With the Head of School leading the school for the last 15 years, the school was innovative before her arrival. Head of School A described the school as “very collaborative,” and she has “partnered with a lot of people who are very good at saying, ‘how important is this for us?’” This approach helps them prioritize innovation and implement new programs thoughtfully. She described their approach as having an “open mind, hearing ideas, deep collaboration.” The school doesn’t distinguish between academic and non-academic components of the school; the Head described a frequent “interplay” between all parts of the school which is focused on what students are learning in all parts of the program. The co-curricular program offers as many rich learning experiences as the classes during the day or the meetings at lunch. Each of these are different opportunities for students to learn.

Head of School A described innovation as “believing in ongoing change” and “having an open mind.” These two values connect to create a collaborative school culture which is constantly focused on the changing world. Several structures have been put in place to allow more communication and engagement with the community outside of the school. For example,
the school has an academic calendar with shorter academic blocks which allow more collaboration with members outside of the school to enrich the academic experience. The faculty have the autonomy to make significant changes to courses within their departments. One faculty member shared that much of the innovation happening at the school begins at the classroom level led by the faculty. As programs achieve success, these innovative initiatives are often scaled up beyond just one department. The faculty focus group shared that there is an unspoken understanding that everyone is constantly working to improve. This culture is an integral part of the hiring process, and the community works diligently to bring in new faculty and staff who support this culture.

**School B.** The school has spent the last five years undergoing significant change since the Head of School arrived in 2012. Head of School B presented his vision during the hiring process which included a variety of innovative initiatives to “attract more students” while completing a “fundamental assessment of its assets and how those could be leveraged more effectively to accomplish the mission.” He carried out this vision when he started his role as Head. He said, “Someone described me as top-down in concept, but quick to delegate.” This statement connects to many of the comments made by the administrators and faculty members who often saw him as the leader of innovation on campus. The faculty spoke about the tremendous changes over the last few years, and how it was often too much change, too quickly. The Head was transparent about how the school needed to change to be more innovative. He created a committee to manage and support innovation on campus and provided the committee both resources and power to support these projects. The presence of the committee and the resources provided for innovative projects showed how much of a priority innovation was for the Head of School.
With rising costs, enrollment concerns, and decreasing ability for families to pay the costs of education at the school, the Head of School had to make significant changes to secure the future of the school. As a small school in a rural part of New England, the school serves students who were often competing in athletics in many other states. As a result, the school is examining how to integrate blended learning models into the program so students can learn more off campus and have additional flexibility in their schedules. The school embraces student travel experiences and often takes large groups of students to other countries during the academic year. The time away from campus presents additional challenges for students to stay engaged with their learning, but it creates an innovative opportunity as well. The community is adjusting to a new culture under this Head of School which is focused on constant improvement.

**School C.** School C has a variety of day students from the neighboring communities as well as boarding students from other states and around the world. A rural New England high school, this school has a long history of innovative programs. The Head of School has only been leading the school for the last four years, and she noted a variety of innovative programs were thriving upon her arrival. For example, the school designed an alternative education program years ago grounded in experiential learning which continues to be both innovative and successful. The school designed an end of the year program where students are able to choose from a variety of elective courses and travel experiences as a way to enrich their academic experiences. These two examples are initiatives which were implemented successfully by members of the faculty and administration rather than by the Head of School. At this school, faculty members shared they had much autonomy in their classrooms and that innovation often came from faculty members working together on programming.
The Head of School described her role as a listener. She would often have faculty and staff talk to her about innovative projects, and she described that her role was to ask questions, encourage, and help with resources. Several administrators and faculty discussed how accessible the Head of School was to new ideas. Her questions often related to how the changes would positively affect students which often ensured innovation was purposeful and not just for the sake of change. The faculty shared that they felt empowered to make changes in their curriculum and were comfortable talking with the leadership team or the Head of School about their programs.

Below the researcher presents the overarching themes derived from a review of the head interviews, administrator focus groups, teacher focus groups, and related documents. The first research question focuses on how heads of independent schools understand their roles as part of innovation happening in their schools. Since the question is based on the experience and philosophy of each head of school, the data collection for this research question was strictly based on the responses from the interviews with each head of school. The second research question will use data from the various focus groups and the document analysis.

**Research Question #1: How do heads of independent schools think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation in their schools?**

A close analysis of each Head of School interview resulted in the identification of Key Ideas from each Head of School. Those are presented and detailed below.
**Head of School A**. The key ideas are presented below.

Table 3

*Key Ideas from Head of School A*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The communication of decision-making processes is essential to support innovative ideas at the school.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The timing for innovation is important to understand in order to take appropriate risks to improve the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring quality faculty and staff who support constant innovation and are willing to work as collaborative members of the community are essential to foster and promote innovation.</td>
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Head of School A emphasized how important the head of school is in influencing innovation in schools. She discussed that communicating decision-making processes to everyone in the school community was essential to support innovative ideas at the school which was her way of “setting the tone for the institution.” The head described several different ways decision-making is done at the school. She mentioned, “We have tried really hard to be very conscious of how we make decisions and who those decisions affect.” The head often shared with the school community how major decisions would be made prior to examining a new project, initiative, or major program. Through each major school-wide decision, faculty and staff were able to provide information which was part of the decision-making process. The school differentiated between input and feedback but integrated both kinds of information into the decision-making process. She stated, “We have admitted and agreed as a progressive school, we are constantly revisiting and potentially reinventing processes in order to make them clear to the group in the work we’re doing.” By emphasizing how decisions were made to the community, barriers were eliminated, so that all faculty and staff understood how innovative practices could be implemented appropriately. The school also used an approach to go “wide and then narrow
and then wide again” to look at how decisions would affect others. This approach allowed faculty and staff to constantly examine how new practices could be successful with both a big idea approach and a detail-oriented analysis. For example, this decision-making process was used when the school implemented one of their innovative programs, a graduation requirement for all students to take cultural-awareness classes and programming. The school went through a thoughtful and deliberate decision-making process in order to add this requirement for all students.

Head of School A spoke about the timing for innovation and how her role as head of school was to support appropriate risks to improve the school. She spoke about constantly removing barriers for the faculty and staff to thrive and also understanding when the timing might be ideal for significant school-wide changes. In order to promote innovation, she frequently spoke with people within the community about new ideas. She shared, “I have this style of throwing a lot of balls up in the air and hoping there’s people out there who are like, ‘Oh, this is a nice ball, I’ll take this one.’” She often highlighted particular innovative ideas, suggested readings, and mentioned people to speak to, so that the ideas could move quicker to implementation. “I support this, move it forward” was her way of moving innovation forward so that community members knew the ideas had value. This approach often reduced the time needed for support across the community. She stated “I was coached early on by one of my former heads of school never to miss an opportunity.” Her role was to help prioritize initiatives and understand the timing for implementation. She learned “timing is everything; prioritizing is key.” In recognizing the importance of timing for innovation, the head shared that she must have an “open mind” to innovation and believe “it can happen anywhere.” She has “done a better job of educating all our potential innovators about when change can take place.” Despite the priority
of timing for innovation, the head expressed the need to also take risks regardless of timing. She stressed that “you have to develop a kind of not caring about what the other guy is doing.” She shared that over time the school community became used to her leadership style and taking risks became easier. For example, the school made the decision to no longer offer Advanced Placement courses because the curriculum restricted the faculty’s ability to offer more innovative units within the courses. Although students can still take AP tests to demonstrate their competencies in particular subjects, the change in policy allows greater innovation in the classroom.

Although timing and taking risks is important to move innovation forward, Head of School A shared that a pivotal part of her role was to hire quality faculty and staff who supported constant innovation and were willing to work as collaborative members of the community. She made a direct connection between hiring high quality talent in her schools and the ability for the school to be innovative. She wanted to hire “people who really have a growth mindset,” “people hungry for change not just for change’s sake,” and people who add to the “community you’re trying to build.” For example, the head identified writing as a central priority for the coming year. Although she identified the area of study, she delegated the review process to one of the academic administrators who had a “fantastic background in this area.” In addition to delegating to particular faculty and staff members, the head often paired two professionals together to create a richer learning experience and ensure diverse perspectives. She expressed that innovation “is nearly always about some kind of teamwork.” Committees were formed at the school through purposeful decision-making to reflect both seniority and/or experience as well as fresh perspectives. She mentioned, “Usually there is a couple of people who are completely voted in random, and then others who get a little tap on the shoulder.” The school designed a thorough
hiring process so that hiring committee members were able to provide feedback on candidates and be deeply involved with the vetting of candidates. This hiring process modeled the way faculty and staff would be working together once the candidates became a part of the school. Bringing in diverse professionals became a central priority to the school which according to the head, “opens up the channels to innovation.” These collaborative and diverse relationships eliminated some of the obstacles with seniority often seen in schools by bringing together more diverse people, ideas, and practices. The head mentioned, “I’ve worked with a lot of people who are right there with me and challenged me to come up with great ideas.”

**Head of School B.** The key ideas of Head of School B are presented below.

Table 4

*Key Ideas from Head of School B*

| Innovation directly connects to the enrollment market and financial stability at the school. |
| Delegating authority and innovative programs to others at the school builds a culture of innovation. |

Head of School B discussed a broader view of the head’s role with innovation. He stressed the connection between innovation, the enrollment market, and financial stability. The head described his role was “to ensure that we are both accomplishing the mission, and we are doing it in a way that is ethical and financially sustainable.” Head of School B shared details of many of his innovative ideas as part of his interview process for the head of school position. He was clear to the Board about how innovation would increase enrollment and provide financial stability. This discussion increased buy-in from internal and external stakeholders and allowed him to lead innovation at his school. He summarized innovation as “Innovation is creatively leveraging our assets to maximize mission accomplishment and financial sustainability. That’s
the algebra. Every single decision, all the time.” He viewed his role as essential to the instructional program and essential to fostering and supporting innovation at his school. He saw innovation across every department. He mentioned, “If I can’t make a compelling argument for the direction we’re moving in that engages people and inspires them, if that doesn’t lead to having the resources to do the job, and then if I can’t help people have the skills to execute it, then nothing is going to happen.”

Although Head of School B discussed his central role in leading innovation, he also prioritized how important delegating to others was to building an innovative culture within the school. He mentioned, “I believe the only way good change happens if we can hand it off as quickly as possible to the people doing the work.” When the head first arrived, he had “to push pretty hard and be pretty directive” to foster and support innovation. He shared that he no longer needs to do this because of the culture that has been built. The head typically provided the “goals and steps, but it’s their job to execute” the work. He often brought together diverse teams of administrators, faculty, and staff to focus on innovative projects. He looked “for people that put the team ahead of themselves, because innovators who have ego tied up in innovation isolate themselves from other people and things ultimately fail.” He viewed his job was “to engage them in the direction so that they feel empowered and excited about that future.” For example, the school invested in the construction of a center focused on design thinking across the school. The center brought together innovative curriculum, additional staff, and a focus on interdisciplinary teaching and learning in a state-of-the-art classroom space. The addition of the center and curriculum offerings “paid off” according to the head of school by offerings innovative offerings, encouraging collaboration, and brought a much-needed redesign of underused space. The head also saw a need to invest in future leaders as a way to preserve the
culture of innovation: “We have been very intentional in sending that next wave of leaders to leadership development programs.” According to the head, he has already seen success from this model.

**The Key Ideas from Head of School C.** The key ideas from Head of School C are presented below.

Table 5

*Key Ideas from Head of School C*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Head of School is in a position to maximize innovative opportunities at the school and support autonomy among her faculty and staff.</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Head of School prioritizes time for listening to the faculty, staff, students, and others at the school which often supports innovative ideas.</td>
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Head of School C understands how to maximize innovative opportunities in all areas of the school. She modeled this process to her faculty and staff. “I’d like to maximize everybody’s opportunity to understand factors in play prior to a decision being made.” To her, innovations are “the great kind of programs that develop out of really good grassroots enthusiasm of a teacher or a leader or a very acute sense of what the school and what the students need.” As an independent school without strict federal curriculum requirements, she shared that “we have the autonomy to innovate.” Her role is to ask questions, to challenge assumptions, and make sure innovation occurs in all areas of the school. She shared that her job is to ask “What really has incredible potential here, and how do we maximize it?” By building in time for meetings with a variety of different school staff, she has had the opportunity to constantly ask these questions.

Head of School C prioritizes time for listening to the faculty, staff, students, and others at the school. This approach allows others to share innovative ideas and allows the head to ask
questions, challenge assumptions, and encourage innovative practices. She mentioned, “Those weekly meetings aim, as well as summer work and retreats, to just develop a mainframe for thinking what is the school we’re trying to be and kind of categorically, how can we think the same way and respond equitably to the issues that are uniquely in front of us.” She values both group and individual conversations. She said heads must “honor any faculty member who’s got an idea, whether it just happened in the middle of the night, a couple of hours before we’re talking, or it’s something that’s more developed and been growing over time. Honor the initiative and the energy with a respectful amount of attention and, kind of, let’s play with this a bit.” Her role as head is to look at “competing issues” and see if “the resources are possible.” Although individuals often offer innovative ideas, she mentioned “The most effective thing you can do is find people in the faculty and staff who are philosophically aligned, who are enthusiastic and change agents in their own right, and make them leaders on a question.” She expressed that “This has been a place where faculty innovation and leadership of new initiatives has been welcomed.” She shared that she came into this culture at the school and works diligently to continue to embrace it in her role as head. For example, the school designed an innovative alternative education program to serve students with hands-on education as a way to increase student engagement in school. According to the Head of School, this program has been celebrated at the school for its success for a long time.

