

# **International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation**

**Spring 2018**  
**Volume 13, Number 1**  
**ISSN 1532-0723**

**Caryn Wells, Editor**  
*Oakland University*

**Nathan R. Templeton, Editor**  
*Texas A&M University Commerce*



**Brad E. Bizzell, ICPEL Publications Director**  
*Radford University*

The International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation is a nationally refereed journal published annually in the Spring by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership.

## **Note from ICPEL Publications Director, Brad Bizzell**

The International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation is ICPEL's contribution to the Open Education Resources (OER) movement. This contribution to OER will be permanent.

In August, 2005, NCPEA<sup>1</sup> partnered with Rice University and the Connexions Project, to publish our IJELP as open and free to all who had access to the Internet. The purpose of the NCPEA/Knowledge Base Connexions Project was to “add to the knowledge base of the educational administration profession” and “aid in the improvement of administrative theory and practice, as well as administrative preparation programs.” Our partnership continues but a new door opened for NCPEA Publications to join the OER movement in a more substantive and direct way. In March 2013, NCPEA Publications and the NCPEA Executive Board committed the IJELP to the OER movement.

### **What are Open Educational Resources (OER)?**

Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching and learning materials that you may freely use, adapt and reuse, without charge. Open Educational Resources are different from other resources an educator may use in that OER have been given limited licensing rights. That means they have been authored or created by an individual or organization that chooses to provide access to all, at no charge. ICPEL Publications is committed to providing access to all, while assuring author/s of full attribution as others use the material.

The worldwide OER movement is rooted in the idea that equitable access to high-quality education is a global imperative. To ICPEL, this is a moral/ethical responsibility and issue of social justice. Open Educational Resources offer opportunities for systemic change in teaching and learning through accessible content, and importantly, through embedding participatory processes and effective technologies for engaging with learning. The OER Commons project aims to grow a sustainable culture of sharing among educators at all levels.

### **What is the OER Commons?**

The Institute for the Study of Knowledge in Education (ISKME) created OER Commons, publicly launched in February 2007, to provide support for, build, and make available to all, a knowledge base around the use and reuse of open educational resources (OER). As a network for teaching and learning materials, the web site offers engagement with resources in the form of social bookmarking, tagging, rating, and reviewing. OER Commons has forged alliances with over 120 major content partners to provide a single point of access through which educators and learners can search across collections to access thousands of items, find and provide descriptive information about each resource, and retrieve the ones they need. By being "open," these resources are publicly available for all to use.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2018 the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration changed its name to the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership

## **What ICPEL OER is Not!**

ICPEL open educational resources are not an open door at the ICPEL Publications submission and review stages. We have always insisted on and will continue to require very thorough peer reviews (double-blind). ICPEL Publications is fortunate to have a cadre of professional reviewers (university professors), numbering over 300. Editors first consider a submitted manuscript, and if appropriate, selects/assigns two reviewers who also have the expertise/interest in the manuscript's specific topic. This process assures that reviewers will read an author's manuscript with expertise/experience in that area.

The "openness" of the IJELP OER comes at publication stage. Once the issues are published, they are formatted/published in an open access website, indexed by Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), catalogued as a "commendable journal" in the Cabell's Directory, and provided to the Open Educational Resource database. The IJELP is currently viewed and read by educators from over 72 countries and all 50 U.S. States (data provided by Google Analytics).

**Read More at: <http://www.oercommons.org>**

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*The manuscripts in Volume 13, Number 1 (Spring 2018) have been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership as significant contributions to the scholarship and practice of school administration and PK-12 education.*

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# A Comparative Analysis of the Education Policy Shift to School Type Diversification and Corporatization in England and the United States of America: Implications for Educational Leader Preparation Programs

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**Valerie A. Storey**  
*University of Central Florida*

*The purposes of this paper were to undertake a comparative analysis of policy shifts in England and the United States of America relating to school type diversification and corporatization, and the implications for educational leader preparation programs. Whilst the school delivery landscape seems to be one of turbulence, over the last four decades there has been a consistent drive in both countries for school-type diversification due to bi-partisan consensus regarding the appropriateness of neoliberal solutions to the problem of raising educational standards. This study involves an intellectual mapping of education provision in England and the United States of America, drawing on a range of primary and secondary data sources, including policy speeches, and for the latter, scholars' interpretations of these. The documents were located initially through keyword searches of databases, archival material and legislation, and subsequently through following up references.*

**Keywords:** educational leadership preparation program, education policy, neoliberalism, school choice, school types, structural reform.

*“It is a question of whether we can grasp the real nature of our society, or whether we persist in social and educational patterns based on a limited ruling class, a middle professional class, a large operative class, cemented by forces that cannot be challenged and will not be changed. The privileges and barriers, of an inherited kind, will in any case go down. It is only a question of whether we replace them by the free play of the market, or by a public education designed to express and create the values of an educated democracy and a common culture.”*  
(Williams, 1961 p.155)

Is it possible to implement a democratic educational system in a competitive market place that incorporates productive choice for all? Neoliberal and neoconservative policy makers in England and the United States of America (USA) would argue a definitive yes and that the route to achieving this outcome requires a change in how we understand public education and how public school systems are organized. This shifts public control over public resources out of the hands of the state and into the hands of the private sector (Saltman, 2009; Whitehurst, 2017); redefining the government’s role in public education by transitioning from state-created, traditional school districts to a model that embraces diversification of school providers (Smarick, 2017). In this model, school reform is driven by corporate partnerships rather than democratic representation, and by diffusion rather than bureaucratic centralization. Examples of diversified reforms include academies and free schools (England), charter schools and virtual schools (USA), and, by extension, independent operators and organizations.

Legislatures in both England and the United States have championed school diversity. Neoconservatives are attracted to the concepts of choice, competition, and deregulation whilst neoliberals, see the opportunity to help disadvantaged students get a quality education that the traditional system has failed to provide (Barber, 2016; Richmond, 2017).

In response to school diversification there emerges a need to ensure that educational leadership preparation program design allows pre-service administrators to develop the necessary knowledge and skills ((Darling-Hammond, 2017; LaFrance & Beck, 2014) to lead effectively in a turbulent landscape. This is challenging as the speed of change in policy outruns the speed of program change in higher education. In a recent study, LaFrance and Beck (2014) found that educational leadership preparation programs create experiences that are largely parallel to traditional experiences. The implications being that if higher education cannot address today’s school leadership professional developmental needs, then other private organizations will soon fill the gap.

The paper’s analysis is comparative, considering the similarities and differences between the policy approaches and their trajectories, the underlying factors that determine these and what is known about their consequences for educational leadership preparation. It reveals a number of issues and tensions relating to both diversification, and corporatization, which then raise questions regarding the training and professional development of future educational leaders.

### **Changing Landscape of Educational Delivery**

The paper first examines current literature on school reform and diversification in the USA.

## United States of America

### Policy Contexts

The American education system is hierarchical in structure, being organized on three governmental levels—federal, state, and local school district (Ornstein et al., 2016). The federal and state governments share primary responsibility and political power over public education, with the states exercising most of the control. Except for Hawaii, states delegate power to local school boards (often bound by county, city or township) that exercise control over a school district (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Since the 1960s, states and school districts have sponsored alternatives to traditional neighborhood K-12 schools e.g. magnet schools, themed schools (arts, law, or health professions), language-immersion schools, and networks of innovative school models, such as the Internationals Network for Public Schools, the New Tech Network, and California’s Linked Learning Academies. In the early 1980s, cities such as New York, San Francisco, and Cambridge, pioneered a choice system (Darling-Hammond, 2017), which lead to a steady rise in the corporatization of public schools.

### Federal Policy

To facilitate the implementation of federal educational policies, the United States Department of Education, as the primary federal educational agency, assumes the responsibilities of overseeing federal policy implementation; administering grant funds; contracting with state departments of education, school districts, and colleges; engaging in educational innovation and research; and providing leadership, consultative, and clearing house services to education (Ornstein et al., 2016).

Over the last six decades, the federal government has enacted three legislative acts, which have gradually increased both their involvement and influence in education reform using top-down approaches (Fullan, 1993). First, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA, 1965) directed states to focus on raising achievement and reducing the achievement gap (Powell, 1965). Second, *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2001) held states and local school districts accountable for students meeting high academic standards in reading and math, as measured by annual performance tests developed by each state (NCLB, 2009). Schools that failed to improve student performance and meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) four years in a row faced possible penalties, including a decrease or elimination of federal funding, being forced to close or convert to charter schools, or being forced to undergo a change in administration (NCLB, 2009; Ornstein et al., 2016). Additionally, *Race to the Top* (RTTT) was established through a competitive grant program, and required states to create educational innovation through the development of plans aligned with federal policy priorities. Each state submitting a proposal was ranked and awarded according to their ranking of educational innovation grounded in the school change initiative. Grants were awarded each year in phases over a 4-year period from 2009-2013 with \$4.35 billion total dollars being spent in education (Kolbe, 2012). Third, *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015), which replaced NCLB, grants increased flexibility to states regarding testing, and funding for low performing schools, as well as emphasis on preparing students for success in college and careers.

Table 1

*United States: Education Impacted in Federal Policy*

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Event</b> | <b>Policy</b>                        | <b>Impact</b>  |
|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1965        |              | Elementary & Secondary Education Act | <p>Provided federal funding to strengthen the capacity of state departments of education and local education agencies</p> <p>Forbade the establishment of a national curriculum</p> <p>Provided federal funding to assist low-income students</p>  |
| 2001        |              | No Child Left Behind (NCLB)          | <p>Expanded the federal role in public education through further emphasis on annual testing, annual academic progress, report cards, and teacher qualifications, as well as significant changes in funding</p> <p>Fostered privatization by investing billions of public dollars in the charter school movement</p> <p>Required high-stakes testing, accountability, and remediation measures that shift resources away from public school control and into control by test and textbook publishing corporations and for-profit remediation companies.</p> |
| 2009        |              | American Recovery & Reinvestment Act | Earmarked 100 billion federal dollars for education<br>4 billion of these federal dollars earmarked for the competitive grant program  |
| 2009        |              | Race to the Top (RttT)               | Promoted state adoptions of content standards and assessments through a competitive grant application.   |
| 2015        |              | Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)    | Supports teachers' and principals' professional development to improve instruction and instructional leadership  |

**States**

Each state has primary legal responsibilities that are delegated from the federal government to support and maintain public schools within its borders. These responsibilities mainly include enacting legislation, determining state school taxes and financial aid to local school districts, setting minimum standards for training, recruiting personnel, providing curriculum guidelines, and establishing assessment requirements (Ornstein et al., 2016). To facilitate state governance of



public education, state governments have created state boards of education and state departments of education. The state board of education serves an advisory function to the state legislature and develops rules to implement the education statutes. The state department of education, operating under the state board of education, primarily emphasizes collecting data and disseminating statistics on the status of education within the state, and oversees implementation of state and federal laws and statutes (Ornstein et al., 2016).

### **School Districts and Traditional K-12 School Model**

In the traditional 20<sup>th</sup> century district model, about 14,000 local school districts provide direct services and govern schools in the United States. Each district has a central office that consists of the local school board, school superintendent, and central office staff (including deputy superintendents, associate superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors, department heads, coordinators and supervisors). Local school boards are legal extensions of state government, and are delegated by the state to assume significant decision-making authority. Local school boards have three primary responsibilities: (1) ensure that state laws, regulations, and rules are followed; (2) establish policies that are not covered by state statutes, including establishing schools, raising and expending public funds, and establishing policy and rules to govern the schools; and (3) employ a superintendent to assist day-to-day operations in the school district and school (Ornstein et al., 2016). In this traditional model, the district exclusively provides education services within its geographical boundaries to geographically assigned student zones (Whitehurst, 2017; Smarick, 2017).

### **K-12 Diversification**

#### **School Vouchers and Tax Credit Scholarships**

Vouchers provide public money to eligible families to spend on private school tuition. Tax-credit scholarship programs provide tax credits to businesses and individuals who donate money to organizations that grant need based scholarships for use at private schools.

Milton Friedman (1955) developed the first concrete policy proposal for school vouchers. Friedman argued that government should be the funder of K–12 education but need not be its provider, and that this system of school choice, would provide a fairer, more effective, and more efficient education to schoolchildren than the assignment of students to neighborhood public schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Currently, vouchers give parents all or a portion of the public funding set aside for their child’s education to choose private schools that best fit their learning needs. State funds typically expended by a school district are allocated to families in the form of a voucher to pay partial or full tuition at a private school, including religious and non-religious options.

The first urban school voucher program in the United States was launched in 1990 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It enrolled just 341 students in seven participating private schools (all of them secular, by law) but grew steadily, especially after religious schools were allowed to participate in 1998. The Milwaukee program currently enrolls almost 28,000 students in 121 private schools (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2017). Though taxpayer-funded private school choice programs represent the smallest source of alternatives to assigned public schools in terms of current enrollments, they represent the most rapidly growing form of school

choice (Glenn & Gininger, 2012).

Like direct government voucher payments to families, tax credits divert money from public schools in support of private schools. But vouchers come from the public budget. They are visible and therefore contestable and debatable. Tax credits divert money from public treasuries before the funds even get there. Tuition tax credit programs operate in 17 states. Florida and Arizona have the largest programs followed by Indiana, Louisiana, and Georgia (Prothero, 2017).

### **1. Traditional Public Schools**

Traditional public schools educate 90 per cent of schoolchildren in America. They operate at the state level through departments of education, and locally by school districts and publicly elected or appointed school boards. Approximately 15,000 different school districts operate in the United States. Students generally go to the public school in the district in which they live.

### **2. Magnet Schools**

Magnet schools have a focused theme and aligned curricula in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Fine and Performing Arts, International Baccalaureate, International Studies, MicroSociety, Career and Technical Education (CTE), World Languages (immersion and non-immersion) and many others (Magnet Schools of America, 2017).

Magnet schools typically use an approach to learning that is inquiry or performance/project based. They use state, district, or Common Core standards in all subject areas; however, they are taught within the overall theme of the school. Most magnet schools do not have entrance criteria, but often use a random computer-based lottery system for admission. There are also “Talented & Gifted” magnet schools that may utilize student assessment data and teacher or parent recommendations for selection (Magnet Schools of America, 2017).

### **3. Charter Schools**

In the 1980s, Albert Shanker, teachers’ union leader, proposed a new approach to K-12 schooling, which focused on “chartering” schools to enable innovative policies, and pedagogical approaches to be trialed and implemented. Minnesota passed the first charter law in 1991; by 2013, 42 states had enacted similar legislation. Federal incentives began during the George W. Bush administration, were increased in the Obama years, and were augmented by substantial investments from philanthropies like the Broad, Gates, and Walton foundations (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Charter schools choose their own management structure: 67 percent of all charter schools are independently run as non-profit, single site schools; 20 percent are run by non-profit organizations that run more than one charter school; and for-profit companies run just under 13 percent. For-profit charter schools have to meet financial oversight regulations, just like any company the government contracts with to provide a service (Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2017).

Approximately three million students enroll in about 7,000 charter schools in more than 40 states (EdChoice, 2016). In 17 cities, at least 30 percent of public school students are now enrolled in charters (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2017). National enrollment in charter schools has grown by about 10 percent annually for the past decade, and student participation in private school choice programs doubled between 2011 and 2016 (Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, 2016). In 2017, about 5 percent of the K–12 populations can be found in charter schools with increasing evidence of for-profit education-management companies running the schools.

### **3.a. Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative**

Established in the 1970s this is a growing movement due to an increasing focus on student centered personalized instructional programs and an emphasis on distributed leadership. Approximately, 115 teacher-powered or teacher-led schools are operating in 18 states. The goal of the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative, a program of the nonprofits Education Evolving and the Center for Teaching Quality is that in 30 years, every teacher in the country will have the option to work in a teacher-led school (Teacher-Powered Schools, 2017).

### **4. Virtual Schools**

Virtual schooling was initiated in the mid-1990s and has experienced continued growth (LaFrance & Beck, 2014). Reid et al. (2009) defined a virtual school as one that offers alternative solutions to educating K-12 students who may not be well served otherwise, whereas Salsberry (2010) described it as one, which typically offers learning experiences via the Internet. Cavanaugh (2010) observed that virtual schools have grown up over the past 15 years in different policy and budget ecosystems, but most of them can be classified into six major categories: (1) state run virtual schools; (2) multi-district virtual schools; (3) single-district virtual schools; (4) consortium programs; (5) university programs; and (6) private and parochial virtual schools. Some virtual schools are fully online; others are fully online with restrictions. Virtual education for elementary and secondary students has grown into a \$507 million market and continues to grow at an estimated annual pace of 30 % (Stedrak et al., 2012). Funding for virtual schools vary depending on the state. Some are funded directly by the state, while others may be funded by local school districts.

### **5. Private Schools**

Attendance at private schools has been declining for the last 15 years, particularly for elementary and middle school students despite the introduction of school choice programs enabling families to use government funds or private funds (e.g., tax credits) to attend privately operated schools (Whitehurst, 2017). There are 33,619 private schools in the United States, serving 5.4 million PK-12 students. Private schools account for 25 percent of the nation's schools and enroll 10 percent of all PK-12 students. Most private schools are small (fewer than 300 students) and religiously affiliated (Council for American Private Education [CAPE], 2017).

### **6. Home Schooling**

Homeschooling is growing in popularity as an alternative to attending a district school, although it is growing at a slower rate when compared to the growth rate of charter schools and voucher programs (Wolf & Egalite, 2016). Estimates suggest that the number of homeschooled students have increased from 850,000 or 1.8 percent of the K–12 populations in 2001 to 1.75 million or 3.6 percent of all students in 2013, a doubling of the rate of homeschooling over a 12-year period (Wolf & Egalite, 2016).

Table 2  
*United States: School type and role*

| School Type                | School Role   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Traditional Public Schools | Public schools funded by the government that students are assigned to based on district zoning regulations                  |
| Magnet Schools             | Public schools that have a particular focus, students may have to take a test to qualify or parents can request they attend |
| Charter Schools            | Public schools that parents can request their child attend  |
| Virtual Schools            | Schools that are conducted via the internet   |
| Private School             | Can be religious, academic, or otherwise, parents need to pay a tuition for their child to attend                           |
| Home School                | Parents are the teachers  |

## England

### Policy Environment

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the education system in England was highly selective, consisting of public state-funded, faith and other charitable schools (Higginson, 1974; Mortimore, 2013). At age eleven, students entered a tripartite system, sorted through high stakes tests, predominantly into grammar, secondary modern, and technical schools (Courtney, 2016; Haydn, 2004; Crook, 2002). In the second half of the twentieth century, English secondary schools underwent a period of radical change, introducing comprehensive schools, in an attempt to develop a more equitable system (Courtney, 2016).

The 1988 *Education Reform Act* (ERA) introduced the marketization of schooling, local management of schools (LMS), and reduced role for the local authority/school district. Responsibility for budgetary control was partially removed from democratically elected local authorities and handed to school head teachers and governing bodies (Ball, 1990; Hill, 1997; Hill, Lewis, Maisuria, Yarker, & Hill, 2016).

Despite these school reforms, an observable correlation between wealth and educational outcomes remained. The Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (Department for Education [DfE], 2010) again attempted to address the issue by “creat(ing) a school system which is more effectively self-improving” (DfE, 2010, para 7.4). The proposed system further bypassed local authorities with funding for proposed academies and free schools emanating directly from the (national) Education Funding Agency (Hill, Lewis, Maisuria, Yarker, & Hill, 2016).

Table 3  
*England: Education Impacted in Government Policy*

| Date Event | Policy | Impact |
|------------|--------|--------|
|------------|--------|--------|

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|      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 1988 | Education Reform Act                               | <p>Introduced choice for parents</p> <p>Introduced City Technology Colleges (CTCs)</p> <p>Introduced Local Management of Schools (LMS). Schools allowed to be taken out of the direct financial control of local authorities. Financial control handed to the headteacher and governors of a school</p> <p>Introduced of Grant-maintained schools (GMS).</p> <p>Primary and secondary schools allowed to remove themselves fully from their local authority and would be completely funded by central government</p> <p>Secondary schools given limited selection powers at the age of 11</p> |
| 1996 | Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act | Introduced unsuccessful voucher scheme for nursery education (later withdrawn by Labour), and allowed governors of GM schools to borrow money   |
| 1997 | Education (Schools) Act                            | Endorsed much of the 1988 Education Reform Act and its successors, in relation both to parental choice and to competition between schools   |
| 1997 | White Paper<br><i>Excellence in Schools</i>        | Encouraged secondary schools to become specialist schools which would be allowed to select a small proportion of their pupils on the basis of 'perceived aptitudes'   |
| 1998 | School Standards and Framework Act                 | <p>Incorporated all aspects of the 1997 White Paper</p> <p>Allowed maintained secondary schools to select by aptitude</p> <p>Empowered local authorities and the secretary of state to intervene in schools judged to be failing. Schools would be given two years to improve or they would be closed or have radical management changes imposed on them</p> <p>Created a new framework for schools (to be implemented from 2000) with community schools replacing county schools and foundation schools</p>  |

replacing grant maintained schools. Voluntary schools (mostly the church schools) would stay the same.

2001 White Paper  
*Schools - achieving success*

Reduced role of local authority. 85% of a school's budget directly controlled by the headteacher.

Increased involvement of the private sector in state provision

Enabled private, religious and voluntary organizations to support the management of both failing and successful schools

Required greater diversity in secondary education, with more specialist schools and city academies attracting private sponsorship

Compulsory use of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) where schools or local authorities were failing, and encouragement of the use of PPPs by successful schools

Allowed successful primary schools to opt out of the National Curriculum and develop curriculum innovations

2002 Education Act

Proposals of the White Paper incorporated in the Act

2006 Education and Inspections Act

Encouraged Primary and secondary schools to become independent state schools (trust schools) backed by private sponsors - businesses, charities, faith groups, universities or parent and community organizations

Failing schools would be given a year to improve before a competition for new providers was held. It would then be reopened as an academy or a trust school with a private sponsor. Parents would be given the right to set up new schools, to close 'failing' ones and to dismiss head teachers

Encouraged good schools to expand or link up with neighboring schools in federations

|      |                   |   |
|------|-------------------|---|
|      |                   | Successful schools would be able to apply for new responsibilities such as teacher training<br>Local authorities would lose most of their powers and would become 'parents' champions' rather than education providers  |
| 2010 | The Academies Act | Rapid expansion of academies<br><br>Removed local authorities' power to veto a school becoming an academy<br><br>Dispensed with parents' and teachers' legal right to oppose such plans; and allowed schools categorized as 'outstanding' to 'fast-track' the process of becoming academies |
| 2011 | Education Act     | Diminished the role of local authorities, further expansion of academies<br><br>Increased schools' powers relating to pupil behavior and exclusions<br><br>Secretary of State has greater power to make land available for free schools   |

Ref: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/acts/>

## **Department for Education**

The Department for Education (DfE) is a ministerial department responsible for 18 umbrella agencies covering children's services and education, including higher and further education policy, apprenticeships and wider skills in England (GOV.UK. 2017). Local government authorities are responsible for implementing policy for a comprehensive system in which the majority of students of all abilities and aptitudes are taught together. Since 1998, there have been seven types of maintained (state funded) schools in England: (1) Academy schools; (2) Community schools; (3) Free schools; (4) Foundation schools; (5) Voluntary Aided schools; (6) Voluntary Controlled schools; and (7) State Boarding schools.

### **School Districts and Traditional K-12 School Model**

In the traditional model, local education authorities (LEAs) provided the majority of support services for schools in their locality. Local management of schools (LMS, 1988), allowed headteachers and their governing bodies to remove themselves from the financial control of local authorities, and introduced grant maintained schools, decentralized through being funded directly by central government, bypassing local authorities (Hansen & Vignoles, 2005).

## **K-12 Diversification**

### **1. State Schools**

There are four main types of state schools funded or maintained by local authorities: (1) Community schools; (2) Foundation and Trust schools; (3) Voluntary-aided schools; and (4) Voluntary-controlled schools. These schools must follow the national curriculum and national teacher pay and conditions.

#### **1.a. Community Schools**

Community schools are controlled and run by the local authority, which employ the school staff, own the land and buildings, and set the entrance criteria (such as catchment area) that decide which children are eligible for a place. State secondaries (high schools) can have a specific **specialism** in: the arts, math and computing, business and enterprise, music, engineering, science, humanities, sports, languages, and technology.

#### **1.b. Foundation and Trust Schools**

Foundation schools are different from state-run schools in that an elected governing body runs them, independent of the local authority. The governing body not only employs the staff and sets the criteria for admission, but it can also own the land the school is on as well as its buildings, although often it is owned by a charity (or charitable foundation).

Trust schools have evolved from Foundation schools, in that they are a type of Foundation school that has decided to develop a partnership, known as a charitable trust, with an outside body. Often that body is either an educational charity or a business, according to Directgov (2017), and it owns both the building and the land used by the school.

#### **1.c. Voluntary-Aided (VA) Schools**

The majority of Voluntary-aided (VA) schools are faith schools. A foundation or trust (usually a religious organization) inputs a small proportion of the capital costs for the school and forms a majority on the schools governing body. The governing body employs the staff and sets admissions criteria. The land and buildings are usually owned by the religious organization.

#### **1.d. Voluntary-Controlled (VC) Schools**

Voluntary-controlled school (VC) schools are like Voluntary-aided (VA) schools, but are run by the local authority that employs the staff and sets the admission policy. The foundation or trust (usually a religious organization) owns the land and buildings, and usually forms a quarter of the governing body. Specific exemptions from Section 85 of the Equality Act 2010 enables VC faith schools to use faith criteria in prioritizing students for admission to the schools.

### **2. Academies**

The first academies were established by the 1997-2010 New Labour Government to replace poorly performing urban secondary comprehensives (Adonis, 2012). While there are different types of academies, they all have the same status in law. Academies are publically funded, independent schools, held accountable through a legally binding ‘funding agreement’. Some academies have sponsors or trusts such as businesses, universities, other schools, faith groups or voluntary groups, which employ the teachers and are responsible for improving the performance of the academy.

In 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government expanded the role of academies in the Academy Program. Flexibility of policy has enabled the academy model to become the template for a range of sub-types. These include (1) Studio Schools; (2) Free Schools; (2i) University Technical Colleges (UTCs); and (2ii) City Technology Colleges (CTC). Academies have statutory freedoms concerning the national curriculum, student admissions,



school hours, term dates, and teacher's pay, conditions and qualifications (GOV.UK., 2016b). Contract law governs these freedoms; each contract is between an academy trust, following a business model, and the DfE.

The Academies Commission (2013) distinguish between what it terms Mark I, Mark II and Mark III sponsored academies. The former, created between 2002-2006, sought sponsors from the private sector, who contributed up to £2 million of the school's capital costs. Mark II academies were permitted to seek sponsors from establishments such as universities, who would not be liable for capital costs, but whose funding agreements were controlled more tightly. In Mark III sponsored academies, from 2010, funding agreements were loosened.

DfE figures indicate that there were 4580 academies in England in March 2015, 1859 of which were secondaries representing around 56 percent of all secondary schools. Academisation has been less popular among primaries, where the total was 2476 or around 15 percent of all of England's primary schools. Academies, have essentially replaced the role of Foundation schools

### **2.a. Studio Schools**

Studio Schools, according to the Studio Trust who oversee Studio Schools, are grounded in extensive research and best practice from the UK and around the world (Studio Trust, 2017a). They are funded by the taxpayer but not controlled by a local authority. They have to be sponsored by existing schools, colleges, and community groups (existing schools cannot convert to become a Studio School). They serve 14 to 19 year olds, unlike the traditional comprehensive school, which serves 11 to 19 years old, and tend to be small (300 pupils). As an academy, Studio Schools have the option to (1) select 10% of their students by reference to a specific aptitude; (2) operate longer school days; and (3) operate an all year calendar to replicate a business model. The first Studio Schools (2010) were approved by the then Labour Government, and the program subsequently expanded under the Coalition Government. Studio Schools are required to reflect their local community, and align with local labour markets. Grounding the Key Stage 4 National Curriculum subjects i.e. English, Mathematics, and two Science subjects (GOV.UK., 2016) is project-based learning; work with real world partners and clients; personal coaches to support students identify and meet personal academic and vocational targets; and strong links into key industries.

Key employability and life skills also underpin the curriculum through the CREATE skills framework i.e. Communication, Relating to people, Enterprise, Applied skills, Thinking skills and Emotional intelligence (Studio Schools Trust, 2017b). Students complete work placements for four hours a week with partner employer at the age of 14 years, and this increases to two days a week after age 16. Many students are paid for this work.

Currently, of the 47 Studio Schools originally established, 33 remain open, and 6 new studio schools are in the pipeline to open (Schools Week, 2016). Seventy five percent of Studio School closures were those established by Further Education (Community) Colleges between 2010 and 2015. These closures are primarily due to four factors: (1) recruitment difficulties; (2) inconsistency of specialism attractiveness e.g. business enterprise or construction are less popular than science or the creative industries; (3) change in formula funding which resulted in a reduction of funds due to the loss of small schools premium; and (4) growing a school where success is not perceived as being dependent on traditional exam success.

### **2.b. Faith Academies**

Faith academies can be either (1) sponsored by a faith; or (2) be an existing church school converting to an academy. Unlike faith schools, which have to follow the national curriculum, faith academies do not have to teach the national curriculum and they also have their own

admissions processes. There are Islamic, Roman Catholic, and Church of England faith sponsored or co-sponsored academies (GOV.UK.,2016a).

### **3. Free Schools**

Free schools are funded by the government rather than by the local authority, and consequently have more internal control (GOV.UK., 2016a). They can (1) set their own pay and conditions for teachers; (2) have the flexibility to change the length of the school day and school terms (semesters); and (3) do not have to follow the national curriculum. Free schools take students of all abilities and are prohibited from using academic selection processes. They can be run on a not-for-profit basis and can be set up by groups like: charities, universities, independent schools, community and faith groups, parents, and businesses.

In March, 2017, the Government established LocatED, a public company, to acquire land and buildings across the country to help the Government build 500 new free schools by 2020 and create 600,000 new school places by 2021 (Nash, 2017). More than nine in ten free schools have been approved in areas where a need for more school places has already been identified. Local communities deciding they wanted more choice have created the remainder. This represents a considerable and rapid shift in England towards an education system in which the majority of schools are independent of local control.

#### **3.a. University Technical Colleges (UTC)**

University technical colleges specialize in subjects such as engineering and construction - and teach these subjects along with business skills and using IT. Students study academic subjects as well as practical subjects leading to technical qualifications. The university and employers, who also provide work experience for students, design the curriculum. University technical colleges are sponsored by: universities, employers, and further education (community) colleges.

#### **3.b. City Technology Colleges (CTC)**

City technology colleges are owned and funded by companies as well as central government (not the local council). They have a particular emphasis on technological and practical skills.

### **4. Grammar schools**

Grammar schools are state secondary schools that select their students on the basis of academic ability. Potential students take an examination at age 11, known as the "11-plus". There are approximately 163 grammar schools in England, out of some 3,000 state secondaries. In the May, 2017 budget, the government assigned 320 million pounds for expansion of the government's free school program, with schools free to offer selective education. New selective schools will be allowed to open and existing schools will be able to become grammars.

### **5. Independent schools**

Schools that charge fees to attend, rather than being funded by the government, and can make a profit. They are governed and operated by the school itself. They are lightly regulated by government and inspected by a range of bodies. They are funded by fees, gifts and endowments and are governed by an independently elected board of governors.

### **6. State Boarding schools**

There are approximately forty State boarding schools in England, which provide state-funded education but charge fees for boarding. Local councils run some state boarding schools, and some are run as academies or free schools. State boarding schools give priority to children who have a particular need to board and will assess children's suitability for boarding.

Table 4

*England: School type and role*

| School Type                               | School Role   |
|---|---|
| <b>State Schools</b><br>Community Schools | A state-funded school, in which local authority employs the school's staff, is responsible for the school's admissions and owns the school's estate.  |
| Foundation Schools                        | Funded by the local authority, but are run by the school governing body who employ the school staff and has primary responsibility for admissions. The school land and buildings are owned by the governing body or a charitable foundation. Many Foundation schools were formerly Grant Maintained schools   |
| Trust Schools                             | Publicly funded by government rather than local council but receive extra support from a charitable trust such as a local business, community group or educational charity. An individual school or a group of schools (such as schools that are in the same area, spread across the country or share a specialism) can choose to work with a trust   |
| Voluntary Aided (VA) Schools              | VA schools linked to a variety of organizations. They can be faith schools (often the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church), or non-denominational schools, such as those linked to London Livery Companies. The charitable foundation contributes towards the capital costs of the school (typically 10%), and appoints a majority of the school governors. The governing body employs the staff and has primary responsibility for admissions |
| Voluntary Controlled (VC) Schools         | Almost always church schools, with the lands and buildings often owned by a charitable foundation. LEA employs the schools' staff and has primary responsibility for admissions.<br><br>State funded schools, which select their students on the basis of academic ability. Grammar schools can also be maintained schools.   |
| <b>Academy Schools</b>                    | Publicly funded by government rather than local council. Established 1997-2010. Some academies have sponsors or trusts. Since 2010, flexibility of policy has enabled the academy model to become the template for a range of sub-types. These include (1) Studio schools; (2) Free schools; (2i) University Technical Colleges (UTCs); and (2ii) City Technology Colleges (CTC)  |

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|   |   |
|---|---|
| <i>Academy-Studio Schools</i>                             | Publicly funded by government rather than local council. The Studio Schools Trust oversees Studio Schools. They serve 14 to 19 year olds; tend to be small (300 pupils)   |
| <i>Academy-Faith Sponsored</i>                            | Publicly funded by government rather than local council. Islam, Church of England, Roman Catholic sponsor, co-sponsor or a key partner in academies located in areas of considerable deprivation  |
| <i>Academy-Converter-Faith Based</i>                      | Publicly funded by government rather than local council. Outstanding schools and schools ranked good with outstanding features can become academies.  |
| <b>Free Schools</b>                                       | Publicly funded by government rather than local council. They can set their own pay and conditions for teachers; have the flexibility to change the length of the school day, and school terms (semesters); and do not have to follow the national curriculum. Free schools take students of all abilities and are prohibited from using academic selection processes. They can be run on a not-for-profit basis and can be set up by groups like: charities, universities, independent schools, community and faith groups, parents, and businesses. |
| <i>Free Schools - University Technical Colleges (UTC)</i> | Specialize in subjects like engineering and construction - and teach these subjects along with business skills and using IT. Students study academic subjects as well as practical subjects leading to technical qualifications. The university and employers, who provide work experience for students, design the curriculum. University technical colleges are sponsored by: universities, employers, and further education (community) colleges   |
| <i>Free Schools- City Technology Colleges (CTC)</i>       | Emphasis on technological and practical skills  |
| <b>Grammar Schools</b>                                    | Charge fees to attend, rather than being funded by the government, and can make a profit. Governed and operated by the school itself. Lightly regulated by government and inspected by a range of bodies. Independent schools vary from those set up by foundations in the middle ages to those founded by new companies and charities. They are funded by fees, gifts and endowments and are governed by an independently elected board of governors.  |
| <b>Independent Schools</b>                                | Provide free education but charge fees for boarding. Local councils run some state boarding schools, and some are run   |

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|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>State Boarding Schools</b> | as academies or free schools. State boarding schools give priority to children who have a particular need to board. |
|                               | Provide state-funded education but charge fees for boarding.  |

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### **Response of Leadership Preparation to School Corporatization and Diversification**

Current structural diversification policies being implemented in both England and the United States enable the enactment of interests other than education through transferring responsibility for education and related assets away from public and towards corporatized or religious actors and institutions. This education reform policy is based on market ideology and the assumption that diversifying school models improve the education system.

At present, the United States lacks a federal policy governing leadership and teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). A review of the literature indicates that while a national conversation about the adoption of standards for educational leadership and the accreditation of leadership preparation programs is ongoing, states continue to make their own decisions relating to leadership preparation. Many states have chosen to adopt the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium Standards or a state modified version of these standards (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Replaced by the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL, 2015).

The changes that have been made since 2010 have occurred so quickly that relatively little empirical research into impact of the diverse educational landscape on the preparation and support of future school leaders currently exists. Future school leaders are likely to find themselves lost amongst a myriad of education delivery models, morally floundering between the efficiency of a business approach and the equity of an education approach. Analyzing a complex budget sheet will go hand in hand with analyzing complex research data. As the locus of control for schools transitions from school districts/local authorities to (1) corporate; (2) religious institutional; and (3) public entities (Courtney, 2016) so the need for innovative educational leadership programs becomes imperative.

### **School Leadership Context in England**

In 2011, the previously required National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), originally introduced in England in 1997, was abandoned as a compulsory headship criterion. In theory, this means that a headteacher in England, as in Florida for example, could be appointed to a school leadership position without any teaching qualification. Arguably, a move, which seriously affects the status of school leaders (Association of School and College Leaders [ASCL, 2015]. Furthermore, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) established in 2000 merged with the Teaching Agency in 2012 to become the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), an executive agency under Department for Education (NCTL, 2017). In effect, the government has withdrawn from the arena of school leadership preparation by making the NPQH optional. As a consequence the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), the National Governors' Association (NGA) and the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) worked with the Teaching Schools Council, to create the Foundation for Leadership in Education (FLE) promoting leadership training, standards and qualifications that practitioners have identified as

essential (National Association of Headteachers [NAHT], 2015). The FLE is run by a board of trustees, and is currently chaired by Sir Michael Barber. Previously, Barber had held the position of Chief Education Adviser of the education company, Pearson; served as Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit from 2001 to 2005; and as Chief Adviser to the Education Secretary on school standards from 1997 to 2001.

Barber characterized the English school system as having devolved responsibility and clear accountability (ASCL, 2016). Many headteachers are now in 'system' leadership roles (ASCL, 2015), either in federations or, most frequently in multi-academy trusts (MATs). Some who formerly held posts designated as headteachers are now chief executives accountable for the operation of more than one school. Consequently, school leaders now have a very different job description, responsibilities and accountabilities requiring a whole new skill-set from that needed to lead a single school (ASCL, 2015). School leaders working across several schools need a much wider understanding of the issues, relationships and micro-politics of working in such a context. Finally, the boundaries between the primary and secondary phases have become much more blurred with many schools covering the entire age range from three to nineteen (ASCL, 2015)

Future school leader preparation programs will need to be active and dynamic. Innovative programs, partnerships, inclusion of non-university based leadership providers and delivery structures, as well as other contributing factors that impact effective preparation, will need to be explored (Sanzo, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

In both England and the United States the landscape of education provision has undergone enormous change and diversification. There has been a roll back of the federal footprint and a growing movement to introduce market forces into education systems in the belief that a twin pronged approach of greater parental choice and better school accountability, will improve the productivity and efficiency of its schools. At a local level this presents as the academy and free schools in England and the charter school, virtual school and vouchers in the United States. Arguably, the United States (as has already occurred in England) no longer has a school system. Instead there exists an increasingly fragmented local landscape of schooling with different patterns emerging in different parts of the country' (Simkins, 2014). Is this a forward move? It is worth bearing in mind that in England, the 1902 Education Act created a single school system out of an isolated and unconnected system comprising of 2,568 school boards and 14,238 voluntary bodies providing elementary schools, and an unknown number of schools (around 600) with charitable foundations providing secondary education. All of which became accountable to local elected councils (1902, Education Act). This coherent system is now being disbanded in order to introduce a disparate system viewed as a failure over a century ago.

Yet, despite a fragmented school system in England the focus of many school leaders is on systems rather than instructional leadership as in the United States, due to the fact that small schools are finding the need to become larger federations in order to access resources and human capital.

Based on the outcome of this comparative analysis, the author recommends that in order to remain relevant, higher education institutions in the United States intending to continue delivering educational leadership preparation programs, proactively engage with professional associations and practitioners in revising their programs to ensure that leaders: (1) reflect the diversified, and corporatized landscape that they serve; (2) demonstrate the professional knowledge and capacity

required to ensure the delivery of high quality instruction in a safe, trusting, and collaborative school culture; and (3) hold professional colleagues accountable to the highest levels of instruction and student engagement.

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# Developing a National Model for Principal Preparation through Service Leadership

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**Hal L. Holloman**  
*East Carolina University*

**Daniel A. Novey**  
*East Carolina University*

*This paper describes the redesign process for a Principal Preparation Program (PPP) that is grounded in strong service-learning elements and evidence-based outcomes. The PPP design team developed the Service Leadership Framework for Leadership Preparation (SLF4LP) which blends research-based service learning and servant leadership principles (Felten & Clayton, 2011; Greenleaf, 1990; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The PPP and its faculty have a rich tradition of excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service. To preserve this legacy, the redesign process maintained a positive culture of teamwork, partnership, and collaboration among candidates, colleagues, administrators, and external stakeholders. An overview of the value-added SLF4LP components will be provided and the impact of each component will be discussed.*

This paper describes the redesign process for a Principal Preparation Program (PPP) that is grounded in strong service-learning activities, servant leadership practices, and evidence-based outcomes. The PPP incorporates the practices and principles of service-learning and servant leadership. This leadership preparation program builds “servant leadership capacity” through a leadership development model that starts with authentic service opportunities in local schools. PPP candidates complete Service Leadership Projects (SLPs), and serve and support *real* improvement efforts, as they collaborate with their school partners. This article will provide an overview of the service-learning and servant leadership program components, as well as the Service Leadership Framework for Leadership Preparation (SLF4LP). In addition, the authors will describe the value-added design components and share program evaluation data from their experiences of implementing this innovative preparation program.

The PPP design team developed the Service Leadership Framework for Leadership Preparation (SLF4LP) which blends research-based service learning and servant leadership principles (Felten & Clayton, 2011; Greenleaf, 1990; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The PPP and its faculty have a rich tradition of excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service. To preserve this legacy, the redesign process maintained a positive culture of teamwork, partnership, and collaboration among candidates, colleagues, administrators, and external school district stakeholders. An overview of the value-added SLF4LP program components will be provided and the impact of each component will be discussed.

### **The Problem**

The PPP professors faced several challenges and expectations during the development and redesign process. Various external stakeholders had expectations that had to be met. These expectations included: (a) to redesign and implement the PPP *with* school district partners, (b) to provide rigorous leadership preparation to ensure school leader success upon graduation, (c) to develop a strong principal pipeline from recruitment, to screening, to admissions, to preparation, to induction, and (d) to align the redesigned PPP to national and state standards (for both leadership practitioner standards and leadership preparation program standards).

### **Program Design and Program Evaluation Questions**

The aforementioned expectations from external stakeholders led PPP professors to ask both program design questions and program evaluation questions. The program design questions included: (a) Could we design a PPP that is a true partnership *with* our school districts? (b) Could we design a PPP that ensures the success of each graduate as they transition into school leadership positions? (c) Could we design a PPP that provides a strong principal pipeline for our region (from recruitment, to screening, to admissions, to preparation, to induction)? (d) Could we design a PPP that is aligned to national and state standards? The program evaluation questions included: (a) How are we going to evaluate our partnerships with school districts? (b) How are we going to evaluate the success of each graduate as they transition into leadership positions? (c) How are we going to evaluate the strength of the principal pipeline in our region? (d) How are we going to evaluate our alignment with national and state standards?

## **Program Overview and the Service Leadership Framework for Leadership Preparation**

This PPP enhances principal preparation through the Service Leadership Framework for Leadership Preparation (SLF4LP), which embeds authentic field-based experiences, rich clinical experiences, and purposeful mentoring and coaching over a period of two years. The PPP is delivered in cohorts which are strategically located in partnering school districts in eastern North Carolina with PPP professors traveling to the field-based experience/clinical experience sites for teaching and coaching on a weekly basis.

The PPP professors are committed to preparing and supporting the current and future school leaders in its region, so the leaders can, in turn, transform the schools and communities where they serve. PPP professors believe transformational leadership starts with serving others, and therefore, the PPP leadership training starts with service opportunities within schools and school districts. With a significant service learning component, the current PPP is nationally accredited by National Board of Professors of Educational Administration (NPBEA) formerly known as Educational Leadership Constituency Council (ELCC) and authorized by the state's department of public instruction. Seven (7) of the Master of School Administration (MSA) courses are approved with a national service learning course designation. This service learning component requires MSA candidates to immerse themselves in problems of practice from the very beginning of their program. Each course's learning objectives require candidates to go back to their principal and ask, "How can I help? How can I serve?" The PPP candidates benefit from this authentic learning and schools receive valuable assistance with their transformation efforts: A win-win!

The PPP encourages and supports candidates to serve as problem-solvers, communicators, innovators, collaborators, and change agents in their respective schools and school districts. A supportive school and district setting is essential for PPP candidates as they immerse themselves in these service learning experiences.

Over the last several years, PPP professors have learned a great deal about the positive impact of service learning on both the leadership development of its candidates and the schools throughout the region. From these experiences, PPP professors developed the SLF4LP. The SLF4LP provides candidates with opportunities to work with principals and other appropriate personnel on: (a) data collection, (b) data analysis, (c) needs identification, (d) problem-solving, (e) comprehensive planning, (f) action plan implementation, and (g) evaluation.

The PPP candidates discover the power of "service" and practice the transformational skills of leading through serving and serving through leading (Noel & Earwicker, 2014). The PPP components are the result of (a) meaningful, ongoing discussions with public school partners (i.e. superintendents, central office leaders, principals, assistant principals, agency leaders, higher education faculty, PPP candidates, PPP graduates, and community college faculty); (b) a thorough review of other PPPs throughout the nation; and (c) the infusion of best leadership preparation practices within a 21st century learning framework.

The PPP professors provide aspiring leaders the training and support they need along their leadership path to become highly qualified instructional leaders with a strong service ethic, who can work effectively with diverse rural school communities. This PPP utilizes research-based service learning curriculum (Felten & Clayton, 2011; Greenleaf, 1990; Henderson & Mapp, 2002) and leadership theory (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Manna, 2015) and embedded assessments to coach candidates to be effective rural school principals.

This PPP is also conceptually grounded in the university's motto *Servire* or "to serve." The university has a long-standing history of service to the region and to the state. In addition, the PPP and its faculty have a rich tradition of excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service. To preserve this legacy, the PPP maintained a positive culture of teamwork, partnership, and collaboration among candidates, colleagues, administrators, and external stakeholders.

### **Service Leadership Framework for Leadership Preparation—Overarching Values**

The PPP was redesigned with strong servant leadership values. The following values support the mission of the PPP and lead to benefits for the PPP graduates and their respective schools.

**Value 1—Service Learning.** Every opportunity to serve is an opportunity to learn. The PPP is grounded in service-learning pedagogy. Cress (2005) describes service learning as a pedagogy wherein "students and their instructors are leaving the classroom and engaging with their communities in order to make learning come alive and to experience real-life connections between their education and everyday issues in their cities, towns, and states." (p. 7) Kaye (2010) emphasizes the importance of service learning and how it leads to reciprocal benefits for students, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. In addition, Kaye (2010) highlights that service-learning makes the learning experience more active, relevant, motivating, empowering, collaborative, and engaging for all participants. The PPP provides candidates with these types of structured service-learning opportunities to enhance the candidates' learning experiences and to ensure purposeful collaboration with their schools and school districts. The PPP candidates also serve in an authentic setting which grounds each course's objectives within the SLF4LP (Felten & Clayton, 2011; Greenleaf, 1990; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sigmon, 1979). Contextual leadership preparation—working with real stakeholders to address real challenges—allows PPP candidates the rich "real world" experiences to refine their leadership skills.

