

Alternative Administrative Certification: Socializing Factors Influencing Program Choice

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This study used an organizational socialization lens to examine factors influencing participants' decision to pursue the principalship and choice to engage in an alternate administration certification program. Through an analysis of participant focus groups and interviews, factors emerged from the codes that were compared with dimensions of a socialization framework. A key finding is the intersection of socializing factors that influenced participants' decisions to pursue the principalship and their choice to pursue an alternative preparation program. Two factors that influenced their decision to pursue the principalship, internal processes related to seeing themselves as change agents and their image of the role of the principal as a vehicle for impacting educational outcomes, connected with the innovative organizational/contextual philosophy of the alternate preparation program. This intersection had a major influence in how these aspiring principals came to pursue this alternate principal preparation program.

INTRODUCTION

The educational landscape is changing in the U.S. with public school restructuring that includes state and city take-over of schools and charter schools. With restructuring comes the question of how to prepare a 'new' type of school leader, a leader able to maneuver within various organizational structures and lead practices that may vary from traditional schools. States have authorized alternative leadership programs, such as those managed by New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS), with the expectation that these programs will prepare this new type of school leader (Campbell & Grubb, 2008; National Governors' Association, 2008).

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Research examining alternative certification programs for educational leaders, however, has yet to expanded at the same rate as implementation of these programs (Corcoran, Schwarts, & Weinstein, 2012; Hickey-Gramke, 2006; Hickey-Gramke & Whaley, 2007). In this study, we explore aspiring principals' involvement in Preparing Leaders for Tomorrow (PLT) [all names pseudonyms], an alternative principal preparation program managed by City Schools (CS), a not-for-profit organization. We examine factors that influenced aspiring principals' choice to pursue PLT as their administrative principal certification program. We postulated the reasons for pursuing administrative certification through PLT are intertwined with aspiring principals' reasons for pursuing the principalship. Consequently, we examined the factors for both pursuing the principalship and choosing PLT.

FRAMING THE ALTERNATIVE PRINCIPAL PREPARATION CONTEXT

Some states have vigorously implemented legislation and policies allowing variations in public school structures and governance, such as charter schools, to address a variety of school issues, including school take-over (National Association of State School Boards of Education, 2007). States have also expanded administrative certification options allowing alternative paths to the principalship to support the volume and variation of these new school structures (National Governors' Association, 2008). The state in which this investigation occurred expanded administrative certification other than the traditional requirement of obtaining a master's degree in educational administration from an institution of higher education. The state now awards administrative certification through organizations beyond school districts or institutions of higher education, such as not-for-profit and for-profit organizations. The state authorizes a provider to grant certification based on a Request for Proposal (RFP), which outlines the general guidelines for program components, including candidate selection, innovative curriculum and the type of practicum experience provided. Candidates to this alternate path to certification must have a valid teaching license and have a passing score on the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLAA) at the completion of the program.

We recognize the wide variation in how alternative certification is defined within and among states, including obtaining alternative certification from universities and school districts through face to face and on line delivery (Hickey-Gramke, 2006); however, for the purposes of this study, we define an alternative administrative preparation programs as programs organized and managed by non-traditional entities, specifically not-for-profit or for-profit organizations. Within this definition alternative programs may be secondarily associated with colleges and school districts, but the organizations managing the principal certification program are legally responsible directly to the state in which they are authorized. This definition allows an examination of the kinds of preparation programs currently being promoted by the growing number of proponents of alternate forms of public education, such as charter schools (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2008), and education policy reformers calling for innovation and deregulation of principal preparation (Herrington, 2005).

AN ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION LENS

Researchers examining administrative preparation have outlined features of effective administrator preparation, highlighting partnership between higher educational institutions and school districts and in-house district preparation (Corcoran, Schwartz, & Weinstein, 2012; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Jackson & Kelley, 2002), yet little is known about administrator certification programs provided primarily by entities outside the traditional sphere of universities and school districts (Campbell & Grubb, 2008). In our exploration of the literature, we found no peer reviewed research outlining why aspiring principals choose to receive certification from alternative providers.

Several research studies of participants in traditional administrative preparation programs, however, have outlined factors influencing individual's decisions to pursue the principalship (Bass, 2006; Begley, Campbell-Evans, & Brownridge, 1990; Coggsall, Stewart, & Bhatt, 2008; Harris, Arnold, Lowery, & Crocker, 2000; Leithwood, Steinbach, & Begley, 1992; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). A common finding from each study suggests aspiring principals are motivated to pursue the principalship as a means to positively influence educational outcomes. Both Harris, Arnold, Lowery, and Crocker (2000) and Bass (2006), through surveys of aspiring principals in university programs, found the reason most given for pursuing the principalship was to "make a difference." Other high ranking indicators included positively impacting people, a personal challenge, ability to initiate change, and the desire for professional challenges. Coggsall, Stewart, and Bhatt (2008), through focus groups and individual interviews, realized similar findings. Aspiring principals in this study "believed that principals can have a profound impact on the lives of children and the viability of a school and community. They wanted to become a principal so they too could make a difference" (p. 5).

Researchers have employed organizational socialization theory to explain how aspiring principals develop an understanding of the role of the administrator and how this understanding influences their engagement in the profession (Begley et al., 1990; Crow & Glascock, 1995; Leithwood et al., 1992). Van Maanen and Schein (1977) defined organizational socialization as "the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (p. 3). Van Maanen (1976) suggested that individuals pass through three phases in the process of organizational socialization: (1) *the choice-anticipatory phase*; (2) *the entry-encounter phase*; (3) *the continuous-metamorphosis phase*. In the *choice anticipatory phase*, an individual's "preparatory learning occurs via the person's family, peers, educational institutions and cultural influences" (p. 81). Individuals in this phase evaluate the correlation between personal goals and values and those of the organizational role that they may wish to pursue. The *entry-encounter phase* occurs as individuals enter an organization as a newly recruited member and the *continuous-metamorphosis phase* occurs as an individual works out the problems associated with the entry-encounter phase. Crow and Glascock (1995) postulated a similar theory of organizational socialization. They also suggested three phases in the socialization process: (1) *exploration*; (2) *giving up the previous role*; and (3) *adjusting self and new role to each other*. In this study, we examine the *exploration phase*, where the individual envisions the possibility of becoming the principal and makes the decision to seek the position, which

may include research, investigation, and gathering other's opinions.