**Cross-cutting themes from across the Heads of Schools in Response to Research**

**Question 1.** How do heads of independent schools think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation in the schools?

A thematic analysis of the interviews from across the three Heads of Schools resulted in the identification of four common themes, as presented in Table 6 and discussed below.
Table 6

Cross-cutting Themes in Response to Research Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heads of school set, execute, and communicate the vision for their schools to constantly improve and better serve students.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Heads of school deeply understand the culture of their schools and work diligently to promote a culture supportive of continual change.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heads of school reduce or eliminate barriers which might impact innovation in order to promote innovation at multiple levels of the schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heads of school model lifelong learning and are actively involved in the academic programs at their schools.</td>
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**Heads of school set, execute, and communicate the vision for their schools to constantly improve and better serve students.**  Head of School A shared that her role is to be “responsible for the overall vision of the school” which she describes as a “progressive school.” She described the school as “one that didn’t seem stuck in traditions that would prevent it from growing.” Her role is to “set the tone for the institution.” Head of School C stresses that improving the school includes every part of the student experience. The academic program is only one part of the student experience. She shared,

> We also really care about their own adolescent development and who they are as young people, and how to provide that kind of safe, rich space for them to grow, and that is as important to me as anything in the so-called academic program.

Head of School A discussed innovation as an “evolution”; she says “it’s a very important tenet of progressive education that things can always get better.” Her role is to have “an open mind” and communicate that innovation is a significant part of the mission of the school.

Similar to Head of School A, Head of School B shared that his role is to set the direction of the school. Prior to his hiring, Head of School B had a very specific vision for the school
which he shared with the Board and the community. He remembered what he shared during his interview process which was “What I believed the school needed was a fundamental assessment of its assets and how those could be leveraged more effectively to accomplish the mission and attract students.” He was clear with the community what priorities were important for the school to be successful which included new academic approaches such as blended learning and design-thinking. He remembered saying “Don’t hire me if you don’t think I’m a good match for what you need.” The Board hired him and he set the vision for the school accordingly when he became the new Head of School. He communicated the vision and moved forward with implementation. His approach was to “provide clear direction, but delegate the execution to the school leaders.” Since he communicated the vision as part of his hiring process, he had broad support from his Board.

Head of School C identified her role as the leader of the school is to promote the mission of the school while “moving the school forward.” She shared how strategic planning has helped set the direction of the school. Her role is to carry out the goals defined in the strategic plan while balancing other priorities. For example, she had to prioritize the major recommendations from a recent accreditation report very early in her tenure. These recommendations became part of her vision while also moving ahead with a variety of innovative programs. For example, she led a revision of the faculty evaluation program in order to both address the accreditation recommendations as well as ensure high-quality teaching across the school. She shared that independent schools have the “autonomy to innovate.” Her role is to ask questions like “What really has incredible potential here, and how do we maximize it? How do we get more mileage out of this?” These questions guide much of her vision as the head of the school.
Heads of school deeply understand the culture of their schools and work diligently to promote a culture supportive of continual change. Each head of school discussed the importance of both understanding and promoting the culture of the school. Head of School mentioned how drawn she was to the school because “it was one that didn’t seem stuck in traditions that would prevent it from growing.” She described her role as an instructional leader as one that requires “high-level collaboration, coaching, iterative processes.” She described her school as one which has accepted innovation as a significant part of what they do stating “we are constantly revisiting and potentially reinventing processes in order to make them clear to the group involved in the work we’re doing.” The culture of continual change has always been part of the school, so the head of school inherited and learned about the culture when she came to the school. She shared that “she works with a lot of people who are right there with me and challenged me to come up with great ideas.” Initially, all of the new ideas “scared the heck out of her” when she first started. She described her role as promoting continual change but also prioritizing what is most important. She values an “open mind, hearing ideas, and deep collaboration” as essential parts of her job to promote the culture at her school.

Head of School B described his primary responsibility is to support the mission and culture of his school. He shared “ensuring that our culture and environment are safe” are his most important responsibilities. He described himself as “forward-looking, interested in innovation, interested in ensuring that we’re keeping the promises we make to our families.” He supports continual change through “handing it off as quickly as possible to the people doing the work.” He described his job is “to engage them [employees] in the direction so they feel empowered and excited about the future.” Head of School B offered advice to other heads about being a part of the culture, “You want to make sure whatever you’re doing matches how you feel
and think about education, so when you talk about it, people feel it. You are a champion for it, you love it.”

Head of School C sees her role as a “safeguard of mission and culture.” She described the school as “this has been a place where faculty innovation and leadership of new initiatives have been welcomed.” She shared that much of how she preserves the culture of the school is through listening and honoring the ideas of the faculty and staff. She asked questions. She provided resources. Head of School C discussed how she supports the culture of continual change by supporting the staff and faculty, “I think the most effective thing you can do is find people in the faculty and staff who are philosophically aligned, who are enthusiastic and change agents in their own right, and make them leaders on a question.” She created opportunities for “professional dialogue” to promote innovative ideas as part of the culture of the school.

*Heads of school reduce or eliminate barriers which might impact innovation in order to promote innovation at multiple levels of the schools.* Communication about decision-making is often a barrier to successful innovation. The heads of school discussed how they are transparent about decision making. Head of School A described a “hierarchical and a matrix model” which is used at her school to examine and communicate decisions. This model allows faculty and staff to understand both what is “happening right now” and what the future will look like. Head of School B described how important his messaging is to promote transparency within his school,

Once you’ve decided what you think and you have got a sense of direction, you are teaching. You are teaching, you are teaching, you are getting better at it, you are taking every opportunity to hone your message, to shrink it down, to get better at talking about it.
Head of School C discussed her role in decision-making at her school by saying “I’d like to maximize everybody’s opportunity to understand factors in play prior to a decision being made.” She explained that everyone needs to “understand that there was a process, and that there’s an opportunity to participate.” Effective communication about decision-making is linked to the success of innovation at each of the three schools.

Building support across the school can often be challenging to implement innovative ideas. Head of School A described that her role is to prioritize innovative ideas at her school and “move ideas forward” with her support. She described that innovative ideas move faster through the school if she endorses the changes. Head of School B explained that the power shifted at his school as a result of new leadership team focused on innovation. He said “giving them the lead on that was a massive accelerator for us. It really empowered them because they had each for support.” Head of School B described how he constantly checks in with the team and other faculty and staff to make sure they “are not stuck” and provide support when needed. He praised their work frequently in order to help build support for their ideas. Head of School C discussed a new initiative she hopes will encourage more support for innovation across the school, which is to provide faculty and staff funding for innovative project work during the summer. This approach would build support for innovation by encouraging faculty and staff to work together on innovative projects. Each one of the heads of school discussed how their role was to help build support for innovative ideas across their schools.

Innovative ideas can require a variety of staff and faculty across the school, so heads of school often pair or group employees together to focus on innovative work. Head of School A described her decision to send a pair of faculty members to a conference about scheduling. She described that she paired an “obvious choice” with experience in scheduling with someone “less
obvious” who is “an innovator—a big thinker.” She explained how successful the pair have been in leading the scheduling work at the school which has been a very innovative process. At School A, one of the most significant innovative programs is their academic schedule which allows students to take courses for five weeks. Students are able to take more classes as a result of the module schedule, and faculty members are able to offer increased interdisciplinary courses as a result of the schedule. Students only take three academic courses during each five-week session. Head of School A described how partnering small groups of faculty and staff is an essential part of their innovative work at the school. This often happens because of the academic schedule. Through a combination of “appointing and electing a group,” the staff are “tasked with educating themselves about the issue” then “tasked with educating us.” She explained that “innovation is nearly always about some kind of teamwork. An openness to partnering with people they wouldn’t usually partner with.” Head of School B set up a leadership team specifically focused on innovation. He described how essential it is to partner faculty and staff because “change is across the traditional organization.” Head of School C described how the majority of their innovative work is done with groups of faculty and staff rather than individuals. Partnering on initiatives is a significant part of their school culture and is actually required for a number of academic programs.

*Heads of school model lifelong learning and are actively involved in the academic programs at their schools.* Each head of school discussed how important it is to remain open to new ideas and constantly be learning about new best practices. Head of School A described that innovation fits in “everywhere, everywhere” in the school. She described that “having an open mind is number one. Kind of believing it can happen anywhere, number two.” She referenced a variety of authors that she has learned from through thoughtful reading and reflect on their work
as a school. Head of School B discussed a variety of innovative practices regarding design thinking, leadership development, and related ideas. He referenced a variety of authors and points to many resources he has used to help inform his thinking and planning at the school. Head of School C constantly reflected on her time as a teacher and goes back to these experiences to promote lifelong learning with her staff. She shared how challenging a teacher’s role is within schools and often researched ways to improve the experience of the teachers at the school. She stressed the need for professional development funding for all staff and was vocal about supporting the needs of the adults along with the needs of the students.

Each head of school is involved in the academic programs of their schools. Head of School A discussed her involvement in curriculum development, “I would take a stronger interest in a new course development, mainly because it would often need to be a bit more supported in the school.” A significant part of her role, Head of School A said “Ultimately, for the board, they see me as responsible for the curriculum and academic program, and I know that.” Head of School B recognized the importance of balancing traditional department head structures with new committees focused on innovative ideas. His approach was to increase the number of faculty focused on parts of the academic program in order to support both continued quality instruction and new programming. Each member of the committee focused on innovation is also in charge of a specific innovative program at the school. For example, one of the administrators is in charge of implementing the blended learning program. The blended learning program offers students more individualized programming and flexibility with time within a traditional classroom. In contrast, Head of School C described how active she was in the hiring of new faculty, which she sees as pivotal to her role as head to support the academic program. She looks for faculty who teach lessons with “the sense of lesson design and the
degree to which it’s designed to invite student inquiry and to allow for teachable directions that may not be part of the script.” She wants to see “interdisciplinary experience, rigorous project-based management” and an ability to integrate technology into lessons seamlessly. Despite each head’s approach to the academic program is slightly different, it is clear each head is actively involved in curriculum decisions and supporting the faculty.

**Differences across the Heads of School.** How do heads of independent schools think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation in the schools?

From a careful analysis of the interviews across the three Heads of Schools, two major differences were identified.

Table 7

* Differences across the Heads of School

<table>
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<th>Differences across the Heads of School</th>
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<tr>
<td>Although some heads of school believe their role is to lead school-wide innovative programs, others encourage faculty and staff to lead this work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Although some heads of school put students at the center of their innovations, other heads of school focused on the faculty and staff.</td>
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Although some heads of school believe their role is to lead school-wide innovative programs, others encourage faculty and staff to lead this work. Head of School B discussed that in his first three years he had to “light a fire” for innovation and initially led much of the work. He had to “push pretty hard and be pretty directive.” Head of School C discussed how her role is to empower faculty and staff and support their innovative efforts. She shared that the school was a very innovative school prior to her role as head. She mentioned “This has been a place where faculty innovation and leadership of new initiatives has been welcomed.” Head of School C stressed that she “honor[s] any faculty member who’s got an idea.” Similarly, Head of School A
sees her role is to partner and group faculty and staff members to support innovation rather than to lead the school-wide innovative programs. She frequently empowers faculty and administrators to lead the innovative work. Although she “loves new ideas,” she explained that her faculty and administrators are the ones who often are able to both plan and execute innovation across the school.

Although some heads of school put students at the center of their innovations, other heads of school focused on the faculty and staff. Head of School A discussed how students are essential to their innovation. She explained, “all in the interests of the students, making sure we have a fantastic school for kids, a place that lives up to our mission and vision as a progressive school.” She shared how the innovation at the school extends beyond the walls of the classrooms and includes all aspects of the student experience. The school is “student-centric” and does not have strict rules according to Head of School A. In contrast, Head of School C stressed that faculty and staff lead innovation. She said, “I think the most effective thing you can do is find people in faculty and staff who are philosophically aligned, who are enthusiastic and change-agents in their own right.” Head of School B agreed and has spent much of his time creating new teams of faculty and staff to lead innovative work at the school. He stressed how much time and resources were spent on developing leaders across the faculty to lead this work. Although each head of school discussed how students benefit from the innovative programs, the role of students, faculty, and staff varies on each campus.
Research Question #2: What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources support innovation in schools, as presented by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

The second research question is presented in three parts. The first part is the explanation of leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources to support innovation by **heads of independent schools** across the three schools. The second part is the explanation by the **administrators** across the three schools. The third part is the explanation by the **faculty** across the three schools. Within each different group of school staff, cross-cutting and divergent themes are presented.

**Cross-cutting Head of School themes in response to Research Question 2.** What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources support innovation in schools, as presented perceived by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

From a careful analysis of the interviews across the three Heads of Schools, four common themes were identified, as presented in Table 8 and discussed below.