**Value 2—Candidate-Centered Learning.** The PPP delivery model reflects learning by doing instead of learning by lecture only. The PPP professors realized that teaching something does not guarantee that the candidates learn it. The role of the faculty has shifted from teacher-centered to candidate-centered. Faculty see themselves more as leadership coaches to future principals (LaPointe, Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, 2007; Levine, 2005). The PPP classes include many practice and application opportunities via (a) dynamic lectures, (b) simulations, (c) case studies, (d) role play, (e) field experiences, and (f) cooperative learning.

**Value 3—Irrefutable Evidence-Based and Project-Based Learning.** The best indicator of what you will do—is what you have done. During each course, PPP candidates complete Service Leadership Projects (SLPs) that are aligned to the *North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Proficiency Indicators for Pre-service Principals* (May 2, 2013). These SLPs also provide clear and convincing evidence that each PPP candidate has worked in a school with school stakeholders to complete projects that address real issues. The PPP graduates can confidently share at job interviews what they have accomplished to promote (a) school improvement, (b) teacher empowerment and leadership, (c) instructional leadership, (d) community engagement, (e) organizational management, and (g) school culture and safety at their respective schools.

**Value 4—Authentic Outcomes for Stakeholders.** The impact of an effective school leader must be measured by more than students' test scores. An effective principal collaborates with stakeholders to set and meet high expectations for everyone in the school community. As PPP candidates complete each SLP, they must maintain an action plan with a record of their action steps. These action steps are evidence-based examples of their teamwork and collaboration with a

variety of community stakeholders (Copland, 2000). They must also capture the impact of their leadership by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Candidates learn the value of listening to stakeholders and gathering their language throughout the SLP process. The impact of the candidate's leadership can be found in the various stakeholders' comments about how the project was completed and their thoughts on the outcome. Candidates also develop a short digital story about their SLP work and highlight the outcomes for stakeholders. These digital stories are included on a website and are also used as artifacts in recruitment activities and program assessment activities.

**Value 5—Service Leadership.** Every interaction is an opportunity to lead (Greenleaf, 1990). The PPP candidates exhibit characteristics of servant leaders: (a) visionaries for school improvement, (b) effective listeners in their school community, (c) effective communicators, (d) empathic leaders, (e) leaders by example, and (f) leaders through service (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

**Value 6—Caring Relationships.** Leading is intensely interpersonal (Barth, 2001). School leadership is about working with people; therefore, building caring and trusting relationships between faculty and PPP candidates is essential to ensure program success. In addition, principals, superintendents, and PPP faculty have developed a system in which PPP candidates—starting from the admissions process—are identified as potential leaders and enter the PPP with a written agreement signed by the candidate, their principal, and their superintendent committing to provide necessary support throughout the PPP. Halfway through the program, PPP candidates receive formal formative feedback on their leadership competencies from their principals and PPP faculty. This process is repeated at the end of the program with formal summative feedback on leadership competencies aligned to the North Carolina Standards for School Executives (NCSSE, 2013).

**Value 7—Ethical Behaviors.** A leader is the moral compass of the school (Northouse, 2015). Ethical behaviors are essential for providing a school culture that has high expectations for student learning. The PPP uses case studies and “*What Do You Say?*” round-robin scenarios to address challenging issues in school administration.

## **Service Leadership Framework for Leadership Preparation--Key Components**

The PPP's SLF4LP has seven key components to ensure the success of each candidate as they move from recruitment, to screening, to admissions, to preparation, and eventually transition into the field. The following sections provide a description of each key component and a summary of the program impact data related to each component.

**SLF4LP Key Component 1—Selection by Design.** The PPP has a proactive, intentional, and district-supported recruitment strategy that runs from the recruitment stage to the screening stage to the admissions stage. This research-based selection process is designed to ensure a strong principal pipeline for school district partners. The PPP's recruitment efforts begin with strong relationships with school superintendents and principals forged over decades of trust and service to the region. Faculty members and school district stakeholders schedule evening recruitment events and individual recruitment sessions to establish PPP cohort programs across the region. The PPP integrates these strategies into a comprehensive recruitment and admission plan in which public school partners are active participants in the recruitment and admission process. The PPP candidates are required to obtain a letter of recommendation or endorsement from the superintendent or his/her direct designee and a principal who agrees to actively coach the



candidate throughout the program. This letter of support is the foundation of a partnership to foster innovation and promote a culture of change that embraces continuous school improvement.

With this recommendation, the superintendent agrees to work with the PPP by: (1) endorsing their candidate can and will be involved in significant early field experiences within the school system as a part of the candidate's coursework, and (2) creating quality leadership experiences wherein the candidate is able to participate in service learning in his/her LEA.

***PPP's Selection Criteria.*** The PPP's rigorous selection criteria are based on competencies that predict success as a school leader. The PPP's systemic screening and selection criteria establish professional learning communities that serve as strong models for improved communication, innovation, and collaboration throughout the program. The screening criteria for the PPP are based on a research-based selection process designed in 2008, which include a required signed letter of support, a written sample responding to leadership scenarios, and an interview. The PPP's selection criteria, embedded in the interviews and written scenarios, incorporate seven (7) key leadership areas synthesized from competencies that are predictive of success as a school leader (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Orr, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, La Pointe, & Orr, 2010; Mana, 2015; NPBEA, 2015; Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Wallace Foundation, 2016) and are aligned to the 21 Leadership Competencies from the North Carolina Standards for School Executives (NCSSE).

The PPP uses the following Key Predictors of Leadership Potential (KLP) during the screening process:

1. *Understands Self:* The candidate has an awareness of his/her strengths and weaknesses. The candidate is cognizant of these traits and understands how they can impact others positively and negatively (NCSSE: Emotional Intelligence).

2. *Commits to Strong Leadership through Service:* The candidate has an awareness that leadership starts with serving others. The candidate demonstrates evidence of "leadership through service" in their school, school district, and/or community (NCSSE: Customer Focus, Organizational Ability, Responsiveness, and Results Orientation).

3. *Promotes a Vision of High Expectations for All:* The candidate has an awareness of what teaching and learning should look like and sound like in a school. The candidate a commitment to high expectations for all (NCSSE: Global Perspective, Visionary).

4. *Develops Self and Others:* The candidate has a commitment to improving himself/herself. The candidate has a commitment to supporting the development of others. The candidate demonstrates a commitment to develop self and others (NCSSE: Delegation, Personal Ethics and Values, Personal Responsibility for Performance).

5. *Initiates Creative and Collaborative Problem Solving:* The candidate has a passion for helping others and improving schools. The candidate demonstrates a commitment to creative and collaborative problem-solving (NCSSE: Creative Thinking, Change Management, Environmental Awareness, Systems Thinking, Technology, and Time Management).

6. *Establishes Supportive Relationships Built on Trust and Mutual Respect:* The candidate values the importance of relationships built on trust and mutual respect. The candidate provides clear evidence of an established a network of support for their leadership training (NCSSE: Dialogue/Inquiry, Judgment, and Sensitivity).

7. *Communicates Ideas Clearly and with Optimism:* The candidate clearly communicates their thoughts, values, and beliefs to others. The candidate has a positive outlook when presented with a set of challenges and promotes a sense of possibility (NCSSE: Communication).

**PPP Selection Criteria Impact Data.** The PPP professors interview each candidate and give a score of 1, 2, or 3 for each of the key predictors. The highest score for a candidate is a 21. These scores are analyzed and discussed during the admission decision process. The PPP reviewers can see all the candidates’ scores and comments. The utilization of these criteria increases the quality of incoming candidates, strengthens cohort collaboration, and ensures program success for each candidate. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the overall average of each incoming PPP cohort on each key predictor and a total composite score.

Table 1  
*Incoming PPP Cohort Composite Score on Interview*

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Key Predictors of Leadership Potential</b>                          | <b>Average Score</b> |
|-------------|--|----------------------|
| 2016        | Understands Self   | 2.67                 |
|             | Commits to Strong Leadership through Service                           | 2.80                 |
|             | Promotes a Vision of High Expectations for All                         | 2.67                 |
|             | Develops Self and Others   | 2.54                 |
|             | Initiates Creative and Collaborative Problem Solving                   | 2.63                 |
|             | Establishes Supportive Relationships Built on Trust and Mutual Respect | 2.80                 |
|             | Communicates Ideas Clearly and with Optimism                           | 2.76                 |
|             | Total Composite Score  | 18.83                |
|             |  |                      |
| 2017        | Understands Self   | 2.73                 |
|             | Commits to Strong Leadership through Service                           | 2.79                 |
|             | Promotes a Vision of High Expectations for All                         | 2.86                 |
|             | Develops Self and Others   | 2.74                 |
|             | Initiates Creative and Collaborative Problem Solving                   | 2.76                 |
|             | Establishes Supportive Relationships Built on Trust and Mutual Respect | 2.81                 |
|             | Communicates Ideas Clearly and with Optimism                           | 2.76                 |
|             | Total Composite Score  | 19.31                |

**SLF4LP Key Component 2—Purposeful Partnership.** The PPP was designed in collaboration with public school partners with a special emphasis in involving all area superintendents. The PPP professors engaged in two major initiatives in revising the PPP to intimately involve its public school partners. A team of two PPP faculty members conducted over

30 individual superintendent interviews. Information from these meetings was used in the revision and will be used in ongoing collaborative initiatives and program evaluations. To ensure ongoing public school input, superintendents, the cross-functional team, and other school and agency advisory committees will be utilized.

During this PPP redesign process, a 12-member Cross-Functional Team with representation from K12 public schools, higher education, and other state affiliated organizations provided strong links to the needs in their schools and school districts. The PPP Cross-Functional Team engaged in a set of activities focused on developing a clear vision for the program.

The following is an outline of the membership at the time of the PPP redesign: (a) Superintendent – 1, (b) Central office – 1, (c) Principal – 4, (d) Assistant Principal – 1, (e) Outside State Affiliated Agencies – 2, (f) Higher Education Faculty – 5.

The PPP professors and district leaders partner to provide on-site coaching for each candidate. There are clear expectations for and firm commitments from district school leaders who will oversee the clinical practice of candidates. The PPP mentors provide PPP interns with opportunities to complete required experiences outlined by the SLF4LP, and SLP Handbook, and may add their experiences and knowledge to assist the intern in successfully completing the internship.

In the PPP, the mentor and PPP faculty work more collaboratively and in greater depth to ensure the candidate is mentored appropriately throughout the internship. The PPP professors provide the school partners (i.e. district supervisors, site supervisors, principal mentors) with training in coaching and mentoring.

**PPP Partnership Impact Data.** The PPP has been delivered in cohorts of 15 to 18 candidates at local schools or school district meeting rooms. The PPP cohorts have been offered in the counties below:

- 2016 – 2018 County C, County J, County O, County NE, County L
- 2015 – 2017 County C, County J, County O
- 2014 – 2016 County C, County W1, County W2
- 2013 – 2015 County C, County W1, County W2
- 2012 – 2014 County C, County N, County W

Over the last 2 years, there were 67 PPP candidates from high need school districts in the service region. The following table summarizes the counties and the number of their PPP graduates. (see Table 2)

Table 2

Number of PPP Graduates in High Need School Districts

| High Need School District | # of PPP graduates |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| County B1                 | 2                  |
| County B2                 | 1                  |
| County C1                 | 1                  |
| County C2                 | 4                  |
| County C3                 | 1                  |
| County D1                 | 1                  |

|           |    |
|-----------|----|
| County E1 | 1  |
| County F1 | 1  |
| County G1 | 4  |
| County J1 | 1  |
| County J2 | 3  |
| County L1 | 5  |
| County M1 | 5  |
| County N1 | 3  |
| County O1 | 9  |
| County P1 | 17 |
| County W1 | 7  |
| County W2 | 1  |
| Total     | 67 |

These PPP candidates have completed approximately 67,000 internship hours and over 469 Service Leadership Projects across these high need districts which represent an additional impact of 18,000 hours of service and leadership.

The PPP develops principals in distant rural geographical locations in the eastern region of an eastern state that have limited or no access to PPPs and thus create a pipeline of “home grown” effective school leaders.

It is important to note that 137 (65%) PPP graduates are currently working in a rural school district—classified as either (a) rural, remote; (b) rural, distant; or (c) rural, fringe. The PPP intends to support rural school districts by helping superintendents “grow their own” principal pipeline (Rawls, 2016).

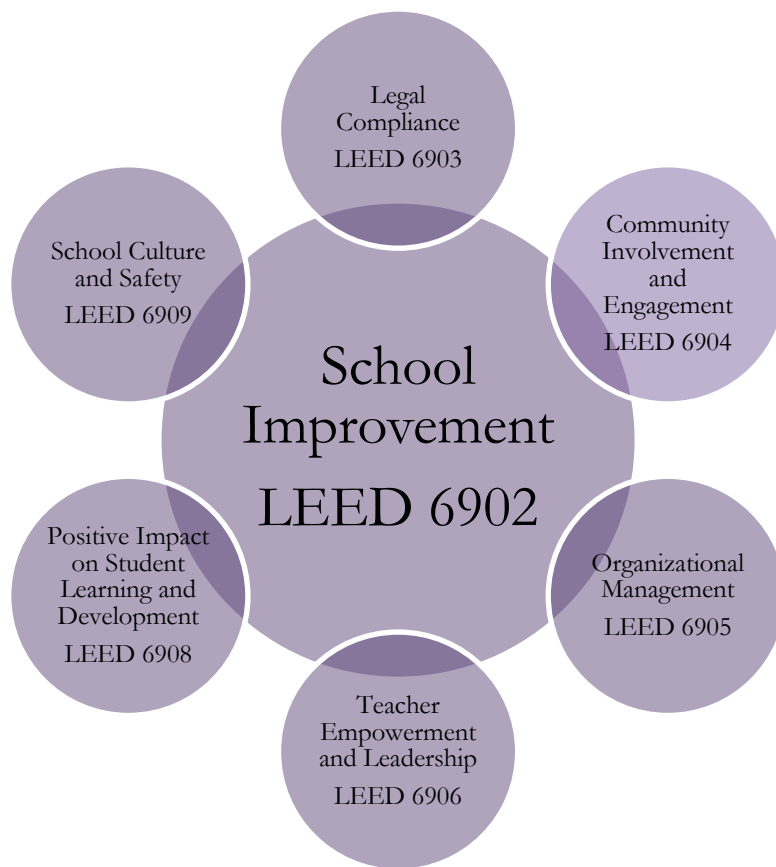
***Additional PPP Partnership Impact Data.*** The strong relationships with the PPP's regional partners have resulted in numerous learning exchanges that result in program adjustments and improvements. The PPP surveys its graduates to determine what worked well and what needs improvement. The PPP professors hold informational sessions throughout the region and these sessions provide an opportunity listen to prospective candidates, their school and district leaders, and other community stakeholders to learn more about specific challenges facing schools and school systems. The “plus/delta” survey that PPP interns and supervising principals complete each year is a helpful tool in determining how to strengthen its program so the PPP can serve its candidates and their stakeholders better.

The PPP has a long history of serving the school districts across the region which has led to strong relationships with school district leaders and community stakeholders. The PPP is represented at quarterly Regional Education Service Alliance (RESA) meetings across its service region (Northeast RESA, Southeast RESA, and Central Carolina RESA).

The PPP is enhanced by an established relationship and feedback loop with: (a) school district leaders, (b) a board of advisors, and (c) cross functional teams. School district leaders have been essential partners in the design of the PPP and have agreed to support candidates and provide them with authentic settings to complete their SLPs.

**SLF4LP Key Component 3—Service Leadership Experiences Linked to Student Achievement.** As an educational leader, PPP candidates learn to identify areas of need within their school and work with others to develop a course of action to address specific needs that will ultimately improve student achievement.

The SLF4LP (see Figure 1) provides the conceptual framework for the PPP. The framework links PPP Leadership Themes, with School Improvement at the center. A candidate’s first SLP will be on School Improvement by determining areas of need in their school. For each SLP, candidates (a) document the number of hours dedicated to this project, (b) determine quantitative and qualitative impact to the school’s culture, and (c) link the SLPs impact to student learning growth and achievement.



*Figure 1. Service Leadership Preparation Framework (SLF4LP)*

The PPP candidates complete seven SLPs in schools over a period of two years in addition to their internship. These SLPs have impacted and improved schools in the following leadership themes: (a) Positive Impact on Student Learning and Development, (b) Teacher Empowerment and Leadership, (c) Community Involvement and Engagement, (d) Legal Compliance, (e) Organizational Management, (f) School Culture and Safety, and (g) School Improvement.

The SLF4LP provides candidates with opportunities to work with principals and other appropriate personnel on (a) data collection, (b) data analysis, (c) needs identification, (d) problem-solving, (e) comprehensive planning, (f) action plan implementation, and (g) evaluation.

For example, candidates might work with their principal to determine that support for beginning teachers is a key area of concern. For their School Improvement SLP, students would research this area and determine a research-based plan for improvement. While working on the School Improvement SLP, students could also look at the other six leadership development areas and determine that (a) School Culture and Safety, (b) Legal Compliance, (c) Community Involvement and Engagement, and (d) Teacher Empowerment and Leadership issues could also be addressed. The key is to “step back” and examine the connections across these leadership development areas and determine how to best use them to support real school transformation.

To enhance the service leadership experience for candidates, the PPP is grounded in seven (7) value-added program elements:

**1. *Understanding of Self.*** As candidates participate in leadership simulations and field experiences, they are challenged to reflect on their strengths and weakness. The PPP candidates reflect on how to improve their current leadership practices, and they consider their (a) thinking habits, (b) speaking habits, and (c) serving habits as they support the work of others.

**2. *Leadership via Immersion.*** The best predictor of what you are going to do is what you have done, and the best predictor of how you are going to lead is how you have led! The PPP candidates are immersed in Service Leadership Projects that allow them an opportunity to serve their school and its stakeholders. They are encouraged to approach their current principal with a humble posture and ask how they can best serve and support the school. These SLPs run throughout the entire program which enhances their immersion in authentic leadership experiences. Students also receive ongoing coaching and feedback from PPP professors as they complete their SLPs, which ensure improved leadership performance.

**3. *Purpose-Driven.*** The PPP candidates learn about the transformational power of servant leadership and are challenged to consider viewing leadership through a servant leadership lens. Many candidates have an initial impression that servant leadership sounds weak and does not fit the leadership power narrative that they have experienced in their professional settings. However, candidates are encouraged to approach their current principal with a humble posture and ask how they can best serve and support the school. Students ask, “How can I help you?” and “What can I do to support you and your work?” This leadership posture provides a strong start and a clear purpose for their SLP, as candidates clearly seek a specific need to address in the school.

**4. *Data-Directed.*** Candidates learn the difference between being data-driven and being data-directed. Data-driven is a term that can represent how some leaders unapologetically make decisions based on a narrow set of data points. (i.e. test scores, assessment results, school’s performance grade from the state, etc.). In other words, data drives the organization—not the leader. Leaders fear the consequences of consistently low test scores and make reactionary decisions that often lead to an unhealthy and depersonalized school culture. Decisions are made based solely on a student’s test score, and over time, the culture focuses more on getting the scores up and less on the individual students and the whole child and the whole family. However, a data-driven approach includes the same data points mentioned above AND includes other quantitative data and qualitative data points to help the leader facilitate decision-making based on a more comprehensive data set. A leader who is purpose-driven (see above) and data-directed places a high value on personalized data sources (i.e. conversations with parents and students, open-ended survey questions from stakeholders, etc.). A purpose driven, data-directed approach to decision-

making leads to improved student learning conditions, improved teacher working conditions, and an overall healthier organization.

**5. *Language of Leadership.*** The PPP is grounded in the belief that you can become fluent in the Language of Leadership. As candidates complete their SLPs in the field, they listen to stakeholders and capture stakeholder language related to their SLP. Candidates examine the patterns of this stakeholder language and evaluate the implications of why stakeholders are saying these words. Candidates learn how to distinguish between Best Practice Language (BPL) and poor language from stakeholders. Candidates are also challenged to reflect on their own language patterns and to listen and capture the language of great leaders. Throughout the PPP, candidates (a) become more aware of their language patterns, (b) adopt stronger leadership language for themselves, and (c) become more fluent in the Language of Leadership.

**6. *Leadership Practices Grounded in Research.*** As PPP candidates complete their SLPs, they read research studies to find the best practices related to their specific project. For example, if the principal wants the candidate to initiate an SLP to increase parental involvement in the school, then the candidate compiles a research table on the studies, programs, and practices that have had a positive impact on improving parental involvement in other schools. The candidate shares these findings with stakeholders at the school and incorporates these practices as much as possible at the school. The candidates are also able to integrate this “research language” into their language of leadership.

**7. *Irrefutable Evidence of Impact on Schools.*** The SLP experiences for PPP candidates are compiled into individual leadership portfolios for each student. The SLPs focus on the areas of: (1) Positive Impact on Student Learning and Development, (2) Teacher Empowerment and Leadership, (3) Community Involvement and Engagement, (4) Organizational Management, (5) School Culture and Safety, (6) School Improvement. For each SLP, candidates (a) gather and analyze a comprehensive set of data points from their school, (b) set strategic priorities, (c) meet with the principal to determine their focused area of need, (d) gather stakeholder and researcher language, (e) generate an action plan—with action steps of their leadership activities, and (d) summarize the impact of their leadership with both quantitative and qualitative data.

As indicated in element six, to support their SLP experiences, candidates draw on the research and practices that provide the correlation between principal leadership and student achievement, which provide a rationale for schools to host candidates and their SLPs. Candidates explore the literature prepared to find the practice that provides results and the practice that promises but does not deliver. They find that the literature rebounds from the work of Jacob, Goddard, Kim, Miller, and Goddard (2015), who hypothesized that student achievement would increase logically following improvement in principal leadership and reduction in teacher turnover. The researchers found that despite implementing programs to improve principal leadership and reduce teacher turnover, data indicated that there was no significant improvement in student achievement. Corcoran, Schwartz, and Weinstein (2012) provided mixed results linking student achievement to principal leadership. Their data indicate that principal leadership in low-performing schools improved English language arts scores but not math scores.

Despite the findings of Jacob et al. (2015) and Corcoran et al. (2012), other researchers have connected principal leadership with student achievement (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Edmonds, 1979; Glatthorn & Jailall, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Lezotte, 1991). Further, according to Rodriguez (2008), principal leadership lifted a high poverty school from Academically Low Performing to Academically Recognized in one year. Likewise, Pyo (2013) found that principals’ instructional leadership had a positive impact on high school students’

achievement in math. In a different but still positive view of principal leadership, McGuigan and Hoy (2008) concluded that principals who control variables to promote academic optimism among students and teachers lead schools that demonstrate higher student achievement. Most recently, in a study using 2015 PISA data focused on fifteen-year-old students, Wu, H., Gao, X., & Shen, J. (2018) found principals' instructional leadership positively related to student achievement.

*Students.* The SLP-rich curriculum is grounded in the literature that supports project-based learning that is linked to student achievement. The literature encompasses process, education levels, degrees of student/candidate achievement, and subject matter. Overall, the literature provides much in the way of defining and implementing project-based learning in virtually all levels of instruction (Bauer, 2014; Coffey, n.d.) Initially, David (2008) indicated that the literature provides much discussion on the difficulty of implementing project-based learning effectively but provides little in the way of support for its impact on student achievement. Since David's assertion, Duke, Halverson, and Strachan (2016) found that project-based learning has produced significant student achievement in elementary literacy skills and social studies, specifically improving high school social studies' AP scores. The work of Duke et al. (2016) also asserted that student achievement was significant for students in schools with high poverty, especially narrowing the poverty gap in literacy skills. Their results provide support for using project-based learning with students of low socioeconomic status who according to Weber et al., 2010, were the lowest performers on national standardized assessments and the most likely to drop out of high school. This glimpse into the literature reveals the sturdy foundation upon which the SLP-curriculum is anchored.

*Candidates.* In addition to the link to the host school's benefitting from candidates' SLPs, the literature provides robust testimony and support for the benefits that the candidates garner as they successfully complete their SLPs, which are an integral part of the framework. Stone, Grantham, Harmancioglu, and Ibrahim (2007) found that graduate and undergraduate business candidates who participated in community-based projects believed their projects better prepared them for their careers. In fact, several studies that examined different disciplines found positive benefits for candidates who participated: (a) physical therapy candidates who worked in communities with high poverty (Anderson, Taylor, & Gahimer, 2014); (b) agricultural candidates who worked together on a national poster contest (Bonczek, Snyder, & Ellis, 2007); (c) mental health workers who participated in pre-service social work in the community (Iachini & Wolfer, 2015), and (d) teachers in a learning-by-doing graduate course (Chen, 2017). In a certification program without previous significant studies, Jenkins and Sheehy (2009) found that graduate and undergraduate candidates pursuing special education teaching degrees learned best in courses that incorporated SLPs. In their study of graduate candidates focusing their service in community libraries across the state of North Carolina, Becnel and Moeller (2017) found support for candidates benefits of SLPs delivered innovatively on-line.

Seymour (2013) found support for how well candidates learned team-building skills. More general benefits but no less important were identified by Lowenthal and Sosland (2007), who found that alumni indicated that non-traditional instruction such as SLPs led to stronger academic performance and more successful careers.

Three studies provided support for the benefits of SLPs while candidates studied abroad. Hull, Kimmel, Rogertson, and Mortimer (2016) found that candidates who participated in projects while studying in China were engaged successfully with business, government, and non-government groups. Araujo, Arantes, Danza, Pinheiro, and Garbin (2016) found SLPs delivered in Brazil provided not only problem- and project-based learning but also "real-world" learning.



Rajdev (2011) found a similar result but added the importance of cultural awareness that candidates learned while participating in an SLP in India.

Baker and Murray (2011) found that an afterschool SLP benefitted the undergraduate teaching candidates seeking a special education degree. Grant, Malloy, Murphy, Foreman, and Robinson (2010) found that Information Systems graduates involved in SLPs arranged with a local business sharpened their skills.

*PPP Link to Student Achievement Impact Data.* The PPP candidates, mentors, and faculty participate in multiple forms of assessments throughout the program to assess: (a) the candidate as a leader, (b) the candidate's evidences and artifacts of their leadership performance, (c) the candidate's leadership competency, and (d) the candidate's impact on their individual schools. Candidates complete the *NCSSE Self-Assessment* (SBE, 2015) a pre-assessment of each candidate prior to starting the internship and then again as a post assessment of the internship. These assessments rate each candidate's practices within each of the NCSSE standards using a Likert scale from 0 to 4 and Not applicable where 0 indicates not applicable, 1-indicates little, 2-indicates some, 3-indicates good, and 4-indicates strong experiences with each of the 12 practices. In addition, the candidates, mentors, and PPP faculty will conduct a formative assessment and a summative assessment of the NCSSE Competencies during the internship. These sources of data are utilized to determine the candidates' leadership skills and dispositions.

Each PPP candidate completes 7 SLPs in schools over a period of two years in addition to their internship. These SLPs have impacted and improved schools in the following leadership themes (see Figure 1): (a) Positive Impact on Student Learning and Development, (b) Teacher Empowerment and Leadership, (c) Community Involvement and Engagement, (d) Legal Compliance, (e) Organizational Management, (f) School Culture and Safety, and (g) School Improvement.

The PPP candidates also submit evidences from their SLPs to show they meet the NC School Executives Pre-Service Candidate Rubric. The rubric outlines the criteria for Emerging, Developing, Proficient, and Accomplished pre-service school leaders. Each PPP candidate must demonstrate irrefutable evidence for all the proficiency descriptors to meet the NC principal licensure guidelines. The SLP framework embedded in the PPP provides a clear process for meeting these licensure guidelines. Each SLP has specific proficiency descriptors assigned to it (see Appendix A). The PPP candidates complete each SLP and compile their evidence into an electronic portfolio. Once a student has successfully completed seven (7) SLPs and successfully presented evidence via electronic portfolio, they meet the state's principal licensure guidelines.

Additional samples of candidate data can be found in Appendix B. Appendix B is a sample of candidate rubric results for SLP 1.

**SLF4LP Key Component 4—Alignment to High-Quality National and State Standard.** Alignment to high-quality national and state standards for school leadership development is a vital component of the PPP. As previously mentioned, this PPP has been accredited by the National Board of Professors of Educational Administration (NPBEA) formerly known as ELCC, since 2001. The following link is to the national accreditation website that features this PPP: <http://www.ncate.org/tabid/165/Default.aspx>.

The PPP is also aligned with the NC Standards for School Executives and the North Carolina School Executive Evaluation Rubric (NCSEER) (see Table 3). The PPP candidates complete evidences (or SLPs) on seven themes: (1) Positive Impact on Student Learning and Development, (2) Teacher Empowerment and Leadership, (3) Community Involvement and

Engagement, (4) Organizational Management, (5) School Culture and Safety, (6) School Improvement, and (7) Legal Compliance.

Table 3

*Alignment to NCSSE standards, ELCC standards, and NCSEER Preservice Standards*

| ELCC Standards  | NCSSE Standards   | NCSEER preservice   |
|-----------------|---|---|
| ELCC Standard 1 | Standard 1.<br>Strategic leadership   | 1a. School Vision, Mission and Strategic Goals<br>1b. Leading Change<br>1c. School Improvement Plan   |
| ELCC Standard 2 | Standard 2.<br>Instructional<br>Leadership<br>Standard 4. Human<br>Resource<br>Leadership                                   | 2a. Focus on Learning and Teaching,<br>Curriculum and Assessment<br>2b. Focus on Instructional Time<br>4a. Professional Development/Learning<br>Communities<br>4b. Hiring, Placing and Mentoring of Staff<br>4c. Teacher and Staff Evaluation<br>5b. Conflict Management and Resolution<br>6a. Parent and Community Involvement and<br>Outreach |
| ELCC Standard 3 | Standard 3. Cultural<br>Leadership<br>Standard 5.<br>Managerial<br>Leadership   | 1d. Distributive Leadership<br>2b. Focus on Instructional Time<br>3a. Focus on Collaborative Work Environment<br>3b. School Culture and Identity<br>3d. Efficacy and Empowerment<br>5a. School Resources and Budget<br>5c. Systemic Communication<br>5d. School Expectations for Students and Staff   |
| ELCC Standard 4 | Standard 3. Cultural<br>Leadership<br>Standard 6.<br>External<br>Development  | 2a. Focus on learning and Teaching,<br>Curriculum and Assessment<br>3a. Focus on Collaborative Work Environment<br>3b. School Culture and Identity<br>5b. Conflict Management and Resolution<br>5c. Systemic Communication<br>6a. Parent and Community Involvement and<br>Outreach<br>7a. School Executive Micropolitical<br>Leadership         |
| ELCC Standard 5 | Standard 3. Cultural<br>Leadership<br>Standard 6.<br>External<br>Development<br>Standard 7.<br>Micropolitical<br>Leadership | 2b. Focus on Instructional Time<br>3c Acknowledges Failures; Celebrates<br>Accomplishments and Rewards<br>4c. Teacher and Staff Evaluation<br>5b. Conflict Management and Resolution<br>5d. School Expectations for Students and Staff<br>6b. Federal, State and District Mandates<br>7a. School Executive Micro-political<br>Leadership        |

|                 |   |  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| ELCC Standard 6 | Standard 1.<br>Strategic<br>Leadership<br>Standard 6.<br>External<br>Development  | 1b. Leading change<br>1c. School improvement plan<br>6b. Federal, State and District Mandates              |
| ELCC Standard 7 | Each NCSE<br>Standard delineates<br>practices of what<br>one would see in an<br>effective executive<br>doing in each<br>standard. | Each NCSEER delineates indicators that<br>describe the practices that a PPP candidate<br>should experience |

***PPP Alignment to Standards Impact Data.*** This PPP has been accredited by the National Board of Professors of Educational Administration (NPBEA) formerly known as Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC), since 2001. The following link is to the national accreditation website that features this PPP: <http://www.ncate.org/tabid/165/Default.aspx>.

**SLF4LP Key Component 5—Authentic Leadership Practice (Simulations, Field Experiences, and Internship).** The PPP has a strong legacy of service and leadership to its region and state. It develops leaders who can engage their constituents and communities and serve as transformational leaders to improve the quality of education and quality of life in eastern North Carolina. The PPP is also centered on (a) the integration of Educational Leadership theory, (b) best practices, (c) practical applications, and (d) coaching through extensive field and clinical experiences. The PPP encompasses the following three phases (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010): (1) leadership development through simulation; (2) leadership development through problem-based learning in field experiences, and (3) leadership development through a supervised internship.

***Phase 1.*** The first phase of the PPP identifies the candidate’s leadership skills and dispositions. Candidates immerse themselves in a simulation (NASSP, 2016) that will help them identify their leadership strengths and weaknesses and use these findings as a guide to leadership skill development throughout the candidate’s program of study.

***Phase 2.*** The second phase of the PPP includes problem-based learning through SLPs and extensive field experiences that require candidates to work with (a) principals, (b) other administrators, (c) school improvement teams, (d) teachers, (e) staff, and (f) other members of the school community to resolve (or provide recommendations to resolve) problems of practice that support teaching and learning. The field experiences are framed by a service learning model that requires PPP candidates to immerse themselves into problems of practice at the very beginning of their program. Candidates complete seven SLPs in addition to field experiences. During the first year, PPP faculty travel once a week to a SACS approved rural location in the northeastern portion of the state to meet with PPP candidates and provide professional development in leadership. Candidates are required to complete field experiences and project-based learning through SLPs that tie into leadership theory at their schools. The PPP faculty and PPP candidates meet weekly to discuss projects and the field experiences. These coaching sessions help candidates learn the roles and responsibilities of an effective school leader.

**Phase 3.** The final phase of the PPP requires candidates to complete a year-long internship experience. When PPP candidates work in schools addressing daily administration issues, they engage in authentic experiences to bridge the gap between leadership theory and practice (Cunningham, 2007). This statement is especially true for principal interns who may not have had experiences with diverse populations that are present in rural school settings (Figueiredo-Brown, Ringler, & James, 2015). The PPP requires a year-long, clinical experience (1000 hours) in an authentic setting during the second year of the degree. Interns are expected to (a) examine the overall school vision, (b) become immersed in the school’s improvement process, and (c) make a significant contribution to this vision and process as they refine their leadership skills (Risen, & Tripses, 2008). Upon successful completion of the PPP, interns will be prepared to assume a school leadership position. While it is understood that the scope and sequence of experiences included in the role of a principal is expansive, the ability of an intern to develop skills in the running of a safe and orderly school and curriculum development relative to pertinent test data is paramount. Interns will be required to provide evidences of required experiences deemed central to a successful, effective internship experience.

The clinical internship experiences provide on-the-job training and opportunities for PPP interns to develop and refine leadership skills as they provide a service to a school and are coached by a licensed and practicing principal. The mentor must agree in writing to accept on-site responsibility for the supervision of the intern. Mentors receive guidance and comprehensive information through (a) a mentor manual, (b) a monthly meeting with PPP faculty, and (c) emails (Gray, 2007). Mentors also complete a formative and summative assessment on the intern’s performance and provide the assessment results to the PPP advisor.

**Alignment to Standards and Best Practices.** The PPP prepares graduates to demonstrate five key practices (see Table 4) identified in the national research by the Wallace Foundation studies (2016). A special emphasis is placed on Instructional Leadership to provide support to schools that encourages reform and sustains meaningful change (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). The PPP also helps candidates practice instructional leadership by teaching them how to create collaborative structures within the school to facilitate high time on task and include peer feedback and sharing of ideas and strategies throughout the learning community (SBE Department of Public Instruction, 2015).

Table 4  
*PPP’s Alignment with Wallace, NCEES Standards, and SLPs*

| Key Practice (The Wallace Foundation, 2016)   | NC School Executive Evaluation Standards (SBE Department of Public Instruction, 2015)   | PPP SLP themes                             |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards | Iia. The school’s identity, in part, is derived from the vision, mission, values, beliefs and goals of the school, the processes used to establish these attributes, and the ways they are embodied in the life of the school community | 6. School improvement                      |
| 2. Creating a climate hospitable to education   | Iia. The school’s identity, in part, is derived from the vision, mission,   | 1. Positive impact on student learning and |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail                        | values, beliefs and goals of the school, the processes used to establish these attributes, and the ways they are embodied in the life of the school community   | development  |
| 3. Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision | IIa. The school's identity, in part, is derived from the vision, mission, values, beliefs and goals of the school, the processes used to establish these attributes, and the ways they are embodied in the life of the school community | 2. Teacher empowerment and leadership  |
| 4. Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn to their utmost                | IIb. The principal/assistant principal articulates a vision, and implementation strategies, for improvements and changes which result in improved achievement for all students  | 1. Positive impact on student learning and development<br>5. School culture and safety |
| 5. Managing people, data and process to foster school improvement   | IIb. The principal/assistant principal articulates a vision, and implementation strategies, for improvements and changes which result in improved achievement for all students  | 3. Community involvement and engagement<br>4. Organizational management                |

***PPP Authentic Practice Impact Data.*** The internship experience is assessed by four requirements (1) active engagement in seminar activities and other enrichment activities, (2) observations by the PPP faculty and the principal mentor; (3) completion of a webfolio (including summative activity) which documents professional growth; and (4) completion of an oral examination based on the webfolio evidences. See Table 5 for a description of the alignment of the internship assessment and the NCSSE School Executive Rubric

Table 5  
*Assessment of Internship at Proficiency Level*

| Expected Performance  |  | The evidence demonstrates that the candidate has performed at the expected level for a PPP intern.  |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| Seminar Activities and Enrichment   | Observation  | Webfolio  | Oral Examination   |
| The candidate has attended most of the scheduled seminars, been prepared to present an artifact aligned with the designated NCSE Standard, demonstrated learning and reflection, participated in the discussions following presentations of artifacts by peers, and used the sharing of information and reflections to increase own learning. | The candidate has been engaged in administrative activity at the school site, interacted with the PPP faculty to provide journals that demonstrated learning was occurring, and been evaluated in a generally positive manner by the principal mentor (orally and in writing). | The candidate has created a webfolio that included the information listed in the PPP Internship Manual-- included artifacts that show learning related to each NCSSE Standard, included summative activity that demonstrated learning across the performance indicators, and has included a journal that documents 1,000 hours of direct administrative experience. | The candidate was able to respond to questions in a manner that supports the learning documented in the webfolio, was able to articulate an appropriate educational philosophy, was able to discuss the importance of vision in a school and relate it to the internship experience, was able to discuss skills that were developed during the internship, was able to demonstrate an understanding of current issues in education, was able to discuss ways in which research, theory, and knowledge impact schools and their leaders, and was able to describe ways in which technology impacts schools. At the conclusion of the examination, the candidate has provided evidence that he/she had performed at the expected level for a PPP intern and is a qualified candidate for a position as a school administrator. |

In addition to the clinical experience assessments listed above, candidates will submit evidences from their SLPs to show they meet the NC School Executives Pre-Service Candidate Rubric (The rubric outlines the criteria for **Emerging, Developing, Proficient, and Accomplished** pre-service school leaders. Each PPP candidate must demonstrate irrefutable evidence for all of the **proficiency** descriptors to meet the NC principal licensure guidelines. The SLP framework embedded in the PPP will provide a clear process for meeting these licensure guidelines. Each SLP has specific proficiency descriptors assigned to it (see Appendix 1). The PPP candidates complete each SLP and compile their evidence into an electronic portfolio. Once a student has successfully completed seven (7) SLPs and successfully presented evidence via electronic portfolio, they will meet the NC principal licensure guidelines.

## Conclusion

Over the last several years, PPP professors have learned a great deal about the positive impact of service learning on both the leadership development of its candidates and the schools throughout the region. From these experiences, PPP professors developed the SLF4LP. The SLF4LP provides candidates with opportunities to work with principals and other appropriate personnel on: (a) data collection, (b) data analysis, (c) needs identification, (d) problem-solving, (e) comprehensive planning, (f) action plan implementation, and (g) evaluation.

The PPP is a true partnership with regional school districts that continues to grow. The PPP graduates are demonstrating success as they transition into school leadership positions. The PPP is a strong principal pipeline that provides qualified candidates for our region from recruitment to induction. Finally, the PPP is aligned to national and state standards.

As PPP professors continue to evaluate the program components, they are working with school districts to gather and monitor the quantity and quality of the program's graduates. As national and state standards change, they will continue to align the PPP with those standards.

The PPP candidates discover the power of “service” and practice the transformational skills of leading through serving and serving through leading (Noel & Earwicker, 2014). The PPP components are the result of meaningful and ongoing discussions with public school partners (i.e. (a) superintendents, (b) central office leaders, (c) principals, (d) assistant principals, (e) agency leaders, (f) higher education faculty, (g) PPP candidates, (h) PPP graduates, and (i) community college faculty), a thorough review of other PPPs throughout the nation, and the infusion of best leadership preparation practices within a 21st century learning framework.

The PPP incorporates the practices and principles of service-learning and servant leadership. This leadership preparation program builds “servant leadership capacity” through a leadership development model that starts with authentic service opportunities in local schools. The PPP candidates complete Service Leadership Projects (SLPs) and serve and support *real* improvement efforts, as they collaborate with their school partners. Finally, the PPP professors provide aspiring leaders the training and support they need along their leadership path to become highly qualified instructional leaders, with a strong service ethic, who can work effectively with diverse rural school communities.

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*Appendix A*

**Sample Assessment of SLP at Proficiency Level.**

DPI Evidence 1: Positive Impact on Student Learning and Development SLP

Candidates must meet the descriptors of the elements addressed in the evidence: ***DPI: 1b1; 2a1; 2a2; 2a3; 2b1; 2b2; 4a2; 4c1*** by completing the Evidence box next to each descriptor

**Project Name:**

| <b>DPI pre-service descriptors</b>  | <b>Service Leadership Project Evidence (what you did)</b> |
|---|---|
| <b>1b1.</b> Works with others to systematically consider new and better ways of leading for improved student achievement for all students and engages stakeholders in the change process. |   |
| <b>2a1.</b> Works with others to systematically focus on the alignment of learning, teaching, curriculum, instruction, and assessment to maximize student learning.                       |   |
| <b>2a2.</b> Helps organize targeted opportunities for teachers to learn how to teach subjects well with engaging lessons.   |   |
| <b>2a3.</b> Utilizes multiple sources of data, including the Teacher Working Conditions Survey, for the improvement of instruction  |   |
| <b>2b1.</b> Adheres to legal requirements for planning and instructional time   |   |
| <b>2b2.</b> Reviews scheduling processes and protocols that maximize staff input and address diverse student learning needs   |   |
| <b>4a2.</b> Routinely participates in professional development focused on improving instructional programs and practices  |   |
| <b>4c1.</b> Works with others to provide formal feedback to teachers concerning the effectiveness of their classroom instruction and ways to improve their instructional practice         |   |

*Appendix B*

**Sample Candidate Assessment Data for SLP 1 (Positive Impact on Student Learning and Development)**

| Rubric Criteria   | Spring 2016          |                         |                              | Spring 2017          |                         |                              |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
|   | Candidates evaluated | Average for Group (Raw) | Met/Not Met Requirements (%) | Candidates evaluated | Average for Group (Raw) | Met/Not Met Requirements (%) |
| 2a1. Works with others to systematically focus on the alignment of learning, teaching, curriculum, instruction, and assessment to maximize student learning (ELCC 2.2)                | 54                   | 3.11/4.00               | 100% Met                     | 40                   | 3.38/4.00               | 100% Met                     |
| 2a2. Helps organize targeted opportunities for teachers to learn how to teach subjects well with engaging lessons (ELCC 2.4)  | 54                   | 3.13/4.00               | 100% Met                     | 40                   | 3.38/4.00               | 100% Met                     |
| 2a3. Utilizes multiple sources of data, including the Teacher Working Conditions Survey, for the improvement of instruction (ELCC 4.1)  | 54                   | 3.07/4.00               | 100% Met                     | 40                   | 3.38/4.00               | 100% Met                     |
| 2b1. Adheres to legal requirements for planning and instructional time (ELCC 3.5)   | 54                   | 3.04/4.00               | 100% Met                     | 40                   | 3.38/4.00               | 100% Met                     |
| 2b2. Reviews scheduling processes and protocols that maximize staff input and address diverse student learning needs (ELCC 2.1)   | 54                   | 3.04/4.00               | 100% Met                     | 40                   | 3.38/4.00               | 100% Met                     |
| 4a2. Routinely participates in professional development focused on improving instructional programs and practices (ELCC 2.2)  | 54                   | 3.11/4.00               | 100% Met                     | 40                   | 3.38/4.00               | 100% Met                     |
| 4c1. Works with others to provide formal feedback to teachers concerning the effectiveness of their classroom instruction and ways to improve their instructional practice (ELCC 2.3) | 54                   | 3.07/4.00               | 100% Met                     | 40                   | 3.38/4.00               | 100% Met                     |

A score of Meet Requirements ranges between 3 and 4. To meet requirements students must score at least a 3 (proficient) in each rubric criterion.

# Examining Quality Elements in a High Education Fully Online Doctoral Program: Doctoral Students' Perceptions

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**J. Ray Thompson**

*Texas A&M University – Commerce*

**Julia N. Ballenger**

*Texas A&M University – Commerce*

**Nathan R. Templeton**

*Texas A&M University – Commerce*

*The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to examine the quality elements of online learning in a regional doctoral program. Utilizing the six quality dimensions of Hathaway's (2009) theory of online learning quality as a framework, the study investigated instructor-learner, learner-learner, learner-content, learner-interface, learner-instructional strategies, and social presence in order to explore the frequency and importance of these elements. The study's findings were in alignment with the review of literature. Course design, instructor's facilitation, and student interaction were factors impacting learning outcomes (Eom, Wen, & Ashill, 2006). Faculty participation was found to dramatically improve the performance and satisfaction of students (Arbaugh & Rau, 2007; Hrastinski, 2009). Subsequently, three conclusions emerged from the study. Conclusion one revealed the importance of doctoral students and faculty interaction. Conclusion two revealed that instructor to learner interaction is intentional. Conclusion three revealed that instructor to learner interaction was an important factor in increasing doctoral student performance in the online learning environment.*

State University is a regional university located in Northeast Texas with an enrollment in excess of 13,000, of which 40 percent are graduate students. The Online Doctoral Program in the Educational Leadership Department of the State University was implemented to ensure that all students have access to a quality online learning doctoral program. For years, State University enjoyed a state-wide acclaim for a quality educational administration program (Jefferson, personal communication, August 2012). In an effort to continue the commitment to quality education, State University explored ways to meet the challenges of a changing world with an educational opportunity that seemed economically out of reach for most students (Sabine, personal communication, June 11, 2013).

The Educational Leadership doctoral online program of State University joined Academic Partnerships (AP) in an effort to provide a greater educational opportunity and to increase graduate student enrollment, especially the doctoral student enrollment. The first AP cohort of 24 doctoral students began taking courses in March 2012. Each semester thereafter, a new cohort of doctoral students was enrolled in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program. In the 2012 Summer Semester, 57 AP students were enrolled, 66 AP students were enrolled in the 2013 Fall Semester, and 64 AP students were enrolled in the 2013 Spring Semester (Sabine personal communication, June 11, 2013).

However, with the increasing swell in the doctoral student enrollment, educational quality became an issue. Student support, instructor to student ratio, and faculty training (Trinity, personal communication, May 21, 2013) emerged as areas of challenge. The future of the doctoral online program was facing a dilemma. The sheer volume of numbers created an unmanageable situation with educational quality at risk (Sabine, personal communication, June 18, 2013). Mashaw (2012) noted, “Students in a fast-moving, technological-oriented society demand efficiency in terms of learning effectiveness and time” (p. 189). State University was confronted with the quandary of rapid expansion of the online doctoral program vs. an approach of regrouping with measured steps to ensure a quality education. In their research report, Allen and Seaman (2013) echoed the same concern for academic leaders to grapple with the quality of learning outcomes and faculty issues.