Several studies have examined the socialization of aspiring principals as they participate in certification programs and in the early years of practice – phases two and three of the socialization process (Aiken, 2002; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Crow & Glascock, 1995; Greenfield, 1985; Leithwood et al., 1992). Little, however, is known about the initial phase, the choice anticipatory-exploration process (Begley et al., 1990). Begley, Campbell-Evans, and Brownridge, adapted Leithwood, Steinbach and Begley's (1992) framework that explored phases two and three of Van Maanen's (1976) socialization process for early career principals. Begley and associates specifically examined the choice-anticipatory socialization influences (phase one) as aspiring principals pursued the principalship and the principal preparation program. The adapted choice-anticipatory socialization model outlined four dimensions: (1) internal processes; (2) relational, (3) organizational and contextual; and (4) image of the role of the principal (Table 1). Bagley et al. defined internal processes as the values and cognitive operations that influence aspiring principals' choice of the principalship and program. They viewed internal processes as being an antecedent to other early socializing influences for the aspiring principal. The relational dimension in the model included the influences of superordinates, peers, and subordinates. The organizational/contextual dimension included organizational culture, formal training, informal training, communication networks, and planned critical events. The final dimension, image of the role of the principal, contained perceptions of practices and decision making processes used by the principal.

Table 1

Begley, Campbell-Evans, Brownridge (1990) Choice-Anticipatory Socialization Framework

Socializing Dimensions	Description of Dimension
Internal processes	Socializing influences of aspiring principals' values and cognitive processes on decisions to pursue the principalship and certification programs. Considered antecedent to other early socializing influences.
Relational	Socializing influences of super-ordinates, peers, and subordinates on aspiring principals decisions to pursue the principalship and certification programs. Begley et al. (1990) included family members in findings.
Organizational/contextual	Socializing influences of organizational culture, formal training, informal training, communication networks, and planned critical events on decisions to pursue the principalship and certification programs.
Image of the role of the principal	Socializing influences of the perceived role of the principalship, including perceived goals ascribed to the principalship, such as school/classroom factors, strategies used by principals, on decisions to pursue the principalship and certification programs.

Begley and colleagues (1990) determined that factors within the internal processing dimension primarily influenced the participants' choice to pursue the principalship. Participants perceived the principalship as challenging, interesting, and meeting their need for responsibility. Secondly, participants chose to pursue the principalship based on their image of the role of the principal. Aspiring principals expressed the belief that the principalship provided a way to positively contribute to students and schools and that

they possessed the knowledge and skills to do so. Begley et al. also noted about 25% of the respondents listed, 'making a difference' as a factor influencing aspirants' interest in administration, and categorized this factor within the organizational/contextual dimension.

When Begley et al. (1990) examined the reasons aspiring principals chose a specific preparation program, 12 factors surfaced. All factors were categorized into two dimensions, organizational/contextual and relational. Nine of the 12 factors fell within in the organizational/contextual dimension. Within this dimension over three quarters of the respondents perceived the financial support and availability of the program as influential factors in their decision. In the relational dimension, one of three factors was dominant; over a third of the respondents were influenced by others, including colleagues, family, and friends.

Implications outlined by Begley et al. (1990) suggested factors influencing individuals towards the principalship and to specific principalship preparation programs need to be considered in the recruitment process of aspiring principals. These researchers recommend improving the recruitment processes by promoting certification program features that overlap with socialization dimensions and factors influencing prospective principal decisions to pursue the principalship. Researchers examining principal preparation programs extol the importance of recruiting highly capable candidates and point to the often lack of such effective recruiting (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Educational Research Service, 2000; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Levine, 2005). Investigating how choice-anticipatory socialization factors interact with aspiring principals' choice to pursue a specific alternative administrative principal certification program, like PLT, may open insights into principal recruitment.

THE PLT CONTEXT

PLT became an alternate provider of principal certification in early 2008. CS, the parent organization of PLT, was founded in 2005 as a not-for-profit community foundation committed to improving economic progress and opportunities for citizens. Involved in both settling school desegregation litigation and regional recovery after natural disasters, CS became particularly interested in school redesign to improve student achievement in low performing schools as a means to improve economic development. School leadership emerged as critical factor in school redesign and improvement, which lead the organization to pursue an alternative principal preparation program. In addition, CS also applied to manage three state take-over schools, which they began supervising in the 2008-2009 school year as charter schools.

In the development phase of PLT the Director of CS approached a local university with the proposition of a partnership in preparing school leaders for more autonomous schools, such as charter schools. The emphasis for the curriculum would merge principles of business used in non-profit organizations, labeled social entrepreneurship, and best practices of instructional leadership. CS saw this combined content as particularly relevant to leadership in charter schools. Specifically, the four components of PLT were autonomy, social entrepreneurship, accountability, and distributed leadership. The social entrepreneurship leadership elements became the most unique feature of the PLT curriculum as outlined by CT's application. The social entrepreneurial leader model was

based on transformation through initiation and risk-taking, particularly advocated for school start-ups, through either reconstitution of faculty or transition to a new vision/mission with existing faculty (Hess, 2007; Wilson, 2006). A social entrepreneurial school leadership model seeks to ‘enculture’ aspiring leaders to a sense of autonomy in their decisions while continuing to promote working collaboratively within teams (Wilson, 2006). Both the College of Education and College of Business joined PLT as subordinate partners in the application to the state, agreeing to assist with consultation and instruction. However, because of funding and differences in program goals, the only contribution the university made to the program was allowing PLT students to take a one business class focused on entrepreneurship and education faculty occasionally acting as guest lectures (author three acted as a guest speaker the first year of the program).