**Table 8**

*Cross-cutting Head of School Themes in Response to Research Question 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovative schools value diversity with personnel, philosophies, and experiences.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innovative schools value collaboration and prioritize interdisciplinary learning experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovative schools embrace unstructured time to foster new ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative schools support and promote autonomy for faculty and staff and provide appropriate direction when needed.</td>
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</table>

**Innovative schools value diversity with personnel, philosophies, and experiences.** Each one of the schools embraced diversity across all levels of the school. Many of the participants at
each school correlated their diversity with innovative ideas. They search out different perspectives and try to group individuals together who see the world very differently. Head of School A and Head of School C both discussed how diversity is built into their hiring practices and they are constantly looking for adults who can bring diverse perspectives into their schools. Head of School B weighed in that committee selection at his school is based on who can bring in diverse perspectives rather than their “position at the school.” He shared these diverse perspectives directly relate to the scale of innovation of the group. Head of School A said, “The more diverse a group of people we work with, the more we are all challenged in ways, I think, that replicates what the kids go through.” Each one of the heads of school discussed how diverse people often support and foster innovation at their schools.

The heads of school discussed how they often pair diverse faculty and staff together to promote new ways of thinking. They often see better ideas generated from a diverse group of individuals rather faculty who frequently have similar philosophies. Head of School A explained that people at her school need “an openness to partnering with people they wouldn’t usually partner with.” Head of School A shared that she sees a direct correlation between hiring diverse faculty and staff and their ability to bring innovation to the school. This philosophy extends into the faculty and staff as a whole because the head of school constantly seeks people with different viewpoints and experiences to serve on committees. Head of School B stressed the need to recruit diverse faculty and staff in order to support innovation at the school. He said, “If you don't have the talent you need internally, then you have to go out and hire it.” Head of School C voiced that much of the innovation at her school can be traced to particular people within the institution. She stressed that much of her time is spent understanding the faculty and staff she
works with and understanding how she can help them meet their goals at the school. This individual approach to support faculty and staff recognizes their diverse strengths.

*Innovative schools value collaboration and prioritize interdisciplinary learning* experiences. The Head of School A shared her leadership style is collaborative and she constantly seeks ways for faculty and staff to collaborate and lead projects. She used this model as the school examines the daily schedule. Head of School A emphasized that she uses “a combination of appointing and electing a group” on school initiatives. A popular approach used at the school is for groups to solicit “feedback or input” which are viewed as two separate ways to inform committee work at the school. The faculty often vote on school initiatives and each group uses a “wide narrow” approach to constantly examine changes with the larger community and the smaller community. One administrator confirmed the “wide narrow” approach as one structure that works well to support innovation, “We tried to employ a committee structure where the committee does some work, brings it back to the full faculty, back to small group.”

The faculty and staff collaborate frequently.

The heads at School B and C prioritize collaboration among the school community and promote interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Head of School C discussed how schools should “find people in faculty and staff who are philosophically aligned, who are enthusiastic and change-agents in their own right, and make them leaders on a question.” School C actually requires each faculty member to pair with another faculty member to teach a class in the experiential learning block at the end of the school year. This interdisciplinary approach often produces very innovative courses according to the Head of School. Head of School A takes a different approach forming committees at her school: “Usually there’s some, a couple of people who are completely voted in random, and then others that get a little tap on the shoulder. It’s a
carefully thought-through way of putting the committee together. Both approaches value collaboration in order to come up with innovative ideas and actually implement them across the school. Head of School A shared that “really getting that innovation is nearly always about some kind of teamwork” is key to their success. Head of School B said that he is very strategic on how he approaches collaboration, “I look for people who put the team ahead of themselves because innovators who have ego tied up in innovation isolate themselves from other people and things ultimately fail.” Each school recognizes the value of collaboration and interdisciplinary teaching and takes important steps to promote these experiences to foster and support innovation.

**Innovative schools embrace unstructured time to foster new ideas.** A common theme expressed during the focus groups was that innovation cannot always be linked to specific structures or processes at the school. As independent schools, each school has parts of their schedule which are less structured for faculty and students. This time is often a time when innovative ideas are shared. At School C, they were especially interested in studying how time connects to both student learning and innovation. They are undergoing a two-year process to examine time at the school and how it can be used differently to accelerate learning and provide more choices for students outside of the classroom. The head of school shared that this committee is not about the daily schedule but instead focuses on all aspects of time for students and faculty. The head of school recognizes this committee will redefine the way time is allotted at the school which could revolutionize the way the school educates students. There is hope that this study will continue to deepen their innovative practices at the school by extending student learning to all hours of the day, so students can have better flexibility to take advantage of engaging with the community, traveling, and other unique student experiences.
The Head of School A sees their daily schedule as central to their ability to be innovative as a school. School A has had a block schedule in place for more than 30 years which provides them additional time with students to go in depth with particular subjects. Each module is five weeks long, and there are seven modules each year. Head of School A described how her faculty often attend scheduling workshops and have found out the school’s schedule is frequently used as an exemplar. The school has a longer lunch period and additional time before classes begin in the morning. During these blocks, faculty are often seen interacting with one another on a new idea and supporting students. The scheduled blocks are just as important as the unscheduled time. The Head of School shared the value of the current schedule, “the whole mod system means that especially for the single mod electives, that you're constantly thinking, is this the best way to teach, you know, name the subject? What are the new research pieces? What have kids started to tell me about things that I've got to include?” For School A, the daily schedule provides flexibility during the academic periods and flexibility for students and adults to work together outside of the academic periods.

The Head of School C sees their experiential learning block as a significant part of their innovation as a school. Students are able to take mini-courses during a three-week block at the end of the school year. Some of the courses are very academic while others help students learn a new hobby or practice a particular skill. The time period for this experiential learning block is less structured than the other parts of the school year so teachers and students have more time to experiment. Head of School C recognized this program had significant potential when she first arrived at the school. Her role was “to maximize it” and strengthen the program to support the mission of the school. The students take four hands-on or project-based classes during this time period. The head of school mentioned there were 74 to 75 classes offered this year. The classes
are small, and only students in grades nine through eleven participate given senior activities and graduation. The alternative schedule provides a way for students and faculty members to foster new ideas.

_Innovative schools support and promote autonomy for faculty and staff and provide appropriate direction when needed._ Independent schools often have more freedom regarding curriculum requirements. Each one of the schools discusses how important autonomy is to foster and support innovation at their schools. The heads of schools share similar comments about their roles to support their faculty to try new initiatives. Head of School C said, “I really think [innovation] is the tremendous opportunity or tremendous differentiator for an independent school. We have the autonomy to innovate.” According to Head of School A,

Fortunately, the very nature of being an independent school means we are independent from so many of those external measures. I mean, I think it's all about setting the value really, and if the value is set high for developing change and improving things for kids in every arena, not just the disciplines but in their lives, and allowing the world from the outside to come in.

Across each of the three groups at each school, classroom autonomy was seen as essential to foster and support innovation. Head of School A said, “We want to hire people who really have a, to use a buzzword, a growth mindset, and we have found in fact that the people whom we end up needing to counsel out, don't have a growth mindset.” Faculty who were motivated by change were often the most successful in these three schools because they were constantly trying out new things in their classrooms and across the school community.

Each head of school shared how essential it is to listen to the faculty and staff and let them know how much new ideas are needed and appreciated. Head of School A said that an
important part of innovation at her school is “having an open mind is number one. Kind of believing it can happen anywhere, number two.” By listening to new ideas and being open to new ways to approach challenges, Head of School A fosters and supports innovation at her school. Head of School C said that providing plenty of time in her schedule to meet with faculty and staff is key to innovation at her school. She said the community must know that they can speak with the head of school and be heard regardless of their role at the school. Head of School B agreed with listening as a major priority. He often engages with faculty and staff outside of his office about new ideas where faculty and staff might be feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts.

In addition to listening and encouraging new ideas, heads of school also provide appropriate direction for new ideas to become implemented. The heads of school each stressed the priority of timing of new ideas; they often have the responsibility to decide when an idea can be implemented. Head of School A said, “I've learned over the years that timing is everything, prioritizing is key.” Head of School C shared how she balances listening and providing appropriate direction with new ideas at her school, “Honor the initiative and the energy with a respectful amount of attention and, kind of, let's play with this a bit. How would that work and ask the critical questions that can move the concept a little further along.” Head of School B stressed that he often set the direction but would encourage his faculty and staff to determine the details, which was his way of providing support and encouraging new ideas. He mentioned, “You have to be able to work across boundaries and bring other people along.” Each head of school described this process as quite a balancing act but essential to do to foster and support innovation at their schools.
Divergent Head of School Themes in Response to Research Question 2. What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources support innovation in schools, as presented perceived by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

From a careful analysis of the interviews across the three Heads of Schools, one divergent theme was identified, as presented in Table 9 and presented below.

Table 9

Divergent Head of School Themes in Response to Research Question 2

| The best approach to sustain innovation varied based on the school context and organizational structure. |

The best approach to sustain innovation varied based on the school context and organizational structure. Each school used different strategies, structures, and resources to sustain innovative efforts. At School B, the Head of School worked closely with the Board of Trustees to help fund the innovative work at the school. The Head of School actually borrowed money from the endowment to fund early innovative projects. The Head described that “innovation capital” was very important to make meaningful change across the school. Due to careful managing of the operating budget, he was able to pay back the endowment for the initial funding. This early investment potentially caused increases in enrollment, momentum with the faculty and staff, and needed programming for the students. Head of School B described his role as one who frequently has to leverage assets in order to support innovation at the school. He pointed out that “Leveraging assets can be small things, but it could be big things.” He sees his role as central to finding resources to sustain innovation.

At School A, despite the school being able to implement a variety of innovative programs over the last few years, there is concern about the tipping point at the school to fund innovation.
in the future. The Head of School A discussed that many of the innovative projects have been able to fit into the existing operating budget, but often the fiscal resources are not clear until after the budgeting process is complete. Although they are able to make it work through frequent communication between the Head of School and Chief Financial Officer, they recognize the model needs improvement. The faculty discussed innovative ideas which were “cost neutral” were more likely to be successful. There was consensus during the administrator focus group that fiscal planning for future innovation needed improvement.

At School C, the Head of School is contemplating several new programs to sustain innovative programs at the school which include setting aside funding for teachers to work together during the summer on innovative ideas. She is also making sure the innovative programs are directly connected to the advancement efforts at the school, so that funding is not a barrier in the future to implement the ideas. Head of School C said “I think I have to be the leader on the question, but there's got to be heavy participation from, in this case, the CFO, the person in charge of finances. We have a CFO who's the appropriate balance between ‘no can do’ and ‘yes, absolutely, I want to help you find that money.’” She sees her role as vital to find appropriate resources to fund innovation over time. She pointed out though that resource requests must be balanced, “At the same time, because an administrator is always balancing competing interests or recognizing competing issues, is making sure that what we're talking about is mission-appropriate or feasible, that the resources are possible.” Her role is to help others understand this balance and find creative ways to provide the appropriate resources.

**Cross-cutting Administrator Themes in Response to Research Question 2.** What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources support innovation in schools, as presented perceived by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?
From a careful analysis of the three administrator focus groups across three schools, two cross-cutting themes were identified, as presented in Table 10 and discussed below.

**Table 10**

*Cross-cutting Administrator Themes in Response to Research Question 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing a group responsible for innovation programs helps to sustain innovative practices at the schools.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative schools engage in the community and bring real-world learning and professionals into their classrooms.</td>
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*Developing a group responsible for innovative programs helps to sustain innovative practices at schools.* Each school had a group responsible for brainstorming, vetting, implementing, and reflecting on innovative school-wide projects which was essential according to the administrators at each school. Although each school had a group responsible for this work, the structure of each group varied. At School B, this group’s sole purpose is to foster and support innovation at the school. The group is responsible for four innovative projects at the school and is also the group charged with supporting other innovative ideas across the campus. One administrator described the group as “more strategic and long-term” than the other committees. School B has other committees responsible for day-to-day operations and other important tasks which allows the innovation group to focus on new initiatives. One administrator shared that the groups work together closely, so if a faculty member communicates to one committee and “if it's not directed to the right person, people will re-direct.” The innovation group is well-regarded by the rest of the community. One administrator described it this way, “To have a group that's charged with thinking about innovation, it's a pretty powerful statement, but it's also a pretty awesome responsibility to be part of that group.”
Although School A does not have a leadership group focused only on innovation, the school uses a committee structure to focus on particular innovative projects. For example, there is a committee with diverse representation studying the school schedule which is one of the significant structures at the school linked to innovation. Through a process of individual selection and faculty and staff election, this committee was formed to study this innovative project. One administrator described the committee structure as essential because “With a collaboration also can come competence in a redesign and confidence in breaking things apart because you're not solo. I think the collaborative approach, the listening, is a really important part of coming up with good ideas.” According to another administrator, “There are a lot of formal groups that meet that get entrusted to do some thinking and brainstorming. A lot of committees, we want our faculty and staff to be on committees. We love committees.”

School C uses a similar committee structure as School A to support innovation at the school. Committees are formed based on particular innovative initiatives to brainstorm, execute, and monitor the programming. These specific committees work closely with the leadership team to sustain the innovative practices. The leadership team also acts as a group to vet new ideas and seek out resources when needed.

