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These manuscripts have been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school leadership and K-12 education.

From the Editors

As you all are well aware, this year has been full of unprecedented challenges for educators around the world, as well as the organizations that serve them. At *Educational Leadership Review*, some of those challenges have resulted in the delay of our Fall 2020 issue. Now technically, it is still Fall, but we know that many of you are used to it being available by the end of October or early November. We also know that some of our contributors were notified several months ago of their manuscript's acceptance and have been patiently waiting for this issue to finally get published. So, on behalf of the editorial staff, thank you to all our faithful readers and your enduring patience, and to all the authors for your vitally important contributions. We also want to thank you for your patience as we worked diligently to get your manuscripts reviewed and this issue published.

While we are expressing gratitude, we would be remiss to not thank our reviewers who, in addition to the numerous, unanticipated changes they were experiencing in their workflow due to COVID, gave sacrificially of their time and talents to serve *ELR*. We had several calls for new reviewers throughout the year and greatly appreciate all who responded. Likewise, we are indebted to those of you who have faithfully served as reviewers throughout the years, often accepting requests to serve as a reviewer on multiple manuscripts or for multiple *ICPEL* journals. No doubt, you are essential to the success of this journal.

Another individual who deserves our gratitude is Dr. Brad Bizzell, the ICPEL director of publications. In addition to his fulltime job leading an educational leadership program, he also does an outstanding job in publishing books for *ICPEL*, as well as handling all the final formatting aspects of *ELR* and getting the final product published online.

Last, but certainly not least, I (Ken) want to thank my invaluable assistant editors, without whom you would be waiting until sometime in the middle of 2022 to see this issue get published. Dr. Sandra Harris and Dr. Casey Brown have served this journal faithfully for several years, and their commitment to you and to this journal are unmatched. They dedicated countless hours to relentlessly securing reviewers and tracking manuscripts through the reviewing and revision process, to get us to this point. What an incredible gift they are to our authors and all who enjoy reading *ELR*.

Despite the global pandemic, we had a banner year for submissions to *ELR* and we know you, our readers, will find the research included in this issue well worth the wait! We hope you enjoy it and the ongoing conversations about educational leadership that the articles in this issue are sure to evoke.

In closing, we want those of you who are already preparing to submit manuscripts for the Fall 2021 issue to please make sure to adhere to the 7th edition of the APA manual. Thank you for considering us and we look forward to reading your work!

Sincerely,

J. Kenneth Young, Sandra Harris, & Casey Graham Brown
Editors, *Educational Leadership Review*

Growing Evidence of the Value of School Board Training

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The last three decades of board research has embarked on various aspects of school boards (Alsbury, 2008b; Delagardelle, 2008; Resnick & Bryant, 2010; Strauss, 2018) including characteristics of effective boards (Alsbury & Gore, 2015; Dervarics & O'Brien, 2016), importance of targeted school board trainings (Cook, 2014; Gann, 2015; Hess & Meeks, 2010; Plough, 2014; Pollard, 2012; Reimer, 2015; Weiss, Templeton, Thompson, & Tremont, 2014; Wilkins, 2015), boards and student achievement (Blasko, 2016; Brenner, Sullivan, & Dalton, 2002; Ikejiaku, 2000; Lorentzen, 2013; Peterson, 2000; Saatcioglu & Sargut, 2014; Shelton, 2010), board behaviors (Bradley, 2013; Choi, 2013; Gates, 2013; Gomez, 2013; Murray, 2013; Nava, 2013; Richter, 2013; Turley, 2013), and board professional development and grades (Gates, 2013; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Roberts & Sampson, 2011; Turley, 2013). Eadens, Schwanenberger, Clement, and Eadens (2015) found a positive relationship between participation in Arizona School Boards Association (ASBA) trainings and state rankings of school district performance/grades. The current study furthers that previous research three years later. Results indicated a statistically significant relationship between district (n=203) performance scores/grades and number of trainings governance team members attended during the 2017-18 school year. Essentially, higher attendance at ASBA trainings again was correlated with higher grades (Performance Ranked [4.0 to 0.0 / A to F]). Once again, the districts that had lower training attendance tended to have statistically significantly lower grades, $r_s = .168, p = .017$. Given this repeated relationship between training participation rates and performance scores/grade rankings, it is evident that Arizona districts' which desire to improve student academic achievement should commit to ensuring regular participation in trainings. While some