Beyond curriculum, PLT was designed as a cohort-based program. Participants in the program were not required to have a master’s degree nor would completion of PLT result in a master’s degree. PLT was also given permission by the state to recruit individuals without K-12 teaching experience. The PLT program encompassed four phases (Table 2). Instruction was primarily delivered through daily seminars given in the summers by outside experts. The director of CS, a former principal and university educational leadership instructor, provided the majority of the instruction. The first cohort participants were placed in full-time paid leadership positions, took one business class through the university partner each semester, and attended weekend seminars once a month. First cohort participants were also required to attend one national leadership conference. Due to less funding than anticipated, second cohort participants were not guaranteed a paid administrative position, although participants were guaranteed a paid teaching position in a school with some administrative tasks if they were not already in such a position. Second cohort participants attended just one university course and were not required to attend a national conference. The second cohort also attended weekend seminars once a month. In addition, both cohorts met together monthly and a full time coach visited each participant in their placement. Both cohort participants were also guaranteed two additional years of mentor support beyond certification from PLT staff.

Recruitment for PLT cohorts included personal contacts with local educational and non-educational agencies, open recruitment forums, involvement in local educational panels, newspaper advertisements, and individual contact with school personnel in the charter schools managed by CS. Regional and national organizations, such as Teach for American (TFA) and charter school associations, were contacted to introduce PLT to alumni and members. CS staff also handed out materials in other educational settings, such as district and university aspiring principal programs and meetings of National Board Certified teachers. The selection process for PLT participation began with an application which was screened by CS staff. The second phase of selection included an interview by a panel of CS staff and invited guests. The first cohorts yielded only five participants from a limited application pool due to late program approval from the state. One candidate left the program after the first summer session. The second cohort included 18 participants as this cohort’s first summer session began.

Table 2
Structural Phases of PLT

Phase	Description
Recruitment Phase	Recruitment of candidates and development of job placement in participating schools. Participant selection from application screening and panel interviews.
Summer I	Five-week full day institute designed to build a foundation of theory, best practices, and technical know-how. Institutes include case studies of real-world school problems. Instruction occurred through one to several day seminars from PLT director and outside experts.
School Year I	School-based residency augmented by the placement mentor and PLT/CS coach. Candidates involved in cohort meetings (monthly) and seminars periodically. First cohort, participants enrolled in one graduate-level course in the college of business fall and spring and attend one national conference. Second cohort, participants enrolled in one business course and were not required to attend national conference.
Summer II	Five-week full day institute designed to build and hone skills in the areas of leadership. Instruction was supposed to occur through one to several day seminars from outside experts; however, the first cohort just attended some of the initial summer activities of the second cohort due to limited funding.
School Year II and II	Continued CT coaching support for new principals for 2 years following certification.

RESEARCH METHODS

Our two research questions were: (1) what factors influenced an individual's intentions to pursue the principalship? And, (2) what factors lead aspiring principals to choose PLT, an alternative principal preparation program, as their pathway to certification? Most of the current research foundational to this study was based on survey methodology. From an interpretive frame (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), we believed understanding participants' perceptions in their own words would provide additional insights. Also, the paucity of research available concerning why aspiring principals choose alternative preparation programs led us to consider the rich description participants' interview responses might give to the investigation of this topic.

Data Sources

The primary data source for this study came from in-depth semi-structured individual and focus group interviews. All four participants in year one were individually interviewed in August of 2009 and four randomly selected participants from year two were interviewed July 2010. Due to the larger number of participants in year two we chose to conduct focus group interviews in July 2010 in order to triangulate individual interview data. All of the researchers were involved in individual interviews allowing us to discuss field notes and impressions. The individual interviews ranged from 38 to 53 minutes while the focus group interviews were 59 to 70 minutes in length. All interviews were recorded and

transcribed. The interview protocol for individuals and focus groups included questions related to participants' views of principal leadership, why they were interested in the principalship, and their interest in PLC, as well as asking about the participants' professional background. The following are examples of interview questions: When did you begin thinking about pursuing the principalship; what are your reasons for pursuing the principalship; how did you hear about the PLT principal preparation program; why did you select PLT; and what are the primary goals or emphasis of this program? Our data also included archival documents and results from in-depth semi-structured interviews with the CT Director and Project Director for PLT, to understand the organizational and philosophical features of the program. Documents included the RFP grant to the state, the CS web site, brochures, and newspaper advertisements.

Participants

Participants involved in the individual interviews had varied backgrounds with a majority entering education through non-traditional routes. Five of the eight were alternately certified as teachers (Gladys, Hope, Mille, Titus, and Peter) with teaching experience ranging from four to 20 years. All were secondary teachers with the exception of Ethel. Gladys, Chrystal, Hope, and Micca were certified in Language Arts, while Millie, Titus, Peter taught math. Three were currently teaching or had recently taught in a charter school or alternative school (Gladys, Titus, Paul). Three held advanced degrees: Chrystal a master's degree in education, Millie a master's in business, and Titus a PhD in educational technology. Millie had already obtained principal certification and had chosen to participate in PLT in order to have a better possibility of obtaining a principal position. Three, Millie, Micca, and Paul, held leadership positions in their schools, curriculum specialist, literacy coach, and dean of students. Five, had been employed in other sectors before becoming teachers (Hope, Millie, Titus, Micca, Peter), including news reporter, chemist, food service management, factory worker, and accountant.