Innovative schools engage in the community and bring real-world learning and professionals into their classrooms. The administrators at each school shared how important it is for students to interact with the wider community outside of the classroom. The administrators see this approach as essential to the student experience and another innovative approach to engage students with additional learning resources. At School B, this engagement occurs through blended learning. One administrator shared, “Some of our students do distance learning with master teachers who are located out of state. Those are hourly lessons. I think that's really
shifted our performing arts program pretty dramatically in a pretty short time, brought in some really high achieving and highly motivated musicians.” Through blended learning, students are able to access college professors and practicing musicians despite the rural location of the school. The school is undergoing a study of how they use time on the campus, which will potentially increase the ways students can interact with professionals outside of the classroom.

One administrator described their reasoning,

I would add to that part of the reasoning is to be able to interact with the external world more. Sometimes boarding schools are restricting. They can't get out and interact with the community. We have students that want to do internships, more time ski racing, more time playing the piano at the symphony.

Through being open to blending learning opportunities and different ways to use time in a student’s day, the school hopes to increase real-world learning and expose students to more professionals in the community.

At School A, the administrators shared that their schedule already allows students to interact with people outside the school and for others to actually come in and teach courses because their modules are shorter than most schools. One administrator shared that “We can offer courses that others can’t offer. We offer almost 340 courses.” He shared a prestigious college wants to work with them to develop a high school curriculum on global health as a result of the schedule allowing this work to happen.

The administrators at School C shared that engaging with the community is a significant part of what they do in the classroom. Their experiential learning block at the end of the school year allows additional opportunities for students to do real-world learning through shorter hands-on experiences. The administrators shared their campus is used constantly by other groups and
community members which facilitates students getting more authentic, real-world experiences especially in the performing arts. The school’s recent focus on the environment will also allow additional experiences for students to engage with professionals in the community through outdoor experiences.

**Divergent Administrator Themes in Response to Research Question 2.** What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources support innovation in schools, as presented perceived by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

From a careful analysis of the three administrator focus groups across three schools, one divergent theme was identified, as presented in Table 11 and discussed below.

Table 11

*Divergent Administrator Themes in Response to Research Question 2*

| Administrators shared alternative perspectives on how fostering and supporting innovation is part of their roles at the schools. |

Administrators shared alternative perspectives on how fostering and supporting innovation is part of their roles at the schools. The administrators at each one of the schools shared their understandings of how they foster and support innovation at their schools. Despite the administrators each working at an innovative school, they had alternative views on their roles to encourage innovation. At School B, the administrators expressed that they understand that foster and supporting innovation is a significant part of their roles. The Head of School B is a champion for innovation and is transforming the school into a place where innovation thrives. As a result, many of the members of the members of the administrative team are leading an innovative initiative as part of their roles. They are also serving on a leadership team tasked with innovative program development. One administrator from the school mentioned “Yeah. I think
there's an expectation. I think that [the head] has probably done a pretty good job of knowing that the people that he's put in to some positions are wanting to be innovative.”

In contrast, administrators at Schools A and C see their roles a bit differently. An administrator at School A said, I don't feel like I was hired as a manager of the status quo, that if that's what I was doing, I would be falling short. No one's told me that. It's what drew me to the school.” The other administrators agreed. Innovation is part of the school’s culture and is integrated into each part of their work. The responsibility to foster and support innovation are not overt but instead they are subtle. The administrators from School C agreed sharing that innovation is part of their history as a school, so it is just a part of what they do. They are not to support particular innovative practices. They shared their focus is on what is best for students and sometimes that is a new practice or a refinement of an old practice.

Cross-cutting Faculty Themes in Response to Research Question 2. What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources support innovation in schools, as presented perceived by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

From a careful analysis of the three faculty focus groups across three schools, three cross-cutting themes were identified, as presented in Table 12 and presented below.

Table 12

Cross-cutting Faculty Themes in Response to Research Question 2

| Faculty, administrators, and the head of school need to be open to new ideas and constantly seek improvements in order to improve the student experience. |
| Engaging with the head of school early in the planning process is key to the success of innovation at schools. |
| Clear and transparent decision-making processes support innovation and ensure the successful implementation of new programs. |
Faculty, administrators, and the head of school need to be open to new ideas and constantly seek improvements in order to improve the student experience. Each faculty focus group communicated how open their school communities are to new ideas to improve the student experience. The faculty stressed that each layer of the organization supported new ideas which was essential for innovation to occur across the schools. These layers included faculty colleagues, individual departments, administrators, and the head of school.

At School B, one faculty member mentioned “they are really open to new things” when describing the administrators and head of school. Another faculty member agreed and shared how strong the support is, “the support you get from everybody here; they’re going to find a way to make this happen.” The faculty experience was similar at School A where one faculty member shared “Within each department you have teachers, instructors who are allowed to explore their interests and be very creative about those interests.” The faculty at School A stressed that much of the innovation they see happens in departments. They shared that the innovation is always connected to how students are learning (both during the traditional day and outside of the day). As one faculty member put it, “I think this is a place where you could experiment if you wanted to with different ways of teaching.” One suggested that the open block in the morning is one structure that supports this openness because all faculty and students are free during that time. The faculty at School C expressed that their leaders and colleagues are very open to new ideas. They emphasized the importance of new ideas connected to better teaching and improved student engagement rather than just for “innovation sake.”

Engaging with the head of school early in the idea planning process is key to the success of innovation at schools. At each of the schools, the faculty members expressed how essential it is to communicate with the head of school regarding major innovative ideas at the
schools. Despite the heads of school having varying day-to-day responsibilities connected to the academic program, the faculty expressed that the heads of the school had the power to make essential decisions about school change including resource allocation. The head of school can often be a champion for a new idea and reduce barriers to implementation. The faculty at School A encouraged early communication with the head of school regarding major ideas. Several faculty members mentioned this strategy was necessary so they did not waste time investing in a project that would not be supported. The faculty at School B mentioned the head of school would often help hone an idea and offer encouraging thoughts. At School C, the faculty voiced that the head of school would ask tough questions which would help refine the idea. Each faculty member expressed that the head of school would be important to engage early as the ideas began to take shape.

Some of the faculty expressed that the head of school often held the power to support innovative ideas. For example, at School A one faculty member shared “Our voice is encouraged to be brought to the table, but I think that we get reminded quite frequently that ultimately the power rests with the head of the school.” Another faculty member agreed that ideas are often floated to the head before he spends much time pursuing the idea, “The process, to me, has to include a lot of communication with the head and a lot of buy-in from the head before it kind of becomes big enough or before I can 100% invest it it.” A few faculty members shared that they seek out administrative allies to help promote their ideas with the head in order to have a better likelihood of getting support. If the head is supportive, the ideas are able to be implemented pretty efficiently.

Since many innovative ideas take additional resources in time and money, the faculty shared that the head of schools are pivotal to engage early if the project is significant. At School
A, the faculty mentioned if the innovation is cost neutral than it has a much better likelihood of success. At Schools B and C, the faculty shared how essential the connection of the innovation to student learning was communicated. If this connection is clear and can be easily communicated in and out of the school community, the innovation has a better chance of being sustainable.

**Clear and transparent decision-making processes support innovation and ensure the successful implementation of new programs.** The faculty at each school discussed how essential it was to have clear decision-making processes in order to support innovation at the schools. Faculty need to know who to talk to about their innovative ideas and how the final decisions will be made on both small and large scale innovation. Although each decision-making process is different at the schools, the faculty emphasized how clarity of these systems led to successful implementation of innovative programs.

At School A, the school often uses the “wide narrow wide” approach which is their way of examining both the big picture impact of the change and the smaller details. The faculty often vote on school-wide initiatives through a very democratic process, but ultimately the faculty shared there are two ways to ensure the idea is implemented successful. A faculty member must have the support of the majority of the faculty or support from the head of school. If they have this support, the ideas are typically implemented. One faculty member mentioned “I would just say communication has to be very transparent. Like if there is only a 5% chance that what I’m trying to do is ever going to work, I’d really would like to know that at the beginning and I think it would really help.” The faculty members agreed there is more work to do to improve communication regarding decision-making at the school.
At School B, the faculty members expressed that the decision-making systems are more clear since there are several different committees with very clear responsibilities. Since there are common members across each of the teams, it is also very easy to communicate between one team and another. The addition of the innovation team has made this decision-making process much clearer since this group has both power and resources.

At School C, the leadership team with support from the head of school makes the majority of the decisions on school-wide changes. This system is clear to the other faculty members. The faculty members also shared that the administrators help them manage this decision-making system and often advocate for their needs when appropriate. The department heads also have decision-making power on curriculum aspects. The faculty were clear who they could speak to with new ideas. The faculty shared their autonomy in the classroom was respected, so they could experiment frequently.

Divergent Faculty Themes in Response to Research Question 2. What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources support innovation in schools, as presented perceived by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

From a careful analysis of the three faculty focus groups across three schools, two divergent themes were identified.

Table 13

Divergent Faculty Themes in Response to Research Question 2

| Although there was support for much of the innovation occurring at schools, there was also tension about how many changes were occurring at the same time. |
| There was disagreement about the definition of innovation and what programs were innovative based on the school context. |
Although there was support for much of the innovation occurring at schools, there was also tension about how many changes were occurring at the same time. At School C, the faculty spoke positively about the rate of changes happening at the school. The faculty shared that the changes are more incremental and based on consistent review and dialogue. In contrast, faculty members at School C shared that they are unsure which innovative programs are the most important and which ones will fade over the year. They shared that classroom innovation is very supported at the school but school-wide innovation can often be slow.

At School B, one faculty members described the rate of changes as “It’s like we’ve been driving a beat up bus, and pretty soon we’re going to be driving a brand new Ford 30 miles to the gallon.” One faculty member from School B reflected on innovation at the school in the future, “I think it’s going to be exponential, honestly.” Another said “I think there will be a lot of growing pains because it’s a lot of expectation.” One concern a faculty member expressed is that “people get confused and a little disenfranchised” if there are too many changes. At School B, the faculty stress the balance of new and old ideas and question how innovation at the school is measured. One faculty member mentioned “How do we know if the innovation is working?” Each school has different pacing for innovative programs, but several of the schools share tension across the faculty about the rate of change.

The faculty at School A expressed that they often see innovative programs disappear without much explanation. They shared frustration about how the same people are often asked to lead innovative projects and how it can be disappointing when projects are not supported after the faculty have spent so much time on the tasks. One faculty member shared details about how faculty are selected to lead innovative projects, “So people who can see value sometimes in hierarchy and in consolidated decision-making power, but who are also interested in
collaborative work, and I think those are the people who get tapped, because if I were the Head of School, these are the people I would tap. Right?” Although the faculty were supportive of the school-wide and classroom innovative projects, they mentioned tension about how innovative programs are retired and concern about the sustainability of the faculty champions.

There was disagreement about the definition of innovation and what programs were innovative based on the school context. Each faculty focus group struggled to come to a common understanding of innovation. Table 14 illustrates the variety of innovative programs described at the three schools. The faculty at School A expressed innovation at their school as new approaches happening both in individual classrooms and across the school. One faculty member pointed to the schedule as a central innovative project, “Well, one of the first things when you say that, I think we always point to the [schedule] as being kind of the frame of all other stuff and that gets into that in terms of creativity, risk taking, and innovation.” The faculty provided a range of examples of innovation at their school on various scales. They expressed that classroom level innovation was much easier to implement than all-school innovation. One faculty member described the community in this way, “This is a place that focuses on, that really wants to find joy in what we do and in the moment and that things should feel energized and connected and student-centered, project-based.” The other faculty members agreed that the student experiences drive their work rather than always trying innovative approaches.
Table 14

Innovative Programs Discussed during Interviews and Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique academic schedule with modules for five week periods and more than 300 courses</td>
<td>Blended learning opportunities for students to maximize courses on and off campus</td>
<td>End of the year experiential education program for all students with dozens of elective options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Placement courses no longer offered to increase flexibility with curriculum</td>
<td>Travel programs to connect students with learning outside of the classroom</td>
<td>Outdoor learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation requirement of cultural-awareness and global citizenship classes for all students</td>
<td>Music program offered through prestigious higher education institution using distance education</td>
<td>Restructured student life program to better serve all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers partnership program with higher ed institution focused on global issues</td>
<td>Design thinking center with interdisciplinary courses</td>
<td>Alternative education program with hands-on learning experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique daily schedule with unstructured time before and after school and at lunch</td>
<td>Effort to create travel programs in each content area</td>
<td>New computer science program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of interdisciplinary courses in areas like math and art</td>
<td>Effort to study how the school can use time differently to maximize student learning opportunities</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, at School B some faculty members viewed innovation as “constantly improving” while others described innovation as disruptive and truly different. One faculty member stated it this way, “I would say that there's that but I would argue that to be truly innovative, I think you can change things for the better and improve things without being innovative. To me, innovative is new, creative, different.” Despite differences in definition, the faculty shared a wide range of innovative programs at the school including many that were school-wide. The faculty members expressed that they are constantly being challenged to think differently, teach differently, and improve the way they connect to students in and out of the
classroom. They expressed a need to be innovative due to the rural nature of the school and the competitiveness between other boarding schools to enroll students. One faculty member described that innovation was the one factor that would separate them from the other schools.