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districts may argue against devoting the financial resources to pay for conference registration fees, lodging, and travel, in even the smallest of districts, this expense would represent a fraction of a percent of the district's operating budget. Given the payoff of higher student achievement potential, it appears that the benefits would far outweigh the minimal cost in time and funding. Recommendations included school boards schedule annual planning meetings, calendar of trainings available, engage members in committing to meaningful participation in school board trainings, establishing a practice of assigning a mentor to each new board member to accompany to their first training events. Future research recommendations included developing a deeper understanding of the differences in board training and actions in districts that are making achievement gains versus those that are not. Such research could provide rich insights into the complex and vast dynamics of the superintendent-board governance relationship and the outcomes of participation in trainings.

Keywords: *Governance, School Board, District Grades, Leadership, Education.*

Ford and Ihrke (2016) operationalized U.S. school board best practices, *The Key Works of School Boards*, originated by the National School Boards Association, and found more support for the ideas that *"*school board governance behaviors are linked to district-level academic outcomes" (p. 87) and "school board governance does affect district performance" (p. 93). This growing body of evidence continues to offer measurable value to school board member training. The current study is a continuation of research previously completed by Eadens, Schwanenberger, Clement, and Eadens (2015). That study also found a significant positive relationship between participation in Arizona School Boards Association (ASBA) training opportunities and state rankings of school district performance. In short, school districts in Arizona that sent board members to ASBA sponsored training sessions in 2014 received higher effectiveness ratings, *grades*, as determined by the Arizona Department of Education. This current study updates prior research and provides current data that further substantiates findings from the original 2015 study.

Background, Literature, and Theory

Ansell and Torfing (2016) professed in their *Handbook on theories of governance*, that "there is no single *theory* of governance, but rather many overlapping theoretical discussions and debates" (p. 2). They well defined governance and discussed "the governance debate in Western liberal democracies" and claimed "governance theory is also a particularly interdisciplinary endeavor-with roots in political science, public administration, sociology, economics and law and with branches that extent into many applied fields" (p. 2). Their ideas of theories of governance seem to indicate that a new paradigm has arisen in governance and has reoriented practitioners (Ansell & Torfing, 2016). The myriad of governance theories, philosophies, concepts, and approaches today are diverse, but we can all agree that there is much more work needed to better prepare board members to be highly effective at school governance. While theories help us to try to conceptualize, reality may be different in each case depending on political and social structures of each district.

In fact, many of the efforts to reform U.S. public schools over the last three decades have focused on issues related to governance of schools. Some reflected an effort to push authority down to individual schools through site-based management (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998), and some reflected a desire to *eliminate the middleman* (Finn, 1991) and *undermine the public's ability to govern its schools* (Strauss, 2018). Lashway (2002) studies schools and also "suggest that board actions are a key part of a *culture of improvement"* (p, 3). At that same time, Land (2002) asserted that "some critics of current educational governance have charged that school boards are anachronistic and/or chronically ineffective and have advocated for their demise" (p. 245). While there can be little doubt that state and federal governments today heavily influence the direction of public education, local school boards continue to play a significant role in linking schools to local communities. Resnick and Bryant (2010) argued that "the responsibility for drawing community and business leaders, parents, civic groups, and the public into the schools falls squarely on the shoulders of the local school board" (p. 14). In fact, some characteristics of districts influences student achievement (Leithwood & Azah, 2017).