Many published research studies have examined factors that affect the effectiveness of online learning in higher education. For example, Eom, Wen, and Ashill (2006) found that course design, instructor’s facilitation, and student interaction were factors impacting the learning outcome. Student participation was also found to dramatically improve the performance and satisfaction of students (Arbaugh & Rau, 2007; Hrastinski, 2009). The researchers used Hathaway’s (2009) theory of online learning quality, which includes six quality dimensions (instructor-learner, learner-learner, learner-content, learner-interface, learner-instructional strategies, and social presence) as a framework for this research study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this descriptive case study research was to examine the elements of online learning quality. The quality of the online learning environment and experiences was determined by quality elements such as: (a) Instructor-Learner, (b) Learner-Learner, (c) Instructor-Learner Instructional Strategies, (d) Learner-Content, and Learner-Support.



## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this descriptive study: (a) What do doctoral students report about the quality of online learning environment and experiences: (b) What do doctoral students report about the importance of these quality elements for their learning? (c) What quality elements would you add to the online learning environment and experiences that were not present? Specifically, this research inquiry was to determine the extent to which these learning technologies aided in the teaching and learning of the course content and increased student-to student, student-to-teacher, and student-to-content interactions.

## **Significance of the Study**

The original online doctoral program was implemented in the Fall Semester in 2011 (Livingston, personal communication, May 31, 2013). The impetus for this educational endeavor was in response to students' request to introduce flexibility into their face-to-face program (Livingston, personal communication, June 18, 2013). This motive aligns with the finding of Allen and Seaman (2011), who found that 80 percent of their study respondents viewed the online education program as superior to the face-to-face program due to the flexibility for scheduling of courses. Once implemented with nineteen students (Livingston, personal communications, June 11, 2013), it became evident that the online doctoral program was preferred by the students. Thus, the face-to-face program was retired from the Educational Administration Doctoral program and the online format was embraced for doctoral studies.

Allen and Seaman's (2013) research involving ten years of tracking online education in the United States revealed the view that online education is just as good as face-to-face instruction is decidedly mixed. During the period of 2003 through 2009, their data reflected a small decrease in the proportion of academic leaders reporting the learning outcomes for online education were inferior to those of comparable face-to-face courses. Furthermore, they found that from 2011-2012 an increase in the proportion of academic leaders who had a positive view of the quality of the learning outcomes for online courses as compared to comparable face-to face courses. However, there remains a sizable minority that continues to see the online option as inferior (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Thus, the significance of this study is to add to this body of research on online instruction to determine students and faculty perceptions of the effectiveness of online instruction in State University's Online Doctoral Program.

## **Literature Review on Effective Online Learning Quality in Doctoral Programs**

The quality of online learning programs has been evolving as more and more colleges are offering online coursework. Current literature (Jung, 2010; McNaught, 2001; Phipps & Merisotis, 2000; Sun, Tsai, Finger, Chen, & Yeh, 2006) suggests that there are several dimensions of quality e-learning programs. Although each set of research categorizes the dimension slightly differently, the overall dimensions of online learning quality are described as how the learner interacts with the instructor, other learners, the course content, the course interface, and the instructional strategies. Each of these dimensions will be discussed in more detail.

## **Learner-Instructor**

The interaction between the learner and the instructor can affect the student's perception on the quality of the course. The aspects of this relationship that have been found to be most important are instructor support (Dykman & Davis, 2008b), instructor attitude (Wang, 2006) and the quality of the interaction (Sebastianelli, Swift, & Tamimi, 2015).

**Instructor support.** One of the most important interactions between the learner and their instructor is for the instructor to provide support for student learning by providing students with prompt, meaningful and consistent feedback. This type of feedback was found to build trust between students and their instructor (Dykman & Davis, 2008b). While students may have unrealistic expectations about the timeline of providing feedback, this can be combated by establishing communication with students in regards to a reasonable turnaround time (Sebastianelli, et al. 2015)

**The Sloan-C framework.** Wang (2006) used the Sloan Consortium Framework to apply the frameworks' five pillars of quality to the online education environment. One of the pillars is faculty satisfaction. Wang found during his study that faculty who found online instruction personally and professionally rewarding were determined to be more effective in their teaching practices. Sun et al. (2007) had a similar conclusion stating that instructor attitudes affect their student's performances. The more positive the instructor felt about using a computer to deliver their content, the more effective students perceived the course. The researchers also assumed that an instructor's timely response times could increase student's performances, but this result was not found to be significant in their study.

**Instructor interaction and quality.** Sebastianelli, et al. (2015) found that positive student and instructor interaction had a significant impact on student learning and student satisfaction in their course. However, a significant result was not determined for perceived quality for the course. Nevertheless, instructors can use the diversity of their students to encourage frequent interaction and engagement in the discussion forms and learner-learner interaction were found to have a small, but significant impact on perceived quality for an e-learning course.

## **Learner-Learner**

Although students do not get to interact face-to-face in an online course, student interaction is still possible in online courses. The importance of learner-learner interaction and the perceived quality of the course was linked in Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Drago's (2007) research, although Sun et al. (2007) did not find a significant increase in this dimension.

**Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Drago Quality Factors.** Student interactions in online programs typically occur in a discussion form setting. These interactions have been shown to be important in any online course. Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Drago (2007) found that student interactions were especially important in professional programs. Peltier et al. (2017) found this was due to students having outside professional experience to share in the discussions and less faculty direction was needed to direct the conversations. Sebastianelli et al. (2015) go further and state that some of the perceived quality of the course is dependent on the caliber of students enrolled in the course. Sweeney and Ingram (2001) also found that online discussions often are more meaningful and productive than in a classroom setting since students are allowed time to critically think through their responses.

## Learner-Content

When students enroll in an online education program, they are expected to learn the same content as they would in a face-to-face classroom. Course content has been found to be the greatest predictor of perceived learning, student satisfaction, and quality of the course in regards to the learner. Sebastinanelli et al. (2015) determined that content for an online MBA was the strongest predictor of quality even when compared with learner-learner and learner-instructor interactions. Their study for quality used a Structural Equation Modeling Approach to compare factors that had the potential to effect quality of the course.

**Structural Equation Modeling Approach.** Sebastinanelli et al. (2015) compared course content, course structure, rigor, learner-instructor interaction, learner-learner interaction and learner support to determine which factor had the greatest impact on learning and quality of the course. Although the learner interactions with other learners and their instructors played a part in determination of quality, course content was concluded to have the greatest influence over quality. The conclusion of the significant impact of the course materials was also reached in Peltier et al. (2007) using a complex SEM model. The importance of content indicates that instructors must take great care to choose content that students will find relevant, useful, and add value to their chosen profession.

**Flow model.** Student engagement with the course material can also be used to evaluate the quality of an online course. Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Model is used to determine how engaged learners are with the content of the course. Edel-Malizia and Brautigam (2014) proposed that the model can measure the students' socio/emotional, cogitative, and behavioral engagement with the course material. Although this theory has yet to be tested, student engagement with the course material has been shown to be a significant dimension of quality in face-to-face courses (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

## Learner-Interface

The interface is the online software that allows students to access the program learning content. The interface should be intuitive enough to engage novice learners but also be adaptive and take into account the many different ways students learn. Flexibility and usability (Ardito et al., 2006; Dringus & Cohen, 2005) are the keys to these learning software interfaces since they must allow for the platform to be used for many different types of courses in an online program.

**Usability.** The International Organization for Standardization (2000) defines usability as "the capability of the software product to be understood, learned, used and attractive to the user, when used under specified conditions" (Abran, Khelifi, Suryan, & Seffah, 2003, p. 324). The usability of the interface to the learner has a role in how well the content of the course is understood by the user, the learner in the case of online education. If the software interface does not make a natural connection with the learner or if the software is too slow or frustrating, learners spend more time learning the interface instead of the content of the lesson or give up on the lesson entirely (Ardito et al., 2006). The interface then would prove to be counterproductive and can overload students. This means that the interface must be clear and distraction free to increase the student's retention of the content.

**SUE.** The System Usability Evaluation (SUE) method describes a way to evaluate the quality of the learner-interface interaction. SUE evaluates both the platform and the educational modules separately with both inspections by experts and users. The user testing is cost effective,

but is difficult to apply the results to many different platforms. Ardito et al. (2006) found that it would be applicable to provide specific guidelines of e-learning systems.

**Usability heuristics.** Dringus and Cohen (2005) developed an adaptable usability heuristic checklist for online courses based on Nielsen (1994)'s summary of specific guidelines for evaluating online courses. The checklist has thirteen categories, which are as follows: (1) visibility; (2) functionality; (3) aesthetics; (4) feedback and help; (5) error prevention; (6) memorability; (7) course management; (8) interactivity; (9) flexibility; (10) consistency; (11) efficiency; (12) reducing redundancy; and (13) accessibility. These categories were also included in studies by Squires and Preece (1999); Shneiderman (2003); and Wong, Nguyen, Chang, and Jayaratna (2003).

**Evaluation method.** Although the SUE expert and user method of evaluation proposed by Ardito et al. (2006) is not new, they do include new guidelines for completing the inspections. Once user studies have been completed using a checklist similar to Dringus and Cohen (2005), guidelines for the experts can be associated with this criterion in mind and a set of Abstract Tasks can be identified. These Abstract Tasks are what drives the expert's inspection of the interface. Ardito et al. (2006) has shown that this method of inspection is far superior to a traditional evaluation.

**Learner dimension.** The learner's attitude toward the technology they must use to complete their online programs also plays a role in the success of their program. Sun et al. (2006) found three significant aspects of learners' perceived quality based upon their approach to technology. The significant characteristics that were found were a positive learner attitude toward computers and high internet self-efficacy positively influenced a learner's satisfaction with their e-learning program. Conversely, if a student had any anxiety about learning on a computer, their perceived e-learner satisfaction of their program decreased.

## **Learner-Instructional Strategies**

In an online classroom, the best instructional strategies promote a learner-centered environment. Li (2015) suggested a School to Work (STW) model, which promotes the strategy of using formative assessment to ensure the quality of the course. Sun et al. (2007) also noted that multiple assessments during the course were also effective.

**School to work model.** An increasing number of nontraditional students are enrolling in online programs. These students are seeking a more career-based educational environment. Li (2015) suggested the best way to accommodate nontraditional students' learning goals is to continually monitor the learner's development throughout the course. By using this formative assessment strategy, it was found that there was an increased feeling of a classroom community based on mutual engagement and creates a "social fabric of learning" (p. 212).

**Formative assessment.** Li (2015) defined formative assessment as the process of instructors taking "advantage of feedback information they collect to modify their teaching plan, methods, and process in order to improve their teaching proficiency" (p. 209). The feedback to students in turn can adjust their learning and study habits to complete their educational goal. In this way, the instructor can also personalize their students learning materials and increase student engagement. Instructors can directly influence a student's future achievement by having a clear idea about their students' interests and goals. Li suggests the instruction for the course to have textbook learning, game-based learning, group work, role playing, simulation and other meaningful activities.

**Environmental dimension.** An instructional strategy Sun et al. (2007) found important in perceived quality was diversity in assessment during the course. It was determined that diversified assessment methods encouraged students to give their best effort on each new assessment and had a more genuine interest in each activity. When instructors used this method, the learners' perceived learning and overall effectiveness of the instruction increased.

## **Quality Assessment in Online Courses**

Although most research on the quality of online programs has not been conducted on graduate programs, a consensus on the dimensions of quality programs has been achieved. While each research study categorized the dimensions slightly differently, the main dimensions remain the interaction of the learner with their instructors, other learners, the course content, the interface and the instructional strategies. Even though the literature has found all dimensions to be significant to the quality of the program, some have been found to be more important than others.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

This research utilized a descriptive qualitative case study design in an effort to understand social phenomena by employing descriptive and interpretive methodology. Case study designs develop an in-depth analysis of a single or multiple cases (Creswell, 1998). Specifically, "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events—such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries" (Yin, 2003, p. 2).

## **Criteria for Selecting Participants**

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants for this study. The criteria for selection were that the participants had to be graduate students who had been consistently enrolled in doctoral classes from Fall 2012, Spring 2013, Fall 2013, and Spring 2014. Names and email addresses were obtained from the Educational Leadership Department doctoral students' database. These students were invited via email to participate in the study. Adobe Connect software was utilized to present participants with semi-structured, open-ended questions. Clicking on the Adobe Connect link demonstrated student agreement to participate. Student responses were recorded in Adobe Connect software. Researchers transcribed students' responses.

## **Qualitative Data Collection**

Qualitative data for this descriptive case study were collected using the responses to the three open-ended questions in an online, focus group setting using the Adobe Connect software program. The questions were: (a) What do doctoral students report about the quality of online learning environment and experiences: (b) What do doctoral students report about the importance of these quality elements for their learning? (c.) What quality elements would you add to the online learning environment and experiences that were not present?

Participant responses in the online focus group and, open-ended question responses taken from the questionnaire distributed to these students through the online Qualtrics software program.

This qualitative data enabled the researchers to solicit deeper meanings about the perceptions of the quality of the online doctoral program at State University-Commerce.

### **Qualitative Data Analyses**

Yin (2003) maintains that qualitative data analysis consists of "examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study" (p. 109). He contends that any of these strategies can be used in practicing five specific techniques for analyzing case studies: pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2003, pp.109, 116-137). The researchers used pattern matching and explanation building during the data analysis process. Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously.

### **Discussion of Qualitative Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore doctoral students' perceptions of the quality elements of the online learning environment and experiences. Specifically, we wanted to know: (a) What do doctoral students report about the quality of online learning environment and experiences: (b) What do doctoral students report about the importance of these quality elements for their learning? (c.) What quality elements would you add to the online learning environment and experiences that were not present? There were seven students who participated in the focus group. The following sections describe the findings from the faculty participants.

#### **The Quality of Online Learning Environment and Experiences: Student Perceptions**

All participants contributed responses that underscored an overwhelming importance of the quality of online learning environment and experiences. Participant 6 noted "I have enjoyed the online courses. Teachers have provided feedback and been very helpful." Participant 2 concurred " *it enabled us to form groups with other students in order to complete projects, papers, etcetera [sic].*" The importance of the learning experience was offered by Participant 8:

*"I learned best when the teacher was present in the course such as chats, discussion board. Some teachers even held google handouts and Adobe Connect. Teacher presence in the classroom was helpful."*

However, Participant 7 stated "I did not get feedback from all of my professors. Perhaps one or two gave me feedback. I was not pleased with teacher presence in my courses." Participant 4 voiced "I wish more of the teachers had provided feedback on my assignments. Some did, but most did not."

Participant 3 noted:

*"Some of the teachers provided feedback. Some of them did not. I learned best when the teacher was present in the course such as chats, discussion board. Some teachers even held google handouts and Adobe Connect. Teacher presence in the classroom was helpful."*

## **The importance of Quality Elements for Learning: Student Perceptions**

An overall review of the data revealed that most students were pleased with feedback from teachers, teacher presence, student-centered teachers, and the cohort model. For example, Participants 1 used these words to express their feelings: *“The Cohort model was great. The support, help with assignments helped me be more successful. We had good teachers. Students like to complain but most of our teachers were good.”* Participant 4 added:

*“I think online teaching is effective. I really enjoyed some of the teachers. They were student-centered. We received feedback and helpful resources in each module from most of the teachers.”*

Participant 2 noted:

*“The quality elements that I felt, were really good included the discussion threads since they drew upon participation from everyone with occasional input from the professor. We established oftentimes Skype groups whereby we would meet by ourselves on a weekly basis in order to discuss what we needed to do in order to complete whatever assignments that might have been assigned for that particular week.”*

Participant 3 remarked that *“I learned best when the teacher was present in the course such as chats and discussion board. Some teachers even held google handouts and Adobe Connect.”*

Lastly, Participant (5) added *“I thought the discussion board was very helpful. Some teachers provided great feedback on the discussion board and on the assignments. I am pleased with my courses. I have learned a lot.”*

## **Quality Elements Need for the Online Learning Environment and Experiences: Student Perceptions**

Overall students were pleased with the online environment and experiences. No student expressed a desire to return to the face to face environment. Participant 1 stated *“Online learning was just as effective as f2f for me because of teacher presence in the classroom.”* Participant 4 added *“I think online teaching is effective.”* Participant 4 concurred :

*“I wish more of the teachers had provided feedback on my assignments. Some did, but most did not. I think online teaching is effective. I really enjoyed some of the teachers. They were student-centered. We received feedback and helpful resources in each module from most of the teachers.”*

Participant 5 noted *“some teachers provided great feedback on the discussion board and on the assignments. I am pleased with my courses. I have learned a lot.”* Participant 6 concurred *“I have enjoyed the online courses. Teachers have provided feedback and been very helpful.”*

However, participants did identify needs to make the online environment and experiences more effective. Participant 2 noted *“there needed to be more timely feedback from the professors, clarification in what it was that we had to do in an assignment, and professor monitoring instead of teaching assistants.”* Participant 7 added *“ I did not get feedback from all of my professors. Perhaps one or two gave me feedback. I was not pleased with teacher*

In summary, each of the students (100%) who responded to the open-ended statements perceived these learning technologies used in the online learning environment were important and of value to increase the social presence of the teacher and students in the classes. In addition, the student indicated that the use of technologies such as streaming videos, responding to the case

students and simulations, and Skype or Google+, had the potential to assist with the retention and mastery of the content as well as create an interactive and exciting learning environment.

## **Conclusions**

The researchers drew several conclusions for a quality online program from the qualitative findings of this study. Conclusion one revealed the importance of doctoral students and faculty interaction. All of the students agreed that instructor to learner interaction was an important factor in the online learning environment. This is facilitated in a variety of ways, especially timely response to concerns. This conclusion is supported by Swann's (2003) contention that student achievement is related to the frequency of interaction with instructors, clear prompt feedback, and multiple opportunities to learn and demonstrate learning.

Conclusion two revealed that instructor to learner interaction is intentional. From the qualitative data, all 7 (100%) faculty members overwhelmingly agreed that the use of online learning technologies were important and of value to increase instructor to learner interaction. This conclusion is supported by Mashaw (2012), who refers to instructor to learner interaction as teacher social presence. Chen (2007) advances the notion that engaging students in meaningful learning activities increases the likelihood of learning.

Conclusion three revealed that instructor to learner interaction was an important factor in the online learning environment. This is evidence by over all (100%) of students expressing agreement. Two students indicated that they miss the meaningful conversations from face-to-face interactions. Students do benefit from individual assessment and continual feedback toward their progress (Swan, 2003).

## **Implications/Recommendations for Practice and Future Research**

Lives of students are now influenced by technology, and all of its implications, on a daily basis. In 2010, under direction of President Obama, the United States Department of Education and the Office of Educational Technology developed the National Education Technology Plan, *Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology*, to identify goals for technology implementation. The model was designed to assist all levels of education to connect what is taught in education with how it is taught. The model was intended to identify areas for research and development to meet the ongoing challenges posed by changes in technology.

This study has examined students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online instruction in State University Doctoral Online Program is aligned with *Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology* because the findings and conclusions of this study contribute to the body of research for a quality online instructional program.

The findings of this research provide meaningful data that suggest implications for the elements of online learning quality within the online doctoral program. It is critical to expand the understanding of online learning quality, for Eom, Wen, and Ashill (2006) found that course design, instructor's facilitation, and student interaction were factors impacting the learning outcome. This current study confirmed these findings. Three implications/recommendations for future study emerge that are noteworthy.

The first implication emphasizes the importance of having tools in place for the purpose of determining the strategies that encourage student/faculty engagement and interaction. Allen and Seaman (2013) surveyed more than 2,800 colleges and universities for the purpose of determining



the opinions of academic officers regarding online education. The study reported that academic leaders expressed substantial improvement with regard to the quality of the online learning. This is based on the belief held by academic leaders that good tools are in place to assess the online instructional program. Duncan and Cator (2010) contend that the infrastructure of learning must be adjusted so that educators and students can access each other or resources at any time. If this done correctly, productivity increases for all stakeholders (Duncan & Cator, 2010). Chen (2007) noted that while student engagement and student/faculty interaction requires more time from the instructor, as well as the learner, the learning occurs that is truly meaningful.

The second implication is the periodic evaluation of the online program for quality. Given the changes in technology hardware and software, program evaluation serves to maintain program focus and emphasize student outcomes. Assessment information should be regularly gathered and evaluated to help educators improve upon their efforts (National Education Technology Plan, 2010). Duncan and Cator (2010) advance the notion that if our education programs are more productive, it will create students who are more productive and capable. Glenn (2008) observes that universities are now feeling the challenge of educating students with skills and knowledge of technology so that individuals can compete globally. Moloney and Oakley (2010) reported that online enrollment is expected to grow 20% for the following few years. With these issues in mind, addressing what quality online educational programs are, and are not, is of prime importance. Moloney and Oakley strongly contend that given the educated and competitive nature of international market, online education programs must be evaluated for quality, just as traditional schools are.

Thus, we recommend that our online program continue to be evaluated using both formative and summative assessments. One method would be to structure a time and section in each course for students to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of technologies and pedagogical skills to engage them in the teaching and learning environment and result in a successful experience. Another method of evaluation could be during the time the student exits from the program. A few structured-open-ended questions could be designed to obtain students' perceptions of program effectiveness related to content, teacher and student presence, engagement, and learning outcomes.

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# High Quality Professional Development in Charter Schools: Barriers and Impact

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**Laurie A. Kimbrel**  
*University of West Georgia*

*This case study examines how a charter school overcame obstacles to offer professional development aligned with research based best practices and how that program impacted teacher behavior and student outcomes. Staff interviews were conducted and documents were analyzed in order to determine the characteristics and impacts of professional development. Data analysis revealed the presence of a teacher driven, best practice aligned program that had positively impacted teacher practice and job satisfaction as well as student engagement. Unique barriers to planning and delivery of the program due to the charter school environment were identified as: (1) financial constraints, (2) time constraints, and (3) teacher attitude.*

Charter schools represent a relatively new but quickly growing segment of K-12 education in the United States and are a central tenant to many reform agendas. The charter school movement began when the first charter establishment law passed in Minnesota in 1991 and has since grown quickly. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2017) estimates there to currently be over 6,000 charter schools serving about 2.57 million students, which is about 4% of the student population in the United States. The rapid growth of charter schools and increasing numbers of students served by them creates urgency around a set of questions regarding why some charter schools are successful and others are not. What commonalities do successful charter schools share and how to those characteristics contribute to student success? The research in this field is in its infancy, but is of importance given the increase in number of schools that open every year and numbers of students served in them. Although there are many characteristics that may lead to charter school success, high quality teacher professional development is one that provides promise.

The purpose of this case study is to examine how one charter school worked through systemic barriers unique to the charter environment to plan and offer professional development aligned with best practices as described in recent research. In addition, this study examines the impact of high quality professional development on teacher attitude and behavior and student outcomes.

### **Literature Review**

Not all charter schools have lived up to the promise of a more effective type of school and in fact, they are no more likely than traditional public schools to positively impact student achievement. The Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (2009), found that when charter students are matched demographically with their public school counterparts, only 29% outperform traditional public schools in math and only 25% outperform traditional public schools in reading. Much of the challenge for charter schools is rooted in the characteristics and quality of the teachers. Charter school salaries are often lower than their traditional public school counterparts and teachers are more likely to be uncertified, not have a master's degree or have less experience than teachers at traditional public schools (Cannata & Penaloza, 2012). Stuit & Smith (2006) noted that teacher turnover is much higher in charter schools because teachers are more likely to be young, inexperienced, and dissatisfied with working conditions. In addition, the required use of complex instructional strategies mandated by many charter contracts can create challenging conditions for teachers who lack experience and certification and may lead to dissatisfaction, and turnover.

A traditional school district would likely have the capacity to overcome problems presented by inexperienced and uncertified teachers through established systems of mentoring and professional development. In order to meet system reform goals of increased student achievement, many states have created policy initiatives that require mentoring for new teachers in traditional public schools that pair the new teacher with a successful, experienced teacher (Mullen, 2011). These types of mentoring situations have proven successful in reducing teacher turnover and increasing teacher skills when teachers are given emotional, logistical and communal support from experienced peers (Strong, 2005). Implementing these types of mentoring relationships in charter schools may prove problematic because of the high numbers of inexperienced teachers typically hired. Furthermore, in an independent, start-up charter, every teacher is new to the

school. In these cases, charters must rely on professional development rather than mentoring to support teacher skill development and teacher retention.

The effects of teacher professional development on gains in student learning have been studied in depth over the past decades in traditional public schools but there is little similar research conducted in charter schools that operate under different conditions. In research commissioned by the Council of Chief State School Officers, Blank & de las Alas (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 74 studies focused on the effects of professional development for K-12 teachers of science and mathematics. This study confirmed that high quality professional development does have a significant impact on student achievement. In addition, teachers who engage in sustained professional development are more likely to implement a specific teaching methodology, as is often required in a charter school, with greater fidelity than those who are untrained. Hixson, Ravitz, & Whisman (2012) studied the influence of teacher professional development on the implementation of Project Based Learning (PBL) and found that teachers who received professional development were significantly more likely to implement the instructional methodology than teachers in the control group.

Much is also known about characteristics of high quality professional development programs that are likely to result in improved student achievement. In 2013, the West Virginia Department of Education conducted a meta-analysis that identified an emerging consensus on professional development implementation characteristics that enhance teachers' use of new knowledge and skills in their classrooms, thus leading to improved student outcomes. According to their study, high quality professional development has the following characteristics:

- content focused with learning that deepens subject area knowledge and related pedagogical approaches;
- coherent instruction that provides experiences in a progression that builds upon skill over time and aligns with school goals;
- an active learning environment that provides teachers an opportunity to plan for implementation;
- provides opportunities for teachers from the same grade level, department or school participate together;
- is of the appropriate duration considering the complexity of the skills being conveyed and includes follow up coaching or instruction (Hammer, 2013).

Although charter school teachers are almost as likely to receive some type of professional development than traditional school teachers, the focus of that training does not tend to align to best practices that cause an increase student learning. Charter school teachers tend to participate in professional development focused on classroom management, teaching English-language learners and teaching students with disabilities. Traditional public school teachers are more likely to receive professional development in their subject matter content, instructional methodologies and use of computers (Goldring, Gray, Bitterman, & Broughman, 2013). The difference in teacher characteristics in charter schools combined with the required use of complex instructional strategies and lack of access to high quality professional development creates a set of circumstances that may be responsible for the lackluster performance of some charter schools. This case study examines the questions regarding the impact of high quality professional development in charter schools, including whether it is a condition that increases the likelihood of student success.

## **Method**

This case study examined professional development planning, implementation, and outcomes at one suburban K-8<sup>th</sup> grade charter school that draws a diverse student population from the near suburbs of a major metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. At the time of study, the school was in its second year of operation and there were approximately 600 students enrolled with 60 staff members including four administrators and one counselor and 40 teachers. The school was granted its charter contract from the public school district in which it resides, but that district has no role in governance or day to day operations of the school. The charter school operates as an independent entity that is accountable to the school district only for meeting the goals within the charter contract. Governance functions are performed by a ten-person volunteer board of directors that appoints their own members.

The mission of the school is to provide an education based on design thinking and problem-solving with an emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to K-8 children in a diverse community. The overall goal of the school is to prepare children in a way that provides them a foundation to be creative innovators and problem solvers so they are prepared for success and leadership in the rapidly changing world. Given this mission and goal, the required instructional methodology at the school is a complex mix of design thinking and project based learning with a STEM focus. In addition, the school adds one hour to each day to the school schedule, four days per week for a class in innovation for students in all grades and provides a differentiated programming in math, science and literacy. The charter of the school specifically calls for the use of materials from the Singapore Math program and Full Option Science System (FOSS).

### **Data Collection**

Staff member interviews were utilized to gather data regarding the planning, delivery, and impact of professional development. Participants were selected through the solicitation of volunteers. Seven teachers and three administrators volunteered and participated in interviews. The participating teachers included regular and special education teachers, teachers from elementary and middle school as well as gifted teacher and a department chair.

Documents were examined including professional development plans and surveys in order to corroborate data gathered from interviews. Student achievement data in the areas of reading and math were examined by grade level using results from the Northwest Evaluation Association Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment that was administered at the end of the previous school year to all K-6 students.

### **Research Design**

A descriptive qualitative single case study format was utilized to gather and report data in an attempt to answer three questions: (1) What are the barriers to offering a high quality professional development program at a charter school, (2) How can these barriers be overcome, and (3) What is the impact to teachers and students when high quality professional development is offered?

Using case study allows for the description of contemporary phenomenon within the real-life context in which the intervention has occurred (Yin, 1994). The case study format also allowed the researcher to deeply consider a single element within a single system (Stake, 2010).

This study follows Wolcott's (1994) recommendation to increase depth rather than scale with the understanding that a study at a single school prevents the ability to make comparisons across settings. This case study is exploratory in that it is an effort to develop knowledge about a particular phenomenon with the expectation that this information will shape future research including study of the impact of professional development on student achievement in charter schools.

Construct validity was ensured by analysis of multiple sources of data including data from interviews with teachers and administrators as well as review of documents. Documents were reviewed in order to triangulate the data gathered from interviews. Internal validity was ensured as data were collected and analyzed in order to test the theories that a charter school can overcome barriers to offering high quality professional development and when they do so there is an impact to teacher behavior and student outcomes. External validity is often difficult to ensure using the case study method but was considered through the literature review process by searching for similar research. For the purposes of this case study, high quality professional development was defined using the characteristics identified by Hammer in the meta-analysis from the West Virginia Department of Education in 2013.

### **Analysis of data**

Data analysis was guided by elements of constant comparison coding methods as described by Glaser (1965). Interview recordings were transcribed into written documents and those transcriptions were coded into categories based on the characteristics of quality professional development as described by Hammer (2013) in the West Virginia Department of Education study. Teacher and administrator statements were coded into as many different categories as possible while also comparing each statement to the previously coded statements following what Glaser referred to as the "defining rule for the constant comparative method" (p. 439). Additional themes that were not best practices identified by Hammer (2013) were also sought.

Professional development plans and surveys were analyzed according to theme areas to corroborate the data gathered in interviews. Finally, Measure of Academic Progress assessment data were analyzed by grade level to establish the extent of student growth after the first year of operation. Charter schools are public schools supported by tax dollars and therefore, all documents examined were available in the public domain.

### **Results**

Document analysis provided information regarding the structure of the professional development program in place at the school. The school calendar included 11 full teacher work days without students present that were utilized for teacher training. These 11 days included five days prior to the start of the school year and one at the conclusion of the school year with the remainder of the days scattered throughout the year. The focus of training on full days of professional development was utilization of resources and materials required by the charter such as Singapore Math, FOSS science, and design thinking. In addition, students are dismissed from school one hour early one day each week and this time was also utilized for teacher professional development. The training sessions on early dismissal days were collaboratively planned and delivered by the administrative and teaching staff. Staff members volunteered to develop and deliver mission driven training sessions and teachers were free to sign up for any session based on their personal interest or need.



The analysis of the staff interviews and documents resulted in five themes associated with the professional development program at the school, which are discussed in the following sections.

### Evidence of High Quality Content Delivered in Training Sessions

A major theme identified in the analysis was the presence of professional development content that aligned with research based best practice and was therefore, most likely to impact student achievement (see Table 1). It was found that professional development in this school served the dual purposes of being content focused with learning that deepened subject area knowledge and also improved teachers understanding of the pedagogical approaches that are specifically called for in the school charter. School professional development plans called for a two stream approach to training. All training related to the mission of the school was mandated for staff and additional training was personalized to the needs of the teacher. At the time of the study, professional development to improve content area teaching had focused on effective use of instructional materials required by the school charter. Teacher A stated, “The all-day professional development workshops are usually our big ticket items like Singapore Math and Foss Science. We have had the trainers come and work with us lots of times so that we really know how to implement.” Teacher E added, “We have Singapore Math training in grade level clusters. Generally, it is effective and interactive.”

Table 1  
*Coding Results: Content of Professional Development*

| <i>Indicator</i>                       | <i>Teachers<br/>(n)</i> | <i>Administrators<br/>(n)</i> | <i>Examples</i>   |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| <i>Content focus pd offered</i>        | 5                       | 3                             | “At the beginning of the year we focus on overall school needs and those curriculum spots that need work, for example, the math trainer worked extensively with our teacher teams this year.” |
| <i>Pedagogical approach pd offered</i> | 7                       | 3                             | “We have a training session today about how to make thinking visible and that is something I can use in any content area.”  |
| <i>Content aligned with mission</i>    | 7                       | 3                             | “Innovation training is aligned with our mission and that’s what sets us apart from other schools”  |

All staff interviewed agreed that professional development training sessions were related to the mission and charter of the school. Teacher E said:

Having innovation training and help is good because we teach innovation lessons that are not in our content area and we are stepping outside of our comfort zone in doing that. I think that it actually helps us strengthen us as teachers to expand a little bit.

Both teachers and administrators mentioned pedagogical professional development as the most typically offered type of training, as well as the most meaningful to their work at the time. Administrator B, who had primary responsibility for planning professional development stated:

We have done a lot but have so much more to do with design thinking and PBL (Project Based Learning). There are a lot of connections but they are not always completely compatible. The combination is something no one has really done before and this will drive our professional development in the coming years.

Teachers agreed that the complex combination of pedagogical techniques required by the charter had been the focus and highlight of the professional development program at their school. Teacher C said, “Design thinking, differentiation, and making thinking visible have all been fantastic. There are lots of sessions about things you can do in your classroom”, the same teacher also said, “What I really like about our sessions is that you come in, get an agenda that aligns with our mission, and you jump right in. There’s time to learn and share and it’s personalized to what I need.”

### **Evidence of High Quality Structure of Professional Development Training**

Elements of high quality professional development structure were also evident in the interviews; however, this theme area was not as strong as the high quality content theme (see Table 2). Teachers and administrators indicated that each of the indicators were present to some extent.

Staff generally felt that instruction had been coherent and that training had provided experiences in a progression that built upon skill over time, but that based on the complexity of the instructional methodologies required in the charter contract, much more training was needed. “Some of our teachers have never seen these things and so we need to start by introducing concepts just to get them underway”, said Administrator A. This complexity of the pedagogy was also echoed by Administrator B, “This will take time. PBL and design thinking training take years just by themselves and to marry the two is even more complex. We are also embarking on STEM certification and that is complicated as well.” She summarized by saying, “We need to balance the relationship we have with our teachers with the complexity of our mission statement.”

Teachers had mixed feelings about the level of active learning that that provided an opportunity to plan for implementation of the new skill and the opportunities for teachers from the same grade level, department or school participate together. Teacher B said, “Our team is scattered at the Thursday workshops because everyone has a choice, but I like it because I don’t want to attend something that doesn’t apply to me.” Teacher C said, “Teams try to meet during times when there are no children here like in the early morning. Other teams seem to find other time to talk like at lunch or when they supervise recess.” The value of additional time for team work was expressed by Teacher D:

A week or so ago, there was a workshop that my whole team chose to attend. It was a time when I felt on an even playing field with the rest of the teachers. It was helpful because I was able to communicate with others and plan how we would use the information.

Table 2  
*Coding Results: Structure of Professional Development*

| <i>Indicator</i>   | <i>Teachers<br/>(n)</i> | <i>Administrators<br/>(n)</i> | <i>Examples</i>  |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Progression that builds over time</i>                           | 4                       | 1                             | “We have sessions on a cycle so if you need a refresher or repeat, you can choose to go again.”        |
| <i>Participation in teacher teams that plan for implementation</i> | 4                       | 2                             | “Training at the beginning of the year is with teams but it is something I would like to see more of.” |
| <i>Follow up coaching</i>  | 2                       | 3                             | “Administrators have an open door policy and if you want coaching, you just have to go ask.”           |

That sentiment was echoed by administrators and Administrator B stated, “(Teams working together) hasn’t really happened yet except for in content area training. We need to get to that point.”

### **Evidence of Teacher Driven and Personalized Training**

The strongest theme noted in the interview coding and document review was the presence of teacher driven professional development (see Table 3). Students at the school were released an hour early one day per week allowing teachers time to attend personalized sessions intended to meet self-identified needs. All teachers and administrators interviewed stated that teachers had a choice about which professional development sessions they attend. Teacher C summarized the approach:

Every Thursday the students are dismissed an hour early and we have that time for professional development and we have flexibility in what we choose. The thing I think is most important is sitting and listening to your colleagues and then being able to speak out about your issues and ideas.

Table 3  
*Coding Results: Teacher Driven and Personalized Professional Development*

| <i>Indicator</i>                                | <i>Teachers<br/>(n)</i> | <i>Administrators<br/>(n)</i> | <i>Examples</i>   |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| <i>Teacher input into workshop topics</i>       | 3                       | 3                             | “I filled out a survey about what sessions I would like to see and many of them have been offered.” |
| <i>Teacher choice in training sessions</i>      | 7                       | 3                             | “There are anywhere from 3-5 sessions per week and we have the option to choose.”                   |
| <i>Option for teachers to deliver workshops</i> | 7                       | 3                             | “It’s fun when teachers present and we learn from each other.”                                      |

Teachers also noted the value in learning from their colleagues. Teacher D stated, “Last year, a lot of times, it was all admin that delivered, but this year they have branched out and asked teachers and that helps with our evaluations as well.” Teacher input into the topics for workshops was also corroborated in the document review through analysis of professional development surveys given to teachers.

Teacher driven professional development and personalized instruction is not an element of high quality professional development identified by Hammer (2013) in the West Virginia Department of Education meta-analysis; however, even if it is not likely to impact student achievement, in this case study, it clearly had an impact on teacher satisfaction. Teacher C stated:

I think in the past I may have been hesitant to deliver PD because people just kind of shut down and look at their phones. That isn’t the case here. This is a community and everyone is a lifelong learner. Everyone is kind and receptive. It’s very welcoming and people value what you deliver to them.

The high level of personalization of professional development did have a downside in that teacher teams did not have a common experience and it did not give teams opportunity to plan for implementation of the skills learned. The need for more time to work with teams was a consistent theme. Teacher A stated, “We share out at grade level team meetings but that’s more like maintenance than professional development. It’s like a temperature reading where we ask were you able to incorporate that?”

### **Barriers to High Quality Professional Development**

The literature regarding professional development in charter schools indicates that the focus of training does not typically align with practices found to increase student achievement; therefore, administrators in this case study were asked questions about the barriers to planning and implementation of high quality professional development. All administrators discussed their

collective belief about the importance of teacher training and identified money, time, and teacher attitude as barriers that they encountered (see Table 4).

Financial constraints were identified as a barrier that manifested itself in multiple ways. Administrator A stated:

We have financial barriers because we are a new school and so many things need to be done. There are still a lot of moving pieces. We want to make sure we are training the people who will stay with us so we don't make them marketable and then they leave.

The same administrator also noted the lack of money to pay substitute teachers when teachers were in trainings, "Our para-professionals are the only subs we have and if our teachers are off campus or in trainings, we don't have enough people to cover their classes."

Table 4  
Coding Results: Barriers to Implementation

| <i>Indicator</i>             | <i>Teachers<br/>(n)</i> | <i>Administrators<br/>(n)</i> | <i>Examples</i>  |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Financial constraints</i> | 1                       | 3                             | "We have less money per student than other schools and so there isn't enough money to do what we want to do. We have to limit and prioritize." |
| <i>Time</i>                  | 2                       | 3                             | "Our school day is longer and teachers are paid less. We have to balance it all and not overwhelm them."                                       |
| <i>Teacher attitude</i>      | 1                       | 3                             | "Teachers are so conditioned to not take risks and they have a fear of failure so they don't want to try new things."                          |

Another financial constraint mentioned by both an administrator and a teacher was the inability to pay for teachers to attend outside workshops. Administrator B said:

We don't have the money for teachers to attend conferences and that is a huge limiting factor and one of our biggest challenges. Teachers feel valued when we pay for them to go to a workshop and so this is something we need to add as soon as we can. Fortunately, we applied for and received a huge grant so this will be something we add.

The lack of time for professional development was also noted as a factor that is exacerbated in a charter school. Administrator B said, "Our school day is a few hours longer than the other schools in the county, so time is our number one problem. We don't want to burn out

our teachers and yet, there is so much they need to know. One of the things we have added to help is learning walks that take place during the school day. We were surprised by how excited some teachers were about this opportunity.”

Teacher mindsets and attitudes were identified by all administrators as an obstacle to professional development implementation. Administrator C summarized, “I would say a lot of our teachers have been conditioned that the lesson plan is on the desk, the standard is on the board and you do everything in 15 minute increments. Even when we tell them we want them to take a risk and that failure is ok, they have the deer in the headlights look.” Administrator A also mentioned the significance of teacher attitude, “Sometimes the teachers are overwhelmed by the complexity of a new school and what we are trying to do and it looks like they are being dismissive. They aren’t doing it to be mean, but sometimes they just think they don’t need any more training.”

The administrators continued to echo their commitment to providing teachers with high quality training, despite the numerous obstacles to doing so. Given their strong beliefs, none of the administrators felt that the barriers they mentioned were insurmountable and each shared strategies that were utilized to overcome them. The large grant that the school applied for and received was mentioned as the most important method to overcome the financial barriers, but creative ideas were also highlighted, “We are planning to open up some of our workshops to teachers at other schools so that we can have more things here on site for our own teachers and then we can offset some of the costs”, said Administrator A. She also stated that they are working with vendors to negotiate more training hours as they increase their supply orders.

Administrators also discussed overcoming the barriers to teacher motivation by developing productive relationships with them, modeling what is expected and creating a positive school culture. Administrator B said, “I now have teachers that regularly share their work with me and I’m trying to have that type of trusting relationship with everyone. I model strategies and offer assistance. It’s the kind of help I wanted when I was a teacher and we make it fun and active.” Administrator A summed up the beliefs of the leadership by saying, “I can understand why many charters do not offer much teacher training. There are so many priorities and so many things get in the way but we have made a commitment to our teachers, families and students to be different and to train our teachers in ways that we think will improve our teachers’ skills so that we can live up to the promises in our charter contract.”

### **Impact to Teacher Attitude and Behavior and Student Outcomes**

Data were analyzed regarding the impact of professional development on teacher attitude and behavior as well as student outcomes (see Table 5). Staff expressed the belief that the professional development did impact teacher behavior and skills. Administrator A summarized:

There are times like when we had the MAP testing sessions where our teachers really seemed to get it and it use it and other days where the training doesn’t seem to matter. Sometimes we see teachers using the skills but it is not immediate. I know the changes we need won’t happen overnight but we are seeing incremental improvements.

Administrator C stated, “I have seen a few teachers try project based learning elements outside of innovation hour. We know they get it when the generalize it to the classes they teach.” Teacher C shared a story related to student impact:

I just happened to hear one of the teachers when she used the visible thinking strategy I taught in a workshop. She has a pretty unruly and uncooperative group of students and they were reading about women in the Middle East and she used the handout I provided.

Every student identified a color, symbol, and image. They did it and they wanted to share their work. It was remarkable and they were all in. The teacher shared with me later that the students handed in work that she did not think they were capable of.

Table 5  
Coding Results: Impact on Teachers and Students

| <i>Indicator</i>                                 | <i>Teachers<br/>(n)</i> | <i>Administrators<br/>(n)</i> | <i>Examples</i>   |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| <i>Teachers implement skills taught</i>          | 4                       | 3                             | “I am implementing design thinking and I understand the connection to students now.”    |
| <i>Teachers deliver content more effectively</i> | 2                       | 3                             | “I know how to creatively use the materials and I’m not stifled by standards anymore.”  |
| <i>Increase in student engagement</i>            | 5                       | 3                             | “Our students are really responding to positive reinforcement and they are so engaged.” |

Teachers also indicated that the focus on teacher driven and personalized professional development gave them a sense of job satisfaction that they had not experienced in other public school settings. Teacher B said, “I have been in other places where you have to sit in long training sessions that don’t apply to you at all. It’s a waste of time. One of the reasons that I like working here is that I get to choose what workshops are most valuable to me.” Teacher D said, “I was nervous at first to lead a workshop but I will definitely do it again. I have never been asked to share my skills and ideas with other teachers before and it makes me feel like administrators care about me and value what I do.”

Interview coding revealed a consensus that professional development had begun to impact teacher behavior as well as student engagement, but that it was too early to see the impact on students’ academic performance. Administrator B stated, “I think it will take us a few years to get data about academic impact, but I have already seen a big impact on the behavior and engagement of our students. I have seen teachers with difficult students use the design thinking strategies instead of worksheets and the level of appropriate engagement has increased dramatically.” Administrator C expressed similar sentiment, “When I see students and they stop asking me if their work is good because they know it’s good, that’s student impact. I have the best job in the world because I see that moment, record it and work to replicate it.”

Table 6  
*Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) Spring 2017 Assessment Results*

| <i>Grade level</i> | <i>Students with valid score</i> | <i>Above norm Math</i> | <i>Above norm Math</i> | <i>Above norm Reading</i> | <i>Above norm Reading</i> |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
|                    | <i>(n)</i>                       | <i>(n)</i>             | <i>(%)</i>             | <i>(n)</i>                | <i>(%)</i>                |
| <i>K</i>           | 49                               | 37                     | 76%                    | 39                        | 80%                       |
| <i>1</i>           | 40                               | 35                     | 88%                    | 36                        | 90%                       |
| <i>2</i>           | 75                               | 58                     | 77%                    | 62                        | 83%                       |
| <i>3</i>           | 87                               | 66                     | 76%                    | 73                        | 97%                       |
| <i>4</i>           | 75                               | 58                     | 77%                    | 55                        | 73%                       |
| <i>5</i>           | 66                               | 56                     | 85%                    | 48                        | 73%                       |
| <i>6</i>           | 56                               | 42                     | 75%                    | 44                        | 79%                       |

Student assessment data were analyzed as a part of the document review (see Table 6). After one year of instruction at the school, all grade levels performed higher than the national grade level norm scores. This is particularly notable in the early grades where students have had little or no instruction at other schools. In addition, 68% of students enrolled at the school scored at the proficient or distinguished level on the state required end of grade assessments during the previous year of the study, which was their first year of operation. These are promising early results but further data will need to be gathered over the coming years definitively connect student performance to the professional development of teachers.

### **Discussion**

As noted, charter school teachers are less experienced and less likely to hold a teaching certificate than their traditional public school counterparts. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), 30% of charter school teachers were in their first three years of teaching and 75% have taught for less than 10 years. In traditional public schools, only 15% of teachers are in their first three years of teaching, and 43% have less than 10 years of experience and only 23 states require that charter schools hire licensed teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). As was the case with the school in this study, charter school contracts often call for a complex set of pedagogical practices, which may be difficult for even an experienced teacher to deliver. The lack of training and experience of charter school teachers also creates more teacher turnover in than in traditional schools, which is detrimental to school culture and student performance (Exstrom, 2012). This unique combination of teacher inexperience, lack of formal training in a certificate program, and complex pedagogical practices makes high quality professional development important for charter school teachers and the potential success of the school.

The data collected in this case study showed that despite multiple systemic barriers, it is possible for a charter school to offer a program of research based professional development when the school leaders hold a shared belief about its importance and create the conditions necessary for implementation. Interviews and document analysis confirmed that both the content and structure of professional development were aligned with best practice as defined by research. Hammer (2013) found that in order to impact student achievement, the content of teacher training should be aligned with school goals and focused on learning that deepens subject area knowledge and related



pedagogical approaches. Interviews with teachers, administrators and document analysis revealed that professional development had been primarily focused on supporting teachers as they learned the skills to implement the complex blend of pedagogical approaches required by the charter contract. Teacher training had also been focused on deepening subject area knowledge through a series of workshops delivered by certified trainers in Singapore Math and the Full Option Science System (FOSS). All teachers and administrators interviewed stated that all professional development was rooted in the school mission and goals.