At School C, the faculty members described innovation primarily based on student learning. They saw innovation as a way to better connect with students and improve student learning. They shared that innovative ideas in the classroom needed to be tied to how the student experience would improve in order to be successful. Although the faculty described innovation in broader terms, there was a common understanding of where it fit into their school culture. They expressed that innovation was not only a way to engage their students but a way to engage their adult community.

**Document Analysis**

In addition to the head of school interviews and focus groups with administrators and faculty members at each school, a variety of documents were collected to examine regarding innovative programs at each of the schools. The researcher reviewed course catalogs, admissions materials, and each school’s website.

**Course catalogs.** Each school has a course catalog used to communicate the curriculum at the school. The course catalogs include the specific courses for each school and outlines the requirements for graduation. Each school offers a variety of courses which are interdisciplinary and many which are team taught by the teachers. The emphasis on interdisciplinary teaching provides evidence for one of the themes communicated in the multiple case study which is that innovative schools value collaboration and prioritize interdisciplinary learning experiences. For example, School C requires all faculty to team teach one course during their experiential learning block at the end of the year. Instructors from various departments join together to create high
interest courses often integrating multiple subject areas. Each school also offers a wide variety of courses which demonstrates how teacher autonomy is a priority at each one of the schools. For example, the schools stressed the importance of educating the whole student through varied learning experiences rather than a reliance on particular standardized tests or required proficiencies. These two themes were communicated clearly in each of these documents.

**Admissions materials.** Each school offers engaging admissions materials to market the school to prospective students and families. They offer both comprehensive brochures as well as specific collateral materials for particular programs. The admissions materials highlight innovative programs at the schools and share specific student experiences. Each set of materials communicates the mission and vision of the school clearly. Each mission is directly tied to serving students. For example, School C stressed that their school will “meet the needs of a wide range of learners.” These materials support the role of the heads to communicate the vision and constantly improve the student experience. The admissions materials also stress how much each school values diversity through the text, pictures, student stories, etc. Diversity is also a core value with several of the schools. School A actually includes a diversity statement as part of the admissions materials to clearly communicate their school as an inclusive place for students. The emphasis on diversity supports the theme connecting innovation to diversity.

**Websites.** Each school’s website offers ways for viewers to better understand the culture of the school. Through news postings, Head of School blogs, social media, alumni communication, etc., each school communicates the innovative programs at the school. By communicating regularly about the changes at the school, the Head of School works diligently to support a culture of continual change. Each website stresses the vision of the school and clearly demonstrates the direction the Head is leading the school in the future. The websites support
several of the themes discovered during the interviews and focus groups including the head of school setting and executing the vision of the school as a constantly improving place and the schools embracing diversity with personnel, philosophies, and experiences. The head of school communication materials serve as one way to communicate the variety of values and programs at the schools.

**Summary of Findings**

This study is a multiple-case study which includes data from three independent high schools in New England. The researcher conducted three interviews with heads of school, and facilitated two focus groups (one with administrators and one with faculty) at each one of the three schools. Print and web materials were reviewed as part of the case study to triangulate the data from the interviews and focus groups.

The themes about how heads of schools think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation in their schools included:

- Heads of school set, execute, and communicate the vision for their schools to constantly improve and better serve students
- Heads of school deeply understand the culture of their schools and work diligently to promote a culture supportive of continual change
- Heads of school reduce or eliminate barriers which might impact innovation in order to promote innovation at multiple levels of the schools
- Heads of school model lifelong learning and are actively involved in the academic programs at their schools.

The themes from the heads of school about leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources to support innovation in their schools included:
- Innovative schools value diversity with personnel, philosophies, and experiences
- Innovative schools value collaboration and prioritize interdisciplinary learning experiences
- Innovative schools embrace unstructured time to foster new ideas
- Innovative schools support and promote autonomy for faculty and staff and provide appropriate direction when needed.

The themes from the administrators about leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources to support innovation in their schools included:

- Developing a group responsible for innovative programs helps to sustain innovative practices at schools
- Innovative schools engage in the community and bring real-world learning and professionals into their classrooms.

The themes from the faculty about leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources to support innovation in their schools included:

- Faculty, administrators, and the head of school need to be open to new ideas and constantly seek improvements in order to improve the student experience
- Engaging with the head of school early in the idea planning process is key to the success of innovation at schools
- Clear and transparent decision-making processes support innovation and ensures the successful implementation of new programs.

To summarize, heads of school expressed their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation both by setting the direction of the school and empowering the faculty and staff to implement innovation across their schools. They understood their roles were to reduce
barriers to innovation including budgeting, decision-making, hiring and retaining quality faculty and staff, and supporting collaboration across the schools. Each school shared a variety of strategies, structures, and resources which foster and support innovation at their schools. Common themes from the heads of school included valuing diversity, encouraging collaboration, embracing unstructured time, and promoting autonomy across the schools. The administrators shared additional themes including creating a group responsible for promoting innovation, engaging the community to bring in real-world learning experiences for students, and setting aside time to develop new ideas separately from the day-to-day operations of the school. The faculty shared themes including ensuring all members of the school community are open to new ideas, communicating potential new ideas to the head of school early in the development of the ideas, and ensuring clear and effective decision-making processes. Each of these themes is essential as one of the strategies, structures, and use of resources to support innovation in schools.
Chapter V: Discussion of the Findings

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

Heads of School have a variety of responsibilities within independent schools. One of their important responsibilities is to understand how to foster and support innovation in their schools. As instructional leaders, heads of school often oversee programming and are engaged directly with the faculty and staff at the school. Although instructional leadership in public schools is one of the most studied topics within leadership literature, very little research has been done to understand instructional leadership in independent high schools (Rigby, 2014). Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) posited findings that instructional leadership studies within public schools are not always appropriate to apply to independent schools. Very few research studies have been conducted to understand how heads of school foster and support innovation in their schools.

In this study, the purpose was to understand how heads of independent schools foster and support innovation in their schools. The study sought to understand how heads of independent schools perceive their roles as instructional leaders and how they foster and support innovation at their schools. The study sought to understand what strategies, structures, and processes they use to foster and support innovation. The findings from this study might recommend particular strategies or practices that school leaders could employ to foster and support innovative teaching practices in their schools.

Review of Methodology

This multiple case study explores how three heads of school support innovation in their respective independent schools. Toward this end, the study is guided by the following two research questions:
1. How do heads of independent schools think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation in the schools?

2. What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources actively support innovation in schools, as presented by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

In this study, the researcher selected three independent high schools for the multiple case study. These schools had a history of innovation and with heads of school who were actively involved with innovation at the schools as evidenced by selection by staff at the National Association of Independent Schools and the Independent School Association of Northern New England. The research design included interviews with each head of school, focus groups with administrators and faculty at each school, and a review of materials about each school. The individual interviews with the heads of school allowed each participant to share his or her understanding of their roles as the head and how they fostered and supported innovation at the schools. The focus groups allowed the administrators and faculty members to share their perceptions of how the head of school fostered and supported innovation as well as have an open dialogue about innovation at their schools. The participants were able to discuss their observations and opinions with one another and build off of one another’s comments. In addition, a variety of academic documents were reviewed to support the data collected through the interviews and focus groups. In this study, the case was defined as how the head of school fostered and supported innovation at each of the school sites, as perceived by heads of school, administrators, and faculty. This particular topic was bound by place (at each one of the research sites) and by definition (details relating to innovation at the research sites) (Baxter & Jack, 2008).
After completion of data collection, the interviews and focus groups were transcribed in order to begin analyzing the data. Course catalogs, admission materials, and web materials were reviewed to compare and contrast this data with the data from the interviews and focus groups. Descriptive and in viva coding strategies were used to review the data and construct emergent themes for each case and across the cases. The themes for each research question connect to the overall findings of the study.

This chapter includes the following sections: discussion of major findings, discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework, discussion of the findings in relation to the literature review, final analysis, significance of the study, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

**Discussion of Major Findings**

After reviewing data collected from individual interviews with heads of school, focus groups with administrators and faculty, and a document analysis of each school’s course catalog, website, and admissions materials, two major findings were identified grounded in the presentation of themes in Chapter 4:

1. Heads of independent schools are instructional leaders who strategically develop people, programs, and school cultures supportive of continual growth and change.
2. Heads of school encourage innovation through collaborative long-term planning and providing autonomy, time, and support for new ideas.

**Heads of independent schools are instructional leaders who strategically develop people, programs, and school cultures supportive of continual growth and change.** The heads of schools in this study are actively involved in the academic programs at their schools.
They were each identified as instructional leaders during the interviews. As one head said describing his role as an instructional leader, for example:

I see the head of school as the most dependent individual in the organization. If I can’t make a compelling argument for the direction we’re moving in that engages people and inspires them, if that doesn’t lead to having the resources to do the job, and then if I can’t help people have the skills to execute it, nothing is going to happen.

The findings linked instructional leadership with innovation at each one of the schools. Heads of school used a variety of approaches to support continual growth at their schools.

**Heads of school as active instructional leaders.** Although all of the heads of school agreed the term was overused, they saw their roles as deeply involved as instructional leaders supporting the programming, culture, and mission of the school. The heads used words like “coach,” “collaborator,” and “helper” to better describe how they support the academic program. Head of School A described herself as someone who “develops student learning opportunities” rather than one responsible for instructing students. The heads of school agreed the majority of their work was to support the faculty and staff, manage the programs, and protect the school culture. As an administrator at School A simply put it, the head gives “freedom for those ideas to percolate” which supports innovation at the school.

**Support for faculty and staff.** The heads of school discussed a variety of ways they develop their faculty and staff as part of their roles as instructional leaders. Each head of school had an administrative team responsible for day-to-day operations at the school and spoke in detail about how strategic they were in forming these teams. Head of School C made major changes to her administrative team by creating a small team with people with her complete trust. She mentioned much of her role is to help that team thrive because they lead the people and the
programs across the school. Head of School A discussed the significant time and priority she puts on hiring to ensure new employees understand the school culture and have the capacity to grow professionally at the school. Her role is to help them thrive by supporting them with various growth opportunities at the school. For example, she often selected faculty and staff to serve on particular committees as one way to develop their skills. Head of School B invests in leadership development programs for the faculty and staff to create more leaders across the campus. Despite each head of school approaching talent development in a different way, the heads were very clear that developing quality faculty and staff was a significant part of their strategy to foster and support innovation.

In order to mentor and support the faculty and staff, the focus groups said that the heads of school exhibited many of the qualities of transformational leaders to influence the faculty and staff. The faculty focus group at School B referred to the head of school as “having high expectations” and “a visionary.” They shared that they were motivated by his “long-term plan” and ability to take risks. The faculty focus group at School A referenced the head of school’s “ability to listen” and “to be a cheerleader for new ideas” helped motivate them to pursue innovation. At School C, the faculty focus group shared they appreciated how the head of school was always supporting the mission of the school and sometimes had to make hard decisions for the good of the school. Each of these focus groups described qualities of transformational leaders regarding their heads of school. The faculty focus groups were motivated by these characteristics and spoke about the innovative projects they led as a result of their mentoring and support.

**School programming.** In addition to developing quality faculty and staff, the heads of school discussed how their role is to facilitate programming to engage and challenge students.
When asked about what is it that makes the school innovative, the participants often described specific programs at the school. For example, Head of School C discussed the end of the year program as one example of innovation at the school. Head of School B discussed a performing arts program as another example of innovation at the school. Although the heads of school put a significant investment into the people at the school to bring about innovation, the heads also emphasized their role is to build and promote innovative programs at the school. Head of School A described her role was to improve the student experience, and this was done through engaging programs and outstanding educators. Each school was going through major curriculum changes. Head of School A described the need to constantly evaluate the curriculum and respond to what the students need to know to be successful after high school. She described this work as an “iterative process” that is constantly evolving. This process matches the study by Lai (2015) which describes innovation as mindset focusing on experimentation and iteration rather than structure. Each head of school described curriculum improvements at the center of their work to foster and support innovation. Although they often have mid-level managers who help with these tasks, ultimately it is their responsibility to support quality and engaging programming for students.

**School culture.** The heads of school spoke frequently about the culture they have fostered and supported to encourage innovation. Abbey and Dickson (1983) state that organizational culture can encourage innovation. The focus groups and interviews in this study supported that conclusion. At School A, the administrative focus group described that they felt the need to constantly innovate at the school because this was part of “their school culture.” Although there were no written expectations regarding this understanding, several of the administrators shared that they felt it was part of their role. At School B, the administrators
shared a similar sentiment. At each one of these schools, frequent improvement was part of the way they operated each day. One administrator at School B shared that having a team of individuals specifically charged with innovation modeled the priority to constantly improve. A faculty member at the same school shared that the presence of the team provided both support and resources for innovation. Another faculty member described the culture was one where “you can take risks, fail, and then learn” frequently. Comments were similar at the other two institutions which speaks to the culture at the schools. In addition, there was a common understanding that innovation was always to try improve what was happening in schools and better prepare students for what they expect after high school. The faculty focus groups at each of the three schools discussed that the innovation across the schools was better preparing students for 21st century skills. This observation supports Trilling and Fadel (2000) uncovering that an innovative culture better prepares students for the 21st century.