While many opinions based on experience and observation have been offered regarding the characteristics of effective school boards, there has been insufficient consistent empirical research on school board effectiveness as it relates to student achievement. Board's very distance from the classroom calls into question the influence that they might have over teaching and

learning. It is important to recognize, however, that "While by their nature school boards are removed from the day-to-day work of teaching and learning, they control the conditions allowing successful teaching and learning to occur throughout the system" (Delagardelle, 2008, p. 192). Politically-motivated actions of board members impacting turnover of key leaders has been established as a factor in student achievement (Alsbury, 2008b).

Although the lists of characteristics of effective boards can vary, the qualities articulated by Dervarics and O'Brien (2016), citing Delagardelle (2008), capture the overarching responsibilities:

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision.
2. Effective boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and about the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.
3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more focused on policies to improve student achievement.
4. Effective boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.
5. Effective school boards are data savvy: They embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals (pp. 10–12).

These characteristics may set unreasonably high expectations for board members who may have little or no training to perform these tasks. In an extensive review of school board meetings, Lee and Eadens (2014) found that boards in low-performing districts were prone to exhibit practices including disorderliness, spending less time on issues related to student achievement, not listening respectfully, and being focused on personal agendas rather than the policies of the district. It is reasonable to conclude that shortcomings such as these may be diminished through training and support for board members and through the influence of school board presidents and school superintendents. This furthers the importance and benefits of targeted school board trainings (Gann, 2015; Hess & Meeks, 2010; Plough, 2014; Reimer, 2015; Weiss, Templeton, Thompson, & Tremont, 2014; Wilkins, 2015). Brenner and colleagues concluded correctly when they stated that, "Board members cannot monitor what they do not understand" (Brenner et al., 2002, p. iv).

Walser's (2009) descriptions of sixteen school boards across the U.S. identified as high-functioning help to illustrate the characteristics that distinguish boards that are perceived as effective. Walser noted,

> On the most basic level, members have to keep up with continually changing state and federal mandates and laws… They also need to keep up with promising initiatives to raise student achievement in and outside their district as well as continually evolving systems for monitoring data and engaging the community in school improvement. New board members especially need training in their roles and responsibilities and in laws pertaining to ethics and conflicts of interest (p. 73).

According to the National School Boards Association (Cook, 2014; Pollard, 2012), at least twenty U.S. states require some type of training for individuals elected to school boards. Like most states, Arizona imposes no training requirements for school board members, and mandates

minimal requirements for those who wish to serve on a school board. In order to serve on a school district governing board, board members must only be a resident for at least one year immediately prior to election, and be registered to vote. Some charter boards do not even require that much. In many cases, these minimum requirements could not be lower.

Both the National School Boards Association and state associations across the U.S. offer trainings to school board members. In some cases, superintendents undertake the responsibility to provide training and orientation to new board members. Such training generally encompasses topics such as board member responsibilities, governance, ethics, school finance, open meeting laws, communication with staff and members of the public, school law, and the law-making process.

It is important to note that individual board members have no legal authority when acting alone. Therefore, they carry out their duties as a board member only when acting in concert with their fellow elected members and professional staff. This implies that training should include a significant emphasis on strategies and behaviors to improve interpersonal relations and to increase open communication and collaboration.

As noted above, the relationship between board effectiveness and district performance has not been extensively examined. In fact, a team from the University of Texas at El Paso concluded a decade and a half ago that "Empirical evidence linking school board practices with high levels of student achievement is so scant that it is virtually non-existent" (Brenner, Sullivan, & Dalton, 2002, p. ii).

A study of 258 districts in New York revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between boards that use a *professional* policy-making style (as opposed to a *political* style) and student performance (Ikejiaku, 2000). Young found that board members saw no relationship between training intended to improve achievement and any discussions among the board members regarding student achievement (2011), even though other research has demonstrated that board members believe such training to be important (Pollard, 2012). In a survey of state directors of school boards associations, Roberts and Sampson (2011) found that states that have a statutory requirement for board professional development received an overall rating of B or C in the Education Week ratings of the states, while those states that did not require professional development received a rating of a C or a D.