The structure for effective professional development should include an active learning environment that provides teachers an opportunity to plan for implementation, opportunities for teachers from the same grade level, department or school participate together, and should be of the appropriate duration considering the complexity of the skills being conveyed and includes follow up coaching or instruction (Hammer, 2013). Each of these elements of structure was present in the professional development program of this school, although to a slightly lesser extent than the elements of content. Teacher teams had the opportunity to work together during content area professional development, but not during training to learn or improve pedagogical skills. Workshops were repeated so that skills could be built over time, but there was no structured format to ensure that teachers received the follow up training necessary either from these repeated workshops or from coaching.

The professional development program at the school was highly personalized and teacher driven. Surveys were utilized to determine teacher interest in various topics and the resulting data were used to plan workshops held one time per week when students were released from school early. Teachers had the autonomy to choose which workshop to attend based on their own needs and preference and many of these sessions were delivered by teachers at the school. Personalized teacher learning is not a part of the best practice framework used for this study, but it is very well supported by other research. Compton (2010) reported that teachers at later stages of their career need and desire different types of training than novice teachers and that teachers are motivated by having options for their ongoing development. Teachers at the case study school reported feelings of increased job satisfaction and feeling valued because they were able to deliver workshops and choose the direction of their own training.

The document and interview analysis also revealed that the professional development program had had an impact on teacher attitude, behavior and skill as well as the observed level of student engagement. The greatest impact was found in the area of teachers' ability to implement the skills and techniques that were covered in their training sessions. Teachers reported that their content area understanding in math and science had increased as a result of their training. Student engagement was reported to be increased by all of the administrators and five of the seven teachers interviewed. All interviewed agreed that it was too early to draw conclusions regarding the impact of professional development on student achievement, although results from the spring 2017 administration of the Measure of Academic Progress showed that students in all grade levels of the school performed better than national norm means. This is particularly notable for students in Kindergarten, who had no previous instruction at other schools. Of all Kindergartners assessed at the charter school, 76% scored better than the norm grade level mean in math and 80% scored better than the norm grade level mean in reading. Further study is necessary to make a connection between the program of professional development and student achievement.

Administrators who were responsible for planning professional development identified several barriers that are unique to the charter school environment. Financial constraints were the most often mentioned barrier due to the fact that the school was new, funded at a lower level than

traditional public schools, and had not yet had the opportunity to build financial reserves. This barrier was overcome by negotiating with textbook and supply vendors for training to be included with purchases, by utilizing the expertise of administrators and experienced staff to deliver professional development, and by allowing teachers to attend local workshops if they were willing to pay their own registration fees. The administrative team also applied for and received a sizable grant that they reported would allow for additional professional development in the near future.

Time was also identified as an obstacle. The charter contract requires a longer school day than a traditional public school, which severely limits the time available for professional development. This barrier was overcome by creating a schedule that included a student early release one time per week. This schedule was implemented when the school opened and did not have to be created after the fact. Finally, teacher dispositions or attitudes were also named as barriers. Teachers with previous experience in traditional public schools had demonstrated some resistance to the innovation required at the school. Administrators reported that they planned to continue to work to overcome this barrier by developing supportive working relationships with teachers, modeling their expectations, and coaching teachers through the evaluation process.

### **Conclusions**

In this case study 10 interviews were conducted with 3 administrators and 7 teachers at one K-8<sup>th</sup> grade suburban charter school and professional development plans, professional development surveys and standardized assessment results were reviewed. Based on the evidence collected and analyzed, the research concluded that a program of research based professional development was implemented at the school of study. Furthermore, teacher training had impacted teachers' attitude, pedagogical skills and content delivery. Evidence also indicated that the teacher training impacted student engagement. Three major barriers to the delivery of high quality professional development were identified within this setting: (1) financial limitations, (2) lack of time for training, and (3) teacher attitude and disposition. As is true with any case study, this research was highly contextualized, and practitioners and researchers should avoid the generalization of these results to other settings (Greene, Caracelli, and Graham, 1989). It is quite possible that if this case study were replicated in a different context that there may be different results. In addition, one year of student assessment data is insufficient to determine the impact of teacher professional development on student achievement. Early success on standardized tests may be attributable to other causes.

### **Implications**

While this case study was limited to one specific charter school, the results create implications for both practitioners and future research. The purpose of any school, whether it is a charter school or a traditional public school, is to cause students to learn at high levels and so ensuring the presence of highly skilled teachers should be considered essential rather than optional. Given the lack of experience and certification of many charter school teachers, it is important that charter school leaders not be tempted to offer a limited or low quality professional development program because of a lack of money, time, or teacher desire for training. This case study demonstrated that in this setting, a research based program that is most likely to impact student achievement while simultaneously meeting the needs of teachers at various stages of their career was present, despite the identified obstacles. This study also gives direction to practitioners who grapple with the

problems associated with teacher turn-over and a lack of teacher satisfaction regarding working conditions within charter schools. Teachers interviewed for this case study worked longer hours for less pay than their traditional public school counterparts and were required to implement a complex set of pedagogical practices. Despite these issues, the teachers reported feeling valued because their professional development program allowed them to share their talents and choose the training that was the best fit their needs.

The lack of studies investigating the impact of teacher professional development within charter schools also provides clear opportunity for future research. This case study can be replicated at schools with different conditions such as an urban or rural setting or within schools that are well established in order to determine if similar results are found when conditions differ. In this case study, high quality professional development was defined using the characteristics identified by the meta-analysis conducted by Hammer in 2013 for the West Virginia Department of Education; however, those characteristics do not include personalized learning for teachers. Further research should be conducted to examine the link between teacher job satisfaction in charter schools and teacher driven training in order to determine if the opportunity to guide one's own training reduces teacher dissatisfaction and turnover. Opportunity also exists to examine the impact of high quality professional development on not only student engagement, but student academic achievement using a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine different types of data in a variety of settings in order to create a causal link between the two and to understand if professional development is a defining characteristic of a successful charter school.

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# Internal and External Elementary Principal Hiring and Minimal Student Achievement: A 5-year Cohort Model

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**David G. Buckman**  
*Kennesaw State University*

**Henry Tran**  
*University of South Carolina*

*The purpose of this study was to examine whether there exists a relationship between selection practices of school districts (i.e., whether the principal was hired from within the district as an internal hire or hired from outside the district as an external hire) and changes in minimal proficiency in school math and reading achievement. More pointedly, we examined whether the hiring type of principals bears any association with the percentage of low performers at the school. The units of analyses were all newly appointed elementary principals in the state of Wisconsin in 2010, who consecutively led a school in a principal role for five years (2010- 2014). Based on results obtained from the five-year panel regression analysis, hiring type was not found to be statistically significant. However, descriptive examination of trends indicate the performance of schools led by internal hires fare worse than those led by external hires and that the relationship between hiring type and minimal reading proficiency appears to change across time. Results are discussed.*

With the ever-growing principal turnover problem seen in the United States (Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010), some school districts have begun to identify methods to better prepare for principal turnover. One such method is a formal plan for principal succession. Through formal succession planning, it is reported that schools may benefit by the inclusion of selection and reward systems, partnerships, and leadership development (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Although the recruitment and selection of leadership candidates often include a pool of internal and external candidates, the principal preparation strategies associated with principal succession planning utilizes only aspiring leaders from their district or schools. Buckman, Johnson, and Alexander (2017) imply this practice may be utilized to promote employee loyalty to the organization and remove potential risks associated with hiring unknown candidates. In addition, some school districts provide incentives for their employees to receive formal leadership training, and to receive a return on investment, these school districts recruit exclusively internally (Noremore, 2007).

Considering the assumption that internal promotion is a best practice for leadership succession, one would assume that the internal promotion of an assistant principal to principal would be most advantageous for school district outcomes. As schools in the United States continue to strive for success and adhere to accountability measures in a post No-Child-Left-Behind era of public education, school performance in terms of student achievement remains critical in evaluating school success (Noddings, 2005) and are further enforced by current national policies such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015), but to what extent this performance is influenced by the internal promotion of school principals is unknown. As schools continue to apply internal promotion strategies to address leadership vacancies, an empirical evaluation of the value of this practice is necessary.

We specifically seek to identify if there is a difference in the relationship between internally and externally promoted principals and their minimally proficient school math and reading scores. In addition to controlling for predictor variables empirically utilized in similar research, we also descriptively highlight trends in the population of newly promoted principals who consecutively led their schools over a five-year span to explore potential differences in student achievement and principal human capital (i.e., educational attainment and years of experience) between the two groups. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

*Is there a relationship between the internal and external promotion of assistant principals to principals and student achievement when controlling for human capital and school contextual variables?*

## **Literature Review**

There is very little research supporting a direct relationship between principal behaviors and student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003), rather research supports that a principal's influence on student achievement is indirect through avenues such as the hiring of effective teachers (Hornig, Klasik & Loeb, 2010; Grissom & Loeb, 2009) and instructional leadership practices that improve teaching and learning environments (Ross & Gray, 2006). It is through the selection of quality teachers and effective principal leadership practices, that a nurturing school culture and climate is developed which positively impacts a school atmosphere and ultimately improves student achievement.

The bulk of the literature concerning the relationship between principal performance and student achievement focuses on the characteristics of great leaders. For instance, in research conducted in the United States, Loeb, Kalogrides and Beteille (2012) found that high performing principals are better able to attract and retain high performing teachers than their lower performing counterparts. In their study, performance is operationally defined as improvements in value-added student achievement test scores. Relatedly, Jacobson (2011) found that the core school leadership practices (e.g., direction setting, developing people, and transforming the learning environment to meet student needs) were essential to improving student achievement. As educators understand, there is no one uniform approach to educate all students successfully; therefore, instructional differentiation is necessary. Similarly, there is no uniform method to lead a school successfully because school environments differ. Therefore, principal best practices and leadership styles must be adaptable to meet student and school needs.

There are many commonalities in the findings concerning the relationship between principal behaviors and student achievement. For instance, comparable to the findings of Jacobson (2011), when employing a mediating effects model on a sample of secondary schools in the Netherlands, Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens and Slegers (2012) found school leadership practices affected student outcomes not only indirectly, but also directly. In the area of student promotion rates, the principal's ability to set rational goals resulted in both a significant and positive indirect effect.

While the study did find direct effects, the researchers cautioned that the effects may not reflect "real" direct effects and could be easily misinterpreted without the inclusion of all relevant confounding variables. They also purport that principals' behaviors vary based on school achievement. For example, school leaders employed at a high performing school may be less inclined to establish immediate action plans with set goals as compared to leaders who are receiving pressure to increase performance in a poor performing school.

Using a qualitative case study approach, Brown (2016) further emphasizes the indirect effect of principal behaviors on student achievement. When investigating the practices of a 15-year principal at a high performing elementary school, the researcher suggested that the principal's behaviors could be an important factor of the school's academic success. Through interviews with the principal, teachers, and district office personnel as well as the triangulation of building plan documents and parent organization agendas, the leadership best practices themes identified in this study were: 1) data driven instruction, 2) parental involvement, 3) student behavior and intervention, and 4) budgeting and scheduling. These themes represented the areas in which the principal's efforts were directed and potentially contributed to the school's positive performance outcomes. This study is not generalizable because of the limitations of the research method; however, the findings are in alignment with the previously cited studies that employed inferential statistics and, therefore, provides further support of the indirect effect of principal behaviors on student outcomes.



## Principal Longevity and Student Achievement

Although a principal's influence on student achievement is by and large indirect, research does support that principal longevity and its counterpart turnover, impacts overall school performance (Borg & Slate, 2014; Huff, Brockmeier, Leech, Martin, Pate, & Siegrist, 2011; Miller, 2013). When utilizing public and private school data in the United States, Azaiez and Slate (2017) found that principal tenure positively influenced student reading and mathematics scores. Specifically, principals with six or more years of experience at a particular school campus produced significantly higher reading and mathematics performances among students as compared to principals with less than six years of experience.

Principal longevity is ideal in sustaining and increasing student achievement; however, a principal's propensity to turnover is not solely an intrinsic factor, but one that is at least partially influenced by a school's environment. Miller's (2013) study found that principal turnover was more prevalent in poor performing schools. In addition, the number of principal turnovers in a ten-year span is negatively related to student achievement and is also positively correlated with increased percentages of free/reduced lunch (i.e., a metric reflecting school socioeconomic status) and teacher turnover.

Miller (2013) indicated that for principals who turned over, their school test scores fell in the last four years prior to the principal's leaving and school achievement continued to fall within the first two years of the newly appointed principal's tenure. After two years, the newly appointed principal's school test scores began to rise and reached baseline levels within five years. This study demonstrates the importance of principal longevity and the indirect impact of a principal on student achievement.

The relationship between achievement and principal turnover, however, is more complicated than a unidirectional effect of one on the other. For instance, Bêteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2012) found that low student achievement may be a major influence of principal turnover. Their study highlighted the fact that 30% of principals in Miami-Dade County Public Schools with high concentrations of low achieving students leave each year as compared to the 15% of principals that turnover from schools with lower concentrations of low performing students. In addition, the researchers also assert that students make lower achievement gains in math when there is a new principal. This suggests that the relationship between achievement and principal turnover is bi-directional in that low school achievement may effect principal turnover and principal turnover in turn may cause lower achievement.

To further address the impact of principal longevity on student achievement, a study administered upon over 1,000 elementary schools in the state of Georgia also found that principal longevity impacted student achievement (Brockmeier, Starr, Green, Pate, & Leech, 2013). Analogous to the findings of Miller's (2013) study, Brockmeier et al. (2013) detected schools with only one or two principal turnovers scored significantly higher than schools with three or four principal turnovers in the area of reading for third and fifth grade over a 10-year period. Their findings also support the importance of limiting principal turnover and retaining principals in efforts to promote school improvement.

Logically, if principal turnover impacts student achievement as noted heavily within the literature, principal behaviors and performance at large impact student achievement as well. Therefore, be it through direct or indirect effects, studying the relationship between principal performance and student achievement is just as vital as studying the direct effect of teacher performance on student achievement.

## Principal Succession

Principal retention and its positive effect on the overall quality of a school is heavily supported by past research, yet unfortunately, principal turnover has not become any less common nationwide over the past few decades (Battle, 2010; Miller, 2013; Papa 2007; Stoelinga, Hart, & Schalliol, 2008). Within this review of literature, it has been documented that principal turnover influences student achievement (Azaiez & Slate, 2017; Brockmeier, Starr, Green, Pate, & Leech, 2013), but it also influences a host of mediating factors as well. When reviewing factors beyond student achievement, principal turnover has been linked to the loss of promising leaders, loss of teachers, and increases in employee replacement costs (Tran, McCormick & Nguyen, 2017; Tran & Buckman, 2017; Trevor, Gerhart, & Boudreau, 1997). As a result, many school districts have become strategic by developing recruitment and training strategies that can assuage the negative impact of principal turnover and better prepare schools through succession planning.

Because of the shrinking applicant pools for principal candidates due to rigorous certification requirements, increased organizational responsibilities, and stress from accountability policy, school districts have found it necessary to begin developing leadership pipelines which prepare internal leadership candidates for future vacancies (Zepeda, Bengtson, & Parylo, 2012). Because formal leadership succession planning in the education setting is a fairly new practice, there is limited research explaining the practice and its impact. Due to the absence of leadership succession planning in education, research has provided support for the need to strategically plan for principal turnover (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hart, 1991; Zepeda et al., 2012).

Although, succession planning should be a structured human resources event in the educational system, Hargreaves (2005) ascertained that principal succession in most cases resulted in a mix of unplanned discontinuity and continuity. He claimed this paradox resulted in, “discontinuity with the achievements of a leader’s immediate predecessor [i.e., assistant principal], and continuity with the mediocre state of affairs preceding the predecessor (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 167). His statement identifies that the lack of planning for unexpected principal turnover in the education system often results in internal promotion of assistant principals that are not vetted at a high level and are assumed to be able to provide the same high-quality leadership as their predecessor.

Through anecdotal evidence and empirical research, many school districts do not devote effort into formal, ongoing recruiting processes and planning for school administration turnover (Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011). It is not until leaders have demonstrated their desire to leave or have informed their supervisor of their soon departure that the recruitment and planning process begins. Because of the sense of urgency and lack of time, school districts often show preference for informal recruiting processes, such as “tapping” in lieu of continuous formal recruitment or succession planning (Lortie, 2009; Myung et al., 2011).

Tapping is defined as the identification of candidates (i.e., teachers) in one’s school that display leadership ability and are encouraged to become school leaders by their supervisors (Lortie, 2009). This practice can be a gamble because the principal’s judgement is often based on the teacher’s ability as an educator or their experiences supervising small quantities of students; contrarily, those competencies may not be transferable to successfully leading an entire school. Although “every teacher has the same opportunity to pursue a school leadership position by earning an administrative credential [without being tapped] (Myung et al., 2011, p. 69),” some state educator licensing agencies, for example Georgia, require that state accredited educator

preparation programs at universities place admission restrictions on leadership candidates. Those that do not have a professional qualified supervisor (i.e., assistant principal or principal) agreement to serve as mentor throughout their leadership training, or cannot find a willing mentor, will not be accepted into the program by the university. This practice essentially can be viewed as a state level policy enforcing local leadership tapping.

Myung et al. (2011) specified teacher gender and race significantly influences a teacher's potential of being tapped. Specifically, male teachers were nearly two times as likely to be tapped by their principal as female teachers, and Black and Hispanic teachers were more likely to be tapped than their White colleagues (66% and 37%, respectively). School factors prompting a teacher's likelihood of being tapped for principal preparation were: 1) high percentage of black students, 2) the race matching of teacher and principal, 3) high free and reduced lunch percentages, and 4) weak school performance (Myung et al., 2011). In addition to the findings of Myung et al. (2011) concerning tapping as an informal means of succession planning, Zepeda, Bengtson, and Parylo (2012) claimed that larger school districts were more likely to have a formal succession plan than smaller school districts. It was indicated that smaller school districts found formal succession planning to be problematic because of their limited number of leadership positions and turnovers. Thus, a formal succession plan would likely lead to their aspiring leaders departing the district for external leadership opportunities.

### **Internal and External Promotion**

Promotion practices is not an area heavily studied in the field of education. However, in the private sector, researchers have identified the impact of internal and external promotion on organizations (DeVaro, 2006; Devaro & Morita, 2013; Rao & Drazin, 2002). Internal promotion is commonly defined as a move within an organization to a position that is traditionally higher in rank, pay, and skill requirements (Bidwell, 2011; DiPrete & Soule, 1988; Cohen, Broschak, & Haveman, 1998). Alternatively, external promotion is commonly defined as the hiring of a candidate that is entering the organization for the first time (Bidwell, 2011).

The purpose of internal promotion is often introduced as a mechanism organizations utilize to incentivize workers to increase their job performance (DeVaro, 2006). Moreover, when individuals have been recognized for performance excellence over an extended amount of time, these individuals are rewarded by promotion to a higher ranked position. This finding can be theoretically supported by Lazear and Rosen's (1981) *Tournament Theory* which acknowledges organizations introduce internal tournaments as an efficient way of labour compensation by ranking workers, setting goals to incentivize work effort, and utilizing raises and promotion as the reward for the winner.

Leadership succession planning in most cases employ tournament theory by endorsing the highest performing teachers for formal school leadership training (i.e., tapping). This practice is often only associated with internal leadership candidates. However, does this practice leave external leadership candidates at a disadvantage in terms of being hired for external leadership positions? When studying the promotion of teachers to administrators, Buckman et al. (2017) found that employability, as defined by the percentage of job offers a teacher received for assistant principal positions, was significantly lower for teachers applying as external candidates. This study provides evidence that internal promotion is a preferential practice in Georgia's public education system and the likelihood of receiving a promotion from teacher to assistant principal is more probable for internal candidates. It should be noted that when a district or school is

designated “emergency status” or is taken over by the state, it is not uncommon that current school leadership is removed and replaced by external candidates.

The extent that school performance is related to the internal and external hiring of principals is an area with little to no empirical research. The closest relationship to this concept has been tied to school characteristics and other contextual factors that produce principal turnover and its associating effect on student achievement. Particular factors aligned with principal turnover supported by literature have been principal pay and school performance (Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010; Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Tran, 2016).

In Tran and Buckman’s (2017) study of elementary school principals, they found a positive association between elementary schools reading achievement scores and principals who were internally hired. This study, however, did not indicate if the principals were recently promoted to this role or if the school was high performing prior to the principal’s tenure. Therefore, principal’s experience was not addressed as an influence on school achievement, nor was student growth addressed within their longitudinal study. This is the only study in the education setting that incorporates internal and external hiring of principals as variables and analyzes its relationship with student achievement. The aforementioned limitations concerning promotion and the achievement was not within the scope of Tran and Buckman’s (2017) study, but these questions do impose the need for more literature to address these inquiries.

### **Theoretical Framework**

We applied the external recruitment and internal promotion paradox developed by Chan (1996) as the theoretical framework for this study. Chan’s research advances Lazear and Rosen’s (1981) Tournament Theory, by addressing the internal competition within an organization that rewards employees in the form of job promotion with the addition of opening the competition to external candidates. Chan also indicates internal candidates are often afforded a competitive handicap due to their pre-existing network with key players in the organization to increase the likelihood of internal candidates receiving the promotion over external candidates. Therefore, external candidates often need to be significantly “superior” to internal candidates in the form of human capital and professional performance in order to be selected. For example, in addition to needing to possess stronger human capital endowments than internal candidates to often be considered, external hires are often expected to bring about the potential of novel thinking, fresh ideas and the avoidance of group think (Irwanti & Muharman, 2015) that would deviate from the normative institutional thinking espoused by internal candidates.

When comparing individuals that are internally promoted to those promoted externally, one can assume based on this theory that external candidates will outperform internal candidates in the field. When applying this theory in an educational setting, this would suggest that assistant principals promoted externally to the role of principal will not only exceed internally promoted principals in the form of traditional human capital, but also in the area of principal performance as defined by lower minimal student achievement in this particular study.

### **Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this study is to increase the body of literature concerning the impact of leadership promotion practices in the education setting. This study explicitly addresses the potential relationship between internal and external promotion of principals and student reading and math

achievement. Due to the paucity of research concerning this topic and because of the impact of human resources practices on district, school, and student outcomes, the finding of this study may be significant in impacting future recruitment and selection practices of school leaders. In addition, this study answers the call from Buckman et al.'s (2017) study concerning internal and external promotion of school leadership candidates that requested future research examining the relationship between internal and external hiring practices and student achievement. This study will provide empirical evidence concerning the academic impact of internal and external promotion, in addition to determining if there is a significant difference in the human capital associated with the two types of candidates.

### Methodology

Our sample consisted of all of the assistant principals in the state of Wisconsin who were hired as first-year traditional public elementary school principals (n=15) in the year 2010 and stayed at their respective schools in the position for at least five years. Five years is an important cutoff point because research has suggested that it takes at least five years for principals to mobilize their vision and see school change bear fruit from the efforts of their leadership (Fullan, 2001; Hall & Hord, 2001). Specifically, we removed from the dataset any principals who transitioned back to the assistant principal position and any principal who departed from their school within that timeframe.

It is important to focus on a particular school type (i.e., elementary) because the job responsibilities and state examinations vary by level of schooling. For instance, many elementary schools are often smaller than secondary schools and principals of these schools may not have the assistance of department chairs or assistant principals to help leadership efforts. Our sample came from 15 schools in 12 different districts, of the 15, eight of the principals were external hires from outside of the district and seven of the principals were internally promoted.

A descriptive statistics table of the variables that we analyzed is displayed in Table 1. Descriptive information is provided for principal, district, and school characteristics.

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics*

|  | Variation | Mean     | Standard Deviation | Minimum   | Maximum  |
|--|-----------|----------|--------------------|-----------|----------|
| Principals' Total Education Experience | Overall   | 17.46    | 8.39               | 1.5       | 33.6     |
|  | Between   |          | 8.01               | 5.9       | 31.78    |
|  | Within    |          | 1.80               | 13.06     | 23.56    |
| District total Revenue                 | Overall   | 2.61e+08 | 4.58e+08           | 10,972.2  | 1.30e+09 |
|  | Between   |          | 3.06e+08           | 56,654.23 | 7.60e+08 |
|  | Within    |          | 3.41e+08           | -4.99e+08 | 9.36e+08 |
| School's Percent Free or Reduced Lunch | Overall   | 46.87%   | 23.92%             | 10%       | 98%      |
|  | Between   |          | 24.49%             | 13.80%    | 94.75%   |
|  | Within    |          | 3.82%              | 35.67%    | 55.66%   |
| School's                               | Overall   | 419.75   | 138.78             | 153       | 789      |

|   |         |       |        |         |        |
|---|---------|-------|--------|---------|--------|
| Enrollment  | Between |       | 145.42 | 184.33  | 773.8  |
|   | Within  |       | 25.98  | 336.147 | 483.15 |
| School's % of students deemed minimal proficiency | Overall | 32.14 | 15.84  | 12.37   | 71.22  |
|   | Between |       | 15.72  | 15.73   | 63.06  |
|   | Within  |       | 4.31   | 21.73   | 41.01  |
| School's % of students identified as disabled     | Overall | 14.97 | 6.14   | 4       | 28.95  |
|   | Between |       | 6.70   | 4       | 26.89  |
|   | Within  |       | 1.42   | 11.23   | 18.77  |

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Note: Number of observations: 67; Number of Principals: 15

As can be seen from the table, there is wide variation in the type of principals, districts, and schools captured by our study. For example, our sample includes relatively inexperienced principals (e.g., total education experience equaling approximately 1.5 years) as compared to those with many years of experience (i.e., over 33). Similarly, our sample included principals leading schools with relatively low levels of poverty (i.e., 10% free/reduced lunch) as compared to schools where almost all the students are on free and reduced lunch (i.e., 98%). The wide variation in our sample allows for increased generalizability of our findings.

In terms of observations over time, the highest degree obtained by our sample of principals were primarily Master's degree (n=62), with a handful holding bachelor's (n=5). Because some have argued that external candidates often have more human capital attributes, such as more years of experience and higher educational degrees (Chan, 1996), we stratified these variables by whether the principal was an external or internal hire and dummy coded them (i.e., 0 = not internal; 1 = internal). There were 39 external hire observations to the 28 internal observations. Almost all individuals possessed a Master's degree (34 for external observations and all 28 for internal observations).

When it comes to total education experience, principals ranged from 1.5 to 33.6 years. If we operationally define 10 years of experience as "more experienced" and less than 10 as "less experienced" and stratify these along the categories of internal and external hires, more experienced candidates would be distributed relatively evenly among external (n=26) and internal (n=28) principals' observations. This contrasts with the fact that all less experienced principals were external hires.

Taken together, these findings suggest that some external candidates were hired with lower degree obtainment than internal candidates and that external candidates had less experience than internal candidates, which contradicts the arguments of those who suggest the opposite to be true (Chan, 1996). However, these findings may be a function of the focus of this study being on elementary rather than middle or high school principals, where the former typically earns less than the latter (Tran, 2015), which likely influences the type of human capital that can be attracted to such positions.

We conducted a panel regression analysis on the group of new principals, tracking their schools' state examination performance from 2010 to 2014. Because of the increasing importance of focusing attention on low achievers (i.e., their long-term consequences; policy goals targeted at

reducing their numbers; and the equity concerns, given that a disproportionate percentage of low performers are from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (OECD, 2016)), our study targeted low performance. Specifically, the dependent variable in our study is the percent of students scoring minimal proficiency (i.e., lowest performance group) on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concept Examination (WKCE) in the areas of reading and math.

The main focus of our model is the relationship between hiring type (i.e., whether the principal was hired from within the district as an internal hire or hired from outside the district as an external hire) and changes in minimal proficient student achievement. More pointedly, we are examining whether the hiring type of principals bears any association with the percentage of low performers at the school through inferential statistics.

We control for a set of covariates that have been found in the literature to be related to student achievement. The covariates include district revenue (Mensah, Schoberek, & Sahay, 2013; Neymotin, 2010), percent of students with exceptionalities or “disabilities” (Schulte, Stevens, Elliot, Tindal, & Nese, 2016; Wei, 2012), percent of economically disadvantaged students as measured by the percent of free or reduced lunch (Lee & Slate, 2014; Perry & McConney, 2010), percent of English Language Learners (Polat, Zarecky-Hodge & Schreiber, 2016) and school’s student enrollment (Egalite & Kisida, 2016; Buckman & Tran, 2015). In addition, we also controlled for observable traits of the principal such as their total education experience and highest degree obtained because they often server as proxies for quality in the hiring process. They have also been found to be related to student achievement (Rice, 2010; Valentine & Prater, 2011) and been suggested that internal candidates often differ from external candidates along these human capital dimensions (Chan, 1996).

## Results

Based on the theory that the impact of principal leadership and student outcomes depend on time and that it takes time for principal reform efforts to take fruition (Fullan, 2001; Hall & Hord, 2001), time and hiring type were interacted in the model to capture potential interaction effects. Figures 1 and 2 display the relationship between hiring type and student performance across the five years of the study, after statistically controlling for the aforementioned covariates. As can be seen from the figures, the relationship between hiring type and minimal reading proficiency appears to change in the second half of the five-year period, with the schools led by internal hires initially performing better, but that pattern reverses in the middle of the third year. While we do not know whether this is a function of internal hires being assigned to worst performing schools or not, our sample data tracks the performance across five years, which indicates that the pattern appears relatively stable. In fact, the gap in performance between schools led by internal and external hires appears to widen by the fifth year.

Another trend noticeable in both figures was the dip in 2013, suggesting improvement in student performance. This could be due to state efforts to receive a waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCBL). In 2013, the state of Wisconsin enhanced the rigor of the WKCE assessment by aligning it with standards set by the National Assessment of Educational Progress and increased the minimum scores needed to be assessed as “proficient” or “advanced;” however this change does not affect the result of this study because “minimal proficiency” and “basic proficiency” were not changed.

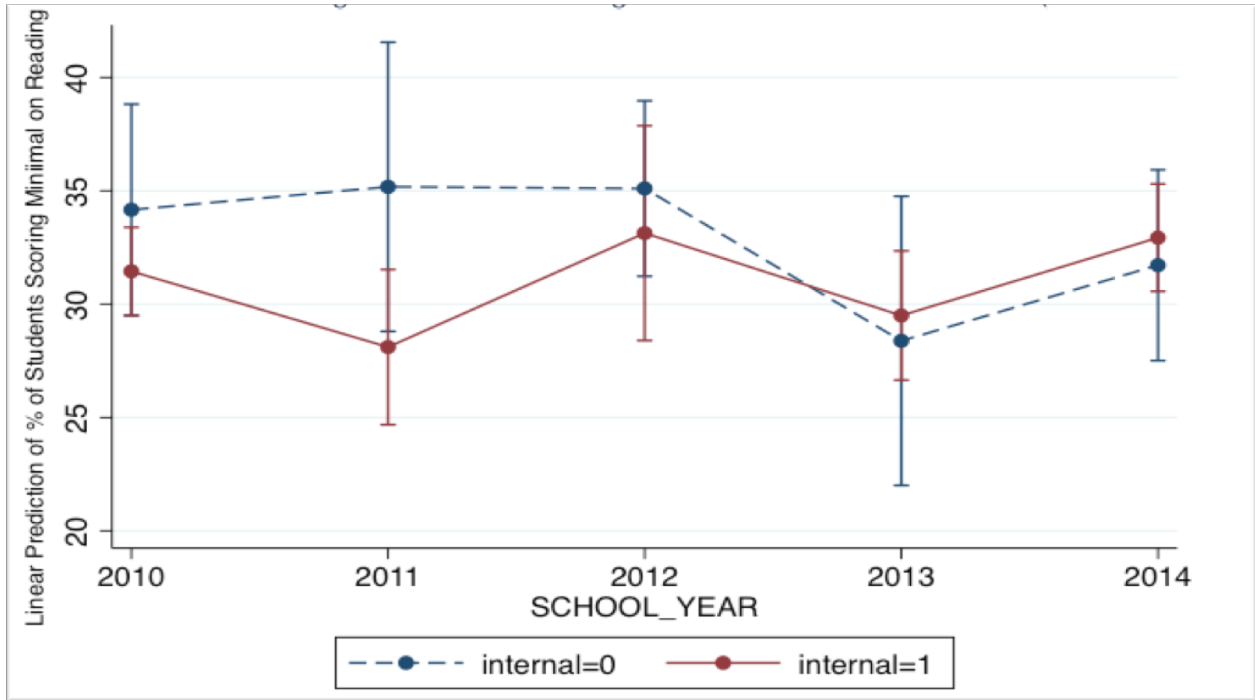


Figure 1. Percent of Students Scoring Minimal on Reading for Internal vs. External Hires (with 95% Confidence Intervals)

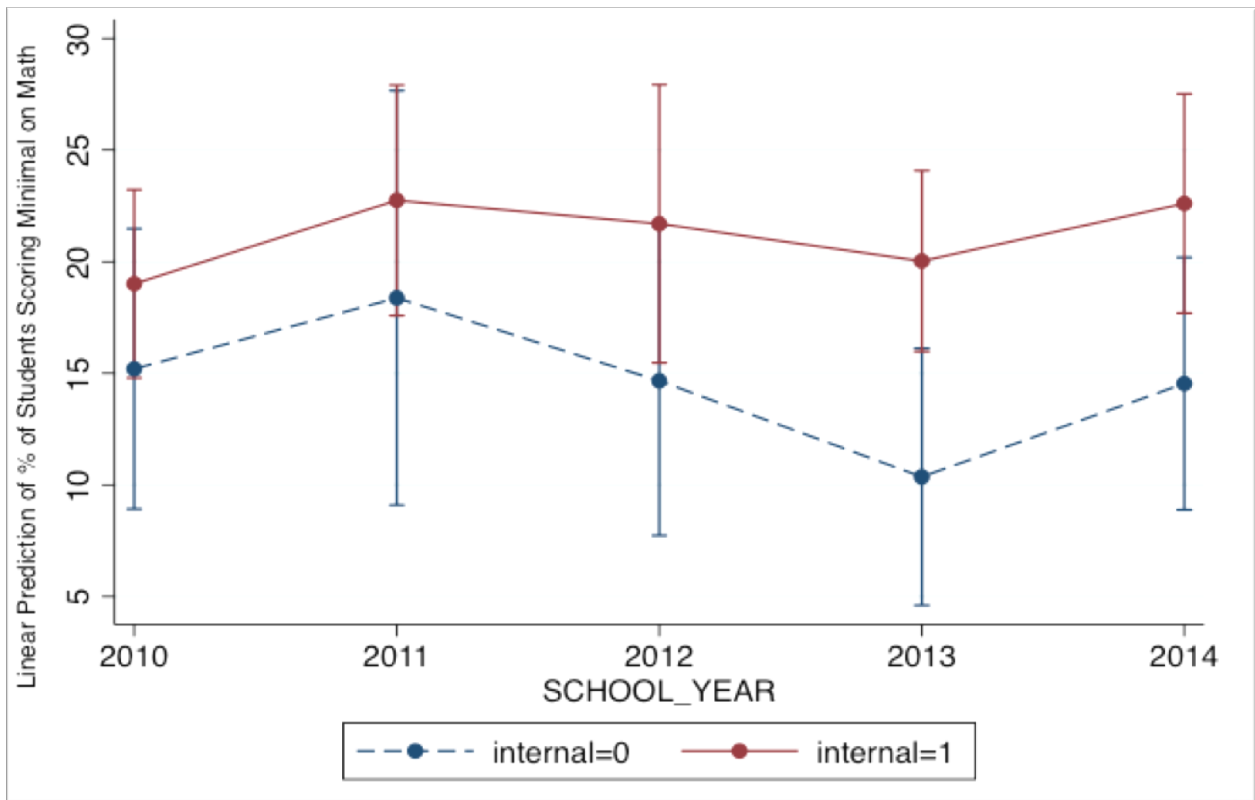


Figure 2. Percent of Students Scoring Minimal on Math for Internal vs. External Hires (with 95% Confidence Intervals)



Although schools led by internal principals and external principals experienced considerable improvement in 2013, external principals experienced more success in this given year than internal principals. For example, in the area of reading, internal principals began with a lower percentage of student categorized as minimum performers; however, in 2013, schools led by external principals experienced a percentage decrease of students identified as minimal performers and fell below the schools led by internal principals. Considering the increase in rigor of the assessment and the increase in student performance at these schools, one might assume efforts were made to ensure students were prepared for the changes to the state assessment.

The full results of our examination between hiring type and school achievement in reading and math, are displayed in Table 2. Variables that were found to statistically predict the percent of minimal reading and math at  $p < 0.05$  included free and reduced lunch and the percent of students with disability for both minimal performance in reading and math. While the results were in the predicted direction for free and reduced lunch in that more students from impoverished backgrounds performed worse, the percent of the school's students identified as disabled was negatively related to minimal performance, which differs from the literature.

This finding may be due to the impact of federal and public policy on the instruction of student with disabilities. The guidelines under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) both provided accountability measures for student with disabilities to succeed academically or schools risked penalization (Hardman & Dawson, 2008). Therefore, one might infer that the significant achievement gains for students with disability could be due to success from efforts made to meet federal public policy, at least towards the lower end of the performance spectrum.

Table 2  
*Fixed Effects Regression Models of Hiring Type on Percent of School Scoring "Minimal" in Reading and Math*

| <i>Variables</i>                    | <i>Reading Coefficients</i> | <i>Math Coefficients</i> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Hiring Type (Internal Hire)         | -2.71<br>(-2.558)           | 3.81<br>(-3.996)         |
| Enrollment                          | 0.01<br>(-0.007)            | 0<br>(-0.01)             |
| Percent on Free/Reduced Lunch       | 65.00****<br>(-5.662)       | 64.66****<br>(-9.939)    |
| Percent of ELL Students             | 0.18*<br>(-0.091)           | -0.22<br>(-0.142)        |
| Total Education Experience          | -0.12<br>(-0.138)           | -0.11<br>(-0.238)        |
| Highest Degree (Masters)            | 3.23<br>(-9.45)             | 0.75<br>(3.31)           |
| Percent of Students w/ Disabilities | -0.25**<br>(-0.094)         | -0.67****<br>(-0.125)    |
| Total District Revenue              | 2.19E-09<br>(1.63E-09)      | 1.22E-09<br>(2.40E-09)   |
| 2011.year                           | 1.01<br>(-2.44)             | 3.18<br>(-2.642)         |
| 2012.year                           | 0.94                        | -0.54                    |

|                        |           |           |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
|                        | (-2.049)  | (-2.706)  |
| 2013.year              | -5.78     | -4.84     |
|                        | (-3.972)  | (-2.926)  |
| 2014.year              | -2.44     | -0.66     |
|                        | (-2.931)  | (-2.564)  |
| internalhire#2011.year | -4.35     | 0.56      |
|                        | (-2.726)  | (-3.16)   |
| internalhire#2012.year | 0.74      | 3.23      |
|                        | (-2.383)  | (-3.838)  |
| internalhire#2013.year | 3.83      | 5.86*     |
|                        | (-4.122)  | (-2.776)  |
| internalhire#2014.year | 3.93      | 4.26      |
|                        | (-2.64)   | (-3.152)  |
| Constant               | 14.41     | 7.48      |
|                        | (-12.912) | (-15.866) |
| Observations           | 67        | 67        |
| R-squared              | 0.93      | 0.89      |
| Adj. R-squared         | 0.9       | 0.85      |

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10

## Discussion

While hiring type was not found to be statistically significant, this may be a function of the small sample size (e.g., 15 principals) of our study, which reduced the statistical power of our tests. That said, our sample included all elementary first-year principals in the state that were hired in 2010 and who stayed at their school for five consecutive years. Considering only 15 newly promoted elementary principals out of 26 refrained from turning over in the state, this equates to a 42% turnover rate. The statistic is noteworthy in better understanding the plight of school leaders, providing further evidence of principal sustainability issues, and indicating the need for effective administrative succession planning.

In terms of support for tournament theory, as associated with Lazear and Rosen (1981) and Chan's (1996) studies, the findings of this study provides confounding results. Considering large quantities of applicant pool data is often unobtainable, determining the number of internal candidates versus external candidates in the hiring pool to compare each candidate's level of human capital would have enabled us to better analyze this theory. In doing so, we would have been able to capture the internal tournament within an organization; however, we were able to determine the nuances between internal and external elementary principal hires who displayed sustainability (i.e., 5 years as a principal).

Dissimilar to Chan's study, this study found that within the population of new elementary principals hired in the state of Wisconsin in 2010 who remained leading at the helm of the school during the 5-year observation period, internally hired principals displayed more human capital in the areas of educational attainment and years of experience. Considering years of experience and educational attainment can influence principal performance and indirectly impact student achievement, one would expect internally hired principals to have higher performing schools over

time than external candidates in terms of lower percentages of minimally performing students. The descriptive statistics from this study supports the notion that externally hired principals had a fewer number of minimal performing students in the area math throughout the five-year study; however, in the area of reading, internally hired principals had a fewer number of minimally performing students within the first three years, but externally hired principals were able to surpass the internally led schools by 2013.

Miller (2013) indicated that after a principal turnover, new leaders can expect a decrease in student achievement for about two years before seeing a positive impact. The results of minimal math achievement for both internally and externally promoted principals as well as the results for minimal reading achievement for externally promoted principals support this phenomenon. After the two-year window, academic gains were substantial for externally promoted principals in the areas of math and reading. Although, internally promoted principals did see some improvement after year two, their growth was not as sizeable as the externally hired candidates.

Although the only statistically significant variables captured in our regression models were free/reduced lunch and students with disabilities, which is not uncommon, the trends found within our descriptive statistics concerning internal and external promotion of principals and their impact on student achievement should not be dismissed. While some can view this from the perspective that this data represents a sample in time, from a different perspective, one could argue this is population data which mitigates the relevance of a statistical significance. Nonetheless, the data from this cohort of effective principals can be used to inform hiring agents and school district decision makers. Stakeholders should know in terms of succession planning and the internal nature of leader promotion, this study found externally promoted principals demonstrated more progress in increasing student achievement in low performers than the internally promoted elementary principals. In addition, although the internal and external component was not statistically significant at or below a 0.05 alpha level, the 2013 data does indicate a marginally significant positive association ( $p < .10$ ) between internally promoted principals and math achievement.

### **Future Research and Recommendations**

In either perspective (i.e., population vs. sample), the descriptive data provided from this study is enlightening and provides guidance for future research. For instance, it may be beneficial for researchers to elongate the time from our study to determine whether the trends we identified in the five-year period continue afterwards. Future research should also consider increasing the sample size to all first-year principals across the nation and follow them for a designated time period. By doing this, the statistical power will increase to better identify potential statistically significant relationships between hiring type and school outcomes. Finally, to further evaluate the Tournament Theory, applicant pool data from newly promoted principals can be analyzed to capture the internal tournament between co-workers.

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# Leadership-Focused Coaching: A Research-Based Approach for Supporting Aspiring Leaders

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**Julie Gray**  
*University of West Florida*

*Educational leadership professors prepare aspiring leaders by providing uplifting opportunities to connect theory and practice. This paper proposes a research-based model called leadership-focused coaching, an approach to support graduate students in developing and honing instructional leadership skills and responsibilities (Gray, 2016). This paper addresses the shift in principal preparation programs from theory-to-practice to a knowledge-to-practice approach over the last 20 years (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Cunningham, 2007; Cunningham & Sherman, 2008; Daresh, 2004). While there are numerous models for coaching teachers, we offer this model for aspiring and new instructional leaders of schools.*

**Keywords:** leadership preparation, university-school partnerships, leadership field experience, leadership-focused coaching, and leadership mentoring



Professors of educational leadership prepare aspiring leaders by providing opportunities to connect theory and practice, while emphasizing practical leadership skills. This paper proposes a research-based model called Leadership-Focused Coaching (LFC), an approach to support graduate students in developing and honing instructional leadership skills and responsibilities (Gray, 2016). Over the last 20 years, a shift happened in principal preparation programs from theory-to-practice to a knowledge-to-practice approach over the last 20 years (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Cunningham, 2007; Cunningham & Sherman, 2008; Daresh, 2004). To address this shift in pedagogical methodology, university instructors provide LFC while candidates complete coursework and once hired in school leadership positions.

### **Trends in the Literature**

Educational leadership programs hope to prepare aspiring leaders with more real world and practical experiences in schools and districts (Cunningham, 2007; Geer, Anast-May, & Gurley, 2014). As a part of this trend, faculty in educational leadership programs need to provide more opportunities for students to have early field experiences and authentic leadership practice in schools (Geer et al, 2014; Wallace Foundation, 2016). Experienced practitioners and university faculty members work collaboratively to support aspiring and novice instructional leaders in the school setting (SREB, 2001; Wallace Foundation, 2016). This model for leadership preparation integrates coaching, Leadership-Focused Coaching, as described in this paper, and mentoring with opportunities for early field experiences embedded in coursework as a solution to this concern (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2008; Lochmiller, 2014; Schleicher, 2012).

More recently, the trend is to prepare aspiring leaders as instructional leaders, rather than as administrators of schools, as done in the past (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Geer et al., 2014; New Leaders, 2012; Schleicher, 2012; SREB, 2001; Wallace Foundation, 2016). Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) contend “efforts to provide field-based practicum experiences do not consistently provide candidates with a sustained, hands-on internship . . . with the real demands of school leadership under the supervision of a well-qualified mentor” (p. 6). Prospective instructional leaders are matched with strategically selected mentors and coaches to build their leadership capacity and experience a variety of leadership skills in real world settings (Brown-Ferrigno, 2007; Geer et al. 2014; Pounder & Crow, 2005; Schleicher, 2012).

The Stanford Educational Leadership Institute (SELI) promotes the following attributes for highly effective leadership preparation programs: a philosophy and curriculum emphasizing instructional leadership, a connection of practice to theory via experiential learning in the field, structured and supervised internship and practicum experiences, formalized mentoring support from experts, and a selective recruitment process with recommendations from local school districts (Gray, 2016, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Schleicher, 2012; UCEA & New Leaders, 2016). There is a great demand for high quality and effective leaders in schools, for which leader preparation programs need to meet more effectively (Cheney, Davis, Garrett, & Holleran, 2010). This paper is offered a theoretical framework and conceptual model for addressing this need.

While there are numerous coaching models, this study offers a new style of aspiring leader support, called Leadership-Focused Coaching (LFC). This approach varies from facilitative coaching (coach builds upon protégé’s level of skills); consultative coaching (coach consults from expert perspective); instructional coaching (coach draws upon experience and shares resources);

transformational coaching (coach goes beyond improvement to shift to innovative thinking and actions); and collaborative coaching (coach works with protégé to develop skills and knowledge) and offers an coaching that leadership theory in practice (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; Farver & Holt, 2015; Hargrove, 1995). While LFC integrates some of the skills of these models, the LFC model is individualized, candidate-focused, and driven by goals set by the coach and candidate/protégé and includes coaching cycles of feedback (Gray, 2016, 2017).

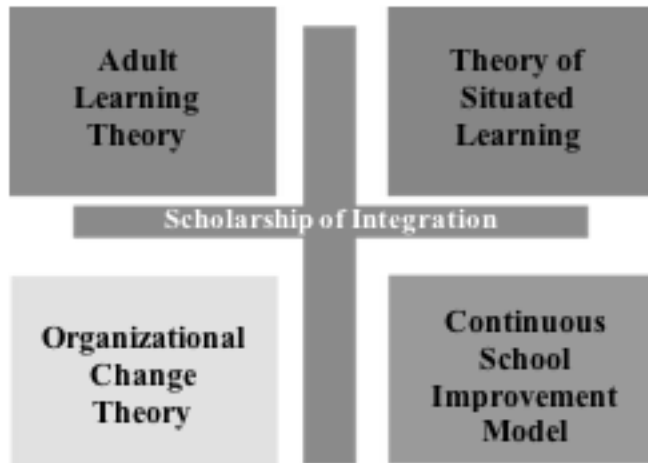
### **Theoretical Framework**

Through the lens of Boyer's *Scholarship of Integration*, this study offers a new construct which is made up of the concepts of experiential learning, early field experiences, leadership-focused coaching, and mentoring support with university faculty and school district leaders and mentors working collaboratively to support novice leaders (Boyer, 1990; Gray, 2016; Hill, 2011). The theoretical framework for this paper encompasses adult learning theory (Knowles, 1984; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 1998) and theory of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the form of communities of practice. Organizational change theory (Lewin, 1951) is discussed, in regard to continuous change in schools and leaders acting as change agents. Finally, the framework considers the role of continuous improvement in our schools, which tends to be complex organizations (Orton & Weick, 1990).