Several of the 14 remaining focus group participants also volunteered background information. Two individuals were already principals of charter schools, Matt and David but did not have certification, while Betty was an assistant principal without certification. Three additional participants had master degrees and certification in school administration (Deedra, Tabatha, and Phoenix), yet had no administrative position. Six participants held bachelors or master's degrees in business and had worked in the private sector before moving to education (Mark, Rita, Betty, Frank, Zack, Ellen). At least three of the focus group participants had received their teaching certification alternatively (Mark, Rita, Zack).

Analysis

As suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), our analysis of participant interviews began by inductively coding words and word phrases related to participant's decision to pursue the principalship or to choose PLT. Using Atlas-Ti 6, we also added an identifier indicating whether the specific code instance was connected to pursuing the principalship or PLT. Using a constant comparison approach (Charmaz, 2006), the researchers consolidated individual codes into categories and then consolidated and organized further

to themes. These themes represent factors that had an impact on aspiring principals' choice to pursue the principalship and PLT. Once factors (themes) were identified, the researchers independently compared them to the dimensions of the Begley et al. (1990) choice-anticipatory socialization framework. The researchers then met, and through consensus identified which factors corresponded to each dimension. By specially identifying which codes corresponded to pursuing the principalship or choosing PLT, we were then able to connect which of the dimensions within the Begley et al. framework had the greater influence in either pursuing the principalship or PLT (Table 3).

Table 3
Themes and Coding Instances

Themes	Codes	Code Instances Related to PLT	Code Instances Related to Interest in Principalship.
View of Self	Change agent/reformer, Leader (teacher/administration), Alternative view of education, Business/education comparisons	0	39
Program Features and Structures	Cohort/Network, Internship/support, Mentor, Summer residency, Don't have Master's degree, Get a Job	52	1
Program Philosophy	Data Driven, Entrepreneurial, Innovation, Business Model, RLRP beliefs and values, Models of leadership, Instructional methods/curriculum	63	6
Timing and Opportunity	Timing and opportunity, Certification, Board with Teaching, Recruitment Tools	30	19
Influential People	Principals, Colleagues, Family	1	30
Making a Bigger Difference	Bigger impact, Dissatisfaction Traditional Schools, Ineffective Teachers, Ineffective Principals/could Do It better, Student achievement, Models of leadership, Lack of innovation	4	49

FINDINGS

We identified 6 factors (themes) representing participants' reasons for pursuing the principalship and choosing PLT. When examining why participants chose the principalship, our analysis yielded four factors across three dimensions of the socialization framework (Table 4). In determining what influenced participants' choice of PLT, three factors emerged in two dimensions within the socialization framework (Table 4). Participant choice to pursue the principalship and PLT overlapped in only one factor within one dimension – timing and opportunity within the internal processes dimension (Table 4).

Table 4

Factors within Dimensions for Choosing the Principalship and PLT

	Internal Processes	Relational	Organizational/ contextual	Image of the Role
Interest in Administration	View of Self Timing and Opportunity	Influential People		Bigger Effect
Interest in PLT	Timing and Opportunity		Program Features Perceived Program Philosophy	

Factors Influencing Pursuit of Principalship

The four factors associated with why participants chose the principalship – view of self, timing and opportunity, influential people, bigger differences on educational outcomes – correspond to three dimensions of the framework. The three dimensions were – internal processes, influential relationships, and image of the role of the principalship. The participants’ responses, representing factors that led to these findings, are presented by their connection to the dimension outlined in the Bagley et al. (1990) framework.

Factors associated with the internal processes dimension. The values and cognitive process of the participants suggested that two socializing factors influenced their desire to pursue the principalship: (1) perceptions of themselves based on experiences (view of self), and (2) the timing and opportunities that presented themselves related to the principalship. Within these factors, participants expressed specific examples that underscored how these influences connect to the dimension.

View of Self. Most of the participants in this study came to education as a career through non-traditional routes. Non-educational career backgrounds seemed to influence the participants’ view of themselves in relationship to the educational setting and leadership within the educational setting. When asked why they chose to pursue the principalship, individuals frequently compared their experiences outside education with the issues that occurred inside schools. Millie, who was a cohort two participant, with alternate teacher certification, a master’s degree in leadership, and 10 years’ experience as a chemist, typified this interaction of past career experiences and view of self with respect to leadership in her individual interview:

I have somewhat of a business mindset and the background with a very strong company. When I look at problems, I think I’m good at understanding what the problem is, not assuming that the symptom is the problem; but, not only that, realizing that a lot of times this out-of-the-box thinking is how to solve the problem. And that’s just something that comes out natural for me. I’m not usually the one who says we can’t do something...

The notion of connecting prior career experiences with leadership outside of education into their decisions to become principals permeated responses by the participants.

Millie's quote also underscores how these individuals' perceptions of their personal characteristics influenced their decisions to pursue the principalship. Without exception, each individual expresses their view of self as an "out-of-the box" thinker, "reformer," or "innovator." Most also indicated their need for a challenge in their work. In her response to why she was pursuing the principalship Hope, an alternately certified teacher in cohort one with several years' experience as a news reported stated:

So I feel as an agent of change... when education takes its leap, I want to be a part of it. I want to have my hands in it. I want to say, I want to be able to say, 'I remember when' and 'Look how far we've come.' I want to be a part of that. I think that's so important...

And I don't [go] for anything that's too easy. If it's not a challenge to meet then I won't continue, ya know, but this [the principalship] this is truly a challenge in every aspect of the word challenged. It's a challenge and I love it, I do.

This view of self as a forward thinking, reform minded individual was a foundational factor in these participants' expressions of why they sought the principalship.