Peterson (2000), analyzing data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (Ingels, Scott, Taylor, Owings, & Quinn, 1998), concluded that overly-intrusive school boards reduce student achievement by approximately 2%, in part through negative effects on school climate. Despite reaching these conclusions, Peterson argued that "Education is too important for society to abdicate democratic responsibility for our schools and leave decision-making to professionals who have their own interests and their own agencies" (2000, p. 62), and proposed training that could help board members to better understand the bounds of their authority and expertise.

A study of board and superintendent turnover in the state of Washington revealed that a statistically significant relationship exists between increasing school board member turnover and a decrease in student achievement (Alsbury, 2008a). This study also found a relationship between an increase in student achievement and low school board turnover in very small school districts.

Recent doctoral research carried out at the University of Southern California has produced findings that:

- School board training resulted in an increased focus on student achievement (Canal, 2013; Gogel, 2013);

- Board members are motivated to take part in such training by virtue of the culture of the district (Gates, 2013; Turley, 2013) and the accessibility of the training (Gates, 2013);
- Board members who receive specific training in governance are likely to exhibit behaviors reflecting good governance (Bradley, 2013; Choi, 2013; Gates, 2013; Gomez, 2013; Murray, 2013; Nava, 2013; Richter, 2013; Turley, 2013);

Holmen (2016) studied the relationship between ten different variables related to the "Balanced Governance®" (Alsbury & Gore, 2015) approach to school board leadership and overall effectiveness. He found that the odds of finding a high performing school district is nearly eight times greater in a school district with a board adhering to this model. He also concluded that Board actions in three key areas (advocacy focus, exercise of influence, and decision-making style) have the greatest potential for influence on student performance.

Lorentzen (2013) found a significant correlation between student achievement, as measured by proficiency scores on state criterion-referenced tests, and certain board actions identified via a board assessment tool available through the Washington State School Directors Association. A positive relationship was found between student performance and board actions including effective governance, setting high expectations for learning, creating conditions for success, holding staff accountable for students' learning expectations, and effectively engaging with the community. School boards that manage to effectively carry out tasks such as these lead those districts with the highest proficiency scores. Saatcioglu and Sargut (2014) purported that scores on eighth grade reading and mathematics assessments are highest in those districts where boards exhibit high levels of both *brokerage* (when members engage with others possessing new ideas and resources) and *closure* (when members engage with one another in an efficient and collaborative manner), and lowest in those districts where brokerage and closure are both low.

Although Shelton (2010) did not find a direct relationship between board members' actions and mathematics achievement, Shelton did find a relationship between superintendent turnover and mathematics achievement. He concluded that the actions of the board could indirectly influence the superintendent's actions by delivering chaos or stability through the Board's governance behaviors.

Blasko's (2016) research regarding *aligned* and *unaligned* boards and superintendents discovered, for the most part, no statistically significant relationship between the alignment of attitudes and beliefs and mathematics achievement. However, a statistically significant relationship was found between such an alignment in attitudes and beliefs and scores on an end-of-course mathematics assessment.

Attempts to find more recent empirical studies, journal articles, dissertations and other relevant sources in this particularly narrow focused area of research proved challenging. We recognize that the majority of references are not within the last five years. However, this is the current state of literature today and one of the purposes of this study is to aid in bringing the literature up to date. However, the investigations of governing board effectiveness, and the influence of governing boards on student outcomes, remain critically important areas of inquiry. As choice and privatization initiatives expand and gain taxpayer support and funding, research that reveals the effects of democratic governance on students can not only help to inform school boards and their associations, but also those who influence and make policy at state and federal levels.

Arizona A-F Accountability System

In 2016, via Senate Bill 1430, the Arizona legislature created a framework for the A-F letter grades system, which was ultimately developed and implemented by the state Board of Education. Today,

> Arizona Revised Statutes § 15-241 requires the Arizona Department of Education, subject to final adoption by the State Board of Education, to develop an annual achievement profile for every public school in the state based on an A through F scale" (https://azsbe.az.gov/f-school-letter-grades, 2018).