#### **Boyer's Scholarship of Integration Model**

According to Boyer (1990), the professoriate is divided into four functions, which can overlap one another, to include: the scholarship of discovery, integration, application, and teaching. Boyer's (1990) model of *Scholarship of Integration* helps scholars to make "connections across disciplines, placing the specialties in larger context illuminating data in a revealing way" (p. 18). *Scholarship of Integration* allows researchers to link literature from a variety of fields and to interpret the patterns of each to one another, as part of their creative scholarly work (Hill, 2011). A scholar can find a way to interpret what others have already discovered in a different way that has not been considered by others (Boyer, 1990).

For this paper, the theoretical framework is built upon adult learning theory (Knowles, 1984), a theory of situated learning as communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), organizational change theory (Lewin, 1951), and continuous improvement models within school organizations (Orton & Weick, 1990) (See Figures 1 and 2). Boyer's (1990) *Scholarship of Integration* serves as a model for the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this study as each of these theories are pieced together for the sake of research. Boyer (1990) divides the professoriate into four functions to include scholarship of discovery, integration, application, and teaching. The *Scholarship of Integration* model allows the researcher to make connections from one discipline to another, while considering the larger context of each and giving scholars an opportunity to make connections in the literature.



*Figure 1.* Theoretical framework for study

Previously, a three-phase model for leadership preparation programs was developed and shared, which included leadership-focused coaching for educational leadership graduate students. The three phases to the model include one while students are enrolled in coursework, the second while completing a practicum experience, and the final phase once hired and working in the field. The first phase focuses on providing student with experiential learning and early field experiences while taking Master’s level courses. The second phase, the focus of this paper, involves leadership-focused coaching, which is offered by university faculty for students during the practicum or internship semester. The final phase includes mentoring support from experienced leadership for novice leaders once hired in the local district. Universities would provide any professional development needed for novices and experienced mentors, in partnership with the districts.

## **Relevant Literature**

### **Adult Learning Theory**

Andragogy, adult learning theory, was introduced by Knowles (1980, 1984) who defines adult learners as “autonomous, motivated, and ready to embrace growth-oriented experiential based learning” (Richardson, 2015, p. 2071). Course learning tasks allow students to be self-directed, open to feedback from peers, and self-reflective (Knowles, 1984; Richardson, 2015). Those who are more actively engaged in their learning, rather than passive, are more likely to succeed as instructional leaders (Richardson, 2015). Keeping this in mind, it is important to offer opportunities for leadership students to participate in reflective writing tasks and course discussions. This type of discourse helps aspiring leaders to gage their thinking in contrast to classmates or determine common perspectives with others.

Richardson (2015) purports leadership preparation course “should provide opportunities for aspiring leaders to retrieve, reflect, and infuse their experience into their learning, and provide context, variability, and personalization for learning success” (p. 2071). Reflective writing tasks give aspiring leaders a chance to think more critically about past practical experience and connect such to the theoretical content in courses. As future leaders are more contemplative critical thinkers, they can discern the causes of decisions made by leaders and effects on stakeholders

within schools (Gray, 2016). As adult learners, aspiring instructional leaders need to engage actively in learning to connect to their prior knowledge and reflect upon what they have learned, discovered, experienced, observed, contrasted, compared, realized, and contextualized about leadership (Richardson, 2015).

It is not surprising that many graduate students enter a preparation program with biases, based upon their past experiences, which can influence their learning (Richardson, 2015). Future leaders should be encouraged to reflect upon, scrutinize, and contemplate the implications of their beliefs and philosophies of teaching, learning, and leader, and consider other perspectives (Richardson, 2015). Class discussions, debates, and interactive activities allow prospective leaders to solidify their thoughts about leadership and education (Gray, 2016). Curriculum mapping in educational leadership programs should be strategic in incrementally developing leadership skills and knowledge during coursework (Richardson, 2015). It is important to keep the characteristics of adult learners in mind as a program and course assignments are developed.

### **Theory of Situated Learning and Communities of Practice**

Lave (1988), while researching how learning occurs, developed the theory of situated learning, which explains how knowledge is acquired. Learning takes place within the context of the place where it happens, where it is situated (Lave, 1988). Further, communities of practice are made up of groups of people who have a set of issues or concerns in common and learn together (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). As members of the group bond and share values and information, they become a community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002). The members of the community of practice learn from one another as they face common issues and develop solutions collaboratively (Wenger et al., 2002). As an organizational model, a community of practice evolves as its members share goals, values, best practices, and discussion with one another (Cambridge, Kaplan, & Sutter, 2005). For this study, communities of practice will include the cohorts of students, faculty, district mentors, and district leaders.

### **Organizational Change Theory**

Huber and Glick (1995) define organizational changes as “departures from the status quo or from smooth trends” (p. 3). The theory has evolved significantly since the early 1900s (Ott, Parkes, & Simpson, 2003). Argyris is credited with establishing the principles of organizational change theory (Ott et al., 2003). “The application of knowledge about motivation, group and intergroup dynamics, leadership, teamwork, empowerment, effects of the work environment on individuals at work, power, and influence” requires organizational change (Ott et al., 2003, p. 444). In his fifth discipline ‘systems thinking,’ Senge (1990) emphasizes the importance of organizational change and learning. For this study, change theory is considered regarding the inevitability of change within organizations, how university and school district partnerships can face this inevitability, and the effects such change can have on leadership preparation programs.

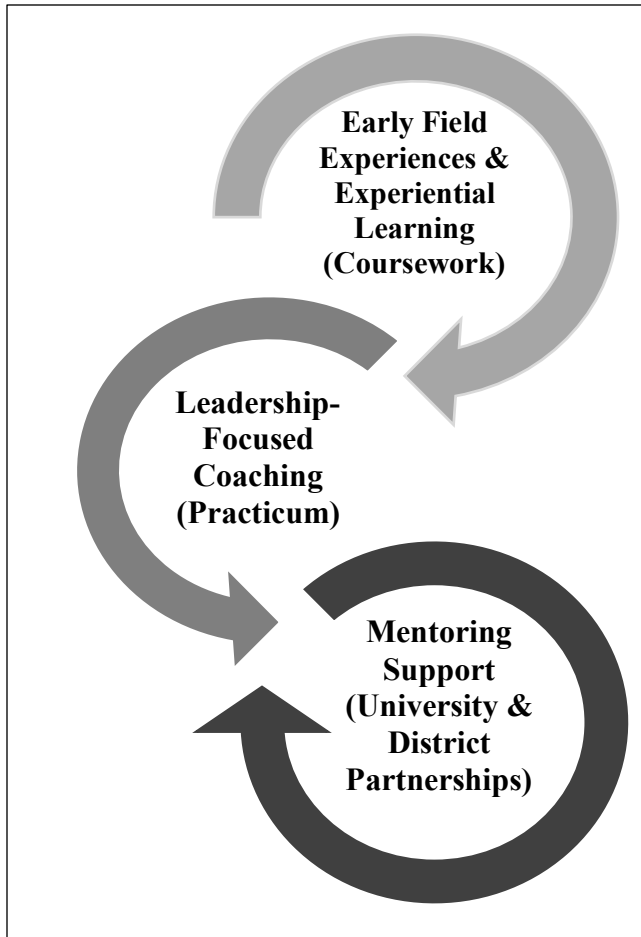
## **Continuous School Improvement Model**

While the concept of continuous improvement has been in the business literature for several decades, it has been discussed more in the context of schools over the last 15-20 years (Cheney et al., 2010; Park, Hironaka, Carver, & Nordstrum, 2013). The Coalition of Essential Schools defines continuous school improvement as “the process cycle of school improvement with the major components of creating the vision, gathering data related to that vision, analyzing the data, planning the work of the school to align with the vision, implementing the strategies and action steps outlined in the plan, and gathering data to measure the impact of the intervention” (para. 1). In contrast to traditional school improvement, a continuous school improvement model finds that schools should always be working toward improvement and progress, that is ongoing (Cheney et al., 2010; Park et al., 2013). In this study, continuous improvement is viewed as a means for addressing gaps in the principal preparation programs and ways to build stronger partnerships between local school districts and universities.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In this conceptual paper, a model is described for early field experiences and experiential learning for educational leadership students, leadership-focused coaching from university faculty members, and mentoring support from and with the school district (see Figures 2 and 4). While completing educational leadership coursework, students would have early field experiences and experiential learning activities embedded in each class, especially in the practicum course. University faculty members would work in collaboration with school district partners to design and develop practical and authentic assignments (see Figure 4).

One of the goals of this model is to more effectively prepare leaders for jobs in schools. During the student’s practicum semester, leadership-focused coaching would be provided by the university instructors and within the context of the school environment by a supervising administrator (Gray, 2016, 2017). The final part of the conceptual model includes mentoring support within schools (see Figure 2). Once hired in a leadership position, districts would match each novice leader with principal or district-level mentor. University faculty members would support partnerships with districts by developing and providing ongoing mentoring workshops, professional development, and resources for such mentors, as well as remediation support for struggling new leaders as requested and part of the warranty agreement that exists in most states in the U.S. (see Figure 4).



*Figure 2.* Conceptual diagram of model

### **Early Field Experiences/Experiential Learning**

In teacher preparation programs, early and sustained experiences in the field are highly recommended, so that pre-service teachers are well-informed about their future roles and responsibilities (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014). In other words, they know what will be expected of them as a teacher in a school setting. In this study, we apply the same thinking, but for leadership preparation programs. If students have more practical experiences in the field, they are more informed about their path to leadership with a more realistic perspective of the responsibilities and expectations (Figueiredo-Brown, Ringler, & James, 2015; New Leaders, 2012). For the field-based assignments, leadership students would work under the guidance and supervision of a variety of school level and district leaders to deepen the extent of their experiences in the field (Pounder & Crow, 2005). Candidates would be encouraged to participate in diverse settings and schools during this phase. Many researchers have described the significance of experiential and practical learning in the field while students are enrolled in educational leadership courses (Cheney et al., 2010; Cunningham, 2007; Cunningham & Sherman, 2008; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Daresh, 2004; Geer et al., 2014).

Internships and practicum courses “provide authentic experiences to bridge the gap between theory and practice when students work in schools addressing daily school issues” under the guidance of a school leader (Figueiredo-Brown et al., 2015, p. 38; Cunningham, 2007). Students benefit from a “practice-rich” experience in a real school leadership setting (New Leaders, 2012, p. 6). With universities and school districts working together to improve principal preparation programs, candidates’ capacity to lead school effectively increases (Cunningham & Sherman, 2008). Professional development should be linked to practice, ongoing, problem-focused, and emphasize leadership skills not yet mastered (Best, 2006). This model asserts that experiential field-based learning will address this need for practice and skill building.

By redesigning principal preparation to include more “practical, experiential curriculum designed to teach explicitly for transfer of skills, knowledge and strategies may improve the impact leaders have on learning in schools when they assume a leadership position” (Richardson, 2015, p. 2074). The U.S. Department of Education (2004) report *Innovative Pathways to School Leadership* determined programs must be “more innovative and need to include intensively focused, authentic courses and lots of field work” (p.4). While experiential learning is considered a best practice, this study describes leadership-focused coaching as a means for improving leadership preparation programs (Gray, 2016).

### **Other Coaching Models in Education**

While there are numerous models of coaching teachers, this study focuses on the two approaches: peer coaching and clinical supervision. The original models of clinical supervision of Cogan (1973) and Goldhammer (1969) are mentioned briefly in context of clinical supervision.

**Peer coaching.** Many coaching models are designed for providing support to aspiring or novice teachers, rather than leaders as this paper suggests. Peer coaching is one such model in which colleagues work collaboratively “to expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas; teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace” (Robbins, 1991, p. 1). This approach to coaching is typically teacher-led, informal, specific to instructional practices, and formative in nature. However, peer coaching often leads to formal observations, in which a pre- and post-conference would be involved. To be clear, peer coaching is never intended to be used for evaluation or summative means. Robbins (1991) shares the rationale for peer coaching is to:

Reduce isolation among teachers; build collaborative norms to enable teachers to give and receive ideas and assistance; create a forum for addressing instructional problems; share successful practices; transfer training from the workshop to the workplace, promote the teacher as researcher; and encourage reflective practice. (p. 8)

Finally, teachers involved in peer coaching are not required to do so, but rather volunteer or choose to participate. Principals’ role in peer coaching is limited to offering support and resources (time in the schedule, etc.), although some have been known to act as a peer coach (Robbins, 2009).

**Clinical supervision.** Acheson and Gall (2002) developed the model of clinical supervision, which varies from the earlier models by Cogan (1973) and Goldhammer (1969). The model described by Acheson and Gall (2002) is more collaborative, interactive, and teacher-centered, rather than authoritative, directive, and supervisor-centered, as Cogan and Goldhammer defined clinical supervision. Clinical supervision involves a three-step cycle with a pre-observation conference, observation, and post-observation conference (Acheson & Gall, 2002).

During the pre-observation conference, the teacher communicates the goals for the lesson, personal concerns, and areas for feedback. The supervisor assists in clarifying the teacher's current instructional skills and strategies for reaching the most effective level of instruction. Together, they select a tool for gathering data, the actual observation instrument to be used.

During the observation, the observer gathers data in an objective manner. In the post-observation conference, also called the feedback conference, the data is reviewed and the observer shares his inferences from notes and based upon his expertise about best practices. Often times, the feedback conference becomes a planning session for more effective instructional practices (Acheson & Gall, 2002). The goals for clinical supervision are:

to provide teachers with objective feedback on the current state of their instruction; to diagnose and solve instructional problems; to help teachers develop skill in using instructional strategies; to evaluate teachers for promotion, tenure, or other decisions; and to help teachers develop a positive attitude about continuous professional development. (Acheson & Gall, 2002, pp. 12-13)

The peer coaching and clinical supervision models were designed for teacher preparation, while the learning-focused coaching is intended for leadership candidates.

### **Learning-Focused Coaching**

In the conceptual diagram of the proposed model, leadership-focused coaching makes up the second part of the process described in this paper (See figure 2). The model promotes early field experiences and more experiential learning and leading for students pursuing a Master's of educational leadership. Leadership-Focused Coaching is provided by university faculty while aspiring leaders are completing coursework and the principal practicum (or internship). The final part of the model involves mentoring support from the school district, once candidates are hired in leadership positions.

The concept was first inspired by Content-Focused Coaching (CFC), an approach to mathematics coaching (West & Staub, 2003). Content-Focused Coaching is "a professional development model designed to promote student learning and achievement by having a coach and a teacher work jointly in specific settings, guided by conceptual tools" (Staub, West, & Bickel, 2003, pp. 1-2; Staub, 2004; West & Staub, 2003). Content-focused coaches use specific lesson planning and observation tools to support new mathematics teachers (West & Staub, 2003). Novice teachers collaboratively plan, develop, and teach lessons with their content-focused mentor, who models strategies and gradually shifts more responsibilities to the developing teacher during the process (West & Staub, 2003; see Figure 3).

In the same way that novice teachers receive the support, coaching, and feedback from a faculty supervisor using the CFC model, aspiring instructional leaders would have an educational leadership faculty member offer coaching during the practicum experience. However, the emphasis for LFC is placed on developing and honing instructional leadership skills and responsibilities through feedback cycles. The researcher defines Leadership-Focused Coaching (LFC) as an approach to provide specific instructional support for aspiring and novice school leaders (Gray, 2016). This model differs greatly from that of CFC in its focus on support to aspiring and novice instructional leaders and integration of experiential learning and early field experiences (see Figure 3). While participating in the practicum course, educational leadership interns would be visited by the university faculty while conducting leadership-type activities in the school environment (Gray, 2016). This type of support could also be provided virtually via



Skype, Blackboard Collaborate, Zoom, or phone conference by the faculty member with the candidate, as needed.

The leadership-focused coach assists aspiring leaders in questioning current practices and philosophies about leadership, establishing professional goals during the practicum semester, and further developing leadership skills (Lochmiller, 2014). Early field experiences and critical reflection assignments in courses prior to the practicum should facilitate the shift from classroom teacher to instructional leader, a transition some aspiring leaders struggle to make. Leadership coaching has been described as “one induction strategy that supports principals in acquiring the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to be successful as instructional leaders” (Lochmiller, 2014, p. 60; Killeavy, 2006; Rhodes, 2012; A & Hammack, 2011). While cultivating a culture of change among adult learners, coaches will likely face those who are hesitant to change. Frequently, there are “some entrenched norms . . . schedules, use of time, ways of relating, and habits of mind.” which will need to be addressed via coaching (West & Cameron, 2013, p. 28). This study describes a model designed to address these types of challenges for future leaders enrolled in educational leadership preparation programs.

| <b>Content-Focused Coaching</b>  | <b>Leadership-Focused Coaching</b>   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designed for teacher candidates or novice teachers of mathematics</li> <li>• Professional development model to promote student learning and achievement</li> <li>• Coach and teacher work together using specific observation tools</li> <li>• Specific lesson planning format implemented</li> <li>• Novice teachers plan, develop, and teach lessons in collaboration with coach</li> <li>• Coach models and scaffolds strategies, but gradually shifts responsibilities to developing teacher</li> <li>• Coach leads sessions as the content expert</li> <li>• Focuses on specific instructional skills, strategies, or knowledge</li> <li>• Provides formative, constructive feedback</li> </ul> <p>(Staub, West, and Bickel, 2003; West &amp; Staub, 2003)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designed for aspiring instructional leaders</li> <li>• Model to promote best leadership and decision-making processes and skills</li> <li>• Coach and candidate work together using PSEL, state, or district instruments, evaluation tools, or resources</li> <li>• Format will vary based upon district format recommendations</li> <li>• Candidate plans activities (during practicum/internship) with guidance from coach and supervising principal</li> <li>• Candidate leads sessions with coach facilitating</li> <li>• Focuses on connecting theory and practice, leadership skills, and decision-making processes</li> <li>• Provides formative, constructive feedback</li> </ul> <p>(Gray, 2016)</p> |

*Figure 3.* Contrast of content-focused and leadership-focused coaching

A leadership-focused coach offers feedback for building upon strengths, suggestions for improvements, and strategies for improving areas or skills needing growth, while sharing relevant leadership theory and decision-making models (Gray, 2016; see Figure 3). Checklists and rubrics are developed and aligned to state standards and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, formerly known as the ISLLC Standards (NPBEA, 2015). A sample observation form was developed and aligned to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (see Appendix A). The observation form could be used to establish baseline data, in addition to formative and summative evaluations throughout the student’s coursework. In addition, the sample form could be used by candidates as a self-

assessment tool, as well. Finally, a sample practicum/internship plan template is shared (see Appendix B). Ideally, the Leadership-Focused Coach would work collaboratively to develop the practicum/ internship plan with the supervising principal and candidate. The plan provides a structure to guide the candidate through the practicum experience. Other organizational tools could be used as well, such as critical reflection logs, structured response reflections, and guided discussions.

A key aspect of LFC is the development of instructional leadership skills and knowledge for aspiring leaders. While in the past, principals typically worked independently within their schools, often lacking a colleague or mentor to reach out to as a resource (Mitgang, 2008; Schleicher, 2012). Mitgang compares working in isolation to that of a conductor of a music group who leads and motivates others but lacks support for himself (2008). Thankfully, recent trends have led to principal networking opportunities and learning communities being developed among principals, veterans and novices alike (Schleicher, 2012). These networking connections established can “foster collaborative problem-solving and alleviate the sense of isolation that some school leaders feel” (Schleicher, 2012, p. 22).

Every educational leadership student would be paired with an area principal (or assistant principal as needed) during the practicum/internship semester. Most students choose to work with their current supervising administrator but have the option to consider another school or district level leader if requested. At the beginning of the practicum semester, the candidate would use the template aligned to the PSEL or state’s standards (if preferred) to develop a plan of action for a variety of leadership-type activities and experiences with feedback from the university faculty member and supervising school leader.

Some competencies would have required tasks to be completed (i.e.: attend a school board meeting and writing a reflection; visit another school campus and compare the school’s culture to that of your own school, etc.). Under each competency would be several options or examples of ways to demonstrate mastery or experience while developing specific leadership skills. By allowing choices and flexibility, the practicum candidate is more likely to take ownership of the plan. Interns could use the sample observation form (Appendix A) as a self-assessment by ranking their skill levels for each of the competencies and at the end of the practicum semester as a reflection of their progress.

The leadership-focused coach would provide constructive suggestions for improvement, feedback for building upon strengths, and strategies for further developing areas needing growth while emphasizing relevant decision-making models and organizational leadership theory (Gray, 2016). Formative and summative evaluation forms, rubrics, and checklists would be designed to align to state and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). Leadership-focused coaches will assist novice leaders in establishing goals, questioning current practices, and improving leadership skills throughout the leadership practicum semester (Gray, 2016, 2017; Lochmiller, 2014).

Leadership coaching has been described as “one induction strategy that supports principals in acquiring the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to be successful as instructional leaders” (Killeavy, 2006; Lochmiller, 2014, p. 60; Rhodes, 2012; Wise & Hammack, 2011). When promoting and cultivating a culture of change among adult learners, coaches often face teachers and leaders who are hesitant to change and “some entrenched norms . . . schedules, use of time, ways of relating, and habits of mind” which will need to be addressed via coaching (West & Cameron, 2013, p. 28). This study offers a model for facing these types of challenges for aspiring leaders. Figure 3 offers a contrast of content-focused coaching, intended for aspiring and novice

teachers, and leadership-focused coaching for aspiring and novice instructional leaders. In Figure 4, the roles and responsibilities for the student, faculty member, school supervising principal, and districts are described for each phase of the model.

While many candidates will self-select their current principal, others may need to be matched to a supervising principal or district leader. Ideally, these mentoring relationships could be developed and sustained over time, to the benefit of the mentor and aspiring leader alike. There are advantages for the novice leader to receive constructive feedback and leadership-focused coaching from the supervising principal and university professor (Bickman, Goldring, De Andrade, Breda, & Goff, 2012; Gray, 2016). Practicum candidates would benefit from critical criticism from the leadership-focused coach (university faculty) and school level mentor (principal or assistant principal), allowing for a variety of perspectives, resources, and information (Bickman et al., 2012). Further, candidates would be encouraged to shift their thinking from that of a classroom teacher to considering the whole school and district.

|                          | <b>During Coursework</b>   | <b>During Practicum</b>  | <b>Once in Leadership Position</b>   |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Role of Candidate</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participates in early field experiences within each course with cooperation from principal</li> <li>• Writes reflections to connect theory to practice based upon early field experiences</li> <li>• Benefits from interaction with classmates in small learning communities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops plan for practicum activities with supervising principal and university profession (LFC)</li> <li>• Completes field-based experiential leadership tasks under supervision of principal</li> <li>• Writes reflections to connect theory to practice based upon practicum field experiences</li> <li>• Benefits from interaction with classmates in small learning communities</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applies theoretical and practical knowledge from Master’s program in daily leadership skills in the field</li> <li>• Receives support from principal mentor</li> <li>• Requests support from university faculty as needed (part of warranty agreement)</li> <li>• Participates in professional development offered by district and/or university</li> </ul> |
| <b>Role of Faculty</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaches courses and designs early field-based and experiential learning activities</li> <li>• Ensures field experiences are authentic and tied to national and state standards within courses</li> <li>• Helps candidates in connecting practical to the theoretical</li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps with development of practicum plan</li> <li>• Monitors candidate’s progress in completing plan</li> <li>• Provides learning-focused coaching throughout practicum semester (feedback, observations, planning, etc.)</li> <li>• Provides access to small learning communities</li> <li>• Offers constructive, formative feedback</li> <li>• Shares effective decision-making models</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides mentoring support to graduates in the field as requested (part of warranty agreement)</li> <li>• Develops and provides professional development for experienced and novice leaders in the field in partnership with districts</li> <li>• Consults with districts about best research-based practices as requested</li> </ul>                       |

|  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Role of Principal/School District Leader</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperates with students completing early field and experiential learning tasks in schools</li> <li>• Advises university to ensure tasks are practical and aligned to national, state, and district expectations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps with development of practicum plan</li> <li>• Monitors candidate’s progress in completing plan</li> <li>• Provides support and advice to practicum students</li> <li>• Shares constructive, formative feedback</li> <li>• Communicates concerns to university instructor</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategically matches novice leaders with principal mentors</li> <li>• Requests professional development from university faculty as needed</li> <li>• Seeks mentoring support from university faculty as part of warranty agreement</li> </ul> |
|--|--|--|---|

Figure 4. Roles and responsibilities of candidate, faculty member, and district leader

As a part of the partnership with local school districts, leadership-focused coaches (faculty members) could provide professional development sessions for mentor principals and leaders in the local districts. Professional development needs might vary from district-to-district, based upon instructional or leadership needs or trends. Many school districts have adopted a ‘grow your own’ approach to recruiting by encouraging teacher leaders into administrative roles. So, there could be a need for teacher or instructional leadership professional development sessions to be provided by the university instructors.

### Mentoring Support

The final part of the model is mentoring support, which is provided for new leaders by their districts once hired in a leadership position. Ideally, the district will have small communities of practice for novice school leaders, so they do not feel so isolated in their new roles, which is often what is experienced by new leaders. The districts would be responsible for matching school principals to act as mentors for novice leaders. There would need to be consideration of grade level (elementary, middle or high), personality compatibility, and leadership styles when pairing novices with mentors.

University educational leadership faculty would cooperate and collaborate with school district mentors, providing ongoing support and professional development about mentoring best practices (Best, 2006; Bickman et al., 2012; Cheney et al., 2010; Lochmiller, 2014; UCEA & New Leaders, 2016). A recent Wallace Foundation report concluded “principals suggest that induction and mentoring are critical to the successful improvement of leadership practices” (Cheney et al., 2010; Lochmiller, 2014, p. 62; Gray, Fry, Bottoms, & O’Neill, 2007).

There are numerous advantages to mentoring aspiring leaders for districts, schools, and mentors. Support for novice leaders can be viewed as “an investment in retention, integration, and continual growth” (Lipton & Wellman, 2003, p. x.). Effective mentoring programs allow districts to: “improve instructional performance, transfer the district policy, procedures, and educational philosophy, frame the professional learning journey, and promote norms of learning and collaboration” (Lipton & Wellman, 2003, p. xii). There is also reciprocal learning and growth for the protégé and mentor, as well as emotional security and support for the protégé (Lipton & Wellman, 2003).

Mentor principals can share advice and support for novices, based upon their years of experiences in the field (Schleicher, 2012). Mentoring can “empower and enhance practice . . . and unblock the ways to change by building self-esteem, self-confidence and a readiness to act, as well as to engage in constructive interpersonal relations” (Fletcher, 2000, p. xii). By sharing what

he knows and why things are done, the mentor makes the implicit explicit to the novice leader (Fletcher, 2000). By providing support and advice to the novice, the experienced principal scaffolds the learning of the novice who develops and hones his leadership skills (Díaz-Maggioli, 2004). When engaged in mentoring relationships, novices are more likely to “increase their efficacy as instructional problem-solvers and decision makers, engaging in collaborative exchanges regarding improving practice, [and] remain in the . . . profession” (Lipton & Wellman, 2003, p. 1). The mentor should be willing to challenge the novice to grow and improve professionally as a leader and help him to develop a professional vision and goals (Lipton & Wellman, 2003).

### **Implications for Practice**

The model proposed in this paper is supported by the research about leadership preparation, leadership coaching, mentoring, and experiential learning. There has been much discussion in the literature for the need of this type of redesign and improvement of leadership preparation programs, especially in regard to the major aspects of this model (Campbell & Gross, 2012; Cheney et al., 2010; Crow & Whiteman, 2016; New Leaders, 2011; Schleicher, 2012). Boyer’s (1990) *Scholarship of Integration* establishes the foundation for this study, built upon adult learning theory (Knowles, 1990), theory of situation learning (Lave & Wenger, 1984), organizational change theory (Lewis, 1951), and continuous school improvement model (Orton & Weick, 1990). We can bridge theory from different disciplines and create new frameworks for our research. This study is offered as a new model for addressing ‘old’ problems within our school systems and leadership preparation programs.

Exemplary leader preparation programs should “feature close integration of course-work and fieldwork, using such techniques as case method, problem-based learning and journaling to encourage continuous reflection about the connections between theory and practice” (Mitgang, 2008, p. 6). The Urban Excellence Framework (New Leaders, 2011) describes an approach to leadership preparation in which universities and school districts partner to develop more selective processes for recruiting and more supportive networks for retaining leaders via mentoring, coaching, training, and networking opportunities (Campbell & Gross, 2012; Crow & Whiteman, 2016; Schleicher, 2012).

Authentic assessments can be integrated to engage aspiring leaders, university leadership-focused coaches, and school district mentor principals in effectively preparing and supporting of novice leaders, as suggested by the model of this study (New Leaders, 2012). In having more early field experiences and experiential learning during coursework, aspiring leaders are more engaged in their learning, as well as educated about what will be expected of them in their future roles. During the practicum, candidates receive feedback that is constructive, formative, and non-evaluative with the purpose of honing and refining leadership skills and strengths (Gray, 2016, 2017).

Further partnerships between universities and districts lead to better communication about expectations for both organizations. In the end, educational leadership programs must develop and prepare instructional leaders who are prepared to perform well and work toward continuous improvement in our schools (Schleicher, 2012). It seems wise to do so in conjunction with school districts. Both the university and districts benefit from such partnerships over time. The model proposed is the type of redesign and improvement needed in our programs to meet the current and future needs of our school districts.

### **For Future Studies**

This model needs to be researched further and evaluated after implementation. A quantitative study could be conducted to determine candidates' perceptions about each phase of the model, as well as the importance of coaching and mentoring of aspiring and novice leaders. More information is needed about building stronger university and district partnerships. There are questions remaining about the importance of delivery of instruction. How are traditional face-to-face and online preparation programs different in their effectiveness and support of candidates? Can coaching and mentoring be as effective in online learning environments as in traditional face-to-face settings? All of these topics could be further developed in future studies using the model suggested in this paper.

### **Conclusion**

Rather than having principals work in isolation, this model promotes networking opportunities and support for aspiring and veteran school leaders. Schleicher asserts "effective leadership development programs often also include networking among participants, which can help to foster collaborative problem-solving and alleviate the sense of isolation that some school leaders feel" (2012, p. 22). Aspiring and novice leaders would certainly benefit from greater coaching, mentoring, and collaborative support from both university faculty members and school district leaders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Crow & Whiteman, 2016; Gray, 2016, 2017). We believe leadership-focused coaching provides a viable framework for aspiring leaders and promotes stronger partnerships between school districts and universities.

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## Appendix A – Sample Observation/Evaluation Rubric

(Name of University) (Course Prefix/#) Principalship Practicum Observation Form

Practicum Student \_\_\_\_\_ Time (Start) \_\_\_\_\_ (Stop) \_\_\_\_\_

| #         | Professional Standards for Educational Leaders Competency  | Highly Effective | Effective | Developing | Novice | Needs Improvement | Not Observed |
|-----------|--|------------------|-----------|------------|--------|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>1</b>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mission, Vision, and Core Values</b></p> Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.                         | 5                | 4         | 3          | 2      | 1                 | N/O          |
| <b>2</b>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Ethics and Professional Norms</b></p> Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.   | 5                | 4         | 3          | 2      | 1                 | N/O          |
| <b>3</b>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Equity and Cultural Responsiveness</b></p> Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.                                 | 5                | 4         | 3          | 2      | 1                 | N/O          |
| <b>4</b>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment</b></p> Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student’s academic success and well-being. | 5                | 4         | 3          | 2      | 1                 | N/O          |
| <b>5</b>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Community of Care and Support for Students</b></p> Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.                                  | 5                | 4         | 3          | 2      | 1                 | N/O          |
| <b>6</b>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Professional Capacity of School Personnel</b></p> Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.  | 5                | 4         | 3          | 2      | 1                 | N/O          |
| <b>7</b>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Professional Community for Teachers and Staff</b></p> Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.                              | 5                | 4         | 3          | 2      | 1                 | N/O          |
| <b>8</b>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community</b></p> Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.           | 5                | 4         | 3          | 2      | 1                 | N/O          |
| <b>9</b>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Operations and Management</b></p> Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.  | 5                | 4         | 3          | 2      | 1                 | N/O          |
| <b>10</b> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>School Improvement</b></p> Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.  | 5                | 4         | 3          | 2      | 1                 | N/O          |

School/District \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Observation # \_\_\_\_\_

*(It is possible that all competencies will not be demonstrated during one observation.)*

**Comments (strengths or areas for improvement):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Leadership-Focused Coach (University Instructor)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Practicum Student (Aspiring Leader)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Supervising Principal (School Leader)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B – Sample Practicum/Internship Plan**

(Name of University)

(Course Prefix/#)

(Semester/Year)

This is a planning document for the practicum candidate/intern to use to plan how each PSEL standard will be addressed. Each PSEL standard has a variety of activities from which to choose. The candidate is responsible for demonstrating how learning has occurred for each PSEL competency. This plan must be approved of and signed by the candidate, supervising principal, and University Leadership-Focused Coach.

**Candidate’s Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Standard 1**

Performance Activity 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Activity 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Standard 2**

Performance Activity 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Activity 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Standard 3**

Performance Activity 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Activity 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Standard 4**

Performance Activity 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Activity 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Standard 5**

Performance Activity 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Activity 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Standard 6**

Performance Activity 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Activity 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Standard 7**

Performance Activity 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Activity 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Standard 8**

Performance Activity 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Activity 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Standard 9**

Performance Activity 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Activity 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Standard 10**

Performance Activity 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Activity 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Intern Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**By signing below, I agree to coach or provide support to the candidate for the completion of these activities.**

**Supervising Principal Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**University Representative Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

# **Making Time to Reflect Together on Preparation and Practice: Lessons Learned from Creating and Sustaining the Educational Leadership Professional Learning Alliance**

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**William R. Black**  
*University of South Florida*

**Joyce G. Haines**  
*University of South Florida*

*In this critical reflective manuscript, the authors share how a University-Based Educational Leadership Program created a professional learning alliance that seeks to create a network across educational leadership preparation and practice. A five-year old initiative, the Educational Leadership Professional Learning Alliance provides a platform for members to interact with each other about evolving leadership preparation needs, as well as provides a platform to organically respond to timely issues that are salient to leadership practice in a variety of roles in k-12 public schools. The alliance meetings have become space for members to find information and support, share challenges, celebrate successes, and enhance a network to promote public education. The authors describe how the initiative developed and sustained itself through mutually beneficial and timely topical discussions that reflect members' commitment to be responsive to a wide variety of personal and professional issues and concerns.*

In this article we share insights into how a University-Based Educational Leadership Program created an alliance across the too often unconnected bridge of educational leadership preparation and practice. In particular, we describe the creation and evolution of an alliance of University Faculty and K-12 leaders joining together in an Educational Leadership Professional Learning Alliance (ELPLA). During the last five years, a cross section of 35 university professors, school district leaders, principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, alumni, and current students have met quarterly to both discuss topics of importance and to provide support for each other. Members attend the three-hour meetings on Saturdays in search of a supportive environment in which to engage in meaningful collaboration and transparent dialogue around problems of preparation and practice. During this time, the alliance members have sought to engender an environment for individuals from multiple school districts in a wide variety of roles to dialogue about timely and pertinent topics. In so doing, members have sought to develop an influential network of relationships across k-12 and higher education institutions that support better-informed and sustainable leadership preparation and practice.

We begin with a review of literature and methods before turning to a description of the context for the development of the ELPLA as an externally leveraged Professional Learning Community. We then describe its organic evolution into a Professional Learning Alliance that provides sustenance to its members through a series of meaningful processes in which members learn something new. These processes include analyzing preparation and its influence on practice, creating dialogue around topics that are responsive to emerging issues in leadership practice, and creating a community of trust and support. We conclude with a discussion of how members found mutual benefit that continues to sustain the ELPLA. In offering a critical reflection on the development, benefits, and challenges of the ELPLA, we hope that our insights will be beneficial to other individuals interested in developing similar alliances.

### **Review of Literature**

Calls for collaboration and bridge-building between university-based educational leadership programs and district and school based leaders have long-standing historical roots (Murphy, 2002; Pounder, 2011). There are also more contemporary critiques that argue for more sustained engagement in order to meet professional development needs that need to be differentiated as leaders take on new roles and experiences (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Hackman, Bauer, Cambron-McCabe, & Quin, 2013). While many contemporary calls for universities to build relationships with practicing administrators come from policy groups (Roach, Smith, & Boutin, 2011) and foundations (Levine, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2013), university-based commentary and scholarship has similarly evoked the need for alliances (Black & Murtadha, 2007; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005; Orr, 2011). Furthermore, Murphy (2007) has suggested that if efforts at crossing the metaphorical university-practice bridges are initiated, it is likely to support a light flow of traffic, as too often it is constructed as a one-way traffic flow-“from theory to practice” (p. 583). Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus that integration, alignment and networking between universities and school district leaders is desirable (Hackman, et al., 2013; Yendol-Hoppey, Shanley, Delane, & Hoppey, 2017) While there are multiple barriers and challenges to school-university partnerships and alliances, we will highlight two primary challenges that relate to our efforts to establish the Educational Leadership Professional Learning Alliance: knowledge commitments, and institutional roles and incentive structures. We also consider possibilities and opportunities across the same dimensions.

## **The Challenge of Knowledge Commitments**

The type of applied knowledge that many practitioners define as preeminent is captured through and in their practice. On the other hand, university professors, often because of their training, privilege theory and materials that come from academia (Murphy, 2007). The work of academics tends to reward slow, careful, systematic approaches that build on previous scholarship and responsibly point out limitations and grey areas, while the work of policy makers and practitioners often privileges knowledge that provides more immediate solutions that clearly lay out the best options for action in the short term. The work that school leaders are asked to do “tends to bias [them] toward solution-oriented learning that fits into their hectic schedule” and addresses the needs of immediate problems or issues (Kochan, Bredeson, & Riehl, 2002, p. 290). As a result, “nuggets of knowledge that can be immediately applied are preferred over solutions requiring reflection and long-term study” (Kochan, et al., 2002, p. 290).

Given the challenge of balancing immediate learning and application that takes place in response to specific problems or issues with the long-term development of school leadership and practice, principals and university faculty are often searching for the best way to balance short and long-term focused preparation and professional development with research-based knowledge. Rather than providing a definitive answer that helps inform pressing decisions in policy and practice arenas, Henig (2009) notes that good research is often slow research as researchers tend to think of their work as limited and part and parcel of a graduated accumulation of evidence. Additionally, researchers are careful to assign causal evidence, while decisions in practice implicitly assume causation. Decisions made in real time benefit from simplification and clarity, rather than the complexity and ambiguity often sought in practice (Henig, 2009). Nevertheless, scholars such as Pounder (2011) have argued that research of leadership preparation programs “may be most fruitful if focusing on the relationship between preparation program quality features and candidates outcomes, most notably on-the-job leadership behaviors” (p. 266), while Korach and Cosner (2017) suggest that “the impact of collaborations between universities and school districts on the quality of leadership development is well documented” (p. 267).

## **The Challenge of Institutional Roles and Incentive Structures**

Differences in knowledge commitments are further complicated by differences in faculty and school leader’s roles and incentive structures. For the most part, faculty are promoted and recognized because of their empirical and conceptual research and national and international prominence achieved through publications and high profile national service (Lamagdeleine, Maxcy, Pounder, & Reed, 2009). Educational Leaders have historically lead from the middle of a set of competing interests and organizational bureaucracies and are incentivized to produce and perform leadership actions that are viewed positively in the local context (rather than national), are highly personal and interactive (rather than interacting with scholarship), and lead to more immediate and visible results (rather than slowly digested peer-reviewed scholarship) (Duke, 2015; Rousmaniere, 2014).

Lamagdeleine and colleagues (2009) argue for the development of incentive systems that incorporate the work that is valued by many in local communities, challenging universities to answer the question of “...how do one’s empirical and conceptual research and publications,

practitioner publications, outreach engagement with schools, and leadership preparation teaching form a synergistic whole?” (p. 137) They argue for a different set of incentives that create release time, space, and resources to work with practitioners. While reports and publications in the last two decades reflect school administrators’ concerns over the relevancy of higher education preparation and faculty members contemporary knowledge of work of schools (Hackman, et al., 2013; Levine, 2005), many educational leadership scholars have argued that multiple forms of knowledge are involved in leadership preparation. For example, some scholars have argued that theoretical, technical and practice knowledge are important components of professors’ approach to leadership preparation (Davis, et al., 2005; Hallinger, 2014; Hackman, et al., 2013; Murphy, 2007; Pounder, 2011) and others posit that educational leadership programs should be involved in a wide variety of pre-service and post service preparation and professional development activities (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Danzig, Black, Donofrio, Fernandez, & Martin, 2012; Orr, 2011).

### **Opportunities in Knowledge Commitments**

Foundations, School Districts and University Educational Leadership Faculty have been working to move beyond providing discrete preservice and inservice programs, but are moving towards a pipeline perspective. Korach and Cosner (2017) document the move towards a greater commitment to knowledge development around practices that take a pipeline perspective that calls for school leaders development to be enacted within the context of a more coherent system that forges deliberate linkages between principal preparation, development and support, and evaluation and where each of these elements is aligned to leader standards. Second, a pipeline perspective encourages partnerships between school districts and universities or other development providers to promote developmental designs that are more responsive to the leaders’ professional contexts. (pp. 262-263)

In addition, knowledge of leadership has evolved from a focus on roles, to a networked and distributed understanding of leadership as centered around webs of interaction and influence (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Spillane, 2005). Networks and alliances such as the ELPLA described in this article can provide the kind of social interaction that leads to the development of collective leadership and professional learning, as leaders become productively connected in developmentally appropriate ways. Such networks support communication, learning, and utilization of untapped resources between members of the community (Daly, 2010, Korach & Cosner, 2017). Well-facilitated professional learning communities can be important spaces for principals and school leaders to learning to improve instruction and increase student achievement gradually over time (Honig & Rainey, 2014).

In addition to learning about professional practices, networks and alliances can assist in reducing the social and emotional burden that often accompanies leadership work. In an era when many schools are labeled as failing and systems are labeled as mediocre, school leaders deal with many stressors as they are often placed in vulnerable and conflicted positions (Rogers-Chapman, 2015). On the university side, public funding has decreased leading to loss of faculty lines and the push to revisit roles and productivity, leading to additional stressors as well (Altbach, Gumpert, & Berdahl, 2011). Pushes towards productivity and shifts in governance towards greater state-level oversight have led to a convergence of policies and pressures across both the k-12 and university contexts (Loss & McGuin, 2016). Networks can provide the kind of



social-emotional and friendship supports that help work become more sustaining and meaningful (Deal, Purinton, & Waeton, 2009).

### **Opportunities to Begin to Reshape Institutional Roles and Incentive Structures**

Recent legislative activity suggest a push towards more partnerships is likely as program approval is likely to hinge documented partnerships between university-based preparation programs and school districts (Fuller, Reynolds, & O’Doherty, 2017). This is reflected in recent legislative activity in Florida (Florida Department of Education, 2017) and other states. As will be described below in the article, the Wallace Foundation has also incentivized university-district partnerships among multiple large metropolitan districts (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2015). These efforts are consistent with research that supports universities and districts working together to select candidates and to place them in optimal positions (Orr & Pounder, 2011; Davis, et al., 2012). As well, current pressures on program enrollment in Educational Leadership programs and Colleges of Education, which have witnessed declining enrollment nationally over the last decade, suggest a shifting incentive landscape that is more likely to promote partnerships and conversations across universities and school districts, particularly as they relate to recruitment and training that is sensitive to school districts emerging needs (Goldhaber & Brown, 2016). As well, many school districts are becoming much more clear in articulating the need for comprehensive leadership development and are incentivized to partner and align their efforts with universities. Many of these efforts are particularly focused on staffing lower performing schools with highly qualified and diverse candidates (Fuller, et al., 2017; Korach & Cosner, 2017; Turnbull et al., 2015).

### **Methodological Approach**

This reflective essay draws on the authors’ recollection of ongoing interpretation and theorizing regarding collected data (Schwandt, 2001). We first reflected on the meaning and challenges of our practice through a series of ongoing verbal and written conversations between the authors themselves, as well as between the authors and participants over the past year. Guided by the authors, participants assisting in the reflection that directly tied to this article included three district leadership directors, 3 principals, 3 assistant principals, and 7 teacher leaders, and 3 current students all of whom would reflect on the history, meaning, and challenges of the Professional Learning Alliance at the beginning and end of meetings-all of which were captured in meeting notes. Most had Masters degrees or Doctoral degrees and some knowledge of thematic analysis and integration. Participants were also active practicing administrators who were well qualified to frame conversation toward the value of the PLA meetings in bridging to and reflecting on practice. In order to further substantiate and guide reflection on our practice, we analyzed collected notes on each of the quarterly Professional Learning Alliance meetings from 2013-2017, as well as drew from two reports submitted to the Wallace Foundation funded PLC initiative in 2012 and 2013. The authors highlighted critical incidences as well as conducted inductive thematic analysis of the notes and reports (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). We utilized participatory methods (Mirriam,1998) in order to illuminate how a professional learning alliance was developed and to discuss themes that are meaningful to participants. Our critical reflective approach allows for transferability and the ability to share perspectives that are useful for others to adapt to their environment (Yazan, 2015).

## Creating the Educational Leadership Professional Learning Alliance

The Professional Learning Alliance originated from two major initiatives: that initially brought together Leadership Development Directors from multiple Tampa Bay area school districts and Educational Leadership Faculty at the University of South Florida (USF): a). a successful application for federal flow through Florida Department of Education *Race to the Top* grant submitted by University of South Florida Educational Leadership Faculty and Leadership Development Directors from four school districts (Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, and Polk county schools), which led to the establishment of an initiative named the Gulf Coast Partnership, and b.) a partnership with the Hillsborough County Public Schools Principal Pipeline Initiative, which was supported by a grant from the Wallace Foundation.

### Gulf Coast Partnership

Six years ago, the University of South Florida Educational Leadership faculty initiated conversation with the school districts of Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk and Manatee to consider partnering on a *Race to the Top* grant application. The grant supported district and university leadership preparation partnerships that aimed to recruit highly successful instructional leaders to serve in “turnaround school” administrative roles. The grant targeted two stages of leadership development and training: 1.) a Masters program with a redesigned year long job-embedded administrative internship leading to initial Florida Educational Leadership Certification (Level 1) for aspiring Assistant Principals; and 2.) a non-degree year-long Principal Preparation program for Assistant Principals aspiring to earn Florida Educational Leadership Certification (Level 2) in order to become Principals. A primary goal of the grant was to engage the strongest candidates in a rigorous academic and intensive experiential program to distinguish them as exceptionally well-prepared beginning Assistant Principals and Principals. During the early stages of planning, the Hillsborough School District, the largest local district, declined to participate directly because they were beginning the implementing a Wallace Foundation sponsored *Principal Pipeline* initiative. The partners named themselves the Gulf Coast Partnership, with Hillsborough participating as a “conversation partner”.