In conjunction with both prior career experience and a reform-minded view of self, these participants also indicated that prior successful leadership experiences in the school was a factor in cognitively thinking about the principalship as a career choice. All participants viewed themselves as leaders in the school; four held assistant principal and principal positions while pursuing their certification with PLT (state does not require certification for the charter or private school principalship). Comments by Ethel, a participant in the first cohort with traditional training and 20 years teaching experience, represented how heavy involvement as a teacher leader influenced her decision to seek the principalship.

I was basically an assistant principal.... I did the schedules for the school – computer lab, PE, library, guidance – I came up with the schedule. With the EduSoft testing that was going on, I was the EduSoft coordinator. I was on the technology [team], I was a teacher trainer. Lincoln District has a program to where our teachers would go in to be trained and our responsibility was to go back and train the staff and that was me.

From Ethel's perspective, the logical step in her evolutions was to pursue the principalship through obtaining her certification. Even for those who already held principal positions, prior informal leadership experiences and formal roles in school leadership influenced their pursuit of the principalship.

Timing factor. While viewing themselves as leaders in the schools was a precipitating factor in pursuing the principalship, the circumstances of participants' lives also played a role in their pursuit of the principalship. Personal life changes, such as family, were factors for some. Rita, who held a master's degree in business, came to education alternatively in order to accommodate young children and then explained in the focus group interview:

My youngest child just graduated from high school... I feel like I have the time to really devote to a school because I think when you take on that leadership role at the school it is very time consuming and I needed to be in a position in my life where I felt I could give it the time that it's going to need and I think it's the perfect time for me right now.

Beyond personal circumstances there was a sense that the time was right to make a career change. Gladys, a member of cohort one who was an alternately certified teacher working in a charter school, had been teaching and working with new teachers, and although she enjoyed teaching and the work with other teachers, she felt it was time to focus on teaching or move to a formal administrative position. She stated, "So, after doing that a couple years [training new teachers] I thought I either need to focus on the outside of the classroom stuff or the classroom stuff." Hope, on the other hand, was definitely looking for something beyond the routine of the classroom. "That was six years ago. I felt stagnated and I felt... I could see progress in my students, my test scores were going up every year which was great, but now what?"

For those who already served in official leadership positions, the time was right to formalize their leadership by obtaining certification. Matt, a former Teach for America teacher, member of the second cohort, and the principal of a charter school, had set a goal to attain certification, but had not pursued it because of past workloads. In the focus group interview, Matt stated:

We started a school two years ago. So it's very much, it's been in start-up mode, adding new grades, constantly hiring, constantly refining our practices. ... I'm at a point now that I can afford to give it [certification] that kind of attention.

Timing and opportunity related to personnel circumstances, career change, and current career circumstances all factored into participants decisions to pursue the principalship and certification.

Factor associated with the relational dimension: Influential people. As part of their anticipatory socialization, relationships played a role in these participants' pursuit of the principalship. Each aspiring principal was influenced to pursue the principalship by at least one person, a practicing principal, spouse, mother, colleagues, or someone they viewed as a teacher-leader. In particular, participants' principals emerged as an influential person in both the quantity of responses and the quality of their influence. For most participants a direct interaction with the principal was either the precipitating or solidifying experience in the pursuit of the principalship. For Amy, a member of cohort two and a teacher leader in her school, an interaction with her principal was the initiating experience. She stated:

I'll be honest, my principal and assistant principal kind of talked to me and asked me to look into going into administration. ... they were the ones that said, "Hey look, this is something in you," because I was classroom teacher but I was doing other things outside the classroom. They said, "Why don't you look into making that a broader picture for yourself?"

Most of the participants had the experience of being “recruited” by their administration. For others, however, principals were influential, but not directly or positively as noted by Chrystal, a member of cohort one and a traditionally trained secondary language arts teacher with six years’ experience,

... seeing my principal. He was just this laissez-faire, so lackadaisical, just too laid back. And he didn’t have too many expectations for anything. I see people who are leading and they’re idiots. Like, ‘Gosh, if that was me’ or ‘If I was up there, I would use this’. I would use that moment to decide to do this [principalship].

Although a harsh statement, the principal was a definite influence in Chrystal’s pursuit of the principalship. All of the participants provided a story or affirmation about how a principal had been a positive or negative role model and influenced their decision to pursue the principalship.

Beyond the principal, encouragement and expressions of support by others concerning the participant’s ability to lead seemed to have an impact on their decisions to pursue administration. Deedra, a member of cohort two who already held an administrative endorsement, expressed how colleagues impacted her decision to move forward with administrative certification.

I had a ranking teacher that recognized my ability to oversee an afterschool program and the rapport I had with the parents and the relationship I had with the kids and she suggested that I should pursue it or look into it and at the time I was kind of reserved on it, but as the years progressed I said, “Well maybe I should give it a shot.”

Although each participant acknowledged colleagues as influencing their pursuit of the principalship, several also indicated family and friends impacted their decisions by encouraging them to pursue the principalship.

Factor associated with the image of the role of the principal dimension: Making a bigger difference. The participants in our investigation wanted to “make a difference.” They wanted to make a difference, however, in a broader context. The participants wanted to extend their influence beyond their classroom and viewed the principalship as a means to do so. In the Bagley et al. (1990) study, the factor ‘making a difference’ was associated with the organizational/contextual dimension. Our findings, however, would suggest ‘making a bigger difference’ is more appropriately associated with the image of the role of the principal. In other words, these participants saw the principalship as ‘making a bigger difference’ than teaching and they believed they had the requisite background to effectively master the principalship. The nuance between connecting this factor to internal processes, organizational/contextual, and image of the role of the principalship hinges on participants’ perception of the principalship as a role that has a more global effect on students and education. A passage by Gladys outlined this understanding:

I realized that by being a principal I can affect the whole student body. I can help the kids and teachers to be better and that's the only way that you'll get a successful school. Everybody has to do their part and as a principal I have the opportunity to do that. I'll miss the classroom but in the end I'm affecting more people. I'm affecting everyone in some way.