For some years, Arizona calculated school and district grades and for other years, it only gave school grades. According to the State Board of Education web site, the current system,

> gives parents a yardstick to compare schools. It gives school leaders a snapshot of where they are doing well and where they need to improve. It creates an incentive for the constant improvement that parents, taxpayers and state leaders expect from our public schools. (A-F Letter Grades | Arizona State Board of Education, 2018)

This system is intended to comply with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act. Schools' grades under the system reflect year-to-year student academic growth; proficiency on assessments in English language arts, math, and science; the proficiency and academic growth of English language learners, measures on indicators that an elementary student is ready for success in high school and that high school students are ready to succeed in a career or higher education; and high school graduation rates. Cut scores for each letter-grade ranking are established by the Arizona State Board of Education.

Purpose

Based on these studies, we can clearly see a pattern that school board behaviors and trainings indeed have an impact on district performance. Continuing in that vein, the sole purpose of this study is to replicate and further previous research completed by Eadens, Schwanenberger, Clement, and Eadens (2015) that found a positive relationship in 2014 between participation in Arizona School Boards Association (ASBA) trainings and state rankings of school district performance/grades. Just as this 2015 study found that districts that received higher effectiveness ratings were the districts that governance teams attended more ASBA trainings, we again hypothesize the same will be true three years later. This update of the prior research provides current data that further substantiates findings from the original study.

Research Question

This is the single research question that underlies this current study: Is there a relationship between the number of ASBA sponsored trainings that governance team members attended during the 2017-2018 school year and the district overall achievement grade?

Method

The researchers of this current study remain aware of the myriad of factors impacting school grades. However, that does not negate the importance of this study, nor its findings. This study was not designed to study every aspect of district grades, but rests its foci on specific

variables. Some of these include, but certainly not limited to, are: diverse demographics of students' socio-economic status, ages, ethnicities, genders; faculty, staff, administration, parents, business partners' demographics, experience, effectiveness, and education; and locations of the schools and communities in rural, urban, suburban locations in economically wealthy and poor areas with many and few businesses. There are a plethora other studies that unpack many of these variables in relation to school and district grades. Again, that is not the focus of this study. Based on the germane literature, although rich qualitative case studies and wide-reaching meta-analyses are both superb options for analyzing relationships of trainings to overall performance, and are highly encouraged, we decided here to quantitively examine this simple correlation between two factors (number of ASBA trainings attended) and (District Grades) as a foundation for beginning much further research. The justification of delimiting to these variables only, are within background provided.

Sample

Approval for this study was obtained initially from Northern Arizona University's Institutional Review Board, subsequently Arizona School Boards Association (ASBA) provided data including the number of ASBA sponsored trainings Arizona school districts sent their school board members and superintendents to during school year 2017-2018, including summer 2018. We separately researched each school's grade that same school year. Records from the Arizona School Boards Association indicate that very few charter school governing board members attend training sponsored by the Arizona School Boards Association. So, only district schools were included in this analysis. This meant that charter schools were excluded from this study.

For this school year, through the Arizona A-F Accountability System, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) was not required to produce district-wide rankings, as had been the case in previous years. Instead, only individual school grades were produced. In order to make district-wide comparisons, the mean of each district's individual school grades, computed on a 4.0 scale, were calculated to determine each district's overall grade. While not as accurate as a calculation taking into account each school's grade and size, this calculation yielded a reasonably accurate estimate of each district's relative performance.

The sample included only those districts with schools receiving letter grades under the Arizona A-F Accountability System. Some schools have too few students to assign a letter grade based on this system. For that reason, some districts were excluded from the analysis. Also, this analysis excluded accommodation and special districts, and only includes unified, union high school, and common school districts. Out of 227 Arizona school districts representing nearly 1,500 schools, 203 districts were included in this analysis.