**Level 1 program.** The Level 1 Gulf Coast Partnership Job-Embedded Master’s Program focused on targeted selection of instructional leaders; coursework responsive to district needs; a job-embedded year-long Administrative Internship; and district selected Mentor Principals. Graduates of the job-embedded Master’s program completed a 15-month Master’s level licensure program with a simultaneous school based job-embedded administrative internship. Upon graduation, the vast majority of graduates were immediately sought after and placed as Assistant Principals in High Needs Schools and Communities.<sup>2</sup> There were many examples of collective action between university faculty and district personnel, including examination and revision of syllabi, mentoring collaboratively in the field, co-teaching, and working together to solve issues around the internship.

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<sup>2</sup> **High-needs students are** defined in the Race to the Top application as “Students at risk of educational failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty, who attend high-minority schools (as defined in the Race to the Top application), who are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, who are in foster care, who have been incarcerated, who have disabilities, or who are English learners” (See <http://www.ed.gov/race-top/district-competition/definitions>).

**Level 2 program.** With the *Race to the Top* grant, the Gulf Coast Partnership districts selected current Assistant Principals for training and certification as Principals (Florida Educational Leadership Level 2). The program included ten full day sessions over the course of a year, with a focus on engaging, face-to-face learning that includes guest speakers, Principal Shadowing, Principal Panels, and a rigorous individual project. These “*residents*” also worked in cross-district, project-oriented groups, as well as grade level and district groups.

Speaking to the success of the Gulf Coast Partnership, during the previous 4 years the school districts of Pasco and Pinellas counties have dedicated Title II monies to support full-time job-embedded administrative interns in the Level 1 program after the *Race to the Top* funding ended. As such, a total of 61 individuals have been prepared through the GCP Level 1 program. Similarly, all four original districts, as well as three other districts have continued to participate in the Level 2 program and as of the summer of 2017, 262 individuals from 7 county-level school districts have completed the rigorous program. This multiyear process has resulted in the development of trusting relationships between the university faculty members and district personnel. Most of the original leadership development directors from the partnering districts in the Gulf Coast Partnership form a core of individuals who participate regularly in the quarterly Professional Learning Alliance conversations.

### **Hillsborough County Principal Pipeline Initiative**

In 2011 the Hillsborough County School District became one of six large metropolitan school districts in the country to receive a multiyear Principal Pipeline Initiative grant from the Wallace Foundation (Wallace Foundation, 2013). A key requirement of the Principal Pipeline grant was to build and strengthen partnerships and accountability between the school district and the local universities that train and educate aspiring leaders that work in the district. The Wallace Foundation contracted with the consulting firm Educational Development Corporation (EDC) to utilize its Quality Measures process to evaluate preparation programs that work with the six originally funded Principal Pipeline Districts. As a result of being one of the primary providers of individuals with Florida Level 1 Certification for Hillsborough County Public Schools, in 2013 USF’s Educational Leadership program was reviewed on 6 program measures consistent with research on effective program features (Crow & Whiteman, 2016; Orr, 2011): course content and pedagogy; clinical practices; recruitment and selection; graduate knowledge, skills, and competencies; graduate responsiveness to market demand; and graduate impact on school, teacher, and student performance. While we were initially distrustful of the “imposed” external evaluator and we saw the process as cumbersome and time consuming, the Quality Measures evaluation process did promote conversation between university faculty and district administrators around how to better align and improve leadership development programs and initiatives. In the end, the process promoted mutual respect and broke down some of the barriers around faculty and district roles and distinct cultural norms (Lamagdeleine, et al., 2009). This initiative also provided a small amount of seed money for ongoing partnership work, including establishing a local Professional Learning Community that later evolved into the Educational Leadership Professional Learning Alliance (ELPLA).

### **Formally Establishing Educational Leadership Professional Learning Alliance**

The Gulf Coast Partnership Level 1 and Level 2 programs and the Hillsborough Leadership

Pipeline work catalyzed productive relationships that led to the development of the Educational Leadership Professional Learning Alliance (ELPLA). The precursor to the ELPLA was a local Professional Learning Community initiated in 2013 through a partnership with USF and Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS). Initiated in July, 2013 with a \$9500 start-up grant from the Wallace Foundation through the Educational Development Corporation (the entity which had evaluated the program through the Quality Measures process), the initial local PLC focused on an examination of the results related to course content and pedagogy, student recruitment and selection, and program responsiveness to market demand. The original PLC consisted of twelve members, drawn from USF faculty, school leaders, leadership development directors, and recent program alumni. While the intent of the Wallace Foundation grant was to support three meetings in the fall of 2013, by the end of the semester, the original members felt that this was a purposeful, effective venue for ongoing collaboration. Accordingly, members expressed a desire to continue meeting through in a more expanded Professional Learning Alliance. In the spring of 2014 the Educational Leadership Professional Learning Alliance (ELPLA) was initiated. Several years later many original members remain even as more have come onboard as 35 individuals currently attend one or more meetings per year.

The ELPLA includes members in a variety of roles, including teacher leaders, semi-administrative support staff, Assistant Principals, Principals, District-Level Leadership Development directors and Assistant Superintendents. The alliance continues to sustain itself and grow through a practice in which members ask a colleague who might be interested to come to the meeting and join in on the discussions. The alliance members have crafted and formally accepted the following guiding tenets: Purpose: To increase opportunities to collaborate for the purpose of bridging preparation and practice; Vision: To provide wraparound support for leadership development as an influential network; and Mission: Through meaningful collaboration and honest dialogue, we will focus on enhancing the success of students and educational leaders.

Educational Leadership and Professional Learning Alliance meetings and network are valued for three primary reasons: to inform preparation through incorporating voices of practitioners, to provide a platform to organically respond to topical needs of leadership practice, and to create a community of trust and support. Following the work of the Wallace funded PLC, the initial ELPLA meetings provided University Professors feedback on their program practices in areas of recruitment and selection, curriculum and clinical practice, and market needs and career placement outcomes. All of the ELPLA members have expressed interest in supporting the growth and development of the program and these topics continue to be discussed in the monthly meetings. In addition, members have demonstrated interest in developing their knowledge in areas that emerge in the field and a series of discussions have emerged in response to practitioner interests. These discussions are led by a variety of members as well as invited faculty members and graduate students. Topics for discussion have included resiliency and well-being, trauma and schools, growing leaders beyond standards, ownership of learning, appreciative inquiry and organizing in education, and English Language Learners and Biculturalism. In terms of creating a community, we often found ourselves discussing transitions and trust, as well as creating a space for support where we can share our losses and celebrate our successes. In the end, we found mutual benefits in the ELPLA as members strive to enhance our network to promote public education, create national contacts through membership in a national research consortium, and commit to be responsive to the needs of the group members.

## **Sustaining the Educational Leadership Learning Alliance**

### **Learning Something New: Collectively Analyzing Preparation Through Practice**

The initial Professional Learning Community convened in September of 2013 in order to improve articulation between the school district and the university strategies to: improve candidate recruitment and selection; continually develop depth and relevancy of course content and pedagogy, including the internship experience; and respond to market demands in ways that support individuals' growth across the different pathways in their career. These continue to be areas of emphasis for the ELPA, as they are vital to preparation program improvement and benefit from collaboration across arenas in order to develop more comprehensive leadership development (Korach & Cosner, 2017; Orr, 2011).

**Recruitment and selection.** Who should be recruited? How might high quality candidates be recruited? The members of the ELPA have consistently noted the lack of marketing resources and the need for USF needs to focus on marketing the value of their program. Ideas have included meeting with local superintendents and as well as having teacher leaders identified by current administrators and alumni in order to attend an information session presented by USF. The group emphasized continued recruitment of a greater diversity of applicants, as well as those candidates willing and able to go to "high-needs" schools. In a related vein, the group urged recruitment and selection of individuals who think critically, skillfully question what is taken for granted, and be able to take risk. Currently, alumni who participate in ELPLA also attend recruitment fairs and effectively promote the university as a premier leadership preparation program.

Another recommendation is to continue to have university presence with district leaders, finding ways to interact and be present through our continued Gulf Coast Partnership activities. One other suggestion was to look for leaders in districts and those who have exhibited community leadership, which we incorporated into our Ed.S. in Turnaround School Leadership program. With the resurrection of our Ed.S. program, we have targeted options for those who might seek district leadership rather than school based leadership development only.

Some suggestions that have been constant but not consistent for all programs include: (1) conducting interviews using targeted selection type questions (our master's level GCP Program does this); (2) involve current leaders in the selection process as is done in both our GCP and Ed.S. programs; and (3) use a 360 degree survey of candidate's colleagues as part of selection process. As a result, we have begun to do what was not done previously: screen graduates/applicants together with districts in an attempt to align the qualities of USF graduates with district needs.

As a part of the collaboration engendered through the ELPLA, faculty members have been invited to participate in the screening process of graduates who apply to enter Hillsborough's Principal Pipeline. This screening activity is also beneficial to faculty, as it provides insight how to better prepare our students for successful administrative screening during their final coursework and internship. There is a desire to increase collaboration with districts to ensure that USF graduates have an advantage in administrative screening.

**Curriculum and clinical practice.** What should be taught? How might the internship be structured more meaningfully? By first forming a PLC and then the ELPA, we seek meaningful input on course content and pedagogy, as we had done under the Gulf Coast Partnership. There were strengths identified for the program, including classes that capture and present

contemporary research that has application to project assignments. In the best scenario, one participant who just finished the coursework commented: “I have never done an assignment I could not use at work”. Others noted that the program of study is diverse enough to meet most of the needs of educational leaders. Nevertheless, we solicited input on areas for further development. They noted that more focus is needed on explicit models or processes of problem solving, such as Response to Intervention so that administrators know steps to use could be incorporated into specific classes.

As is common in the literature, the internship was seen as a high impact activity that could be enhanced (Davis, et al., 2005; Fry, O’Neil, & Bottoms, 2005; Pounder, 2004; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Much of our discussion has focused around the internship and the collaboration across universities and k-12 schools. In looking at the role of the internship, suggestions were solicited concerning how to provide more rigorous, relevant and authentic experiences. Some ideas included developing the capacity of administrators to mentor interns, to fund ways to provide release time for interns to shadow administrators and to reorganize the framework of the internship to include advocacy leadership for students of diverse backgrounds. It was also suggested that interns might design major projects aligned with district needs and initiatives. Such an approach would provide interns with a broader concept of implementing change and it would provide them with a meaningful portfolio of work that better demonstrates their preparation for future administrative positions. During their coursework or internship, students should be called upon to implement a plan for a low performing school, as that is where the need is located. Additionally, leadership development directors asked university faculty to seek out diverse clinical placements, when possible.

As a result of our discussions around course content and internship, many members suggested that USF provide a longer, more structured internship with increased opportunities for shadowing outstanding leaders. As a result of this input, the program went from a one semester to a full year administrative internship. In addition, there have been multiple discussions around preparing administrative interns for leadership positions other than the principalship and the one-year internship allows for application of knowledge in multiple roles.

Other suggestions included having interns conduct a program evaluation coming to understand what the impact is of their approaches, so that they come to know the positive and negative effects. An important point is how might interns learn to translate both positive and negative learning experiences into future administrative work. There were discussions around interns’ roles in a creating meaningful School Improvement Plan, where interns could demonstrate application of skills and theories as learning leaders. Members also called for more attention to effectively leveraging community and parent involvement, as many schools utilize a very traditional school-centered role of parent involvement. This might imply identifying principals and sites that actively engage community and providing those models and case studies to the students.

Through its series of meetings, a discussion thread wove around an area that is ignored because of legal concerns around evaluation: how to train a yet to be licensed administrative intern to conduct a quality observation. Participants suggested that this would necessitate crafting formal agreements with districts that would allow these pre-service administrators to learn how to use the tools of the district and to norm them-to build inter-rater reliability. Even if they are not responsible for supervision during the internship, students can practice supporting an individual through an instructional coaching cycle. Lastly, district leaders and alumni clearly expressed a desire for candidates who can build capacity and lead meaningful professional

development rather than following the too common practice of hiring a vendor, which often lacks relevance or is not sustainable.

**Market and career advancement outcomes.** In our meetings, faculty have been able to gather and then share data on graduate placement and performance with school-based leaders in the ELPLA. We shared program completion data with the group that was based on Florida's classification of USF Educational Leadership graduates during the past ten years, compared with their current position. Data were reflective of three school districts: Hillsborough, Pasco and Hernando. PLC participants indicated that they thought the trends could be generalized to other school districts such as Pinellas and Polk.

As we reflect on this practice, we have found it to be beneficial in formative evaluation of our educational leadership program. Graduates' placement in positions was very revealing. It has continued to inform our collaboration around placement of graduates in positions of greater influence, as well as assisted in promoting better alignment through various stages of leadership development in the university and school district settings. There seemed to be consensus that programs should not be judged on the percentage of people who become AP's or Principals, but that individuals who completed USF's Educational Leadership program were could contribute in various ways as teacher leaders, resource teachers, mentors and district personnel.

It was not surprising, but a bit problematic that the pipeline from graduation to an administrative position is long – many times more than five years. Participants seemed to feel that in many instances, some Educational Leadership graduates return to the classroom for numerous reasons and do not seek administrative positions. Some of these include the reluctance to give up tenure for an annual contract, the uncertainty with Florida's Value-Added Model (VAM), and graduates possibly lacking the people skills to handle administrative challenges. In addition, the lengthy post-graduation application, selection, and training process undertaken by various school districts (nine months to a year after graduation) postpone highly qualified applicants from taking a position. A direct outcome of these discussions is that one district is now screening and providing district-based training to our masters students while they are in the program, and aligning the training with sequenced masters course content. This has cut time for the time for highly qualified program graduates to reach assistant principal positions by one full year.

The alliance members arrived at collective conclusion that as the state begins to evaluate programs based on placement metrics, it is important that programs not be judged on the percentage of people who become AP's or Principals. All agreed that those individuals that went through the program were better prepared to contribute in various ways as teacher leaders, resource teachers, mentors, and district personnel. They argued that as a field we should find ways of measuring contributions of those who do not become school-based APs or Principals. The master's program should not be limited to principal preparation, but to leadership in education more broadly. One county uses the term flattening leadership to indicate that leadership should never be conceptualized as belonging to a role, but rather an administrator, along with others, help to develop a cadre of leaders in a school.

Alumni were asked what they considered to be advantages of being a graduate of USF as compared with other degree granting institutions. Their thoughts included the fact that the program is not one of compliance, but rather one that provides rigor, networking and preparation for working with students from diverse backgrounds. This is especially meaningful in light of the fact that many districts have more Title I schools than others, and most beginning administrators are placed in Title I schools. It was mentioned that being able to establish

relationships and having good communication skills were also part of the focus in USF's M.Ed. program. This feedback was then used in the recruitment fairs and other recruitment information.

Areas for potential for growth were identified and included planning strategically with districts with individuals at different stages in their preparation with a particular emphasis on "high needs" schools in the program. Diverse clinical placements would help, as well as analysis that determines characteristics of successful individual pathways in high needs schools so that the program can be better aligned to an operational definition of who tends to do well. Current issues faced by districts that continue to be discussed include implementation of the RtI process, the use of data from formative assessments to improve instruction, school culture and academic engagement of students, and building the capacity of professionals via the coaching process.

### **Learning Something New: Collectively Engaging Issues Emerging in Practice**

Topics for discussion have varied and have included resiliency and well-being, engaging students, the arts and disability, trauma and schools, growing leaders beyond standards, ownership of learning, appreciative inquiry and organizing in education, building positive school culture, and English Language Learners and Bilingualism. In the following sections we provide highlights of the types of information sharing processes we collectively engaged in around of four topics that were introduced by a wide range of ELPLA members: trauma and schools, growing leaders beyond standards, appreciative inquiry and organizing in education, and English Language learners and bilingualism.

**Trauma and schools.** ELPLA members discussed how their best intentions to promote learning too often became tangled with students' need to work through many traumatic incidences in their lives. Practicing administrators in one meeting discussed how emotionally draining their work can be when working with students and families that have experienced trauma and that more children in their schools are exposed to traumatic events than most people realize. While some trauma is easily recognizable due to a death or natural disaster many not easily recognized forms of trauma can dramatically impact how children experience schools and come with dramatic changes in behavior, mood, and ability to learn. Gerritty & Folcarelli, 2008, go so far as to suggest that untreated trauma is the root cause of most pressing problems" that schools and communities face: "crime, low academic achievement, addiction, mental health problems and poor health outcomes" (p. 5).

When the request was made to provide a session on the effects of a chaotic and unstable environment (toxic stress) on students and the implications for schools a faculty member in counseling education and a certified mental health therapist, provided information for ELPA members. His presentation included discussion, demonstration of sand trays and other manipulatives that can be used by educators who encounter students suffering from abuse, homelessness, parent incarceration, drug abuse, and domestic violence. Dr. Davis also shared a database of reference materials for educator use. Classroom teachers, administrators and district leaders were all at the table, making connections to their practice.

As hoped, the impact was not limited to this specific discussion. For example, one ELPLA member, who was teaching a class in the Ed.S. program on Turn-Around School Leadership, realized the possible implications for including the topic of trauma-sensitive schools in the Issues in Curriculum and Instruction course. The class was composed of current principals and district administrators who had not explored a framework of topics to be considered in designing an



approach that would fit the context of a particular school and meet the needs of students. Using the work of Cole, Eisner, Gregory, and Ristuccia (2013), the ELPA member helped guide discussion of the following issues and their connection to creating an adaptive model for a trauma-sensitive environment: Leadership, Professional Development, Services, Strategies, Policies, and Family Engagement. Leadership development directors from two districts not only incorporated information from the session in principal professional development in their district, but were sparked to look up more information and distribute it to leaders in their districts. Information from this session was also incorporated into principal professional development. They realized how prevalent trauma is in schools, with 25% of the population reporting at least two adverse childhood experiences (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 1998), and it has become an important topic for school leaders to consider.

**Growing leaders beyond standards.** In one of the earlier sessions that drew on the data on program outcomes and discussion of recruitment and selection, the Learning Alliance members discussed how a handful of educational leadership programs in the state were providing quick and low quality master's programs and were growing in enrollment, sometimes as a detriment to our program. We discussed how some of the issues they were concerned about were shared nationally - Baker, Orr, & Young (2007) reported that there was a steep decline in the role that research universities play in the production of master's, specialist, and doctoral degrees in education. More recent data on graduate degree production in educational administration indicates that "major research universities continue to play a declining role in the production of graduate degrees (all levels) in education administration" (Baker, 2012), and a recent study of various state licensure policy and institutional production across 4 states, including Florida, demonstrated continued concentration of production in newer, more entrepreneurial and less research intensive contexts (Black & Danzig, 2016).

In our particular context, we discussed various overlapping factors and potential actions. Declines in enrollment were more pronounced after all surrounding districts removed stipends for graduate degrees and general wariness with investing in education due to the effects of the recent recession. As an organization, ELPLA members came to understand some dynamics and vulnerabilities of shifting contexts in Educational Leadership, we identified mutual goals as public institutions, and members committed to redoubling efforts to recruit and promote our program as a rigorous and responsive program (as exemplified by the existence of the partnerships and feedback received in the ELPLA meetings). Slowly, enrollment has been trending upward. Nevertheless, this is a frequent topic and members help faculty to consider why potential students are choosing other institutions and we discuss how we might recruit together.

**Appreciative inquiry and organizing in education.** ELPLA members came to understand that we were incorporating an appreciative inquiry approach into our masters, Ed.S. and level 2 programs and that we had developed a class on Appreciative Inquiry and Organizing in Education. They were intrigued by the approach and requested that we discuss the approach in one of our meetings.

As a result, we organized a session focused on asset-based approaches to leadership that are informed by literature on Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry Theory (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Mantel & Ludema, 2004) provides an alternative framework for improving schools by building upon on already present organizational assets and capacity. The session organizer directs the Level 2 leadership development program for the USF Anchin Center in partnership with school districts is a co-author on a text that developed an Appreciative Organizing in Education (AOE) framework (Burrello, Betz, & Mann, 2015). The framework

begins with a focus on assets rather than a focus on deficits as it seeks to utilize the positive strength based approach embedded in Appreciative Inquiry theory in order to develop relational leaders that build transcendent purpose and core values and generative learning systems (Black, Burrello, & Mann, 2017).

This approach was well received, as many of the ELPLA members work in or with lower performing or “turnaround” public schools. As we discussed in the session, an AOE stance means leaders do not focus on the all too often common and destructive narratives of pathology and deficit thinking in students, families, and school communities (Valencia, 2015), but rather work on how to identify positive assets and harness the potential in their schools and communities to create a hopeful and engaged future for the students and themselves. ELPA members reported feeling invigorated and several reached out for more information after the session. A high school assistant principal in attendance immediately incorporated an appreciative approach in the student leadership academy and worked with her principal to utilize the approach in strategic planning for the next academic year.

**English Language Learners and bilingualism.** Although the Tampa Bay area has had a history of immigrant communities, recent demographic shifts and a growing recognition of differences between the background knowledge of educators and the students they serve were highlighted in several meetings. The complexity of the issue and need for both background knowledge and explicit strategies led to a request for information. As a result, a doctoral student and one of the authors led a discussion on English Language Learners (ELLs) and bilingualism.

We began by setting the context of shifts in demographics in the nation as well as in Florida and the Tampa Bay area. In Florida, we discussed performance of ELLs in various grade levels and shared data on test performance, graduation rates, retention, and teacher capacity. In addition, we discussed how 73% of English Language Learner students had Spanish as their home language, with Haitian Creole (8.2%) being the next most common language (Florida Department of Education, 2015). We also took on the timely issue of the immigrant community in the strongly nativist Trump administration, most particularly documented reports of increasing anti-immigrant speech in communities and schools, clear evidence that immigrants are much less likely to commit crimes, fear from kids that their family members would be reported to Immigration and Custom Enforcement, and suspicion of public gathering leading immigrants to remain “underground” (Costello, 2017; Pérez-Peña, 2017). Accordingly, we discussed the important calming role schools can play for their kids and the legal and moral obligations that school leaders need to consider and embrace. In order to contextualize the discussion, we also provided a larger historical context-particularly the notions that many schools were bilingual in the United States until the 1920’s. Since that time, the country has swung between assimilationist and accommodationist stances with landmark cases and legislation, such as the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (Crawford, 2001; Dueñas González & Meliz, 2001; Stritikus, 2002).

In order to expand the horizon of possibilities we also reviewed many different bilingual education and English as a Second Language approaches and specific strategies and research on the efficacy of the approaches, including research that shows benefits of bilingualism (Brisk, 2006; Athanasopoulos, et al., 2015). We highlighted where and how districts had positive trends in ELL enrollment in advanced classes, and research on essential elements of effective ESOL and bilingual education programs. The idea for the session was to discuss and contextualize the broader historical, sociocultural and policy dimensions around immigrant students as well as research on both dual language approaches and ESOL instruction that provided some concrete models and strategies that ELPLA members could take home to help teachers and administrators

better serve multilingual students (de Jong, 2014). Members left with resources that they could use in their practice and we are using some material developed for the presentation in a new partnership with Polk county schools.

## **Discussion and Lessons Learned: Finding Mutual Benefit and Sustaining Momentum**

### **Collectively Creating a Community of Trust**

During meetings in 2016, the PLA members identified a common phenomenon that they were experiencing regardless of district or role: the need to deal with transitions in their professional lives. Responding to clearly expressed and pressing affective needs to unpack and learn how best to handle turbulence and transitions in their lives, the ELPLA seems to provide a forum for recent graduates, administrators assigned to schools new to them, current students, and leadership development directors to discuss significant changes in their individual roles and shifts in district priorities. During the discussions, an often-heard term was trust, especially in the context of relationships and how to best develop trust in a turbulent system. Trust was also what brought us together several years ago, as we searched for an effective way to remove barriers between the university and local districts, while focusing on the strengths of each entity. We have come full-circle, from a cross-section of educators who assembled to write a grant to a thought partner group of university and district educators who find value in continuing a relationship built on trust.

### **Building Support: Sharing our Losses and Celebrating Our Success**

One of the interesting themes is the way in which members have related that they look forward to the meetings as therapeutic-as means of releasing frustrations, sharing emotional journeys of losses (of student lives, of professional opportunities, of feeling of having a voice) what often people cannot say within the constraints of their roles and institutional context. It has been helpful to share issues across a network of individuals in various positions in multiple districts. In our reflection on our notes and agenda, we have come to believe that members minimize any evaluation of each other despite having multiple roles and levels of experiences, as they are able to appreciate each others' perspectives and identify broader, more systemic issues and struggles beyond their school or role. Students and recent alumni very rarely get to sit and discuss issues with district office personnel and principals in an open manner. Similarly, as professors we do not have the opportunity to share similar frustrations around University policies and procedures and to share successes in terms of promotions, small victories in the classroom, family successes, and research that is published that relates to members' lives.

### **Enhancing Commitment to Engage Our Network to Promote Public Education**

While there are differences in university incentive systems and those of school districts and often value commitments have long been distinct (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Korach & Cosner, 2017), in one meeting it was clear that during our discussions of budget retrenchment, narratives of defeat around public schools, and efforts to make universities accountable through relatively narrow human capital accountability metrics, that university faculty and district directors have many converging interests as public educational institutions are now under common threats. One

of interesting points of reflection across all organizational contexts is the realization of the interests we share as educators in at K-24 public system that is being increasingly challenged by an array of privatization initiatives and shifting governance structures in which educators have less decision-making power (Altbach, et al., 2011; Henig, 2013, Reckhow & Snyder, 2018).

### **Ongoing Commitment to Be Responsive to the Needs of the Group**

The value of trusting relationships was evident during one session when a district leader lamented the need for principals in her district to develop resilience to be able to handle the demands of the state, district, teachers, parents, students, community, etc. This honest sharing led to an active discussion from other district leaders and ELPLA members concerning the universal need for districts to support strategies that promote efficacy for its administrators. In response, one of the group's school administrators offered to research the subject and share her findings. As a result, *Resilient school leaders: Strategies for turning adversity into achievement* by Jerry Patterson and Paul Kelleher was the subject of an ELPLA book study, which in turn became a resource for districts, university faculty and teacher leaders. A direct impact of the discussion was the use of the text in Polk County principal training the following year. The impact of the trusting relationships continues to perpetuate ELPLA to new arenas. As such, the linkages that are being cultivated are consistent with a well-articulated principal or leadership pipeline that encourages more personalized leadership development across both K-12 and Higher Education contexts that builds from prior preparation and responds to emerging developmental needs. As Korach & Cosner (2017) note, such efforts align with school based practices “in ways that address key limitations of ongoing leader development” (p. 268).

### **Conclusion**

The impact of the group and the importance of it to the members was apparent on the morning of the last meeting of 2016. Inadvertently, ELPLA had been scheduled on a Saturday when there was a major event at the university and the campus was closed to outside traffic. When we realized what was happening and had resigned ourselves to having few, if any people attend ELPLA, we finally reached the meeting location only to realize that nothing will keep ELPLA members from a session – the attendance was the best for the year. Many comments were heard around the theme of “nothing will keep us from seeing each other”, as determined members found a way around barriers.

The Educational Leadership Professional Learning Alliance has become an arena where members trust each other. They express concerns as well as strategies for moving forward personally and professionally without feeling judged or evaluated, which too often happens in their professional lives. Our collaborative efforts have catalyzed efforts to develop effective ways to remove barriers between the university and local districts, while focusing on the strengths of each entity. While there is much work to be done, the ELPLA has begun to attend to aspects of community that intentionally attempt to break through institutional barriers (Block, 2009). In particular,

The ELPLA also reflects elements found in a review of successful partnering: pragmatic approaches rather than idealized stances; comfort with incremental change; building trust through explicitly addressed framework of shared values and aspirations; commitment and capacity building over time from both partners; utilizing less hierarchical approaches in which all voices

are heard so that the group develops a kind of third space that is distinct from both academia as well as K-12 education (Greany, Gu, Handscomb, & Varley, 2014).

Currently, the initial cross-section of educators who assembled for two specific externally leveraged purposes: to write a Race to the Top grant application, and to respond to an evaluation process funded by the Wallace Foundation, have evolved into a more organic alliance fueled by the needs and desires of the members for a safe, secure forum to discuss issues of mutual concern and share knowledge across institutional contexts. These activities continue to serve as crucial bridge to an important component in education: the development of district-university partnerships that promote a shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice (Burns, Jacobs, Baker, & Donahue, 2016; Korach & Cosner, 2017; Sanzo, Meyers, & Clayton, 2011).

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# Preserving the Past or Preventing the Future: Native American Parents' Perceptions of School Efficacy

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**Angela S. Farmer**  
*Mississippi State University*

*Native American students currently enrolled in K-12 schools across the United States face a variety of challenges unique to their ethnicity and often silenced by a majority culture which fails to recognize key, intrinsic factors critical for the students' success in academic settings. Evidences of said challenges include disciplinary statistics, attendance and assessment data, and graduation rates. In order to realize quantifiable gains in measurable objectives, it is critical that educational institutions recognize the value and necessity to respect and maintain the students' language and culture in order to preserve the tribal sovereignty while expanding the students' 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge base. This research provides historical context as well as present day case study evidence to personalize the sentiments of Native American parents within a tribal community in the southeastern United States. Their detail and impressions and historical context provide the reader with a powerful glimpse into the world of institutionalized education from a rarely captured paradigm.*

Understanding how another individual interprets information is a complex proposition even when both parties can frame their perceptions based on similar demographic, cultural, and linguistic experiences. Accurately translating one's perceptions when his experiences emanate from a divergent culture whose foundation was developed using alternative approaches to language, familial supports, and demographic identity offers a challenge unlikely to be appreciated without allowing the pure expressions of the specific population to be heard. In this research, Native American parents whose children attend a tribal school setting in the Southeastern United States were interviewed to assess their perceptions of the challenges faced by their children in school today.

Validating students' loss of inclusion with the majority group's consciousness is the loss of the Native American students' language, cultural norms, and sovereignty. Guised as a support for enhanced educational opportunity, the goal of the Federal Indian policy was never to enhance the native culture and blend it with English literacy but rather to save the Native Americans from their troubled lifestyle (Stewart, 2012). These priorities included a focus on reading, writing, and speaking English; encouraging one's individual identity versus that of the tribal identity; and teaching Christianity. During early Indian education integration, the overwhelming interpretation was that educators should work to completely eradicate native languages (Meza, 2015). However, after generations of suppressing the Native languages, the Native American Languages Act now exists as an effort to support the survival of these estimated, remaining 209 indigenous languages spoken within 562 sovereign tribal nations (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008).

In order to minimize the cultural discontinuity, which may contribute to a set of circumstances involving conflicts, inability to connect with the setting, and eventual truancy or total disconnection from school, many leaders advocate integrating traditional Native American cultural practices and relevant history into the general curriculum (Wilcox, 2015). Perhaps this cultural symbiosis best articulated by Audra Sherwood, Education Director for the Grand Ronde tribes, when she shared, "So much of it (attendance) was showing the families that they mattered, that their part in education mattered" (Blad, 2017, p. 6).

To fully appreciate the justification for the research, the statistics regarding the disproportionate implementation of disciplinary strategies toward Native American students is presented. Further, the struggles that Native American students face in attempting to acclimate to a majority population whose language and cultural norms challenge their tribal sovereignty is detailed. Attendance and assessment data which leads to enunciate the specificity of learning styles of Native students is also explored. Collectively, these facets identify a demography of students whose opportunity for maximized academic efficacy is rarely realized, resulting in exceptionally weak graduation rates.

### **Disciplinary data**

Data from an extensive 2010 study of Native American students showed this subgroup to be dramatically overrepresented in instances of disciplinary infractions, losing over four times as many days as White students with similar behaviors. The Native American students were systematically sent to alternative settings for trivial offenses with significantly higher frequency than their non-Native peers (Sprague, Vincent, Tobin, & Pavel, 2013). There is also extensive evidence to suggest that Native youth regularly experience microaggression in schools to the point that they go unnoticed (Johnston-Goodstar & Roholt, 2017).

Furthermore, these instances of aggression can be subdivided into assault, insult, and invalidation. Microassaults are considered “explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim” (Sue, et al., 2007, p. 4). They are typically intentional and considered as old-fashioned racism; examples can be found on social media, in extracurricular activities and even in disciplinary patterns (Johnston-Goodstar & Roholt, 2017). Such evidence of disproportionate disciplinary instances are detailed by research which finds Native American students to be disciplined more frequently and more severely in educational settings (Gregory, Skiba, & Roguera, 2010).

Compared to a microassault, a microinsult presents as less overt. It presents as an implied impression of one’s deficiency or invisibility, with such omnipresence that it can often eventually lead to a situation of benign neglect (Johnston-Goodstar & Roholt, 2017). Further, the researchers detail microinvalidation as unique as its density is related to communications that tend to isolate or remove one’s feelings and history from inclusion in the group consciousness.

### **Attendance data**

While notable improvements have been made with respect to the preservation of Indian culture, even the structure of today’s, traditional classroom settings in the United States appear to interfere with the way in which Native American children best learn, allowing them to work collaboratively with holistic assessment (Morgan, 2009). Evidenced by national attendance data, these students’ attendance is a key concern in states like Oregon where 33% of the Native American children missed at least 10% of the school days in 2015-2016 (Blad, 2017). Attempting to reverse the trend, one district developed a school model specifically for Native populations to ensure that students have a plan for graduation that does not come at the expense of their culture. When attendance days have been missed, rather than having a backlog of homework, they simply begin where they left off (Wilcox, 2015). According to Hedy Chang, Executive Director of Attendance Works, “There’s now a growing level of evidence that proves what we know from common sense, which is that if kids aren’t in the classroom, they can’t benefit” (Blad, 2017, p. 5).

### **Assessment data**

One of the most notable challenges for Native American students lies in their presentation of English as an English Language Learner rather than as an organic, learner with English as their primary language. While this student population was shown to drop out of the secondary educational system at a rate of over 50% (Buly, 2005), recent data indicates a modest improvement with nearly 70% of Native American students graduating from public high schools across the nation (Olife, 2017). Primary weaknesses were found to be academic reading deficiencies whereby the dropout population averaged six grade levels below their same aged peers. Furthermore, limited evidence demonstrating pre-requisite knowledge and skills fundamental for meeting the national standards was found in the background of these Native American youth (Washington Commission on State Learning, 1988).

Additional research offered an even further disparate lens as National Status Completion Rates (2009) reported an average public school graduation rate of 78% for all students, 83% for White students, and only 69% for Native American students. This lens becomes even more

transparent when one limits the graduation analysis to the nation's 48,000 Native American students attending tribal schools where graduation rates stagnate around 53% (Olife, 2017).

## **Cultural focus**

Giving respect to Native American culture and learning, there were seven interviews selected to align with the Seven Philosophies for the Native American Man (Spirit Gathering, 2011). With the exception of the First Philosophy, to “treat women in a sacred manner,” the remaining philosophies focus on the family and cultural unit. It is, however, noteworthy that the tenets of the First Philosophy specifically mention women with a focus on the support to be given to them as well as an emphasis placed on the treatment of women with dignity and respect (Seven Philosophies for a Native American Man, 2018). Its placement as the premier tenet, during a time which clearly predestined any type of women's equality, speaks volumes to the culture's value of both women as well as the sovereignty of the family unit. The Second Philosophy is to “teach my children learn my Native language.” The Third Philosophy is to “see that the community Elders play a significant role in the education of my children.” The Fourth Philosophy is to “give back to my community by donating my time and talents.” The Fifth Philosophy is to “ensure the land, water, and air will be intact for my children and my children's children – unborn.” The Sixth Philosophy is to “commit to walk the spiritual way called in my own culture.” The final, Seventh Philosophy is to “maintain the knowledge of cultures, ceremonies, and songs, and so that I may pass these on to the future generations.” While these tenets present an emphasis on the male gender, it is both implied and omnipresent within their culture that males are both responsible to and empowered by the leadership of the tribe. This does not diminish the value of the female perspective within the 21<sup>st</sup> century setting, it does, however, serve to support the tone of the Seven Philosophies, as presented.

In order to better appreciate the challenges faced by Native American students, one must understand the significance of these philosophies to the culture of this Native American community. This research offers a glimpse into the challenges faced by today's Native American families as they struggle to maintain their attachment to the past while attempting to grasp at the future. Ironically, it is these same honorable tenets which 21<sup>st</sup> century educators often find challenging as they labor to find a balance to afford Native American students with a contemporary education while providing homage to their cultural ancestry.

## **Methods**

Interviews were conducted with seven parents or parent groups who volunteered to engage in dialog regarding their perceptions of effectiveness and quality of the school programming in their children's Native American tribal school setting in Mississippi. All children educated in this school district are of sufficient Native American heritage to qualify for attendance. Educators are composed of a composite of White, Black, and Native American ethnicities.

The conversational nature of the interviews was considered key in order to engage the parents in manner in which they were likely to be the most comfortable. It was suspected that Likert scale surveys or short answer questions would hinder response density as well as hamper the quality and depth of the responses garnered. The conversations were scripted for review. All names were omitted, in order to protect the privacy of the participants.

The seven interviews were compiled and analyzed individually as the specific responses to questions varied by participant. While the questions focused on their perceptions of school effectiveness in delivering the educational programming and quality of the programming offered when compared to other educational settings, interviewees often digressed into tangent topics which they felt warranted further dialog. The results are detailed per interview for each of the seven participants. Following the narratives, a collective discussion will be provided to compare and contrast the interviewee responses, focusing on areas of overlapping concern.

## **Results**

### **Interview 1**

Interview 1 was conducted with a mother of three who did not graduate from high school. Addressing the effectiveness of the school, she commented on how discipline used to be “more structured than today.” Remembering her own experiences, she articulated that she was always afraid to get into trouble at school based on what would, then, happen at home. “If I got out of line for a split second, the teacher ask me ‘You don’t want me to go speak with your mother do you?’” She also had frustrations with what she considered an inconsistent disciplinary policy stating that “Students come in whenever they want, they drag in after 9 a.m. and go to class as if there is nothing wrong with coming in late....some even show up as late as 11 a.m. I’ve noticed some students even show up as late as they want and nobody says anything. Why don’t they tell them parents they can’t come in after 8:30 a.m. or something to this effect? Maybe even lock the gates at 9:00 a.m. or something? The school administration is the problem. They just ignore it.”

This interviewee also spoke at length about the quality of academics, stating that “Academic expectations have improved, but not much.” She further discussed how she wished “the administration would focus on students’ academic achievement rather than so much on sports.”

### **Interview 2**

Interview 2 was conducted with a parent of the tribal school who did not graduate from high school but who did complete her General Education Diploma (G.E.D.). She had a different experience set as she, as a student had attended both a traditional, public school and then transitioned to the tribal school later in her career. She indicated that the public school had her further ahead of her peers at the tribal school. However, she found herself bored at the tribal school where she felt it was worksheet driven, leading to her eventual disinterest and dropping out for a G.E.D. Her current perceptions of the tribal school, however, painted a more positive image about the school’s effectiveness and quality. “Teachers are more involved with the students, and they seem to care more about their achievement. I have also noticed that there are more options available to students today than when I was in school. There are more advanced classes offered, the Mississippi Scholars program is implemented more now, and a new virtual learning school is in progress. The virtual learning school would have been a great option for me if they had this when I was in school because I would have been able to take courses online as opposed to going the G.E.D. route.”

When the interviewee finished discussing her, personal experiences, she shared some insight about her two children in the tribal school. “Teachers are teaching and making sure that

my child is learning at his potential. I have noticed a difference with my nephew as well. The teachers told my sister that my nephew as a little loud and had a tendency of causing problems, so they had him tested for ADHD and even gave him medicine. However, his grades started to drop. After several assessments, they took him off the medication and his grades came back up. My nephew was told (that) he could do some drawings after he completed his work early. The teacher realized he didn't have ADHD, he was just bored and wanted something to do. Her assessment and care for my nephew is what shows me the teachers are trying their best to make sure the students are learning to their potential.”

Regarding overall efficacy of the school setting, her main concern was the implementation of discipline which she felt should be child specific and not procedural. She indicated that her son who is curious “wanted to touch things all the time. He would be told not to touch something and would end up doing it anyway. The teacher ended up sending him to the office. The teacher should have handled the situation herself in the classroom and not sent him to the principal.” She had suggestions for such in class remediation like taking away privileges versus sending him to the office. She did not seem to want to make home setting changes to change his overall behavior pattern, however.

### **Interview 3**

Interview 3 was conducted with a parent who was able to offer a concomitant view as a non-certified school employee. She immediately began addressing school attendance as a major concern which impacts the quality of a program that can be offered as well as the program's effectiveness. She referred to a significant population of students at the high school who were consistently tardy and disrespectful to both teachers and administrators, stating, “I see students come to school and when they come in tardy, they do not care whether they have 20 tardies; they just don't care. I also see how some students talk back to teachers and administrators and have no care in the world what their consequence will be. There is definitely a lack of respect for self and others.”

“I see how students try to manipulate the system with their attendance. They understand that they can miss up 10, consecutive days before they are dropped from the roll. They will miss 9 days and show up on the 10<sup>th</sup> day, with no consequences.” She faults the overall system leadership indicating, “I hear, ‘Well at least his is here.’ That's only thing that's said about the student absences.”

When asked about how these issues could be addressed, she indicated that the “administrators need to be strong enough to care about the students' success.” She shared how the tribal school's chain-of-command differs from a traditional school setting in that the teachers are at the bottom, followed by the principals and superintendent. The top of the pyramid is the education department director (a councilman), with the acme position held by the tribal chief. In this system she explained how teachers can become intimidated by the students. She shared the example that if a parent complains about a teacher to the administrator, there should be a meeting with the involved parties to rectify the situation. However, “most of the time the principal doesn't take the necessary steps and just lets things to directly to the council. Usually, the tribal council will come to the school to reprimand the teacher without even understanding what is happening. Teachers have a tendency of getting scared to do their job when they hear the word ‘council’ mentioned, so students will throw it around a lot to try to scare their teachers.”

#### **Interview 4**

Interview 4 was conducted with a mother of three who graduated from a neighboring, public high school but sends her children to the tribal school. When asked to discuss the quality of the programs at the tribal school as well as to detail how effective they are, she provided the following on this band of Native American's perceived social hierarchy. "Native students who attend the neighboring, public high school are looked at as 'better' than those who attend the tribal school. She indicated that her daughter struggled with this perception as she had transferred to the tribal school."

When delving into the impact that the discipline may have on mitigating these stereotypes, she indicated, "There is none. I see (procedures) written down, but it is not effective. Nothing is done most of the time. Students sometimes just walk off campus. Something needs to be done so that students are monitored and kept on campus."

Redirecting her to discuss the quality of the tribal school, she presented with strong opinions regarding the need to focus more on academic pursuits and less on athletics stating, "The school's focus needs to be on academics. It's not getting done at home and this needs to be taught at home; however, since it isn't getting done at home, the teachers and administrators must give students this motivation to be better in academics. Since most parents haven't attended college, or even graduated from high school, they do not understand how to communicate the benefit of academics...the teachers here have a bigger task than in public schools."

#### **Interview 5**

Interview 5 was conducted with a parent who is also a tribal district employee whose position requires her to work throughout the district. This parent has seven children and appears to be entrenched in both the community as well as tribal school setting. When asked about the quality of the system she shared the following, she indicated that there were some, subtle variances between schools but that overall, the majority of the students attending the elementary schools were "wild." When asked to elaborate she stated that the students tend "to get away with things," and indicated that the principal allowed the students to talk back to the teachers without consequences. She was disinclined to give the system high marks for quality or program efficacy as she indicated that most teachers give parents good reports to avoid dealing with them.

#### **Interview 6**

Interview 6 was conducted with a parent who has two sons at the tribal high school. When asked about the quality of the tribal school system, she said that she had to send them to the tribal school because she could not afford to give them things needed for public school attendance like school supplies and that they have better chances to participate in extracurricular activities at the tribal school. She did not really know about the quality of the programming or how effective it was, she stated that she, "just hopes they are properly educated and that they go on and finish college. She cries as she explains that she cannot afford to give them what they want.

When prompted as to the overall programming of the school, independent of academics as she was unable to speak to curricular pursuits, she indicated that she was not really familiar with much but knew that most students basically get a "pat on the back" for whatever they do



and wished that the principal would make better decisions and use better judgment when he disciplines students. She indicated that she learns most of what she knows about her sons' school from her extended family.

### **Interview 7**

Interview 7 was conducted with a set of parents whose four children attend the tribal schools. When asked about the quality of the programming at the school, they indicated that they really weren't sure about the curriculum or exactly what is taught. They only knew what was there when they attended. They did go to college from the tribal school system and just hope it's still as good as it was, which, to them indicated that the quality at least used to be good enough. When asked about other school programs like discipline, they shared the following, "it seems like nothing has ever changed. There is always a teenage girl who gets pregnant; there's always fights; there's always cigarette smokers and class skippers." They shared that the school discipline problems come from kids of parents who, themselves, had discipline issues.

Redirecting them to discuss how effective the overall education appears to be at the tribal school system, the parents indicated that they felt that extracurricular activities were important in order for their kids to be more outgoing and "fit in better when they go to college." While they gave the schools credit for its technology, but offered concern as "the majority of teachers are white." The parents were encouraged that many students were getting up to a 20 on their ACT and felt that this data made "the tribal community look good."

### **Discussion**

While none of the parents interviewed shared consistently, positive feedback on their school's academic quality or efficacy, consistent areas of concern were cited among all participants with regard to school discipline. From reiterated to disregard for timeliness, to chronic truancy, to chronic absenteeism, to severe disrespect for educators, this critical factor appeared to offer a paramount concern for all parents. However, none of the parents interviewed seemed inclined to challenge the status quo or to elevate the concern to the parties with the power to implement change, specifically the tribal council. Using a critical, external lens, it would appear that the culture indoctrinated the citizens with sense of learned helplessness where, although they witnessed noteworthy mismanagement, they were disinclined to offer a voice against their establishment, perpetuating what appeared to be a multigenerational issue as well as a systemic problem within the institution. Certainly, in order to reverse the existing trend, it appeared that a cultural shift in leadership and or protocol would be required.

Given that the philosophies are found in a community whose members are expected to defer to the Elders (Spirit Gathering, 2011), it is reasonable to appreciate how present day Native American parents feel disabled to catalyze change. Given the Seventh Philosophy (Spirit Gathering, 2011), where the citizens developmental learning reinforced a need to maintain the culture, finding the power to suggest a change could be aligned with the dominant's culture's idea of treason. Certainly, such voices would be not only disavowed but could, potentially, be shunned from the community.

School quality programming and effective implementation of the programming were breached in a number of manners. Of the interviewed parents, most recognized a lack of substantial change within the curriculum, with the exception of technological advances;

however, many clung to a culture of hope that it was good enough to get their kids into college, or at least as good as it was when they were there. To analyze this microcosm of culture within the larger context of the United States where academic merit is analyzed, tracked, and categorized to the most, minute detail at every grade level, major subject level, and ability level, there is clearly an intense cultural divide between the majority culture's public school student experiences and that of the tribal school's students. While clinging to hopes and allowing others to dictate cultural norms, the parents all presented with a veil of frustration. However, it did not appear that any parents saw themselves as change agents, empowered to demand a better life for their children a better future.

### **Conclusions**

The qualitative analysis of a tribal school system in the southeastern United States using case study interviews of parents representing seven family units within the Native American tribal population offered a depth of insight into both the school system's current strengths and weaknesses. While the cultural design of the system limits diversity to only those students identified as genetically aligned with attendance, it reinforces its legacy and traditions and values. However, in establishing a microcosm of values and protocols, it also serves as an impediment for change, limiting its student population from having access to a variety of the contemporary schools of thought to encourage positive discourse.