Mark, a charter school principal in cohort two, discusses this more global impact in terms of change.

The leader of the school has to drive that and as teachers none of us were able to drive the type of change and impact... an overwhelming number of students. We could create change in our own classrooms-and little bits and pieces of that are going to be picked up on by other teachers-but until you're in a position of influence like school leadership you can't necessarily require it, require the change that needs to be made to have children to have the success that we know they can have.

The participants in this study certainly valued making a difference. These aspiring principals were socialized to view the principalship as a means to extend their desire to make a difference to a larger context, placing this factor in the image of the role of the principal dimension.

Factors Influencing Choice of PLT

Three socializing factors impacted participants' choice of PLT – timing and opportunity, program features, and program philosophy. These three factors fell within two dimensions. Timing and opportunity, as with the choice to pursue the principalship, was an influential factor connected to internal processes. Program features and program philosophy were important anticipatory socialization factors associated with organizational/contextual aspects of the program.

Factor associated with internal processes dimension: Timing and Opportunity. Timing and opportunity had an impact on participants' choice of PLT, albeit a less prominent impact than in their pursuit of the principalship. Although most participants had made the decision to pursue the principal certification, it was not until they gained information about PLT that they acted upon those decisions. The interactions of life and career issues with the introduction of the program seemed to come right at the time when participants were ready to move forward as indicated by Ellen, a member of cohort two. When asked in the focus group interview why members chose to participate in PLT she replied,

Actually, several factors that just all aligned at the same time. The program-finding out about the program, having an administrator who is retiring and felt like that I could move into her position, which I wanted; with the timeliness of the program it just all... all things just locked into place at the right time.

Hope, the former reporter in cohort one, affirms the timeliness of obtaining information

about PLT from her principal, stating, “I read just bits and pieces and I became intrigued and I jumped in.... Yes, [PLT] pushed me over the edge.”

The timing between thinking about the principalship and the awareness of PLT seemed to be the right mix for most of these participants to become involved with PLT. The cognitive processes these aspiring principals experienced in their decisions to choose PLT, however, are difficult to separate from the organizational features of PLT that moved them to action. Timing in choosing PLT, therefore, needs to be explored in relationship to organizational/contextual features of PLT.

Factors associated with organizational/contextual dimension. The interaction of specific PLT program features and the PLT focused message of innovation and change seemed to move these aspiring principals to choose PLT for their certification. Participants discussed program features such as recruitment, length of the program, the internship, and not having to pursue a graduate degree as important in their decisions to pursue PLT. The focus on business principles in education and innovations, such as charter schools, and the PLT curriculum also influenced participants’ choice to pursue PLT. The following passages highlight these interactions.

Program feature factor. PLT placed an emphasis on recruitment both in their application to the state and in their hiring practices. With the exceptions of two interviewees, participants were not looking specifically at an alternative program for certification, let alone PLT. For all participants, however, recruitment procedures and materials created the initial interest that contributed to participation in PLT as expressed by Matt, the charter principal, “I actually just got an email about it and the more I looked into it the more interested I was. The email came through a Teach for America just, like, blast.” There was no dominate forms of recruitment that lead to interest in PLT, but the variety and scope of the recruitment was clearly evident in our data, and was a contributing factor in participation in PLT.

Once initially exposed to PLT through recruitment procedures, specific program features were strong factors for PLT participant as noted by the volume of codes related to this factor (Table 3). Specifically, the compressed summer coursework, a year-long residency with promised support and a potential paid internship, continued support after program completion, and not having to obtain a master’s degree were all factors in these individuals’ choice of PLT.

The compressed time frame of course work in the summer was attractive to all the participants as they perceived it allowed for family and work obligations. With and explanation echoed by other participants, Sally, a 17 year traditionally trained teacher in the second cohort, explained in the focus group interview why the summer coursework was a key programmatic feature in her decision to pursue PLT as her certification program, “The summer, going to the summer, not spending hours in night school for years if you’re having small children; it just works out well for my family’s sake as well as mine.” Participants also expressed that not having to attend courses while working fulltime during the school year was attractive. Matt expresses this perception, “I wouldn’t have to be doing a nightly thing while also working in the school during the school year; I’ve always just wanted to focus on the kids when it’s time to focus in the kids.” Beyond the summer course work, participants found the 14 month compressed time frame for certification attractive. Gladys, the charter language arts teacher, tied this program feature with the internal process of *timing and opportunity*. “So I felt like it was almost destiny

for me to be in the program because I thought like 14 months and I could become a principal.” Ellen, a member of cohort two, captured the participants’ view that the 14 month program was easier and more doable, “...it won’t be forever, it’s just a short amount of time: five weeks this summer, you know, a few nights in the fall and spring, and then five weeks next summer and then it will be over.”

Participants also found the support for the full time internship attractive. The possibility of a paid administrative internship for participants was attractive, although the second cohort was only guaranteed a position that encompassed administrative tasks. All, however, were guaranteed a full-time position of some sort, which participants viewed as being paid to participant in the program or the program not interfering with their full time work. Micca, an individual interviewee from the cohort two who already had principal certification, saw the potential for being paid an administrative salary while interning as a positive in comparison to other programs. “A lot of traditional internships, I knew an assistant principal who was doing an internship, they got paid a teaching salary, whereas if I go into an administrative position in PLT I’m going to get that administrative salary.” More importantly than the potential administrative pay was the perception that participants would actually engage in the role of an administrator and would garner school based support from program mentors while doing so. Chrystal, who already had a master degree, was particularly enamored with getting actual administrative experience. “For PLT, it was more like the hands-on training. I liked the internship portion of it that I would actually get to intern at a school as the particular role that I was trying to become.” All participants viewed the mentorship given by PLT staff during the internship and for the two additional years beyond certification as a unique and important PLT program feature that helped them decide to participant in the program. As an example, when asked why she chose PLT as her certification program Sally stated, “I like the internship with the support and the continued support two years after you finish the program; so I like the idea of not being thrown in the situation and ‘sink or swim,’ but they offer support, ongoing.”