The culture present in this school was one of continual growth and change. Each head of school expressed their schools were undergoing steady change. Table 14 illustrates the variety of innovative programs currently underway at each of the schools. The faculty focus groups at Schools A and B actually shared words like “exhausted,” “chaotic,” and “crazy” as a way to describe the change at their schools. Despite the pace of change at these schools, the faculty, administrators, and heads of school spoke very positively about the improvements. These changes were described as “exciting,” “much-needed,” and “inspiring.” During the focus groups, there was an increase in energy level when discussing innovation at the schools. Although some faculty debated the pacing of the changes, the discussions were passionate and showed how motivated the participants are to help their schools improve. A faculty member of School A described the constant change very clearly, “if we didn’t love it, we wouldn’t be here.” To these
educators, innovation was part of the school culture and it was an essential part of their daily lives.

Heads of Schools encourage innovation through collaborative long-term planning and providing autonomy, time, and support for new ideas. The heads of school used similar approaches to foster and support innovation, but the formality of the process varied significantly. The first was to create deliberate, structured systems which fostered and supported innovation at the schools. For example, School B formed a team specifically charged with implementing innovative programs. Head of School B deliberately paired particular faculty members together to focus on innovative projects. The alternative approach was to allow innovation to happen naturally through providing autonomy and unstructured time during the school day for people to have conversations about programming. Although these strategies varied in terms of formality, each approach encouraged innovation through long-term planning and provided autonomy, time, and support for new ideas.

The three heads of schools used collaborative, long-term planning as a way to prioritize innovation at their schools. Each head of school spoke frequently about the mission, vision, and long-term plans at their schools. Head of School B shared his strategic plan which highlighted the major initiatives in the next few years. The strategic plan embraced innovation and included these significant improvements as a focus point of the strategic plan. Head of School C discussed both strategic planning work and accreditation work as standards which guide their work at the school. Head of School A agreed that long-term planning took up much of her daily tasks. Each head of school discussed how innovation was completely tied into their long-term plans. In addition to stressing the value of long-term planning to foster and support innovation, the heads of school emphasized the collaborative nature of this planning. Head of
School B described his role was to bring people together to accomplish many of their goals rather than lead the programs himself. He stressed that his administrative team was able to give him critical feedback at any time. He expected them to. The faculty and administrative focus groups reflected very positively on how long-term planning motivates them to support innovation at the school. For example, an administrator at School B shared that having this plan provided a roadmap of the work that he needed to do to reach the goals. There was genuine agreement in the focus group that long-term planning documents provided clarity for them and helped them accept the changes easier.

*The faculty and staff were given autonomy within their classrooms and spaces in order to try new ideas and practices.* Since this study focused on independent schools, faculty members had additional autonomy within their classrooms which is a major part of an independent school education. Despite each school going through significant school-wide changes to improve student experiences, the schools encouraged faculty and staff members to innovate on a smaller scale as well. One faculty member at School A shared that it was “very easy to make changes within your classroom and within your department.” A faculty member at School C shared that “the school trusts what we do in our classrooms.” In addition to being able to make changes on a smaller scale, faculty shared there is plenty of support to talk about new ideas with others. A faculty member from School B shared “there are many different spots to talk about your ideas.” He continued, “there are many people here to support you.”

*Additional time was built into the academic day for faculty and staff members to work with students, collaborate with peers, and enjoy their roles at the schools.* This unstructured time brought about many of the innovations expressed during the focus groups. The faculty members at School A described the time before school and during lunch as two pivotal times
which foster and support innovation by bringing together collaborators informally. At School C, the faculty focus group described that time was often given at faculty meetings for faculty to work with one another on various projects. At School B, many of the faculty live on campus and often interact in the co-curricular program and the boarding program. According to one administrator, many of the best collaborations occur through interactions during these unscheduled times. The faculty focus groups each stated that these unstructured times often results in some of the best innovative programs.

**Faculty and staff received support and resources for their new ideas from others in the community.** At School B, there is a leadership team in place to support innovative ideas across the school. This team is responsible for executing major school-wide changes as well as serving as a hub for innovative ideas at the school. According to one administrator, the group often mentors faculty with innovative ideas and provides both advice and fiscal resources to support the innovation. At School C, the support comes from individual faculty or administrators. One faculty member mentioned she felt comfortable approaching a variety of people on campus with new ideas. Similar to School C, an administrator at School B discussed that faculty and staff have multiple individuals and groups to seek input from. The common thread is that each is supportive and resourceful which is part of their culture as a school. The faculty at School A discussed the head of school is very open to listening to new ideas and they felt comfortable bringing new ideas to her because of how well she listens and provides feedback. These comments support the idea that leadership support for innovation has a significant impact on innovative behavior of employees (Scott & Bruce, 1994).

Through the interviews, focus groups, and document review, it was clear that the schools used a combination of deliberate strategies and structures and unstructured uses of time to foster
and support innovation on their campuses. Each head of school balanced these approaches to foster and support innovation depending on the initiative, scale, and timing at the school.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical lens used to look at the findings of this study is transformational leadership. This theoretical framework was selected because of the alignment with the research design and because the theory focuses on leaders who are able to encourage their followers to go beyond their normal levels of performance to make mission-driven changes within their organizations (Bass, 1985). Transformational leadership aligns with the role of the head of school and the focus on how the head of the school fosters and supports innovation at the school. In the next few sections, the researcher will discuss the theory of transformational leadership and how this theory connects to the results of the research study.

**Seminal theorists for transformational leadership theory.** Burns (1978) is often seen as the seminal theorist for transformational leadership theory. This theory states that leaders can appeal to followers through a higher moral position and by modeling values and demonstrating charisma. Burns (1978) originally posits the need for only transformational leadership, and discussed that transformational leadership was superior to transactional leadership (appealing to people through reward and punishment). Although Bass (1985) builds upon the Burns (1978) theory, Bass posits the need for both transformational leadership and transactional leadership. Bass (1985) proposes a four phase model of transformational leadership, which includes idealized influence, inspiration motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. According to Bass (1985), each of these factors are used to influence the leader’s followers. Depending on the leadership situation, Bass (1985) describes value in both
transformational leadership and transactional leadership strategies. The theory from Bass (1985) was the theoretical framework used for this research study.

**Transformational leaders use idealized influence with followers.** Bass (1985) includes idealized influence as one of the four core parts of transformational leadership theory. This influence is often characterized by a charismatic leader who is respected by employees within the organization. The leader has integrity, pride in the institution, and is trusted by others. In the research study, each one of the heads of school clearly demonstrated these characteristics. The administrators from School C spoke about how the head of school was trusted at the institution and had earned respect from the staff, faculty, and students. At School A, the faculty discussed that the head of school had significant pride in the institution, which was evident to them through his work ethic to strengthen the school. The faculty at School B discussed how passionate the head of school is to improve the school. In addition to respect by the faculty, staff, and students, Head of School B mentioned how essential respect from the Board of Trustees is to make significant changes at the school. His support from the Board was essential for him to lead the faculty and staff at the school.

**Transformational leaders use inspiration motivation with followers.** In addition to a leader influencing followers through integrity, respect, and pride, Bass (1985) discusses how transformational leaders exhibit inspiration motivation through long-term planning, optimism, and high standards. In this study, the heads of school discussed these characteristics through individual interviews and the participants also shared examples of these skills during the focus groups. Head of School A discussed her primary role was to set and communicate the vision for the school. She expressed much of her work is to set the tone for the institution, and she often uses opportunities to speak in front of groups as a way to communicate her message. Heads of
Schools B and C also stressed that their roles were to determine the vision for the institution and put strategic plans in place to execute the vision. The faculty at School B discussed the significant changes at the school since the Head began and reflected on his planning and high standards as pivotal for the changes to take place. Each head of school spoke about their plans for the future of their schools. Head of School B reflected, “It's a very important tenet of progressive education that things can always get better.” The faculty focus groups agreed that their schools were constantly changing to improve student experiences, and that the head of school played a significant role in these changes through their long-term planning abilities.

**Transformational leaders use intellectual stimulation with followers.** Much of this research study is focused on how leaders foster and support innovation which directly connects to the explanation of Bass (1985) about appealing to intellectual stimulation of followers to encourage risks, help them learn, and challenge assumptions. In this study, the heads of school reflected on these characteristics during their interviews. Head of School A said “We have admitted and agreed that as a progressive school, we are constantly revisiting and potentially reinventing processes in order to make them clear to the group involved in the work we're doing.” Each head of school spoke about their role is to support risks within the institution and help faculty and staff feel comfortable taking risks to improve the school. For example, Head of School B took a significant risk by borrowing money from the endowment for some much needed improvements at the school. He needed “venture capital” from the Board in order to make immediate changes and committed to the Board that he would pay the endowment back through in the next few years. This risk showed faculty and staff that he was willing to take risks in order to give them what they needed. Head of School A and C emphasized how they often ask questions about new ideas and make sure the new ideas will result in improved experiences for
students. According to the faculty focus group at School A, this approach helps the faculty refine new ideas and gain support from the Head of School when needed. Head of School C discussed sending faculty and administrators to formal leadership development programs in order to help them develop important skills. He said, “That has been very productive in firing people up and giving them a language to come in and say, ‘Here's what I want next. Here's the kind of opportunity I'm looking for.’”

**Transformational leaders use individual attention with followers.** Bass (1985) discusses how transformational leaders pay close attention to the individual needs of employees and often act as coaches, mentors, and active listeners. In this study, the heads of school, administrators, and faculty members discussed how the heads were able to support the needs of individuals at the schools. Head of School A discussed that teaching and learning at her school is centered around “high level collaboration, coaching, and iterative processes.” Their culture is focused on the individual and there is a strong sense that each person grows and learns differently. Much of Head of School A’s role is as listener; she often meets with faculty and staff individually to talk through new ideas. Head of School B shares a similar viewpoint, “You are doing a lot of listening. When I first came I sat down and spoke with each of our more than a hundred employees, and one of the primary things I was trying to understand is, ‘What would you like to accomplish? What opportunities do you hope I bring for you?’” The faculty at School C discussed how the Head of School is a strong listener and how this has built trust between her and the faculty. Head of School A agreed and said, “Well, I think having an open mind is number one.” The focus groups often noted how open the heads of school were for conversations. They stressed how these conversations could be scheduled or simply a lunch
conversation, but they found value in being able to talk openly about new ideas with the heads of school.

**Transformational leaders use transactional forms of leadership with followers.** In addition to transformational leadership characteristics, Bass (1985) discusses how leaders also demonstrate transactional forms of leadership. Transactional leaders often adhere to particular standards, encourage the status quo, and work within the organizational culture of the institution. In this study, the heads of school discussed several strategies often seen with transactional leaders. Each head of school discussed the timing for significant change at the school to occur. Head of School A and C discussed how the first year or so leaders need to build trust and not make major changes. In essence, heads of school need to have trust of the community before using some transformational leadership strategies. In contrast, Head of School B made significant changes at the school in the first year because he made this clear during his interview process and had full support from the Board. Head of School C emphasized that transactional leadership strategies are needed at times because a head of school has to balance change with the current organizational culture of the institution. She said, “I remember saying to someone at some point, nope, no more ideas this year.” Despite the school leaders prioritizing when major changes need to occur within the organizational culture, there was little evidence during the data collection about heads of school promoting status quo or motivating employees through rewards or punishments.

The transformational leadership theory of Bass (1985) is evident when examining each one of the heads of school in the research study. Each head of school uses a variety of transformational leadership strategies to influence the employees at his or her school. There is some data to support the use of transactional leadership strategies as well to influence
employees, but it is limited compared to the evidence to support the value of transformational leadership strategies to influence followers to foster and support innovation at the schools.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

The literature review presented in Chapter II focused on defining innovation at schools, innovative programs at independent schools, sustainability of independent schools through innovation, and transformational leadership within independent schools. Below the findings of this study are related to these four areas of review.

**Defining innovation at schools.** There is quite a debate regarding the definition of innovation. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have offered definitions on what innovation is and what is included in the definition. White (2013) distinguishes between innovations that are revolutionary which are disruptive and new and innovations that are evolutionary which build on existing ideas. In this study, revolutionary and evolutionary innovations were discussed by the heads of school, administrators, and faculty. It was apparent from the data collection that both of these kinds of innovations were happening simultaneously at the schools. Several studies suggest that innovation includes both the new idea and the implementation of the idea (Burgelman & Sayles, 1986; MacKenzie, 1996), which aligned with the practices of the heads of school who described the initial ideas, the implementation, and sustainability of innovation on their campuses. There was little disagreement about innovation among participants across the schools. The majority of the faculty, administrators, and heads of school understood innovation as finding new ways to improve processes or programs. Head of School B discussed the disagreement among definitions of innovation as “simply semantics.” The schools had a variety of different kinds of innovation happening on their campuses including in the classroom, the co-curricular program, and school-wide. Despite the differences in the scale of innovation at each
school, the participants were able to clearly discuss ways to foster and support innovation at their schools.