The citizens of this band of Native Americans were clear in their passion for their children and their hope for their advancement. However, in this digital age of advancing knowledge, global information sharing, and intense competition for resources to provide the pathway to power, the current Native American culture within this sampled demography, appear to be immobilized by their cultural identity. Seemingly more deferential to the past than proactive toward the future, many within this population analyzed could be considered to be aligned with those individuals characterized by Plato's Allegory of the Cave where he claimed that knowledge gained by one's senses was simply one's opinion, and in order to have real knowledge one must step beyond the borders of his surroundings and find truth (Cohen, 2006).

### **Future Research**

Future research using similar questioning and sampling techniques with Native American populations represented by other tribal associations could enhance the lens of understanding as to the motivations for current change levels supported within tribal educational communities. Additionally, advancing the research to target populations of Native American college students who have successfully matriculated from their tribal settings to find a post-secondary success would likely serve to offer a powerful matrix for future generations to use as a template for academic advancement. Given that only 13% of Native American students who begin post-secondary pursuits, actually finish college compared to 28% of the entire student population (Olife, 2017), there is much discourse yet to be examined regarding access, understandings, and preparedness for Native American youth.

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# Show Me the Resources: Teachers' Perceptions of Educational Leader Responsibilities

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**Richard R. Snyder**  
*Wartburg College*

*Effective communication between educational leaders and those with whom they work is of utmost importance. Bolman and Deal's (2003) leadership and organizational frames provide a valuable paradigm for educational leaders as they strive to engage teachers in relevant and meaningful ways. This study draws upon responses generated from two sets of teacher interviews conducted with early adopters and laggards (Rogers, 1973). While both teacher groups spoke toward the relevance of all four Bolman and Deal frames, they overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of the human resource frame. Greater awareness of teacher expectations from the human resource frame enhances interaction with educational leaders working to increase student achievement.*

*Keywords:* organizational theory, Bolman and Deal four frame model, leadership theory

As educational leaders strive for effective communication and engagement with educators, varying expectations can undermine on their efforts. While leadership texts and administrator programs provide valuable conceptual frameworks, these paradigms may sometimes be disconnected from the realities of the educators with whom they work. It is therefore critical for leaders to consider how teacher perceptions of the administrator's role and responsibilities may differ from their own.

Organizational and leadership theories provide a variety of paradigms through which educational leaders frame their roles and responsibilities. Specifically, Bolman and Deal's (2003) four frames provide a model that guides educational leaders regarding the structural, political, human resource or symbolic nature of their positions. These frames help leaders understand primary tasks, as well as important considerations for building a vibrant culture and climate while responding to teacher concerns. The implications of these organizational models also aid more effective implementation of educational reform.

This qualitative study drew upon teacher interviews to identify their perceptions of primary responsibilities for educational leaders. The overwhelming schedule of educational leaders (Fitzwater, 1996; Hall & Hord, 2011) makes it difficult to inquire and understand the experience of teachers. Since teachers are the primary individuals affecting student achievement, leaders do well to understand their perceptions as clearly as possible (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012). If classroom teachers see the task of educational leaders differently, this can create frustration and discord in the educational process.

## **Background**

Organizational theorists provide essential conceptual frameworks for any leader. Organizational paradigms can significantly influence the culture and climate of large, and small, group interaction with co-workers. While working through my own administrator preparation program, this researcher found merit with Bolman and Deal's (2003) four frame model. This model provided a helpful conceptual framework for educational leaders and emphasized the importance of integrating each frame.

Yet while reading Bolman and Deal (2003) along with other organizational theorists (Northouse, 2004; Senge, 1990; Waters et al., 2006), this researcher began to see a disparity between conversations in class and the reality among teachers. The primary discussions around administrative responsibilities at times did not meet the expectations of educators in the classroom. One goal of my subsequent doctoral research (Snyder, 2017) was to help bridge this gap.

Teacher voice is gaining momentum as a field of educational research (Gurley et al., 2016; Mette et al., 2016; Quaglia & Lande, 2017). This qualitative data-gathering method provides rich description from those who work with students all day, every day. While the motives behind generating teacher voice can be mixed, it is certain that educational leaders do well to consider the sentiments of those who have the greatest impact on student achievement.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to provide voice to teachers and in so doing, provide insight for educational leaders. Qualitative interviews with teachers provided data which when sifted through Bolman and Deal's (2003) four frames clarified teacher expectations for the leaders with

whom they worked. For educational leaders striving to move forward with an understanding of those they lead, this information is highly valuable.

## **Literature Review**

Organizational and leadership theories provide numerous philosophical considerations and practical paradigms through which leaders view their interactions with individuals in the organization. Since leaders and members within an organization may consciously, or unconsciously, view their organization through different lenses, it is crucial to identify these paradigms. Inadequate identification of organizational paradigms can lead to miscommunication, mixed motives, and muddled roles. In the context of this research project, clarification of organizational paradigms opens the door for more effective interaction with workers.

Bolman and Deal (originally published in 1991; now in its 6<sup>th</sup> edition - 2017) provided four “frames” through which one might view an organization: structural, human resource, political and symbolic. Recent applications of this model for institutional analysis, leadership, and change, included studies in library science (Novak & Day, 2015; Sowell, 2014), pharmacy programs (Thompson et al., 2008), university planning, departmental, and interdepartmental work (Lindahl, 2013; Roth & Elrod, 2015; Stephenson, 2010) and community college administration (Sypawka et al., 2010). Even while complexity and critical theories address a wider range of leadership and organizational issues, authors from those fields recognized the validity of Bolman and Deal’s (2003) multiple-frame approach (Moen, 2017; Shoup, 2016). Further consideration of each frame will add a richer understanding of their implications for leadership roles and structuring the responses of teachers.

### **The Structural Frame**

The structural frame identifies organizations as factories or machines, the goal of which is to run smoothly. Key concepts in this frame include rules, roles, goals, policies and environment. Essential tasks for leaders in the structural frame include defining roles, establishing proper structures, communicating goals and keeping members aligned to the overall vision. As “social architects,” leaders design appropriate responses to change in the environment, culture, or market (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The structural frame tends to view organizations as rational systems. Leaders can implement changes in a predictable fashion while adapting their organization to the evolving conditions around them (Graetz & Smith, 2010; Kezar, 2001).

The tendency to view the educational endeavor from the structural frame became increasingly popular during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Callahan (1962) explained how the scientific management model of Frederick Taylor gained popularity as Progressives sought greater accountability in social organizations. School administrators bought into Taylor’s model in an effort to increase efficiency and produce measurable standards for constituents. In what Callahan (1962) referred to as a “Tragedy in American Education,” he concluded that educational questions became subordinate to business considerations, schools produced non-educationally minded administrators, practices received scientific labels in spite of not being very scientific, and an anti-intellectual climate was fostered and encouraged among educators. This application of the ‘cult of efficiency’ method to the world of education epitomizes the structural frame.

The structural frame, like all four organizational frames, provides its own perspective from which to interpret barriers to change (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Structural frame barriers to change generally relate to a loss of clarity and stability. Individuals may resist because they do not understand their role, or their changing role creates a level of discomfort. In order to help organization members adapt to change and respond to resistance, leaders need to establish or reestablish policies, and clarify patterns of interaction.

Many contemporary educational leaders prescribe similarly rational, efficient processes of the structural model for implementing change and dealing with resistance. Hall and Hord (2011) suggest that leaders design innovation configurations, identify stages of concern for individuals affected by initiatives, measure levels of use, and leverage techniques of various intervention strategies to predictably and rationally implement change. Fullan (2011) similarly purports that focusing on capacity building (rather than accountability), group quality (rather than individual quality), systemic initiatives (rather than fragmented efforts), and instruction (rather than technology) will result in effective implementation of reform initiatives. These structural frame models emphasize specific, leader-driven strategies that will predictably result in desired organizational change.

### **The Human Resource Frame**

The human resource frame sees organizations as families that focus on needs and relationships within the family (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Since organizations are comprised of individuals, the needs of those individuals must be central in the goals of the organization. If individuals are growing, nurtured, and learning, their health and welfare will extend to the entire organization. Conversely, if managers overlook the welfare of individuals, then the overall purpose of the organization will suffer. Leaders in the human resource frame must focus on individual empowerment while they align human and organizational needs.

Bolman and Deal (2003) recognize that leaders may deal with individuals in the human resource frame considerably different. Drawing upon Argyris and Schon's (2003) Theory for Action, Bolman and Deal (2003) distinguish a very self-centered model from an others-centered model. Argyris and Schon's (2003) *Model I* leaders begin with the assumption that organizational problems or resistance exist within particular individuals. Though still focused on the individual, leaders assume that certain individuals are the source of their organizational problems. Leaders need to identify these people, and then pressure them to change. *Model II* leaders, on the other hand, focus on the potential within individuals to meet mutual goals and influence. Advocacy and inquiry are part of leaders' responsibilities along with dialogue and open communication (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Argyris and Schon's (2003) models clarify that even while operating under the umbrella of the human resource frame, leaders can have fundamentally different attitudes toward an individual.

Human resource barriers to change include anxiety, uncertainty and the tendency for people to feel inadequate (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Rather than focusing on the efficient operation of the organization, leaders need to provide training, build capacity and assure psychological support. Since individuals may cope differently to various initiatives, leaders need to recognize, and adapt to, this differentiation (Graetz & Smith, 2010).

## **The Political Frame**

Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame sees organizations as jungles in which leaders must govern politics and organize power. Since time and resources are limited, members within this frame see conflict as an inherent component of any organization. Effective leaders identify the "arenas" in which power struggles occur, and plan their strategies accordingly. Leaders must focus on building coalitions and maintaining the high ground in order to accomplish their agenda (Graetz & Smith, 2010). Stemming from the Hegelian dialectic, and Marxist ideology, organizational behavior in this frame is frequently viewed as irrational and erratic (Kezar, 2001).

Political frame barriers to change include lack of power and the ongoing conflict between winners and losers (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Organization members will resist directly proportional to the extent to which they perceive new initiatives as a threat to their own agenda or interests. Leaders are put in a position of constant power plays, negotiation, and compromise in order to "win" their desired agenda. Conflict theorists would recognize the legitimacy of many of these realities in the political frame.

## **The Symbolic Frame**

The symbolic frame sees organizations as unique cultures or ceremonies in which leaders must provide meaning and create faith (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Key concepts in this frame include metaphor, ritual, storytelling and hero-making. Typical activities like meetings, evaluations and bargaining serve as theaters in which rituals are played out for the sake of the organization. Leaders must inspire organization members by meaning-making, connecting with the past, and providing powerful transitions to the future.

Symbolic frame barriers to change are based upon clinging to the past or losing meaning and purpose (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Those resistant to change may be overly vested in the comfort and relative success with the way things have always been done. Leaders need to create transition rituals that legitimize past accomplishments while simultaneously celebrating the future (Bolman & Deal, 2010).

## **A Multi-Frame Approach**

The centerpiece of Bolman and Deal's (2003) work is the need for leaders to practice a multi-frame approach in their organization. Some instances may necessitate defining roles and structures more clearly. Other initiatives may require the human resource sensitivity to individuals or the symbolic recognition of accomplishments. Implementing change may require building political alliances and leveraging relationships. Organizational leaders must understand the nuances of all four frames in order to be effective and knowledgeable about the culture and climate of their own setting. A multi-frame perspective is essential for effective leadership, change implementation, and response to resistance to change (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Graetz & Smith, 2010; Kezar, 2001).

Effective leadership also recognizes that individuals within the organization may view their organization differently (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Some members may see the organization as a family, while others approach their daily interaction as a political struggle. Some members may be seeking meaning while others need clarity of their responsibilities. One can only imagine the potential disconnect between organization members and leaders if the leader



approaches change implementation from a political frame while individuals are looking for the psychological encouragement of the human resource frame. Similarly, if members are looking for structural clarity of job expectations while the leader is telling meaning-making, symbolic stories, then effective interaction will be a challenge. Bolman and Deal (2003) note that change agents tend to focus on reason and structure, while neglecting the human, political and symbolic elements.

## **Methodology**

This qualitative study drew upon two different sets of teacher interview data. The first data set was gathered from nine veteran (over 20 years of teaching experience) teachers from six different districts. Administrators provided the names of these teachers based on their tendency to resist change (Snyder, 2017). The second data set focused on 10 teachers from one district. Administrators suggested these teachers based on their role as “model teachers” within the district. In a sense, the two data sets represent individuals at either end of Rogers’ (1973) diffusion spectrum: laggards and early adopters. Yet all participants clearly remained vested in their labor of love: making a lifelong impact on students.

Both data collection experiences used semi-structured, responsive interviews and gave the researcher insight into the phenomenological experience of each teacher (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Merriam, 2009). Responsive interviews provided the opportunity to build rapport with the participants and capture their own words and thoughts about their respective experiences resulting in frustration or enthusiasm (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Interviews were digitally recorded, and then personally transcribed in order to maintain confidentiality and provide hard-copy records for coding and analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Initial coding focused upon the a priori codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) of organizational theory and career issues. Axial coding also identified topics and themes outside the conceptual framework.

## **Findings**

While elements of all four organizational frames appeared during the interviews, the overwhelming majority of teachers viewed the primary role of the administrator within the context of the human resource frame. All teacher names are pseudonyms.

### **Human Resource Frame**

Model teachers as well as resistant teachers consistently spoke toward the relational component of their administrator’s responsibilities. Teachers also highlighted the importance of administrative support for professional development and classroom resources.

Retiring secondary teacher Mr. Booker: It [the role of administrators] should be to support teachers in their efforts to educate students... I do think the whole system should be geared to what happens in the classroom, and what happens to students. And that ideal is one that often isn’t met.

Middle level literacy teacher Mrs. Bateman similarly expressed,

So, um, and then our administrators have been very supportive from day one. And then [our superintendent] of course too, of like professional development. That's a huge advantage that our district has. Um, we can do, I wanna say, almost anything we ask. If we want to learn something, they're going to let us go out, and if it's reasonable, go ahead and do it.

The 30-year veteran, model science teacher Mrs. Skwerski stated,

But, we've never been told... we're never told no. You know, as long as you're willing to put in the time. They, and you wanna go somewhere that's going to be advantageous to your program or to our district, they're all about it.

Ms. Egan similarly told of her request to an administrator. "Can we go to the training? There's training this summer, can we do this? ...Can we just try it? And she's like "Absolutely.""

When implementing change, several teachers felt the primary responsibility of administrators was to provide resources about the initiative.

Ms. Johnson: And I also think if you provide the materials so that teachers know. Don't just say that this would be a good thing to do, but have some books up in the library so that people could check out, or articles.

Ms. Nelson: Um, I like to be educated about things. I like it when maybe a small group of people reads a book. And this is how we started with RTI [Response to Intervention]. We had an on-line book discussion about RTI. This year everybody, they bought a copy of the book for everybody. I think that is a better way of jumping into, into things.

Teachers also stressed the importance of building and maintaining relationships, another aspect of the human resource frame. "I think it starts with the relationship that they [administrators] have with their staff," said Mr. Stauffer. "That probably leads a lot to whether you buy into that - um, the culture that's set."

Mrs. Rittmeyer: First and foremost you [administrators] have to be a people person. It's much more than just managing uh, a system. ...Um, you need to be a good communicator. And e-mails are great, but face-to-face is better... You have to be physically present and mentally present.

Several teachers reiterated the importance of face-to-face interaction. Mrs. Rittmeyer noted, "Personally I don't like surveys. Talk to me face to face. Because you can read into something that somebody writes out and that maybe is not how it was intended." Mrs. Smith similarly expressed, "The face time needs to happen - it's the only way to build trust and respect - listening to each other."

When providing recommendations for young administrators, one veteran teacher emphasized the relational aspect of the human resource frame.

Mrs. Smith: Don't judge until you really know what's going on. And ask, don't be afraid to ask. Take the time, and the time is precious in an administrative office – I get that. But take the time to get to know those teachers. Get to know why they do what they do. And have conversations that show you respect what they do.

Frustrations ran high when administrators forgot the importance of relationships or failed to provide teacher support. As Mrs. Smith stated,

I sent an e-mail in the last week of school and I said to my principal, I want to know what kind of support I am going to get with this child and with this parent because he has not gotten done with his work. And, I shouldn't even have to ask that question.

### **Structural Frame**

While the majority of respondent comments emphasized the human resource frame, several recognized the importance structure and oversight – characteristics of the structural frame. Ms. Nelson stated that the administrator's primary responsibility was to focus on the big picture. "[The principal's primary role is] to be able to step back and see a view that, that we can't see from the classroom. And to make sure that things are coordinated systemically."

Ms. Johnson expressed her desire to see more of a structural frame for professional development.

But we need to have a plan in place. We don't have that... Get the plan in place. Spend a year doing that. Pick a program that's going to meet the needs of our students. Because everything I read it just talks about how important that is... Because when we do it, I want to do it right. I don't like it when we just do it halfway and then wonder why it doesn't work.

Ms. Hackler expressed her appreciation for her administrator's overarching progressive tendencies and willingness to try new initiatives.

I feel like our administrator is very forward thinking. She wants to be on the forefront of education. She's not interested in going with the status quo. Um, and that's how I am. I'm not interested in, "This is how we've done it for 20 years." Excellent, let's do it this way this year, you know?

### **Symbolic Frame**

Several teachers reflected elements from the symbolic frame that emphasizes community, as well as the rituals, history and traditions that preserve their community. Mrs. Smith expressed appreciation for an administrator who sought her out to learn from her lengthy history in the district. "I guess he honored the fact that he wanted background information. There's been less of that. And that's OK. Everybody has a different leadership style."

Mrs. Rittmeyer highlighted the importance of building community in her elementary setting. "I guess I look at our building as a community, and we should build community. We

need to be a community as a staff and with our administrator so we can feed off, and our students feel that community.”

### **Political Frame**

While none of the teachers stated that the primary role of the principal was leveraging political power, several recognized the need for mindful negotiation when implementing change. Mrs. Klinger recalled her appreciation for a previous, as well as her current administrator, both of whom were willing to have a discussion.

But it was, you were able to have a dialogue and debate. And um, hear each other, and then this is, and he had reasons – I can’t remember what they were – why he liked the Mac better. But um, that was, I appreciated that. And I think we’re kind of back to that right now, where I feel like we’ve got somebody who will listen and um, hear you and leave at the end of that and agree to disagree, or we can agree with that. Either way, I really do feel like that’s in place again.

Veteran middle level literacy teacher Ms. Nelson similarly appreciated administrators willing to have a discussion so that teachers get a clearer understanding of the proposed change.

Also, frankly, if I can, if I can force my administrators through my questions to work harder to convince me that it’s a, that what we’re heading into is, is good for our classrooms and for our students, then it, I think it’s good for the administrator to have to, “Now, now why are we telling them to do this?” To have to, to have to question themselves. I think that’s good.

Mrs. Smith also noted the importance of administrators needing to give and take while listening to teachers and providing research to support proposed initiatives.

But I will ask the hard questions. I will... I’m not even bending to e-mail. I will walk and see that person if it’s physically possible to do that and ask for reasons why. And give my insight into why I think that might not be the best thing to do. I don’t always win those. But more often than not, something can be tailored. We can work out a deal.

Secondary social studies teacher Mr. Morales related his sense of freedom granted by his administrator when he said,

You know what I like about working here right now is the, is our administrator’s like, “Go ahead.” You know? Basically if I can connect it to a standard and I think it’s something that’s student centered and kids can get behind it, he’s like “Do it man.”

### **Mixed Frames**

Other teacher comments blended the human resource and structural frames. Teachers wanted basic curricular guidelines (structural) and yet the relational, professional respect (human

resource) to allow them to meet stated expectations as they deemed best. Mr. Clauson expressed appreciation for his administrator who provided both structural flexibility and personal respect.

Uh, he's, first of all he's uh, he respects what I do, how I do it and will allow me some latitude to do it. Um, he uh, he'll discuss things with, I mean if I go talk to him, and I want to talk, and if I want to talk to him about a student, or even a process like standards based, he'll talk but he won't come to me and shove it down my throat.

Mr. Schmidt similarly appreciated the basic guidelines he was given when teaching overseas, along with the professional respect to get the job done.

I just loved that when I walked in there and saw that 4-page document. This is, this is what this end of the year test is going to cover. This is how we want to do it. And it was a broad spectrum of topics. It gave me what I needed to do. But it also gave me leverage to get into areas that were not necessarily a definite part of that curriculum.

Ms. Johnson emphasized how student learning and teacher morale within the school community work interdependently. "I think it's [the administrator's role] to make sure that's learning's taking place – for the students and for the staff. I also think it's to meet the needs of the community. And I also think it's morale."

### **Discussion**

As Bolman and Deal (2003) emphasized, educational leaders must be conscious of all frames when working with constituents. Individual situations and scenarios may reflect aspects of each of the four frames. Teachers specifically expressed their desire for administrators to build a positive climate within the community and invest time in learning the history of the school (symbolic). Teachers also noted that administrators must tend to oversight of building goals, provide a clear plan for professional development and communicate basic curricular expectations (structural). Teachers also related that they wished administrators would be willing to provide opportunities for dialogue and the necessary give and take when rolling out initiatives (political).

While teachers reflected these frames in their responses, the majority of responses clearly viewed the administrator's role from the human resource frame. Both model and resistant teachers greatly appreciated opportunities for professional development and consistent support for their own learning. Teachers desired resources about upcoming initiatives so they might read and think about those initiatives before implementing them in their classrooms. Since the primary task of teachers remains the interaction with students in the classrooms, teachers consistently expressed their desire for unwavering support from administrators to provide resources toward this endeavor. Like military officers providing support for those on the front lines, teachers receiving this support held their administrators in high regard. Whether teachers reticent toward change or teachers enthusiastic about new district initiatives, both groups expressed their appreciation for administrators who consistently supported their own learning, and the instructional strategies they deemed to be most effective for their students.

The human resource frame aligns with Day's extensive (2013; 2011) research analyzing factors affecting teacher passion and commitment. Day (2013) found that teachers who experienced a "positive sense of agency, resilience and commitment" (p. 367) throughout their

careers, cited the importance of leadership, their teaching peers, and family support. Alternatively, those teachers with declining motivation frequently referenced their workload, student behavior and poor leadership (Day, 2013). Consistent awareness of teacher resources by educational leaders sustained teacher passion and commitment.

### **Conclusions**

The roles and responsibilities of the educational leader are broad and demanding. Requirements from the state, as well as expectations from parents, students, staff members and teachers, frequently pull administrators in competing directions. Bolman and Deal (2003) provide a helpful conceptual framework for the numerous interactions with all constituents while emphasizing the need for educational leaders to navigate each frame.

In the midst of these many expectations, those individuals working most directly with students express the desire for ongoing support from educational leaders. Teachers from a breadth of settings and experience consistently cited their dependence on resources with which they could improve student learning. In a day when state budgets become increasingly tight, parents become increasingly critical, and the institution of education comes increasingly under attack, administrators will similarly need to be increasingly creative in ways they provide that support. As Mrs. Skwerski succinctly stated about her administrator's unwavering support for additional opportunities to enhance student learning, "...we've never been told... we're never told no."

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# The Lingering Effects of a Behavior Support System: A Cross-Sectional Study

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**Lisa Pluska**  
*Shenandoah University*

*This cross-sectional study was undertaken to determine the impact of a behavior support program implemented in elementary school on students' high school behaviors. The research question driving the study was whether high school students who had received instruction in the Students Taking Appropriate Responsibility (STAR) program for four years during elementary school exhibited more self-regulation on selected measures of student behavior than students who had not received such instruction.*

*Independent samples t-tests comparing behaviors in the entire treatment population with the randomly selected control population revealed a statistically significant difference in attendance for twelfth graders. Non-significant findings included fewer missed days by ninth and eleventh graders in the treatment population and fewer discipline incidents by ninth graders in the treatment population. No differences were found between populations in the tenth grade nor in drop-out status. These findings suggest the STAR program in elementary school had positive enduring impacts on participating students' behaviors during high school.*

School divisions frequently implement school-wide discipline programs to create an atmosphere conducive to learning. According to Levin and Nolan (1996), studies have shown that reducing the number of referrals, suspensions, and disciplinary actions, and increasing attendance can improve student outcomes. Furthermore, as attendance decreases and disciplinary actions increase, students are more likely to drop-out due to academic difficulties and peer difficulties (Elias & Tobias 1996).

Studies of single rural schools, single urban schools, multiple schools, school systems, and statewide implementations of behavior support programs showed a decrease in disciplinary referrals when positive behavior supports were used with fidelity and training of teachers occurred (Bohanon et al., 2006; Luiselli, Putnam, & Sunderland, 2002; McCrary, Lechtenberger, & Wang, 2012; Muscott, 2004; Snyder et al., 2010; Taylor-Greene et al., 1997; Warren et al., 2006;). Luiselli, Putnam, and Sunderland (2002) found an increase in attendance for students in a rural public middle school over a four-year period when a positive behavior support program was implemented. Snyder et al (2010) found an increase in academic achievement and less absenteeism in a state-wide positive behavior support initiative in elementary schools.

If a student is taught in the early grades of school the proper behaviors for success, then it is logical to assume that the knowledge will carry over into the upper grades. This study tested this assumption by comparing discipline incidences, attendance, and drop-out rates of two populations to determine the efficacy of the Students Taking Appropriate Responsibility (STAR) program implemented during elementary school. The treatment sample population was drawn from students who participated in the STAR program at the one pre-kindergarten through seventh grade school in the county that used the STAR program. The other three schools in the county did not have a positive behavioral system or effective school-wide discipline program in place. All students in the school division attend one high school serving eighth through twelfth grades. The effectiveness of the STAR program during elementary schools was not in question. The question this study examined was whether there were long-lasting behavioral impacts on students following STAR program completion.

## **Materials and Methods**

The purpose of this study was to determine if high school students who had received instruction in the STAR program for four years during elementary school demonstrated more self-regulation on selected measures of student behavior during high school than students who have not received such instruction. Cross-sectional measures of attendance, discipline incidents, and drop-out rates were compiled from school board reports on school effectiveness.

### **Description of the STAR Program**

The STAR Program was developed by teachers and administrators at one elementary school in 2004 to encourage fourth through seventh grade students to be involved in and to make positive changes concerning their own education. Based on the concept that a strong coach keeps the team focused, the STAR program helps students set goals, focus, and reap the rewards. The faculty and staff felt this positive approach was more beneficial for students.

Training occurred within the school by the principal and a group of teacher leaders. All teachers were trained on how to keep accurate records, how to talk to students about the program and consequences, and how to encourage the parents and community to be involved. Each year

the fourth through seventh grade teachers met to discuss the program and determine what changes needed to be made. Since the program spanned fourth through seventh grade and students changed classes for different subject areas, the teachers were very consistent in how the program was administered by classroom. The principal also followed up to make sure the behaviors were consistent for students. The tracking system allowed teachers and the principal to see which students were falling behind academically or increasing in negative behaviors. This allowed for earlier interventions with students.

The STAR program rewarded students for successful school behaviors by allowing them to choose an activity for the last twenty minutes of the school day if all criteria are met. Students should have completed all homework, should be ready for each class, and not have any behavioral issues for the day. If a student had not completed the requirements for the Student Activity Choice (SAC) time, then the student would go to a required study hall time to complete assignments, receive remediation, or work on homework. The teachers kept track of infractions as they would occur and gathered the data at the end of the day to see if students were responsible enough to report to the correct location. If the student failed to report, a teacher, teacher assistant, or another student found the offending student who then had to report to study hall again the following day. Every six weeks, the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) funded a field trip for students who did not have to attend study hall for a certain number of times.

The manifestations of the program during elementary school included fewer days of school missed, fewer disciplinary incidents, and the active involvement of students as far as consequences of choices in their education. As a result of the program, students wanted to attend school and make appropriate choices. As appropriate choices were made, students were rewarded with an activity of their choice. As the students mature and change, the underlying goal of the program was to keep students coming to school and out of trouble.

## **Population**

The population of this study consisted of all 619 students from grades nine through twelve who were enrolled during the 2012-2013 academic year at a single high school that serves an entire county in the southeast portion of Virginia. The one high school contains grades eight through twelve for all students of the county. However, eighth grade students were not chosen for inclusion in the study because the first year of high school is a transition year.

The treatment sample of this study attended one of four elementary schools serving pre-kindergarten through seventh grades in the division. This one elementary school implemented the STAR program to help students begin to self-regulate behavior. For the purposes of this study, the elementary school that utilized the STAR program was referred to as School A. The largest elementary school in the school division was School B, while the next largest was School C. The smallest school was referred to as School D.

According to the Virginia Department of Education website, the school division had 34% free and reduced lunch in the 2004-2005 academic year. In 2012-2013, the school division in this study had 46% free and reduced lunch. During the seven years, the number gradually increased as factories closed, jobs were relocated, and people were unemployed. The population in the county has increased from 14,493 people in 2005 to 15,378 people in 2010. People have apparently stayed in the county even as jobs became scarce. They have just managed the best they could which has led to an increase in the free and reduced lunch percentage. The special education population was 18% of all students in 2004-2005 and in 2012-

2013 the population was 15% of all students. This percentage remained comparable. Total division enrollment has decreased over the years with 2,095 students in 2004-2005 and 2,027 in 2012-2013.

The student population was chosen based on the date of the inception of the STAR program at School A. Since the STAR program targeted fourth through seventh grade students, the first group of fourth graders that received four years of instruction with the program was the group that was in fourth grade during the 2004-2005 academic year. Each succeeding fourth grade class was also instructed in the program for four years. The students in first grade in 2004-2005 were ninth graders in 2012-2013. While second grade students in 2004-2005 were tenth graders in 2012-2013. Therefore, those students in first through fourth grade during the academic year of 2004-2005 were ninth through twelfth grade students for the 2012-2013 academic year and were the sample population of the treatment group. The ninth graders are two years removed from the program, tenth graders are three years removed, eleventh graders are four years removed, and twelfth graders are five years removed. The research question was how long did students demonstrate results of a positive behavioral system after completing the instruction.

Only students who received four years of instruction in the STAR program from School A and continued their education within the school division were included in the treatment sample. Based on the information provided by the central office staff report to the School Board, 72 students from School A began the STAR program in the fourth grade and completed four years of the program. This translated to the following high school enrollment from School A: 20 ninth graders, 18 tenth graders, 17 eleventh graders, and 17 twelfth graders.

The population of control students consisted of a random sample of students from the remainder of the elementary schools. This was done by randomly selecting the appropriate number of students from the rest of the high school population that equaled the number from School A by grade level. Using a stratified random sampling method allowed each grade level in the treatment sample to have a corresponding control sample. Since Schools B, C, and D did not have instruction in the STAR program, all students from those schools were combined in order to draw a random sample. However, only students who had spent their elementary school years in the other schools and completed their education with the school division were eligible for the control group. Therefore, 20 ninth grade students were chosen from the 86 students who had attended fourth through seventh grade in Schools B, C, and D. Eighteen students were chosen from the 92 available tenth graders, 17 were chosen from the 103 available eleventh graders, and 17 were chosen from the 112 available twelfth graders.

### **Variables of Interest**

A report on the attendance, discipline, and drop-out rates of all students who were in the elementary schools of the county beginning with the 2004-2005 school year and ending five years later was prepared by the administrative staff of the school division to the School Board on October 14, 2013. This report was to inform the school board of trends in absences, discipline incidences, and drop-out rates of the high school based on which elementary school each student attended. The purpose was to determine the successful interventions that could be occurring in any of the elementary schools so it could be replicated division wide. The report from the central office staff listed each student from the 2004-2005 academic year that continued to be a student in the same school division for the 2012-2013 academic year. Beside each number that

represented a student was the number of absences and number of discipline incidents reported to the main office by school year, whether the student had dropped out of school or not, and the school attended for elementary school. This report to the school board is a public document and is available to the general public.

### **Data Analysis**

An independent samples t-test was used to compare the discipline incidents, attendance records, and drop-out statuses from students who had instruction in the STAR program from those that did not. The purpose of running the t-test was to determine if there was a significant statistical difference of the means between the control group and treatment group of students. This allowed the dependent variables (attendance, discipline, and dropout status) to be tested based on the independent variable (whether the school offered the program or not) to determine statistical significance ( $p \leq .05$ ).

After running the t-test, the two-tailed significance was used to determine whether the null hypothesis would be rejected or accepted. If the significance was smaller than the probability value of 0.05, then the null hypothesis would have to be rejected because there would be a statistical significant difference showing the program works. Three different variables were used as measures of self-regulation, so three t-tests were run using all the dependent variables by grade level to see the effect of each self-regulation measure.

Multiple independent t-tests were run instead of multi-variate test, and as a result inflation of the type 1 error could be an issue. In order minimize the inflation effect both the Bonferroni correct and a power analysis were utilized. Since there were three dependent variables of interest each with three associated hypotheses that were tested using independent t-tests, the Bonferroni correct was calculated by dividing the set significance level of .05 by three. The resulting significance level with the Bonferroni correction was set at 0.016 for all hypotheses. Using this more stringent significance level, the results of the one statistically significant hypothesis at the .05 level, remained statistically significant. As an add layer of protection against type 1 error, a post-hoc power analysis, using G\*Power version 3.1.9.3 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner 2007), was also conducted for the hypothesis with statistical significance at the 0.016 level. The resulting power was .73 indicating that there is a 73% probability of correctly rejecting a null hypothesis. The resulting Cohens d effect size of 0.90 indicates a large effect with the intervention and control groups' means differing by 0.90 standard deviation. Because of the Bonferroni correction, the high power, and large effect size, the researcher has confidence that twelve graders in the intervention condition had significantly fewer missed days than those in the control condition.

### **Results**

Three sub-questions were framed to support the main research question. Do high school students who have received instruction in the STAR program for four years *have better attendance* records than students who have not received such instruction based on the results of a t-test to show significant difference? Do high school students who have received instruction in the STAR program for four years *exhibit fewer disciplinary incidents* than students who have not received such instruction based on the results of a t-test to show significant difference? Do fewer high school students who have received instruction in the STAR program for four years *drop out*

*of school* than students who have not received such instruction based on the results of a t-test to show significant difference? Each of the three independent samples t-tests were run on the applicable data by grade level using all students in the treatment group and an equal random sampling of students in the control group.

The descriptive statistics for ninth through twelfth grade student attendance, discipline, and drop-out status by grade level are displayed in Tables 1-4. The ninth-grade treatment group had fewer absences and discipline referrals than the control group, and no drop-outs (Table 1). The tenth-grade treatment group had higher absences and lower discipline referrals than the control group, and no drop-outs (Table 2). The eleventh-grade treatment group had lower absences and higher discipline referrals than the control group, and no drop-outs (Table 3). The twelfth-grade treatment group had significantly lower absences, lower discipline referrals, and higher drop-out rates than the control group (Table 4).

Table 1  
*Ninth Grade Descriptive Statistics*

|            | Program | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|------------|---------|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Attendance | No      | 20 | 8.40 | 8.744          | 1.955           |
|            | Yes     | 20 | 7.55 | 6.669          | 1.491           |
| Discipline | No      | 20 | 1.80 | 4.112          | .919            |
|            | Yes     | 20 | 1.25 | 2.845          | .636            |

Table 2  
*Tenth Grade Descriptive Statistics*

|            | Program | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|------------|---------|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Attendance | No      | 18 | 8.17 | 6.176          | 1.456           |
|            | Yes     | 18 | 9.22 | 9.607          | 2.264           |
| Discipline | No      | 18 | .78  | 1.060          | .250            |
|            | Yes     | 18 | .44  | .856           | .202            |

Table 3  
*Eleventh Grade Descriptive Statistics*

|            | Program | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|------------|---------|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Attendance | No      | 17 | 6.53 | 5.959          | 1.445           |
|            | Yes     | 17 | 5.88 | 6.264          | 1.519           |
| Discipline | No      | 17 | .18  | .529           | .128            |
|            | Yes     | 17 | .41  | .618           | .150            |

Table 4  
*Twelfth Grade Descriptive Statistics*

|            | Program | N  | Mean  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|------------|---------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Attendance | No      | 17 | 10.82 | 6.347          | 1.539           |
|            | Yes     | 17 | 5.06  | 6.329          | 1.535           |
| Discipline | No      | 17 | .18   | .393           | .095            |
|            | Yes     | 17 | .41   | 1.004          | .243            |
| Drop-Out   | No      | 17 | .06   | .243           | .059            |
|            | Yes     | 17 | .24   | .437           | .106            |

Tables 5-8 display the results of the independent samples t-test for ninth through twelfth grade for attendance, discipline, and drop-out status. Though no significant differences were found for ninth through eleventh grade on any of the dependent variables, a significant difference was found between the students instructed in the STAR program (M=5.06, SD=6.33) and students not instructed in the STAR program (M=10.82, SD=6.35);  $t(32)=2.65$ ,  $p=0.012$  for attendance for twelfth graders (Table 8).

Table 5

*Ninth Grade Independent Samples Test*

|            |                                   | Levene's Test<br>for Equality of<br>Variances |      | t-test for Equality of Means |            |                     |                    |                          |
|------------|-----------------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
|            |                                   | F   | Sig. | T                            | df         | Sig. (2-<br>tailed) | Mean<br>Difference | Std. Error<br>Difference |
| Attendance | Equal<br>variances<br>assumed     | .104  | .749 | .346                         | 38         | .731                | .850               | 2.459                    |
|            | Equal<br>variances<br>not assumed |   |      | .346                         | 35.51<br>5 | .732                | .850               | 2.459                    |
| Discipline | Equal<br>variances<br>assumed     | .786  | .381 | .492                         | 38         | .626                | .550               | 1.118                    |
|            | Equal<br>variances<br>not assumed |   |      | .492                         | 33.79<br>9 | .626                | .550               | 1.118                    |

Table 6

*Tenth Grade Independent Samples Test*

|            |                                   | Levene's Test<br>for Equality of<br>Variances |      | t-test for Equality of Means |        |                     |                    |                          |
|------------|-----------------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
|            |                                   | F   | Sig. | T                            | df     | Sig. (2-<br>tailed) | Mean<br>Difference | Std. Error<br>Difference |
| Attendance | Equal<br>variances<br>assumed     | 1.943   | .172 | -.392                        | 34     | .697                | -1.056             | 2.692                    |
|            | Equal<br>variances not<br>assumed |   |      | -.392                        | 29.002 | .698                | -1.056             | 2.692                    |
| Discipline | Equal<br>variances<br>assumed     | 1.413   | .243 | 1.038                        | 34     | .307                | .333               | .321                     |



|  |                             |       |        |      |      |      |
|--|-----------------------------|-------|--------|------|------|------|
|  | Equal variances not assumed | 1.038 | 32.547 | .307 | .333 | .321 |
|--|-----------------------------|-------|--------|------|------|------|

Table 7  
*Eleventh Grade Independent Samples Test*

|            |                             | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances |      | t-test for Equality of Means |        |                 |                 |                       |
|------------|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
|            |                             | F                                       | Sig. | T                            | df     | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
| Attendance | Equal variances assumed     | .459                                    | .503 | .729                         | 32     | .472            | 1.765           | 2.422                 |
|            | Equal variances not assumed |   |      | .729                         | 30.609 | .472            | 1.765           | 2.422                 |
| Discipline | Equal variances assumed     | 3.244                                   | .081 | -1.193                       | 32     | .242            | -.235           | .197                  |
|            | Equal variances not assumed |   |      | -1.193                       | 31.244 | .242            | -.235           | .197                  |

Table 8  
*Twelfth Grade Independent Samples Test*

|            |                             | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances |      | t-test for Equality of Means |        |                 |                 |                       |
|------------|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
|            |                             | F                                       | Sig. | T                            | df     | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
| Attendance | Equal variances assumed     | .489                                    | .490 | 2.652                        | 32     | .012            | 5.765           | 2.174                 |
|            | Equal variances not assumed |   |      | 2.652                        | 32.000 | .012            | 5.765           | 2.174                 |

|            |                             |        |      |        |        |      |       |      |
|------------|-----------------------------|--------|------|--------|--------|------|-------|------|
| Discipline | Equal variances assumed     | 3.005  | .093 | -.900  | 32     | .375 | -.235 | .261 |
|            | Equal variances not assumed |        |      | -.900  | 20.793 | .378 | -.235 | .261 |
| Drop-Out   | Equal variances assumed     | 10.618 | .003 | -1.455 | 32     | .155 | -.176 | .121 |
|            | Equal variances not assumed |        |      | -1.455 | 24.995 | .158 | -.176 | .121 |

### **Limitations and Further Study**

Several limitations in this study must be noted when examining the relationship between the students who have been treated using the STAR program and the number of absences, discipline referrals, and dropouts in later years. The first limitation was the difference in faculty and staff within the schools. Since only one school in four used the STAR program, results could be explained by the relationships built with students by the specific faculty and staff within that school rather than the STAR program content. A second limitation was school size. One school in particular was notably smaller than the other schools. The size of the schools could impact relationships between students and faculty and staff.

Additional limitations were related to the geographic layout of the schools within the county. Though the demographics of each elementary school were similar, the school zones differed. Since this study focused on long-term effects measured when all students were going to the same school, the distance from home to school could affect students and parental involvement and be factors in the success or lack thereof for students. Additionally, parents and other family members could emphasize or de-emphasize the STAR program and the importance of the tenets of the program which could in turn affect program results.

Another limitation was the transience of students in particular areas. Though transient student data were not included in the study, it is possible this caused a shift in the data influencing tests of significance.

The fourth limitation was the amount of time away from the program itself. Students in the eighth and ninth grade could show more of an effect from the program learned in fourth through seventh grade than eleventh and twelfth graders. Students in ninth and tenth grade are two and three years out from instruction respectively, whereas students in eleventh and twelfth grade are four and five years out from instruction.

A final limitation of the study was that only one specific program in one specific county was examined. Since other programs or counties were not studied, the results cannot be generalized to other locales or programs.

Future studies could include the students in the eighth grade as part of the population. This would explore whether the benefits of the program are stronger when the student has just completed instruction. Another possibility would be to follow students overtime by including

individual student data from each year following STAR program completion through graduation so as to examine longitudinal trends. Future studies could also include academic achievement as well as other variables to measure success. Also, increasing the sample size and including more school divisions may increase the likelihood of a more robust study. Another future study would be the addition of a qualitative component for a mixed methods approach that could investigate community and students' views about the STAR program. A qualitative approach could also examine whether teachers and administrators observe differences in students or hold different expectations of students based on whether they have been instructed in the STAR program.

An interesting follow-up study would be to delve further into the reasons for the number of drop-outs in the division and the role of STAR instruction in reducing the number of drop-outs. Each if these possible studies could expand on the findings reported here.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Previous studies have demonstrated that fewer absences and disciplinary referrals were the norm in short term studies of different students in the same school (Bohanon et al. (2006); Luiselli et al. (2002); McCrary et al. (2012); Muscott, (2004); and Snyder et al. (2010); Taylor-Greene et al. (1997); and Warren et al. (2006)). As with previous studies, in this cross-sectional study of students who were instructed in the STAR program during elementary school and then transitioned to the high school environment, there was a trend toward fewer absences and disciplinary referrals with an additional finding of a statistically significant difference in higher attendance for twelfth graders.

Descriptive statistics for the 2012-13 school year revealed fewer absences for students in the ninth, eleventh, and twelfth grades who had been instructed in the STAR program. Discipline incidents were fewer for students in the STAR program for ninth and tenth grade students, but higher for the eleventh and twelfth grade students. Drop-out statistics were lower in the treatment sample except for twelfth grade students.

Higher attendance implied that former STAR students wanted to be at school or understood they were expected to be at school. Much of the success of students starts with being present. Perhaps the STAR program helped to teach intrinsic motivation and the feeling of success that comes when students are at school and not getting in trouble. The unexpected increase in drop outs in the twelfth grade merits further investigation. Perhaps the transient nature of the treatment school affected the drop-out rate due to broken relationships or a loss of student engagement. Perhaps that particular year group of students had a unique experience given they were in the first year of STAR implementation.

The conclusion of this study is the STAR program could be considered successful as measured by overall better attendance (with statistical significance for twelfth graders) and decreased disciplinary referrals in the treatment population. This study provided as a solid foundation for further study, which is needed to specifically correlate the STAR program with conditions for success for students. While the STAR program did not demonstrate statistically significant findings apart from twelfth grade attendance, this cross-sectional study suggests positive behavior support programs, like STAR, have the potential to keep students coming to school and out of trouble.

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# The Nexus between Theory and Practice: How the Transformative Initiative Pathway Improved Clinical Practice for Educational Leadership Preparation

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**Kimberly Jamison, Ed.D.**  
*The George Washington University*

**Jennifer K. Clayton, Ph.D.**  
*The George Washington University*

**Ababayehu Aemero Tekleselassie, Ph.D.**  
*The George Washington University*

*This qualitative study, situated within a larger interdisciplinary effort by a graduate school of education and human development at a large private university on the east coast, documents the perspectives of administrative interns on the significance of their experiences engaged in clinical practice. Semi-structured interview data from 20 administrative interns were analyzed through the lens of the following Domains of Interest: a) assessment, b) curriculum and clinical connections, c) mentoring and supervision, and d) context and design of clinical experiences, as well as how these experiences and level of inquiry due to the TI pathway oriented participants into the role of administrator. Data analysis suggests three main themes influencing administrative interns engaged in clinical practice: a) the shift in perspective from the role of teacher to the role of administrator (aligning with domains a, b, and d), b) clinical practice experiences provided strong connections to course content in some areas, and weak connections in others (aligning with domains b and d), and c) the level of mentoring and support from internship mentors, although inconsistent, had a significant impact on how they experienced and made meaning of their clinical experiences (aligning with domain c). These findings have implications for university preparation programs, school districts, and shed light on a unique pathway to accreditation, which focuses on situated learning and role transformation as a result of clinical practice experiences.*

**Keywords:** clinical practice, NCATE-TI, accreditation, principal preparation, self-efficacy, adult learning theory

## **School Leadership Preparation Improvement: How the NCATE-TI Pathway for Accreditation Improved Clinical Practice**

### **Objectives**

One of the most prominent criticisms of administrator preparation programs is that they do not provide meaningful, authentic internship opportunities for candidates (Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2005; Levine, 2005). Clinical practice opportunities for aspiring educational leaders must provide ample and diverse experiences encountering problems of practice (Barnett, 2004; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cunningham & Sherman, 2008; Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Roach, Smith, & Boutin, 2011; Sherman & Crum, 2009). Researchers have analyzed the effectiveness of key components of administrator preparation programs, as identified by program faculty and alumni (Duncan, Range, & Scherz, 2011; Militello, Gajda, & Bowers, 2009; Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Thessin & Clayton, 2013); however, little attention has been paid to studying current candidates about clinical practice as a means to gain experience in a real-world setting, or assessing how program experiences affect their professional growth (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2012; Crow & Whiteman, 2016). This study aims to fill that gap by capturing the voices of current candidates in an administrator preparation program by analyzing how they assess their professional growth, and describe their experiences engaging in clinical practice. Results of this research will not only fulfill accreditation requirements, but also lead to necessary changes for overall program improvement.

This study, situated within a larger research and accreditation initiative, focused on how administrative interns bridge the gap between theory and practice as they describe their experiences engaging in clinical practice. The overarching research study is a cross-disciplinary effort of an educator preparation program at a large, private university in the Mid-Atlantic in the areas of teacher, administrator, and counselor preparation. This is a continuing effort for accreditation with the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), which is formerly the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). CAEP introduced the Transformative Pathways to accreditation in 2010. Transformative Initiative (TI) requires participating institutions to meet all required CAEP standards while at the same time submitting a formal and innovative research study that will advance knowledge of effective practices in educator preparation to inform the field. Institutions will use findings from the TI research project as part of the Transformational Initiative Plan three to five years prior to submitting the self-study report to CAEP and will earn "extra credit" when they meet all other accreditation requirements.