For several of the participants not having to pursue a master’s degree was an enticing program feature. Traditional certification programs required participants to obtain a master’s degree and other alternative certification programs required candidates to have a master’s degree. Some participants who already held master’s degree, and in the case of Titus a PhD in educational research, additional degrees were not seen as valuable. For those without advanced degrees, pursuing a master’s degree were perceived as requiring more time and commitment than would occur with PLT, as reflected in the following statement by Ethel, a member of cohort one and longtime teacher with traditional training, “And then the kids at home. I didn’t think I could pursue a master’s degree at this time.”

Innovation and change. Recruitment and program features of PLT, in conjunction with the timing of the program in the lives of the participant, were important in participants’ decisions to apply to PLT; however, organizational and program philosophy appeared to be more important factors in choosing PLT. Particularly important was the view that the program curriculum was innovative, based on change, and focused on an entrepreneurial-business model. When asked why she chose PLT, Sally, in the focus group interview, emphatically stated, “PLT, is training leaders-or educational leaders-to think outside of the box when it comes to educating children!”

Micca, a participant with principal certification and eight years teaching experience in a high needs middle school, also represented how participants viewed the PLT philosophy and why she selected the program, “For change. For change. PLT is, it’s all about change, it’s about innovation.” All participants, at some point in the interviews, expressed a sense that public schooling was floundering and PLT offered a curriculum that would help them develop necessary skills to lead change. Chrystal, a traditionally trained teacher in the first cohort reflected this connection in the following comment, “I felt like there was something else that needed to be done [in education]. Something needs to come along... you have [in PLT] what I’m looking for which is change and to enter the leadership realm.” Titus, a member of the second cohort and who came to education after 15 years in private industry with a PhD, represented most participants as they joined their view of self as an educational reformer and PLTs curriculum focus on change, “I’ve always considered myself an educational reformer and when I found this program it seemed that was their major drive was to reform education.” Hope, from the first cohort, further denotes this blending of self with the program philosophy,

We have to change and we have to be willing to change... I don’t think I was every really traditional, EVER... so it was not hard for me to become attached to this program and the mission of PLT and CT. It was really easy for me.

Without exceptions, participants commented on how PLT’s focus on changing education was important in their selection of the program.

The focus on change was operationalized for participants through the leadership model promoted by PLT. Educational entrepreneurialism was an undergirding model of leadership of PLT, which participants viewed as an innovative merging of educational and business philosophy. Gladys enthusiastically expressed PLT’s philosophy and her thoughts on why she chose PLT. “[PLT] get[s] principals who have business or entrepreneurial spirit or knowledge plus the educational piece to get them into underperforming schools to help turn those schools around ...” For several of the participants, who came to education with a background in business, the model was particularly appealing, as noted by Millie, a member the second cohort, who had a master’s degree in business:

Edu-preneur; it basically a marriage of business and education and I thought, “I have a really good business background.” And after reading what they’re looking at, they’re looking at running your schools like a business, looking at the data, looking at all the things that I’m accustomed to doing in a business world that I just thought it would be a good fit.

For the participants in this study, PLT seemed to provide an innovative program that could meet their view of themselves as change agents – a factor in their choice to pursue the principalship and associated with the internal processes dimension of the Begley et al. (1990) framework.

DISCUSSION

At first glance, there appears to be little overlap among factors derived from our coding, dimensions of the Begley et al. (1990) choice-anticipatory socializing framework, and participants' decisions to pursue the principal certification and to do so through PLT. However, an interaction among the factors and dimensions influencing participants' decisions surfaced. Timing and the influence of others were factors influencing participants to pursue the principalship. Due to personal experience and circumstance the participants felt 'ready' to move to something different. The appearance of PLT recruiting efforts at the same time participants were 'ready' to move affected their choice to pursue PLT for certification. Recruitment that highlighted specific program features, such as an abbreviated 14-month program, a residency or full time internship, and not having to pursue a master's degree also enticed participant.

Yet, it was the intersection of several dimensions of the Begley et al. (1990) framework that underscored the importance of examining the reasons for pursuing the principalship in relationship to selecting this alternative program. From an internal processing dimension, when considering the principalship, participants perceived themselves as change agents within a system that needed transformation. They viewed the principal's role as the school change agent, with the ability to affect reform in a more global fashion. As participants considered the principalship and certification these two dimensions, view of self as a reformer within the internal processes dimension and image of the role of the principal as change agent, intersected with PLT's proposed curriculum and philosophy of innovation, change, and an entrepreneurial model of leadership. Given the choice of other certification programs with the same structural features, such as extended support and not requiring a master's degree, would these aspiring principals have chosen a program grounded in traditional principal leadership philosophies instead of PLT? Perhaps, but these findings provided indications that matching participants' internal processes, their image of the principalship, and PLT's organizational philosophy focused on innovation and reform combined to be a major collective influence in the selection of this program by these aspiring principals.

This intersection of dimensions in aspiring principals' decisions to pursue the principalship and choice of program outlined in our study substantially supported the conclusions of Begley et al. (1990). For Begley and colleagues internal processes, relational, and organizational/contextual features were seen as important by the participants, first in their choice to pursue the principalship and second to engage in a specific certification program. The only major variation in our findings is our classification of making a bigger difference in educational outcomes within the image of the role of the principal rather than within the organizational/contextual aspects of the program. As with Begley et al., we postulate that the interaction of factors within specific dimensions influenced individuals to the principalship and to specific programs. These findings need to be considered in the recruitment process of aspiring principals.