**Innovative programs at independent schools.** Schools often try new ideas to teach curriculum, engage students, and make connections to real world applications. Teachers implement innovative practices, and schools initiate innovative programs to improve student learning and student engagement. There are a variety of ways schools can be innovative including project-based learning, STEM programming, real world projects, and blended learning. Despite the variety of innovative approaches, each school needs to determine what works best for them based on their students and school culture (Genovese, 2005; Waller, 1932). Several studies have shown a direct link between school culture and innovation (Kanter, 2000; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). In this study, the participants discussed a variety of innovative programs at their schools. For example, faculty members at School A discussed how easy it was to innovate within their own classrooms and within their departments. They felt supported and encouraged to make improvements. These observations support a study by Frost (2008) who identified teacher leadership as a key factor in supporting innovation at schools. At School B, the Head of School discussed how he formed a team of administrators focused on school-wide innovation as well as supported classroom-based innovation through rewarding resources to support it. The administrators at School A reflected that innovation was deeply engrained in their culture and that administrators are expected to foster and support innovation across the school. The faculty at all three schools viewed their schools as innovative and offered many examples of innovative courses, programs, and experiences at the schools. They saw innovation as part of the core of the education offered at the school.
**Sustainability of independent schools through innovation.** Independent schools often compete with public and charter schools for students. Since the cost of education at independent schools can be very high compared to other schools, independent schools must offer high quality, engaging programs. According to Torres (2015), 82% of students are sometimes or often bored in class. These percentages need to change in order for independent schools to thrive. John Chubb (2014), the President of that National Association of Independent Schools, encourages independent schools to seek transformational leaders who can support and inspire followers to help independent schools thrive. In this study, the heads of school each referenced the connection between innovative programming and growth in enrollment. Head of School B discussed the challenge to recruit domestic boarding students to a rural part of New England, so he was very strategic with program development to appeal to prospective students. Head of School A discussed the challenge to stay competitive with other independent schools through innovative programming and quality educational experiences. The faculty were also aware of the need for innovation to recruit quality students which was communicated during the School A faculty focus group. Through the interviews and focus groups, a variety of participants mentioned how they saw innovation directly connected to the sustainability of their school.

**Transformational leadership within independent schools.** School leaders can have a significant effect on the climate of schools (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Studies have shown that innovation is often directly tied to the leadership of transformational leaders (Bass, 1985; Howell & Higgins, 1990). In this study, each one of the heads of school exhibited qualities of transformational leaders. For example, Head of School C discussed the importance of supporting individual’s goals through active listening skills and mentoring support. Head of School B talked about his role was to set the vision and help create excitement around the future
of the school. This observation supports a study by Kanter (1983), who posited that providing long-term goals to employees helps increase innovation. Head of School A discussed encouraging faculty to take risks and creating a culture where new ideas were welcome. The administrators and faculty frequently used words like “ethical,” “visionary,” and “inspiring” to describe the heads of school. It was evident the heads of schools had many of the characteristics of transformational leaders.

Transformational leaders often demonstrate instructional leadership qualities in their roles. Witt and Orvis (2010) agree that the school leaders often support indirect instructional leadership which creates conditions where innovation occurs. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) identify three areas of instructional leadership which include setting and following the mission, overseeing the program, and creating a positive school climate. In this study, the heads of school each shared one of their primary roles was to support the mission of the school. They were the champions of the mission and had to make sure decisions reflected the mission of the school.

Ultimately, each one of the heads of school had program oversight responsibility. The structure at the three schools was that each head of school had a direct report or two that had oversight over the academic program. They were still actively involved in major decisions which affected the academic program, but the day-to-day operations were overseen by another member of the administrative team. The heads of school were actively involved in sustaining an innovative school culture. For example, Head of School A spoke about the importance of new faculty and staff hiring to make sure the prospective new employees fit into the culture of the school. For School A, one of the most important factors was that the new employees embrace change and have a growth mindset. At School C, the head of school also spoke about the school’s culture and how essential it was to bring in diverse faculty who were exceptional teachers willing to
collaborate frequently with others. Despite each school having a unique culture, the heads of school worked diligently to sustain it.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to understand how heads of school think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation and to understand what leadership strategies, structures, and resources support innovation in their schools. The research study used a qualitative multiple case study to understand two primary research questions:

1. How do heads of independent schools think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation in the schools?

2. What leadership strategies, structures, and use of resources actively support innovation in schools, as presented by heads of independent schools, administrators, and faculty?

The researcher gathered data at each school site through individual interviews with the heads of school, focus groups with administrators and faculty, and document analysis of course catalogs, admissions materials, and each school’s website. The data was transcribed, went through a multiple step coding process, and appropriate themes were determined. The themes were analyzed with the literature and theory to produce the major findings for the study.

After thorough analysis, the first major finding was that heads of independent schools are instructional leaders who strategically develop people, programs, and school cultures supportive of continual growth and change. This major finding addresses the first research question by highlighting that heads of school are significantly involved as instructional leaders actively strategizing how to increase innovation at their schools. The second major finding was that independent schools encourage innovation through collaborative long-term planning and
providing autonomy, time, and support for new ideas. This major finding addresses the second research question by communicating the variety of strategies, structures, and resources used in schools to support innovation.

**Significance of the Study**

This research study examined how independent school leaders foster and support innovation in their schools. Schools often prioritize innovation to increase student learning and student engagement in school. Palmer (2015) emphasizes that school leaders are able to increase student engagement in school. In this study, the heads of school each discussed their motivation for innovation at the school which was to improve the student experience at their school. For example, Head of School C frequently analyzes new ideas shared with her to determine how the change will impact students positively. Head of School A discussed how essential it was to reach every student and innovation was often a way to provide more meaningful experiences for a range of students at the school. Students are often the most engaged in school when working on 21st century skills (Torres, 2015). The faculty focus groups discussed 21st century skills frequently during their discussions because they were also making curriculum changes to better address these skills with students. For example, the faculty focus group at School A discussed a new writing curriculum which better suited the needs of the learners at the school. At School B, the faculty focus group spoke about blended learning and how technology was such a major part of teaching and learning at the school. At each school, the faculty, administrators, and heads of school discussed how diligently they were working to increase student engagement, improve student learning, and better prepare students for life after high school through innovation in their programs.
Independent schools often compete for students with public and charter schools since these schools often offer lower costs and sometimes free tuition for students to attend (Davies, 2014). According to a survey by the Secondary School Admission Test Board (2014), the top two reasons why families choose to send their students to an independent school include a rigorous education and a place where students can develop a love of learning. Since these two reasons directly relate to the academic program and the school’s ability to engage a child, it is important to understand how independent schools foster and support innovation in their schools.

In this study, several of the heads of school expressed increased enrollment as a result of their innovative programming over the last few years. The faculty members also stressed that they saw increased student engagement in their innovative programs. For example, the faculty at School C mentioned the high level of excitement students had for their end of year program because it allowed student choice and real world applications. At School B, the administrators spoke about high student engagement in their travel programs. It was clear the faculty, administrators, and heads of school were aware of the importance of innovation within independent schools.

Although this research study focused on the leadership of heads of independent schools, public school leaders may also benefit from the findings of this study. The study includes discussion of particular leadership strategies, structures, and resources used to foster and support innovation. In the study, one of the most frequently used words was “collaboration” across all interviews and focus groups. The participants expressed that collaboration was essential to foster and support innovation which included deliberate grouping with other staff and faculty members as well as spontaneous collaboration during unstructured time. The heads of school and administrators stressed the importance of long-term planning for innovative programming in
order to increase stakeholder support and seek resources. Head of School A encouraged other school leaders to bring together diverse individuals and have them focus on an idea. She expressed this was a meaningful way to foster innovation at her school. Head of School B emphasized the need to provide a topic, communicate a few parameters, and then allow the others to determine how to implement the new ideas. These strategies could help public school leaders begin to think about how to foster and support innovation at their schools.

Recommendations

Based on the careful review of the research findings, there are a variety of practical recommendations important for school leaders to consider:

1. Understand the culture of the school and then begin to strategically link continual change as part of the culture of the school.
2. Examine and refine hiring practices to recruit and retain faculty and staff supportive and motivated by continual change.
3. Develop a well-defined process and timeline to examine curriculum and programs against research-based best practices.
4. Group diverse faculty and staff together to collaborate on innovative projects as part of long-term planning at the school.
5. Make changes to the school schedule to ensure unstructured time is available for faculty, staff, and students to collaborate.
6. Vocally support and encourage new ideas by creating various ways to celebrate innovation at the school.

Understand the culture of the school and then begin to strategically link continual change as part of the culture of the school. Each head of school spoke about how it was
important to understand the culture of the school before planning for significant changes. The culture of the school helps inform the head how to better foster and support innovation at the school. For example, the faculty focus group at School A discussed that “we are a school where everyone is constantly trying to do better. This is who we are.” An administrator from the same school added, “It’s embedded in the school’s identity.” These comments describe the culture of the school and help inform how to approach greater change. At School B, the head of school shared the reasons why it was essential to make changes at the school in order to become more innovative. He linked his goals for the school with the existing culture to show faculty and staff how critical it was to change. By becoming a more innovative school, the school would attract more talented students which allow greater program resources at the school according to the head. The culture of each institution was frequently discussed as a priority for the success of innovation. Through listening, asking appropriate questions, and talking with a wide variety of stakeholders, a head of school can better understand the culture of the school. Understanding how supportive the culture is to change helps heads of school develop what approach is best to implement school-wide change.

Examine and refine hiring practices to recruit and retain faculty and staff supportive of and motivated by continual change. Each head of school discussed how essential the faculty and staff were to leading and sustaining innovation at the schools. In order to strengthen a culture of change at the schools, heads of school should prioritize which individuals are hired at the school. For example, Head of School C spoke about how she looks for people with a “growth mindset” who are supportive of working at an institution that is constantly evolving. Head of School A agreed, “We want people hungry for change.” Since so much of change work is done through collaboration, the heads of school emphasized hiring
individuals who demonstrated the ability to be strong collaborators. The heads of school discussed hiring individuals willing to take risks, try out new ideas, and able to receive critical feedback. Since each head of school focused on strengthening their teams of innovators, initial hiring practices were a significant priority at each school consisting of thoughtful committee-driven hiring processes.

**Develop a well-defined process and timeline to examine curriculum and programs against research-based best practices.** The heads of school, administrators, and faculty discussed varying levels of innovation within their schools. Much of the innovation was connected to specific academic, co-curricular, and student programs. In order to foster innovation at schools, heads of school can ensure that there is a continual cycle of review of existing programs against research-based best practices. This process encourages faculty and staff to examine resources, have conversations, collaborate on challenges, and constantly improve programs at the school. For example, Head of School A discussed how the writing program underwent significant changes because of the curriculum review process. The decision to review the curriculum allowed faculty members and administrators the ability to collaborate, examine research-based best practices, try out new approaches, and move forward with significant changes. This process created an innovative program through an intentional and collaborative review process. Despite a well-defined process and timeline for curriculum review, Head of School A also suggested value in a looser system with a less rigid timeline, “We’re often, we have admitted and agreed that as a progressive school, we are constantly revisiting and potentially reinventing processes….“ By creating a unique schedule and a process to review programs, heads of school are able to communicate the need for constant program improvement.
Group diverse faculty and staff together to collaborate on innovative projects as part of long-term planning at the school. The heads of school were each very thoughtful how they grouped faculty and staff together to focus on innovative projects. Head of School A described how she deliberately selected individuals based on how their strengths and weaknesses would complement others on the team. Head of School B discussed how understanding the philosophies of the individuals helped him assign faculty and staff to groups. Each head of school spoke about how they looked for diverse groups with a range of perspectives. Heads of school should be very deliberate in selecting groups of individuals to work together on important innovative projects at the school. An administrator from School A echoed this advice by stating “There is a lot of value [in collaboration] and I think this comes from [the head], I think the notion is that it takes a lot of smart people from different points of view to address a question thoughtfully.” Although schools often ask for volunteers for committees, these heads of school shared that supporting volunteer-only committees do not allow the right voices at the table. Heads of school need to be active in forming teams and prioritize diverse teams who can challenge one another but ultimately get the needed work done.

Make changes to the school schedule to ensure unstructured time is available for faculty, staff, and students to collaborate. The faculty focus groups shared how valuable the unstructured times were at school for supporting innovation. At School B, the faculty group shared that many of the most collaborative and innovative projects came out of conversations before school and during lunch. At School A, one administrator shared that “I think intentionally or not the late start, the early end, and the open middle make for really thoughtful conversations.” By having unstructured times for faculty, staff, and students on campus, there can be valuable conversations which often inspire innovative ideas. These unstructured times
could be the time before school or an activity period when students can select a range of activities. A common lunch time for all is a popular model where diverse groups can meet to discuss new ideas. These conversations often occur during advisor times and when students stay after school. Despite the research study providing a variety of examples when heads of school created particular structures and used specific strategies to foster and support innovation, unstructured time was frequently mentioned as essential for schools to embrace.