The research site of this study introduced TI in 2011. We believed that the focus on a unit-wide effort in accreditation would create opportunities for cross-program collaboration within the graduate school, allowing faculty members to develop course content, instructional materials, and internship opportunities broadly applicable to educator candidates from various disciplines including teacher education, counselor education, and educational administration. The appeal was that while all educators work in the same-shared setting upon completion of their respective programs, opportunities do not exist for common learning experiences during preparation years. Such insular tradition in educator preparation limits the candidate's capacity and impact as they address problems of practice whose complexity often demand a broader orientation stretching beyond a singular disciplinary prism. Through common Domain of Interest and research foci, a unit-wide approach of the Transformational Initiative has the

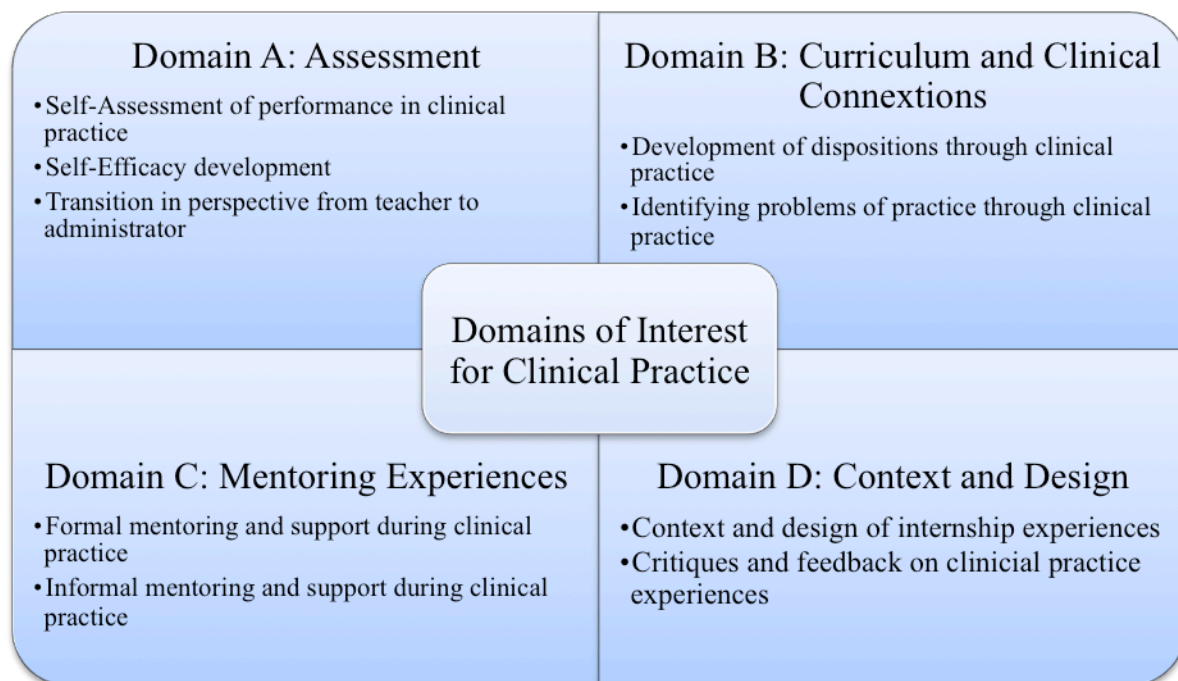
potential to create a collaborative inquiry for greater alignment between course curriculum, internships, standards and work demands educators. The TI research project envisions program completers' complex problems of practice as they occur in the shared space of the school setting, as well as their overlapping and converging roles as teachers, principals, and counselors.

Originating as separate studies in each discipline about clinical practice, this research evolved into a cross-case analysis to synthesize data across disciplines by utilizing an analytical framework consisting of four Domains of Interest. Additionally, this research aimed to provide further evidence of the value-added role of the TI pathway accreditation in improving educator preparation through clinical practice, and potential subsequent programmatic changes based upon lessons learned in the cross-unit research.

The research questions that guided this phase of research were: 1) In what ways do the Domains of Interest inform the candidates' perceived transformation from a role as a teacher to a role as future administrator through clinical practice, and 2) In what ways did candidates' experiences and the TI process provide lessons learned to influence overall program improvement?

### Analytical Framework

In an effort to simultaneously engage administrator, teacher, and counselor preparation programs to deepen the knowledge and understandings of clinical practice within and across programs as part of the NCATE-TI project, an analytical framework was designed based upon emergent data from the separate studies. This paper will report the transition from the role of teacher to the role of future administrator, as described in current candidates' experiences in the following Domains of Interest: a) Assessment, b) Curriculum and clinical connections, c) Mentoring and supervision, and d) Context and design of clinical experiences (see Figure 1), as well as how these experiences and level of inquiry due to the TI pathway influenced program improvement efforts.





*Figure 1.* The Domains of Interest for Clinical Practice. This analytical framework outlines the four Domains of Interest when analyzing clinical practice descriptions, perceptions, and experiences of educators enrolled in a university administrator preparation program.

### **Domain A: Assessment**

This domain explicates the practice-based experiences designed to prepare educational leaders to assess growth and development using data-driven strategies. In this domain, aspiring administrators self-assess their progress throughout the program, and gauge changes in their own self-efficacy as they strive to cultivate and expand their knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Research on self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) and adult learning theory (Knowles, 1968; 1980) informed the constructs of this domain for this research.

### **Domain B: Curriculum and Clinical Connections**

Domain B uncovers curriculum designs that scaffold learning and connect theory to practice and vice versa by intentional bridging of content and pedagogy to balance subject matter learning and clinical experiences. Consistent with research highlighting notable principal preparation programs, the program in this study also assigns concurrent, course-specific clinical experiences embedded within classes so that students acquire practical experience that is aligned with standards-based course content (Bartee, 2012; Dishman & Redish, 2011; Orr, 2006; Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward, & Basom, 2011). This domain was necessary to investigate candidates' experiences connecting practice and theory, and further, how they made meaning of those experiences to shift their perspective from teacher to administrator. The TI framework chosen for this investigation further solidified the triad among teaching/curriculum, research, and clinical practice.

### **Domain C: Mentoring and Supervision during Clinical Practice**

Mentoring and supervision is a critical component of clinical practice; however, as recent research has highlighted, there are still inconsistencies in the quality and relevancy of the relationship between mentor and administrative intern during clinical practice (Bartee, 2012; Bowser, Hux, McBride, Nichols, & Nichols, 2014; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006; Geer, Anast-May, & Gurley, 2014; Jamison & Clayton, 2016; Jiang, Patterson, Chandler, & Cheung Chan, 2009). Jiang, Patterson, Chandler, and Cheung Chan (2009) found that successful implementation of the practicum experience for future educational leaders involves collaboration among the program candidate, the mentor, and university supervisors. This domain of interest guided inquiry regarding the impact of participant's interactions and relationships with mentors and university faculty during clinical practice experiences.

### **Domain D: Context and Design of Clinical Practice**

This domain highlights the varying contexts and designs of clinical practice in educational leadership. Historically, administrator preparation programs have been criticized for not offering real world experiences to interns, instead only providing passive opportunities, such as observation (Fry et al., 2005). Improving upon these critiques, preparation programs have aimed

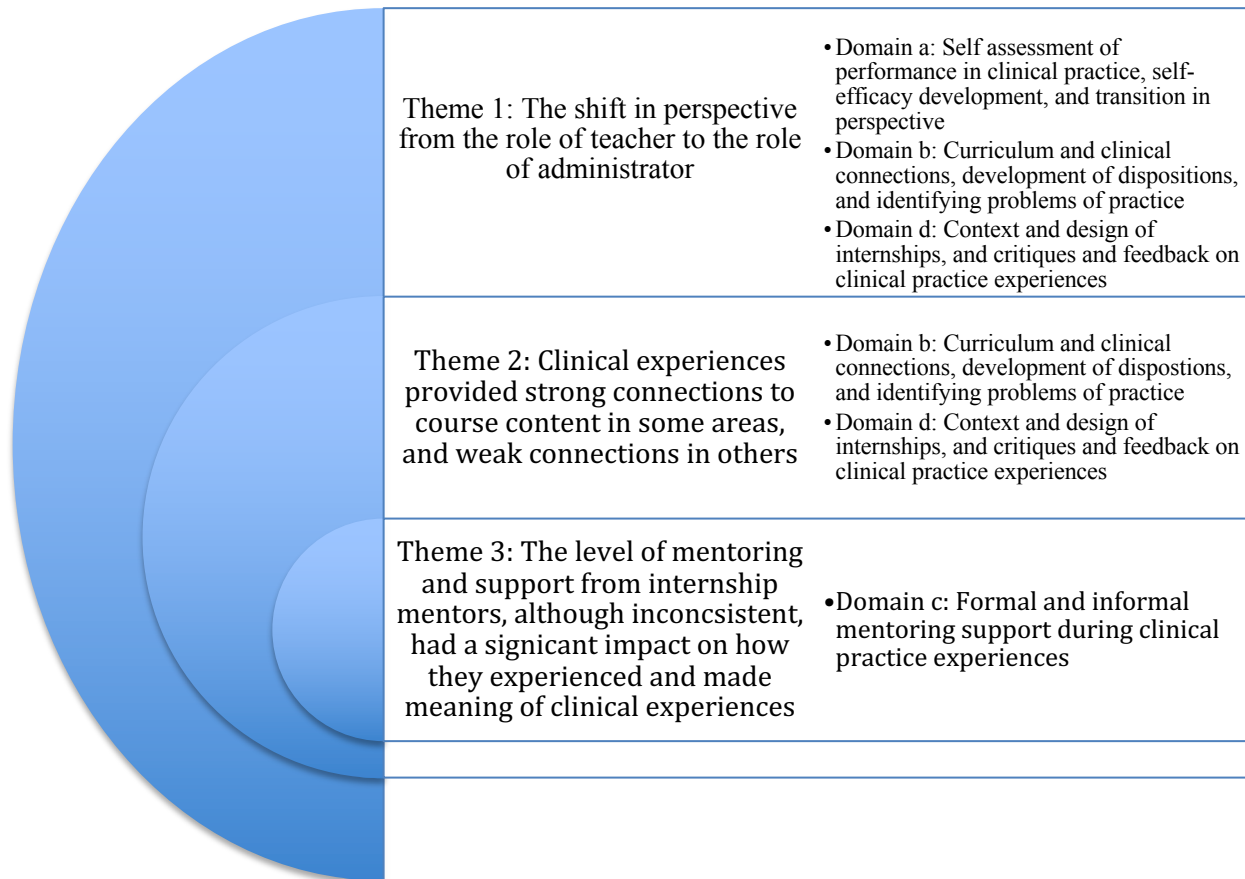
to provide more authentic field experiences for candidates. Findings under this domain provide evidence, or lack thereof, program designs that build upon one another in a developmental sequence under the supervision of skilled program faculty.

## **Methods**

As the TI project evolved into a cross-case analysis in the areas of administration, teacher, and counselor preparation, the Domains of Interest framework supported cross-coding and identification of a common set of thematic codes using data collected in the first stage of research in each discipline. Originally, for educational leadership, data were gathered from 20 administrative interns enrolled in the final internship course of their program of study through semi-structured interviews and document analysis of the clinical practice experiences completed throughout the preparation program (Clayton, Jamison, Tekleselassie, & Briggs, 2017). Following the approval of all processes and protocols from the university Institutional Review Board (IRB), each participant was interviewed once while engaged in his or her full-time administrative internship, and documents reviewed included in the document analysis were course syllabi and rubrics for key clinical practice assessments that were embedded within each course in the administrator preparation program. In this study, staying consistent with existing norms in qualitative research design (Creswell, 2007), interview transcripts were re-coded using Atlas.ti software and analyzed through the lens of the Domains of Interest to examine how participants described their perceptions and experiences of clinical practice in each domain, and how those experiences, along with program feedback and suggestions for program improvement. Throughout this process, the researchers regularly engaged in conversations regarding emerging themes, overlapping codes, and findings. To establish intercoder reliability, each member of the research team coded independently via concept coding, and then compared, revised, and defined codes in order to achieve consistent results (Saldana, 2016).

## **Results**

In analyzing data from semi-structured interviews through the lens of the Domains of Interest for preparing educational leaders through clinical practice experiences, several key themes emerged (see Figure 2). These included: 1) The shift in perspective from the role of teacher to the role of administrator (aligning with domains a, b, and d), 2) Clinical practice experiences provided strong connections to course content in some areas, and weak connections in others (aligning with domains b and d), and 3) The level of mentoring and support from internship mentors, although inconsistent, had a significant impact on how they experienced and made meaning of their clinical experiences (aligning with domain c).



*Figure 2.* Resulting Themes as they relate to the Domains of Interest for Clinical Practice Framework. This figure outlines the relationship between findings and the four Domains of Interest when analyzing clinical practice descriptions, perceptions, and experiences of educators enrolled in a university administrator preparation program.

### **The Shift from Teacher to Administrator Perspective**

Administrative interns in this study attributed their shift in perspective from teacher to administrator to their assessment of their own self-efficacy development during clinical practice experiences (domain a) as they relate to coursework and curriculum (domain b), as well as the quality of the context and design of throughout their degree or certificate program in educational leadership (domain d). The shift in perspective from the role of teacher to the role of administrator was not a seamless process for some of the participants in this study; however, many described experiences during clinical practice that influenced this shift, especially in the areas of legal acumen, visionary leadership, and instructional leadership. One intern expressed,

My philosophy of education has changed dramatically. One was from a teacher’s point of view wanna-be-administrator and now I’m at the end and it’s taken a different turn as almost all administrator philosophy and where I want to go as a leader.

Reflecting upon coursework experiences that influenced the mental transition from teacher to administrator, one participant shared:

We had a lot of visitors. We had a lot of superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and assistant principals. We went to schools. I think in the beginning, just hearing the demands of the job itself, it seemed a bit overwhelming. But now, going through the entire process over the last year, and starting to feel more confident, and starting to have to envision myself, what I would be like as an administrator . . . that has been something that I've learned that has changed; my perspective.

When describing the internal struggle she faced as a teacher with this transition, another administrative intern stated:

It's making that switch from the teacher hat to the administrative hat. It was a slow transformation for me because I felt like taking off the one hat banned me from the other club. So, I felt like once I became an administrator, it's us against them, but it's really not us against them. We're all one.

Regarding her ability to recognize and address problems of practice, another participant shared, "You just see it through a different lens, and sometimes you're forced to." She continued by saying that when making presentations in her classes, her professors would say, "Okay, when you present this, you're an administrator. You're not a teacher." She laughed and continued, "So now I look at everything . . . through an administrative lens . . . how am I going to deal with this problem?" These perspectives also informed our effort as a preparation program to better identify and address the experience levels and individual needs of candidates in order to provide diverse experiences in order to encourage higher levels of self-efficacy and an administrative mindset. As such, the program began to reconsider the admissions process, induction process, and intentional interactions leading to the mindset shift during the program. For example, all interns meet individually with their instructors at the outset of the internship course. The purpose is to unearth areas of strength and areas for growth and to engage the intern in planning activities and experiences that allow for reinforcing strengths, but mitigating weaknesses. Careful selection of mentors, where districts allow input, is also a shift emanating from this work. Specific mentors with certain leadership styles have been matched to interns needing that exposure and learning. Lastly, reflective practice is embedded in all course assignments and in the major key assessments. This reflection asks students to reflect upon each project from a lens of how they are developing as leaders.

Similar to Browne-Ferrigno (2003), this study also found that role-identity transformation (p. 488) was a significant piece of participants' professional growth as aspiring administrators. Some participants expressed the struggle of letting go of their teacher identity and embracing their identity as an educational leader. Others now only see themselves as administrators and fear that they will have to return to the classroom due to not obtaining an administrative position. An implication of this finding for practice is that school districts must be invested in developing awareness of teachers who wish to be administrators and developing them professionally to take on these roles, especially after they obtain administrative credentials. Additionally, university preparation programs should encourage students to pursue leadership positions in their work setting in order to gain experience and exposure on committees or within their department or grade level. Building in these experiences into internships and asking students, for example, to serve on school and district based improvement teams, leadership teams, or strategic planning teams afford them opportunities for growth and interaction with administrators in the field. Principal panels and guest speakers utilized in class also help students gain access to leadership

opportunities and discussions about time management and initiative to advocate for experiences are intentional and emphasized by advisors.

### **Curriculum Connections to Clinical Practice**

Participants in this study described experiences with clinical practice closely aligned to coursework as a vehicle to strengthen their knowledge, skills, and dispositions in school leadership (domain b) and also offered critiques and feedback on the context and design of clinical practice experiences (domain d). Many students cited the experiences from the School Law and Policy class, as well as internship opportunities in Instructional Needs Analysis to be beneficial to understanding school leadership. Of her clinical experiences in the School Law and Policy course, one student shared:

That was eye opening from beginning to end . . . I got a chance to see things that you cannot say or should not do, and the things that you should do to involve parents, involve the community . . . even with the faculty and staff, things you should follow, things that you should say and not say.

Another intern stated, “School law taught me why principals do what they do and how different cases throughout history have affected precedents that were set and that principals have to follow those.” When considering her current administrative experiences, one student reflected upon the relevancy of course content in the School Law class.

Always keeping in the back of my head the school law and policies for everybody. Parents’ rights, due process when I’m talking with the children, for discipline issues. All of those things have been very beneficial when doing my internship.

Many interns expressed the benefits of conducting teacher observations in order to assess curriculum alignment and work with a teacher on instructional improvements.

Using observations as a tool to promote change versus punitive . . . It really makes you think about, what am I saying to this person? How can I help them grow as a professional versus point out everything that they did that wasn’t correct?”

Another participant shared:

I think that in a principal’s or a supervisor’s observation in the classroom, building relationships with teachers [and] transferring the theory actually applies the most there because as an administrator, . . . you’re leading people. So in the classroom, being able to grow a teacher by going in, observing the implementation of lessons and earning that teacher’s trust so that they can actually listen to the things you’re directing them to do or instructing them to do so that they can grow and the students, most of all, can grow.

Conversely, many candidates also shared administrative tasks they were not exposed to during clinical practice, such as budgeting and scheduling, consequently leading to lower self-efficacy in those areas. “I do understand that budgeting is something that in the future, when you’re a building principal, and not so much an assistant principal, but I think that’s important . . . we didn’t really talk much about budgeting.” Another intern expressed:

If someone said to me, “You’re responsible for a budget,” I don’t think I would completely understand what they were saying . . . I think having more classes with those types of scenarios and understanding how the budget process works . . . would be helpful.

Consistent with the findings of Bartee (2012), Clayton and Myran (2013), and Jiang et al. (2009), authentic, practice-based internships and classroom experiences that are closely aligned

are the most relevant to aspiring administrators. This finding also speaks to the beneficial process of the Transformative Initiative pathway because it provided data that influenced continuous improvement in educator preparation by highlighting areas of close alignment between coursework and clinical practice, as well as areas where those two elements were more loosely coupled. The program also began conversations to collaborate with teacher education to allow those in leadership preparation gain practice in supervision and teacher feedback by working with student teachers at the same university. By leveraging such opportunities, which might seem like easy connections, the program actually broke barriers long in place that did not foster such collaboration internally in schools of education.

### **Mentoring and Support during Clinical Practice**

When considering the overall impact of clinical practice for participants in this study, mentoring, supervising, and support offered to candidates from internship mentors were highlighted inconsistently during participant interviews (domain c). Some felt supported and trusted by their mentors, and others felt they were held back from administrative experiences due to their mentor withholding access to certain aspects of the job. Of choosing to select her mentors for clinical practice experiences through the program, one participant shared, “I made sure I picked different people so I could take a little bit from everybody to see what I liked and what I didn’t like. I didn’t want to limit myself to just one mentor.” An intern who was assigned a mentor stated, “She made sure that I experienced every part of administrative work . . . so I feel that she has made me a well-rounded administrator.” Another participant who was assigned a mentor expressed, “He’s going to be there for me and he’s going to end up becoming, by the end of [my internship], he’s going to end up becoming someone that I feel is going to really help me a lot [in the future].” Some interns described the promotion benefits of working with mentors in their school.

She’s making sure that I get all this experience now, so that when the [assistant principal] retires next year . . . I can be promoted into her position. So it’s nice to work for that person . . . I’ve been with her for six years. She promoted me from teacher to department chair and then into school improvement specialist. It’s nice to have somebody who is mentoring you professionally that’s looked out for me.

Another intern shared of working with a mentor:

They’re kind of the gatekeeper. You can have all of these experiences or . . . [they say] “Do this, this, and this, and please just stay out of my way.” I think that still has to be primary because they really control how many different experiences you’re going to get. Are you going to be in charge of busses or are they in charge of busses and you help? Are you going to get to call the parent and deal with the problem or are they going to do it?

This theme led the researchers to explore further options in mentor selection, training, and support before and during the administrative internship, influenced by the goal of continuous improvement as an aspect of the Transformative Initiative. The internship handbook has been expanded to include suggestions to mentors about activities and reflective experiences. Mentors are now provided access to a video providing further explication and training on best practices in supporting aspiring leaders. This assumes a level of professional knowledge, but developmentally builds upon that experience. The program also holds annual meetings with all internship instructors to gain feedback about the course and procedures and to ensure course consistency across sections.

## **Scholarly Significance**

Findings from this study will not only add value when synthesized with findings from teacher preparation and counselor preparation programs as a part of the NCATE-TI accreditation pathway, but also have significance in the literature on university preparation programs and the administrative internship, as well as implications for practice at the university and school district level. Although these findings from a study conducted at one university may not have transferability to every university preparation program, the basic principals and fundamental need for more authentic internship opportunities should be in the prevue of all leadership preparation programs at the university level. The TI pathway stimulates reflective practice through research-based knowledge as institutions engage in major transformative changes and continuous improvement efforts. University programs preparing future school leaders should consider the alignment of coursework and internship activities to have the greatest impact on student learning, as well as analyze the quality and authenticity of clinical practice opportunities under the supervision of a carefully selected, trained, and experienced mentor.

We hoped that the TI approach would foster a collaborative research culture in the unit, leveraging the complementary expertise of diverse partners within the scholarship-practice ecosystem including research-active faculty members, professors of practice, and practitioners. Although this shift in thinking takes time to materialize fully, there is value-added when different groups of faculty members work together. For example, research-active faculty members bring theoretical, technical, and methodological skills that a scientific inquiry requires that the other groups may not have. Practitioners (who often serve as adjunct professors for this institution) bring situated, real-world experience to interpret, analyze and contextualize knowledge, making sense of the theory and data, adding fidelity and credibility to the overall TI research process. In addition, by virtue of their proximity (or local knowledge), practitioners understand the political, cultural and legal dynamics of the district when gatekeepers' buy-in is required to increase access to informants involved in the TI project. Last, professors of practice bring a unique dimension to the TI research project due to their dual and overlapping rapport to both practitioners and research-active faculty. They are the fulcrum who assist research-active faculty's ability to interpret and understand the nuances of local data, and context-bound knowledge in situated practice while enhancing the practitioners' space and horizon of understanding local evidence in light of best practice and research in the field.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the TI pathway proved to be the nexus between theory and practice in educator preparation at the university level. It also served as a de-balkanizing force to unify various research-active faculty groups committed to this work and to share best practices across preparation programs even within the same university. Although our efforts toward improvement continue, this process highlighted further areas of focus in administrator preparation, such as the selection and training of experienced mentors who will take a vested interest in the development of our candidates as future leaders, and providing more exposure to managerial aspects of school leadership, such as budgeting, staffing, and scheduling. This work influenced a more purposeful and intentional approach to improvement efforts and candidate growth, such as utilizing Professors of Practice who serve as liaisons between field sites and the university, as well as field supervisors who expose candidates to authentic problems of practice.

The TI requirements for authentic inquiry and clinical practice created the impetus for tangible and viable school-district partnership. Overall, this accreditation pathway has the potential to maximize the benefit from the TI research activity by creating opportunities and incentives that benefit all groups of faculty within the unit, thus creating a win-win scenario that has never existed before.



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# Educational Leadership Simulations: Learning Lessons from Behind the Curtain of Educational Leadership

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



**David DeJong, Ed. D.**  
University of South Dakota

**Trent Grundmeyer, Ph.D.**  
Drake University

Simulations have long been used for military and medical training. More recently educational simulations have evolved for training teachers and for gaming used as a tool to engage students in learning. Only recently have educational simulations been available to train school leaders who have increased demands on them to lead schools and to improve test scores. Educational leaders must be versed in a variety of managerial and instructional skills that are supremely difficult to develop in any degree or certification program. The researchers in this study used educational simulations to support graduate instruction in two different principal and superintendent preparation programs. Participants were surveyed after participating in four or more educational simulations. The study uncovered a unanimously positive perception from participants regarding their preparedness for leadership and ability to meet graduate course objectives utilizing the educational simulations. Overall, the participants reported increased confidence to handle real-life situations after engaging in the simulations, more engagement in graduate courses and a deeper perspective to think critically about issues they will be presented with in the field. Data from participants in the study provide real insights to principal preparation programs, aspiring school leaders, and districts interested in further training their current leaders.

## **Background**

Simulations for training in the military and medical fields have been used for years. The use of games and simulations for educational purposes can be traced as far back to the use of war games in the 1600s (Smith, 2010). The purpose of these early simulations was to improve the strategic planning of military leaders. Since that time, simulations and educational games have continued to expand. The United States Pentagon used military simulations related to the Cold War crisis in the 1950s (Leemkuil, de Jong, & Ootes, 2000). In that same decade, simulations increased in popularity in both the business and medical fields (Wideman, Owston, Brown, Kushniruk, Ho, & Pitts, 2007). Thanks to the advancements in computer capabilities, the development of educational simulations has also evolved (Smith, 2010).

As the war era ended, the way in which people completed work changed. After World War II, a shift in work as something done by human force and something done by human knowledge made a change in the workforce (Smith, 2010). The first major changes were to become more precise in the work that humans were doing. The manner in which leaders lead also changed. As the industrial revolution ended leaders were forced to change to an innovative manner. Leaders were required to bring the talents of many together as a collaborative manner (Dentico, 1999). During this period, the use of calculators helped simulations become more accessible because the simulations could be conducted in shorter and shorter periods of time because the simulations did not rely on cumbersome mathematical equations (Smith, 2010). These important shifts eliminated the required manual work of calculating outcomes and laid the foundation for technology-based simulations.

### **Simulation Adopted as a Learning Tool for Leaders**

Learning through simulations is an evolving method of developing leaders. Case studies have been used in the past to address deficits to different scenarios (Kowalski, 2013). These case studies give a single problem that can sometimes be solved in a single solution. Simulations can be used with a double loop thought, which provides leaders with a new perspective on how to handle the same simulation (Hwang & Wang, 2016). By doing the same simulation a second time, the leaders experiencing the training can see a different set of possible solutions.

There are two types of learning simulations that have been used to help train and to develop leaders. The first one is specific issue; there is a problem that is specific and need to be solved. The second type requires different roles that are defined through a variety of actions. The content type of simulation explores what action steps to take. If a decision is made, a result might happen. Process simulations look at the how and why different decisions are made. Process simulations usually occur first.

Simulations have positive effects on the development of leaders and their cognitive understanding and process. Simulations lead to a cognitive story and the story leads to the way people think and process happenings (Bruner, 1986). Old experiences are replaced with new ones as the story or simulations fills the thoughts and process of happenings in leaders.

The generic simulation model was derived from different gaming simulations and from different simulations. These generic data models were used to address a variety of people. These simulations models need to be user-configured and are difficult to do in the educational setting.

When one develops a generic simulation model many aspects are required to make the simulation work well.

Educational simulations have shown to be beneficial for economy and cost savings. Another benefit for the use of educational simulations is to mitigate risk and to enrich different experiences. These simulations allow potential leaders to make mistakes and to learn from the experience in a safe environment. These simulations also give potential leaders a wide range of simulations.

These simulations also have many features and cognitive demands that help lead trainees in an effective manner. The trainings need to meet the needs of the training purposes. The cognitive load theory is a body of knowledge that has informed instructional design in educational psychology (Sweller, 1988). The premise behind this thought is that learning while training will help leaders encode information in a way that it is remembered in the working memory. By training this working knowledge and long term memory the thought would be that as issues arise the leader will have reference points to direct their decision making in the current situations. Sweller (1994) found that working memory in complex situations is limited. The goal in instructional design is for leaders to manage the process and leaders have the cognitive load to facilitate the issue.

### **The Cognitive Load Theory in Regards to Simulations**

The cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1994) has three different types of cognitive loads: intrinsic, extraneous, and germane. Intrinsic load is determined by the complexity of the learning content. It generally refers to the amount of information that a given situation has put toward a leader in a given situation. Extraneous load originates from mental health activities that are not directly related to the content but rather copies the design of materials that have been previously learned. Trainees are more comfortable working with simulations that are familiar as cognitive situations are easier to work with as they draw from schemata.

For training leadership to be effective and build on working memory, these simulations must have a specific structure. These structures include variables, relationships, values, distributions, and randomness. The simulations that are used are evaluated based upon the needs to trainees and the goals that facilitators are trying to get across. These structures include several variables: (a) decision and input variables, (b) mediating variables, (c) moderator and (d) outcome variables (Goosen, Jensen, & Wells, 2001). The different forms of decision variables are what set the value for trainees. These simulations also have output variables, which is the feedback that is provided to leaders based on the decision that they have made in the simulations. Dynamics in a simulation deals with the connectivity in the variables inside each different simulation. The model structure for each simulation determines the knowledge that the trainee is required to learn.

Aspects of simulations on the surface are not always as they appear and simulation in the leadership world are similar. The portion of which trainees see in a simulation contributes to the complexity of the different simulations. At the beginning stages of each simulation the variable of what inputs the trainee is going to give on the different situations. The simulation surface can range from a variety of content, which is filled with different graphical influences such as video, pictures and/or symbols. Having a surface and visual representation that is attractive and catches the attention of the audience is important. A simulation that meets the needs of specific learning objectives is equally as important.

There are many types of learning objectives that are designed through simulations. The first is insight-learning objectives; those are designed to have trainees recognize a point, principle, or relationship. The second type of learning objective found in the varied simulations is task specific procedural knowledge. These learning objectives are used in and through simulations to learn the skilled routines for different performance tasks. These simulations should be used to simulate a surgery, crisis management scenario, or trading of items. These task simulations are used in the “if that, then what” scenarios that these people may encounter (Wood, Beckmann, & Birney, 2009). These types of simulations are used repeatedly so that they become automatic responses for the trainees. The downfall to these type of simulations are that they are missing the gray area and other responses that can be necessary to resolving a problem. The third learning objective is the flexible expertise objective. In this type of learning objective the trainees are required to learn and to encompass the body of knowledge required for managing the simulated tasks, which helps the trainees transfer these knowledge into real world scenarios. The expertise knowledge-learning objective requires trainees to show flexibility to a broader scheme. The flexible simulations require multiple solutions to a complex problem that may arise throughout the day of a leader. The fourth type of learning objective used in training simulations is behavioral skills. During these simulation types, the flexible learning objectives are used with a knowledge base that includes behaviors from real world scenarios. The thinking behind the behavioral skill-learning objective is that leaders must use items they have been trained in as well as items that are built from behaviors. Putting these two aspects together effectively can lead to positive changes. The final type of learning objective is the metacognitive and deliberative processing objective. During this metacognitive and deliberative learning objective there is a high level of processes to supervise and to control lower level processes (Gourgey, 1998). This metacognition process helps hypotheses, testing, and exploration (Burns & Vollmeyer, 2002).

When using simulations as a way to train leaders one can prevent gaps that have occurred through strategies that have taken place previously in leadership training. Supporters of using these simulations have stated that the use of simulations is closely aligned to the educational goals of the facilitator. These strategies of using simulations enhance complex decision-making processes for leaders in the areas of teamwork, fostering higher level thinking, and reflection (Gary and Wood, 2011). Computer simulations enhance the process by creating a virtual reality, which challenges trainees to solve problems in a complex and dynamic manner (Berends & Romme, 1999). Simulations have proven to stimulate participant’s hidden cognitive abilities through solving problems and have offered a high level of thinking. The participants also have an opportunity to return to the start of the simulation and learn from the new ways to respond to simulations.

### **Simulations Changing Training Dynamics for Leaders**

Simulations are changing the training dynamics for leaders because they allow for learners to work in groups or individually in order to see the reactions real time instead of the waiting for results to see if one can find something else through research to disprove the conclusion. Responses from the simulations can actually alter perceptions, actions, and thinking patterns for the trainee (Hall & Hord, 2001).

Many organizations have used simulations to enhance the thinking and problem solving of their employees. Simulations have the ability to provide participants real life scenarios and

quick time results to actions they take to solve the problem. Getting away from paper pencil tests and moving toward simulations is an intriguing way to think about educational leadership training possibilities. These simulations have the power to track the knowledge of trainees and change a method of thinking which allows leaders to be better problem solvers. Trainees are able to see the responses to different scenarios, which allows leaders to more effectively answer and solve a problem that may be similar in the future. Simulations allow for the trainee to take part in real life simulations without the real world implications. They also have the power to learn from those simulations and to develop at a much higher rate than traditional trainings.

## **Methods**

This study consisted of both qualitative and quantitative survey data with the purpose of examining the perceptions of graduate educational leadership students utilizing simulations as an instructional tool. The study also aimed at identifying if students felt the simulations helped them meet course objectives. The study consisted of 42 graduate students at two different universities located in the Midwest United States.

### **Design**

To evaluate the effectiveness of simulations as an instructional strategy the researchers formulated two primary research questions. Creswell (2011) advocates for “strategies for good question construction,” as it helps to create “clear language...posing questions that are applicable to all participants” (p. 385).

Careful consideration about the stakeholders and perspectives were considered in the design of the research questions. Furthermore, the usefulness of the feedback the questions presented was a consideration in the development of the research questions. These questions guided the survey instrument and provided useful data to the researchers. The research questions were:

1. What are the perceptions of graduate students enrolled in educational leadership preparation programs in regards to experiencing educational leadership simulations?
2. How do simulations help graduate students enrolled in educational leadership preparation programs meet course objectives?

### **Instrumentation**

Online surveys were used to obtain data from participants in the study. Surveys were administered at both universities during class time so that participation was high. The surveys were sent to all participants during class. The surveys were distributed through an email, delivered to their inbox with a brief introduction letter. Students were given 20 minutes to complete the survey. The survey included both multiple choice questions as well as open-ended response questions, which allowed for reflection and open-ended responses. Creswell (2011) would advocate for a reduction in measurement error by using a good instrument with clear, unambiguous questions and response options.

## **Subjects**

The survey population included a total of 42 graduate students at two separate universities located in the Midwest United States. These students were all enrolled in graduate educational leadership programs with principal and superintendent licensure as the outcome of the programs.

## **Limitations**

There were two specific limitations identified in the study. The first limitation was the sample. Graduate students in two separate midwestern graduate schools were participants in the study. Perhaps graduate students in different programs and different locations would alter the outcomes of the study.

Another limitation is the actual simulation (SIM) platform used in the study. Educational Leadership SIMs was the simulation provider utilized as the instructional tool for both classes. Perhaps another technology platform would produce a different user experience with different outcomes. This is an area for future study with different platforms.

## **Evaluation of Data**

The data in this study was analyzed using the Grounded Theory Method, which was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1965). According to Glaser (1992), the strategy of Grounded Theory is to take the interpretation of meaning in social interaction on board and study "the interrelationship between meaning in the perception of the subjects and their action" (p. 16). Therefore, through the meaning of symbols, human beings interpret their world and the actors who interact with them, while Grounded Theory translates and discovers new understandings of human beings' behaviors that are generated from the meaning of symbols. This method seemed best to analyze the perceptions of graduate students in regard to educational simulations, the ability to meet course objectives, and consequently the ability to prepare them to serve as school leaders.

As the researchers analyzed the data they began by coding the text. In the Grounded Research Theory, coding and theorizing is a key initial piece of analyzing the data. As the data was coded, key concepts began to emerge and examples were assigned to each concept. Field notes from the instructors were also analyzed to deepen and to clarify the concepts that began to emerge. Glaser (1992) suggested the use of field notes because they are an important step between coding and the final analysis where observations and insights are considered. As a final analysis, central categories were linked together from concepts that emerged from the data. Four distinct themes were formulated from the data analysis process that are each addressed in the findings of this paper.

## **Findings**

Students were exposed to both individual and group simulations, and the instructor facilitated discussion during class time. Data from participants was synthesized into four distinct themes, which are detailed in this section of the paper. The first theme was that the discussions were highly engaging. The second theme was that the discussion stimulated critical thinking. The third



theme was that the simulations helped participants to realize different perspectives. The fourth and final theme was that participants reported an increased confidence to lead through complex scenarios.

### **Discussions Were Highly Engaging**

Students were clear in their feedback that the discussions with their peers and instructor were the most valuable aspect of educational leadership simulations. “The most useful part of the scenarios is the conversations and thought process that goes with them,” one student said. Another commented, “The group discussions are the best part.” Students seemed to value the feedback from their peers even though it might have challenged their own thinking at times and was contrary to their own thought process. One student reported, “These (educational simulations) were very thought provoking and made for great conversations.” Another added, “I was fully engaged and also a little shocked at times. It was hard to believe that educators, parents, community members acted the way they did in some of the sims.” This was a reality check for future school leaders who could not believe that principals had to deal with difficult teachers, staff dress issues, disruptive teachers, and many other complex issues. Further data complimented other comments in this theme suggesting, “These simulations were great experiences that were actually engaging and could definitely happen to any of us individually or as an entire district.” Yet another student echoed, “I think this was a great way to learn and have discussions with my peers.”

### **Discussions Stimulated Critical Thinking**

A second theme that emerged from the data was centered on critical thinking. Participants felt that the simulations required them think deeper about how they would actually handle situations as the school leader and forced them to negotiate the consequences of their choices. One student commented, “I loved the mental process of going through these scenarios and the situations that could arise are the benefits.” Another participant that stated, “The simulations presented a good perspective on broad topics that have many underlying pieces,” supported this. Yet another enthusiastically echoed, “The simulations were a great way to get in depth conversations started. Very thought provoking. It was great to think about what I would do in these specific situations!”

Not only did the simulations force students to think deeply and critically about the decisions required, but the simulations also helped participants identify gaps in their preparedness as school leaders. Many students commented on this idea saying, “The simulations helped me figure out where I need to spend my time preparing for the future.” Another stated, “The Ed Sims showed me that I have still have much to learn when it comes to knowing policies at the district, state, national level.” Clearly, students were challenged to think critically about the simulations at hand but also their own preparedness as a school leader. Understanding one’s gaps in learning is an important benefit from simulations highlighted by participants. Because students realized their gaps in learning they could then address strategies to learn these lacking concepts and skills. This may assist them to be a better school leader when given the opportunity to lead.

## **Simulations Helped to Realize Different Perspectives**

Much of why students felt the simulations helped them realize different perspectives was because of the thought process or comments others shared during class discussions. One student made clear, “I liked having the discussions during the simulations. This allowed me to see the perspective of others.” Various students also commented about hearing different perspectives saying, “They (simulations) were a great way to think through things and realize different perspectives.” Another commented, “I liked this format. It gave us all a chance to chime in with our opinions and many of the simulations were eye-opening to problems we may not be involved in.” Based on the simulated experience and follow-up discussions students felt that they better realized different perspectives. One concluding thought from a student mentioned, “I look at education in a completely different light after going through these.” Leadership preparation programs need to find ways to help prospective leaders realize different perspectives as schools continue to diversify (Mette, Nieuwenhuizen, & Hvidston, 2016). For a single instructional tool to completely change the perspective of students, it is clear simulations may be an effective method of preparing future school leaders.

## **Increased Confidence to Lead Through Complex Scenarios**

Based on feedback from participants one could say that educational simulations increased the confidence of future school leaders to handle complex scenarios they will face in the field. Comments to support this were, “I feel more confident in my preparedness to handle real-life scenarios when in the field.” Another graduate student reflected, “The sims gave me confidence in how I would respond to an issue in order to continue/establish strong inter-relationships with staff, parents, and community.” Another student added, “I enjoyed the Sims and feel much more prepared for scenarios similar to these in future positions.” Because principals are faced with complex and important issues on a routine basis, improving their confidence to handle these stressful issues is critical to their future success (Figueiredo-Brown, Ringler, & James, 2015). This is often very difficult in a traditional classroom approach. Per the feedback in this study it is clear that simulations are a key tool to improve the confidence of future school leaders and help them prepare for the complex issues they will soon face.

## **Simulations to Help Students Meet Course Objectives**

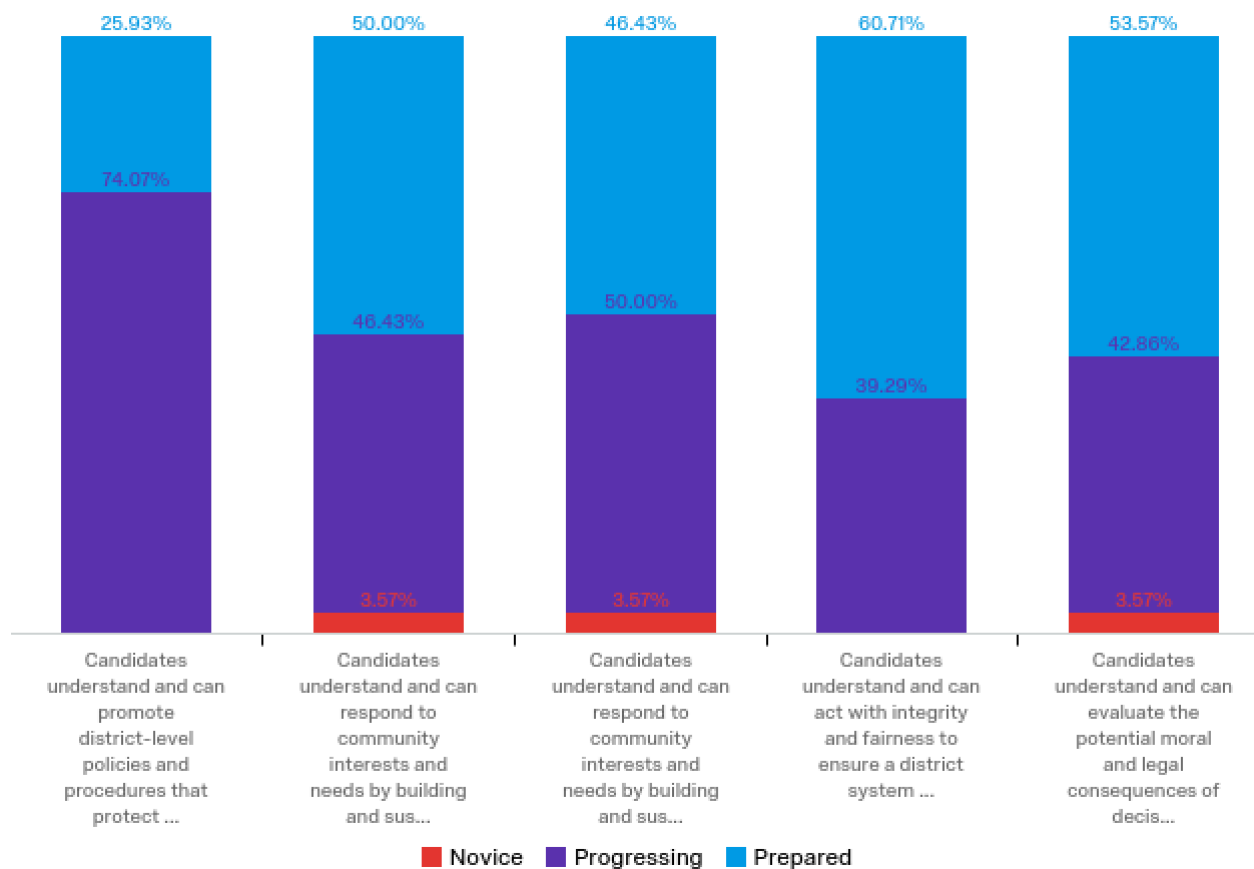
The second research question was, “How do simulations help graduate students enrolled in educational leadership preparation programs meet course objectives?” Students were asked to report on the survey how the education simulations helped them to meet the course objectives. Their feedback was reported using a standards-based approach. The options were “novice,” “progressing,” and “prepared” leader in regard to each course objective (See Chart 1).

The highest rated course objective that was most influenced by the simulations was, “Candidates understand and can act with integrity and fairness to ensure a district system to ensure a district system of accountability for every student’s academic and social success.” Over 60.71% of participants reported that they were “prepared” as a leader on this course objective in part due to the simulation experiences. No students reported being “novice” on this course objective after engaging in four or more educational leadership simulations.

The lower rated course objective as reported by the participants was, “Candidates understand and can promote district-level policies and procedures that protect the welfare and safety of students and staff across the district.” Although no students reported as “novice” for this objective, the majority of participants (74.07%) felt like they were still “progressing” on this course objective.

The other course objectives each had 3.57% of students report being “novice” in meeting the objective(s). The progressing category ranged from 42.86%-50% for each of these particular course objectives. “Candidates understand and can evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision making in the district (43.86%).” “Candidates understand and can respond to community interests and needs by building and sustaining positive district relationships with families and caregivers (46.43%).” “Candidates understand and can respond to community interests and needs by building and sustain productive district relationships with community partners (50%).” As reported by the participants themselves, clearly education simulations helped students meet the course objectives, although some more than others.

**Chart 1:** Leader preparedness toward course objectives



### Conclusions

The aim of this research study was to understand graduate students’ perceptions of simulations in preparing them for school leadership and to identify if simulations help students meet the course

objectives. After experiencing four or more Ed Leadership SIMs, 42 out of 42 graduate students in this study reported that educational simulations were effective or highly effective. Based on the data presented in this study one could clearly gather that educational simulations, whether it is the Ed Leadership SIMs platform or another delivery model, are well perceived by graduate students. One student explained, "They (simulations) provided a good training ground to try and make mistakes without real consequence." This is normally the goal of simulations.

Graduate students studying to become principals and/or superintendents are well versed in coursework and in instructional strategies. This study made clear that experiencing educational simulations and the discussions that ensued, were highly valued as an instructional method by students. Participants who engaged in the simulations reported that they valued discussions and consequently had a broader perspective because of the experience. Evidence of a broadened perspective was heard from one student who commented, "The answers are not always exactly as we would choose or say, however it is good to see how small actions have a great impact on a situation." A graduate student supported this idea when sharing, "I feel like the simulations were a valuable resources to prepare future leaders. I'm glad I had the chance to learn from them. The class was much more engaging and relevant than reading a traditional textbook." Comments like this sum up the overall data from participants and confirm that educational simulations are a worthy instructional tool to prepare future principals and superintendents.

As technology improves, so will the tools and resources available to prepare school leaders. Simulations are currently a highly effective tool that licensure programs should consider utilizing when preparing school leaders. Johnson (2016) found that recent graduates of educational leadership preparation programs reported a lack of training in budget, achievement data analysis, parental involvement, dealing with difficult parents, and human resources. Each of these items has a specific simulation that was facilitated in this study (p. 11). The comments, insights and suggestions from participants in this study convey the overall benefit of simulations and the importance of the discussions that follow. Perhaps school districts wanting to further train their principals or to ensure principals handle situations in a similar manner could benefit from educational simulations.

The data from this study clearly answered the research questions. Educational leadership simulations do help prepare school leaders by engaging them in real-life scenarios and building their confidence to handle other complex situations they will soon face in the field. The simulations build the perspectives of future school leaders, help them to critically analyze complex situations, and consequently meet course objectives. After engaging graduate students in educational simulations and analyzing the data, educational leadership simulations have the potential to help prospective leaders learn lessons from behind the curtain of educational leadership.

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