Though we cannot generalize our findings beyond these two cohorts in this specific alternative certification program, our findings in conjunction with Begley et al. (1990) can provide grounding for further questions. For our participants, their attraction to a specific program seemed to coincide with their internal processes, i.e., cognition and values and the features and philosophy of a particular program. We wonder, does this

relationship hold true with other aspiring principals and other programs? If so, can traditional and alternative school leadership providers develop program features and curriculum that attract a specific type of aspiring principal? There has been much discussion in the school leadership literature about attracting and selecting the best and the brightest to the principalship, individuals capable of providing leadership for change and improved student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, & Foleno, 2001; Southern Regional Education Board, 2007). If the goal is to attract change agents to the principalship, do both traditional and alternate certification programs need to align organizational features and curricula toward change in order to attract individuals enamored with it? On the other hand, the very nature of many alternative preparation programs, which highlight alternative school structures and models of leadership, may more organically attract individuals who perceive themselves as agents of change. From a policy perspective, there is a current push to encourage both alternative school structures, such as charter schools and alternative preparation programs to support these structures (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2008). Our findings indicate that PLT seemed to attract aspiring principals from more alternative educational backgrounds with an eye on change and an interest in alternative principal practices and school structures. However, as Begley et al. and our findings also indicate, recruiting and various program features, such as full-time internships, also provided impetus to choose certification programs. Our investigation only opens the door for further study in these areas of recruitment and choice of alternative principal preparation.

There were other issues related to our study that invite further investigation, one of which is the use of Van Maanen's (1977) choice-anticipatory socialization theory as a theoretical lens. Our findings indicated participants, indeed, had engaged in internal and external process that led them to acquire social knowledge as it related to the principalship and PLT as an organizational entity, albeit not as a full participant, but in an anticipatory fashion. We suggest further examinations employing early stage socialization may shed a greater light on issues of recruitment of aspiring principals.

Future studies may also fine tune Bagley and colleague's (1990) model as a means to understand early stage principal organizational socialization. As noted in this paper, we struggled with grouping factors within the four dimensions of this model. Of particular difficulty was determining if participant's desire to make a greater difference in educational outcomes fell within the internal processing dimension or the image of the principalship dimension. For Begley et al. this factor was categorized within the organizational/contextual dimension. Also, in some ways, merging factors such as timing and PLT program features to specific dimensions seemed artificial because the factors within themes were so intertwined. Even with these issues, we found Begley's framework helpful in presenting a cohesive picture of factors that influenced aspiring principal's pursuit of the principalship and PLT as a program. This framework with its specific dimensions helped us view participants' perceptions more comprehensively than a simple list of influential socializing factors. Also, the framework helped us compare previous work, which included lists of factors from survey methodology, with the information provided by participants within an interview protocol. We suggest this framework, through further use and refinement, may provide a platform to compare choice-anticipatory socialization of aspiring principals and how dimensions of socialization may affect recruitment and participation in alternative and traditional preparation programs.

CONCLUSIONS

Using Van Maanen's (1977) organizational socialization choice-anticipatory theoretical lens and Begley and colleagues' (1990) framework, we examined how socializing factors influenced participants' decision to pursue the principalship and choice to engage in an alternate certification program, PLT. Factors that influenced participants to pursue the principalship fell within internal processing, relational, and image of the role of the principal dimensions of Bagley's socialization framework. Internal processing factors included participants' perceptions of themselves as reform minded change agents and feelings that the timing both personally and professional were right to pursue the principalship. Relational factors encompassed the influence of colleagues, particularly principals. Colleagues encouraged pursuit of the principalship or, as was the case with the principal, acted as a positive or negative role model. A negative principal model influenced participants to move to administration to correct perceived poor practice. This perception of being able to do administration better than predecessors coincided with a view of the participants that they could make a bigger difference in the lives of students by pursuing the principalship. They viewed the principalship as a vehicle to this end, which placed this factor, 'making a bigger difference', in the image of the role of the principal dimension of the Begley et al. framework.

The factors influencing participants to choose the alternative preparation program also included timing of an opportunity (internal processing), but more influentially were a part of the organizational/contextual dimension of the Bagley et al (1990) model, i.e., specific program features and philosophy. The influential program features were a strong recruitment process, condensed course work and program duration, a potential full-time paid internship, promised mentor support post program completion, and the awarding of an administrative certificate without having to pursue a master's degree. Participants of PLT were equally influenced by the program's philosophical emphasis on innovation and change. They were specifically influenced by the emphasis of PLT on social entrepreneurship, the model of leadership highlighted by the program.

A key finding from this study is the intersection of choice-anticipatory socializing factors related to participants' decisions to pursue the principalship and their choice to pursue an alternative preparation programs. Internal processes related to seeing themselves as change agents, their image of the role of the principal as a vehicle for impacting educational outcomes, and the possibility of the organizational/contextual philosophy of PLT providing the innovative knowledge and experiences needed to create change that could positively impact educational outcomes appeared to intersect. This intersection had a major impact in how these aspiring principals came to pursue this alternate principal preparation program.

Although this study examined a few participants in one alternative principal program, it raises questions about practice and policy. If aspiring principals are attracted to the principalship and preparation programs based on internal processes, supportive relationships, their image of the role of the principalship, and organizational/contextual features of the program, can this knowledge be used to structure programs to better recruit highly capable candidates? With the current policy push for school innovation and change and the educational leadership literature advocating continuous school improvement, what kinds of certification programs attract individuals capable and willing

to take on these challenges? Are aspiring principals who are both enamored with and willing to engage in change more readily attracted to alternative preparation programs focused on innovation and models of leadership for alternative school structures, such as charter schools? While our study does not answer these questions, it does provide a departure point and framework for further investigation.

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