Vocally support and encourage new ideas by creating various ways to celebrate innovation at the school. Innovative ideas can often take time beyond the school day in order to plan, execute, and sustain. The faculty at School A discussed how they often feel overworked given the wide variety of responsibilities they have in addition to their commitment to innovation. They stressed how important it was for the head of school to encourage their new ideas and support them to take risks. One faculty member mentioned, “She’s always interested in pursuing new projects and pushing us in new directions.” It is important for heads of school to recognize innovation at their schools and find ways to share and celebrate innovation. Strategies included using the website, admission materials, and course catalogs to include innovative projects at the school. Some heads of school write stories about innovation in newsletters, blogs, and share in interviews with others. Others hold events (School A holds specific events highlighting innovation in the arts) which celebrate innovation and discuss innovation frequently at staff and faculty meetings. This recognition signals to others in the community that innovation is important to the head of school and to the school which supports the individuals who often go above and beyond to implement innovative practices.
Limitations

The findings of the study are limited to understanding heads of schools within independent high schools in New England. The study included just three independent high schools where heads of school were leading innovative work, which limits the ability for the conclusions to be able to be generalized to other independent high schools. In order for the researcher to fully understand the role of the heads of school at each research site, a multiple case study research design was chosen to collect significant data from many diverse participants at each site. The multiple case study research design allowed the researcher to analyze innovation at each school from a variety of different viewpoints.

Since the role of a head of school varies at elementary and middle schools, the conclusions of the study are not applicable to other grade level schools. Independent schools are not bound to follow many of the curriculum mandates of public schools, which makes the context of this study only relevant to independent schools. Independent schools often have more autonomy with curriculum, hiring, and resources. Heads of schools have increased responsibilities compared to public school principals, which supports that this research is only applicable to heads of schools rather than public school leaders. As part of the research study, the researcher confirmed the primary responsibilities of each head of school were similar which allowed comparisons to be made across research sites. Although the schools offered a variety of strategies and structures to support innovation, these strategies do not represent the only way to accomplish innovative teaching and learning across schools.

Validity

Issues of validity included researcher bias and threats affecting data collection. With previous experience as an academic dean, the researcher took several steps to separate his
personal experience with leading innovation to his collection and analysis of the data in the research study. The researcher built trust with the participants through using his independent school experience to build rapport in order to acquire honest and detailed responses during the interviews and focus groups (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In addition, the researcher wrote reflective memos as part of the data analysis process in order to understand the data and limit potential bias. In order to minimize threats to the validity of the data, the researcher limited the research sites to include only participants who the researcher has not worked with in the past. The researcher emphasized during the interviews and focus groups that the data collected was informational and not collected to pass judgment. Interview and focus group guides were used throughout the data collection process to preserve the validity of the data. Interview and focus group dates and times were chosen by the school to allow maximum participation in the research study. These measures were taken to decrease the threat of validity concerns during the research study.

**Future Research**

Although the study addresses how independent school heads think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation, the results of the study made it clear that a variety of school leaders at independent schools have pivotal roles in implementing innovative programs. Despite the study highlighting how heads of school often set the direction for the school, they emphasized that many of their administrators are leading innovative initiatives at their schools. To better understand the roles of administrators and faculty with fostering and supporting innovation, future studies could address these roles prominently in the research design to better understand how these leaders lead innovation at their schools. For example, how do academic deans think about their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support
innovation in the schools? This research question could guide an additional study to examine the varying roles of school leaders within schools.

In addition to the roles of school leaders, several of the focus group participants mentioned the central role of students in designing innovative programs at the schools. At School A, the faculty focus group discussed how their role is often to facilitate student groups and empower them to generate new ideas, suggest alternative approaches, and plan action steps. In this study, the participants were limited to heads of school, administrators, and faculty. The students may have offered unique feedback on how innovation is fostered and supported at their schools. In a future study, it would be useful to include the students as participants to understand what leadership strategies, structures, and resources they see as pivotal to fostering and supporting innovation at their schools.

This study sought to understand how heads of school fostered and supported innovation, but one should consider if the results could only apply to independent schools. Could public school leaders use similar strategies to influence faculty and staff at their schools? Although the study suggested the heads of school prioritized innovation at their schools, how would public school leaders see their roles as instructional leaders to foster and support innovation? Additional research could be conducted to better understand similarities and differences in public versus independent school leaders in their roles to foster and support innovation. A study might examine if the leadership strategies, structures, and resources used to support innovation in independent schools were similar or different than the approaches in public schools. This additional research could build upon the findings of this study and could potentially be generalized to more schools. Although this study focus on innovation in independent schools,
public school innovation may look very similar or very different. Additional research is needed to better understand what innovation looks like in different school settings.

The data from the heads of school in this study suggested a potential connection between innovation and increased student enrollment. This connection could be explored more specifically in an additional study. One of the heads of school discussed that the school was committed to increasing innovation in order to attract more students to the school. Additional research could be conducted to examine the impact of innovation on a student’s choice to select a particular independent school. Although surveys have been conducted examining why families choose independent schools, a study which could examine specific academic programming choices on enrollment could help heads of school understand the effect of innovation on the schools.

Although the multiple case study research design included data from three research sites, these sites provided a small snapshot of practices in place at independent high schools. Increasing the number of research sites and potentially including other grade level schools could offer a better understanding of how heads of school foster and support innovation. The research study was designed to delve deeply into each one of the three schools through interviews, focus groups, and document review. If the sample size was increased, additional data would have been available to consider themes across a range of research sites. Since very little research has been done focusing on independent high schools, this study provides important results to consider in future studies.

**Personal Comments**

As a former academic dean at an independent high school in New England, I am passionate about fostering and supporting innovation in schools. I would often see students
disengaged in school and craving more innovative curriculum that would prepare them for life after high school. As an administrator, I constantly tried to support innovation with the faculty and staff. I encouraged faculty and staff to pursue new ideas, allotted resources to innovative projects, and tried to remove barriers to the implementation of innovative ideas. I often wondered if there were other leadership strategies, structures, and resources to foster and support innovation that were successful at other independent high schools. Unfortunately, there was no professional development where I could learn more about innovation at neighboring schools. Since I was interested in both innovation and leadership, I wanted to learn more about how school leaders can impact innovation at schools. This curiosity motivated me to pursue this research study and better understand how heads of school understood their roles with this work and what best practices they used to support this work in their schools. The research design of the study allowed me to travel to independent schools throughout New England and learn about their innovative programs.

After going through the data collection, data analysis, and writing processes, I have learned a variety of new information from the research study. At the beginning of the data collection process, I expected to find a list of very specific strategies the heads of school used to foster and support innovation. I learned very quickly that each head of school approached innovation differently. They talked candidly about how many of their most successful innovative programs were not tied to fiscal resources, but instead the successes were often tied to particular faculty and staff, time allocation, and collaboration. The heads shared an optimism that innovation can happen at any school and offered a variety of examples of strategies, structures, and resources which helped them increase innovation at their schools. Although available time and available resources are often identified as significant barriers to change, these
schools did not allow these two obstacles to limit their progress. The specific approaches used by each head of school can help inform other school leaders on particular methods to consider for their schools.

As a scholar practitioner, I was able to understand how the literature connected to my own leadership practices as an administrator trying to foster innovation. The balance of applying the theory, understanding the vast literature which informs instructional leadership, innovation, and independent school leadership, and the actual data collection and analysis have significantly affected my practice as an administrator. I encourage other school leaders to balance their own experiences with the literature, theory, and practices used in other schools when determining how to better foster and support innovation. It is the combination of these factors which significantly increased my knowledge of innovation at independent schools and helped me strengthen my abilities to better foster and support innovation with faculty and staff. This research study allowed me to step back from my own practices and analyze how other school leaders understood their roles and which strategies, structures, and resources impacted innovation at their schools. I encourage other school leaders to learn from the research study and determine which knowledge can inform their work as scholar practitioners.


*American Youth Policy Forum, 1-27.*


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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research. Before we begin the interview, please review the consent form and sign it if you agree to participate. The consent form provides a short overview of the study and the interview process. The consent form outlines what I will do to protect confidentiality. Please review the consent form carefully to make sure you are comfortable with everything detailed on the form.

Since this study is meant to learn about what you have done to support innovation, please provide honest responses based on your experiences. Since I will be recording the interview, please do your best to speak clearly.

We will begin the interview in a few minutes. This process will take between 50 and 75 minutes. I will ask that you share your experiences while working at this school. I encourage you to speak openly about the questions. There is no time limit for specific questions, so it is fine to go into detail with your responses.

The first few interview questions will be demographic questions, and then we will proceed to in-depth questions.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Descriptive Information
- Obviously, you are the head of school here, but how would you describe your responsibility and role here?
- How long have you been here?
- Where were you before coming here and what did you do?

I want to take some time to talk with you about the academic and non-academic program of your school, and your and other’s responsibilities in these programs, and developments in these programs over the last several years. Let’s start with the academic program at your school.

1. How would you describe yourself as a leader?
   - Could you provide one or two examples demonstrating your leadership style?
   - What is your approach to leading the academic program?
   - What is your approach to leading the non-academic program?
   - Would you call yourself an instructional leader?

2. How would you describe the academic program at your school?
   - Who else is responsible for the academic program here at the school, and what is their responsibility to it and what do they do?
   - Can you tell me about any developments or changes that have occurred in your academic program over the last several years? What were those? Why did you and/or the school decide to undertake these developments? And how did they come about?

3. How would you describe the non-academic program at your school?
-How would you describe your responsibility for the non-academic program here at the school?
-Who else is responsible for the non-academic program here at the school, and what is their responsibility to it and what do they do?
-Can you tell me about any developments or changes that have occurred in your non-academic program over the last several years? What were those? Why did you and/or the school decide to undertake these developments? And how did they come about?

Now I want to spend some time talking about innovation, and innovation as you see it happening or not happening at your school. And your role in the school’s efforts to pursue or not pursue innovation in both the academic and non-academic programs at your school. Let’s start first with a (wink-wink) easy question:

4. How would you define innovation?
   -Do you feel/think that your school is “innovative”? How so? Can you give me some examples?
   -What role does innovation have in your school? Is it important? Not so important? How so?
   -What is your role in fostering and supporting innovation in the school? Can you give me some examples?
   -What are others’ roles in fostering and supporting innovation? Can you give me some examples?

5. What structures have been put in place to foster and support innovation in your school?
   -What resources have been used for innovation?
   -What have you done, as the head of school, to foster and support innovation in the school?

6. What advice would you have for other school leaders on how to effectively foster and support innovation in their schools?
   -Where should they begin if innovation is not a priority within their school?
   -What is the role of the head in this work? Of others?

7. Is there anything else you would to share about your work at your school in support of innovation?
Appendix B: Focus Group Guide

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research. Before we begin the focus group, please review the consent form and sign if you agree to participate. The consent form provides a short overview of the study and the focus group process. The consent form outlines what I will do to protect confidentiality. Please review the consent form carefully to make sure you are comfortable with everything detailed on the form.

Since this study is meant to learn about what leaders in your school have done to support innovation, please provide honest responses based on your experiences. Since I will be recording the focus group, please do your best to speak clearly and to take turns speaking during the discussion. Since there will be a range of responses during the focus group, it will be important to respect the responses of others.

We will begin the focus group in a few minutes. This process will take between 50 and 75 minutes. I will ask that you share your experiences while working at this school. My role is to facilitate the discussion. I encourage everyone to speak openly about the questions. There is no time limit for specific questions, so it is fine to go into detail with your responses.

The first few questions of the focus group will be demographic questions. During these questions I will ask participants to answer individually in a circle. We will then proceed to in-depth questions and more of a discussion among peers.

Are there any questions before we begin the focus group?

Descriptive Information
-What is your role here?
-How long have you been here?
-Where were you before coming here and what did you do?

I now want to take some time to talk with you about the academic and non-academic program of your school, and your responsibilities in these programs, and developments in these programs over the last several years. Let’s start with the academic program at your school.

1. How would you describe your role and responsibility in the school?
   -Could you provide one or two examples of what that looks like?
   -What is your contribution to the academic program?
   -What is your contribution to the non-academic program?
   -Would you call yourself an instructional leader? If so, how so?

2. How would you describe the academic program at your school?
   -How would you describe your role in the academic program at the school?
   -Can you tell me about any developments or changes that have occurred in the academic program over the last several years? What were those? Why did you and/or the school decide to undertake those developments? And how did they come about?
- Do you feel that leadership (head of school or others) have fostered and/or supported these efforts? And, if so, how so?

3. How would you describe the non-academic program at your school?
   - How would you describe your responsibility for the non-academic program here at the school?
   - Can you tell me about any developments or changes that have occurred in your non-academic program over the last several years? What were those? Why did you and/or the school decide to undertake these developments? And how did they come about?
   - Do you feel that leadership (head of school or others) have fostered and/or supported these efforts? And, if so, how so?

Now I want to spend some time talking about innovation, and innovation as you see it happening or not happening at your school. And your role in the school’s efforts to pursue or not pursue innovation in both the academic and non-academic programs at your school. Let’s start first with a (wink-wink) easy question:

4. How would you define innovation?
   - Do you feel/think that your school is “innovative”? How so? Can you give me some examples?
   - What role does innovation have in your school? Is it important? Not so important? How so?
   - What is your role in fostering and supporting innovation in the school? Can you give me some examples?
   - What are others’ roles in fostering and supporting innovation? Can you give me some examples?

5. What structures have been put in place to foster and support innovation in your school?
   - What resources have been used for innovation?
   - What have you done, as a school administrator/teacher, to foster and support innovation in the school?

6. What advice would you have for school leaders on how to effectively foster and support innovation in their schools?
   - Where should they begin if innovation is or is not a priority within the school?
   - What is the role of the head and other school leaders in this work? Of others?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share about your work at your school in support of innovation?