Analysis and Results

The data was coded into Excel by training participation and scores for each district. District's grades (A to F grade scores) were categorized as follows: 2.59-4.00 (High-Performing), 1.50-2.49 (Moderately-Performing), and 0.00-1.49 (Low Performing). With the data available, it was challenging to run a robust analysis beyond frequency / percentage descriptives and correlation, nevertheless, SPSS version 24 was used to analyze the data after uploading grade and training data from Excel. An ANOVA was not possible because the data in a scatter plot, historically the best method to check for the linearity assumption, did not appear linear enough. While the Kruskal-

Wallis analysis, a non-parametric test, did indicate statistical significance (Table 1), the Ranks table showed that the numbers between each group were substantially different.

Table 1

Chi Square of Rank/Grade with ASBA Training Attendance

Chi-Square	6.372		Performance Rank / Grade	N	Mean
	2	Total Number Trainings	2.59 – 4.0	105	92.9
Asymp. Sig.	.041		1.50 – 2.49	65	103.98
			0.00 – 1.49	31	122.21
			Total	201	

Note. A. Kruskal Wallis Test. B. Grouping Variable: Performance Ranked

Alternatively, Spearman's Rho was used to examine any correlation. These results indicated a statistically significant relationship at the $p < .05$ level between district grade performance scores and number of trainings governance teams attended. Essentially, higher attendance at ASBA trainings (TOTAL Trainings) was correlated with higher Grades (Performance Ranked [4.0 to 0.0 / A to F]). The districts that had lower ASBA training attendance (TOTAL Trainings) tended to have statistically significantly lower Grades (Performance Ranked) / lower Grade rankings, $r_s = .168$, $p = .017$ (Table 2). The effect of this relationship is significant.

Table 2

Spearman's Rho Correlating Rank/Grade and ASBA Attendance

Correlations

			Performance Ranked	Rank Total Trainings
Spearman's rho	Performance Ranked	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.168*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.017
		N	201	201
	Rank Total Trainings	Correlation Coefficient	.168*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.000
		N	201	203

* Correlation significant at .05 level (2-tailed).

Concluding Implications for Practice and Future Research

Given the significant relationship between training participation rates and school grade score rankings, it is evident that districts which hope to improve student academic achievement must commit to ensuring regular participation in targeted professional development and such trainings. Despite the distance between the board room and the classroom, this study and similar studies (Lorentzen, 2013) indicate that Board training does make a difference practical significant for districts, schools, and students. While one could argue for countless other covariates that affect district grades, those were not the focus of this study, and in no way reduces the significance of the findings of this study. Among the tremendous responsibilities borne by school board members, participation in training must be viewed as among the least conflict-laden and least burdensome of duties. While some districts may argue against devoting the financial resources to pay for conference registration fees, lodging, and travel, in even the smallest of districts, this expense would represent a fraction of a percent of the district's operating budget. Given the payoff of higher student achievement, the benefits far outweigh the minimal cost in time and funding.

Based on our findings, we also recommend that school boards schedule an annual planning meeting to discuss the calendar of training available over the course of the year, and engage each member in committing to meaningful participation in ASBA sponsored school board trainings. Since job and family responsibilities vary among school board members, it would make sense to take particular steps to accommodate those board members with jobs or with young children by providing them with the first choice of trainings that best fit their calendar and needs.

Additionally, we recommend that boards establish a practice of assigning a mentor to each new board member to accompany the new member to their first training event to assist in navigating the process of picking up registration materials, selecting breakout sessions, and making sense of the volume of new information.

A critical focus for future research in this area would be to develop a deeper understanding of the differences in board training and actions in districts that are making achievement gains versus those that are not. This could involve mixed methods research targeting low-performing districts and their demographically-similar but higher-performing counterparts. Research questions in that future study could focus on observable differences in training participation rates and board meeting practices. Though it is assumed that board variables would be but one of a host of differences to be found, findings could lead to changes in approaches to trainings and governance practices of most benefit to students.

Future research could also involve a replication of this study to determine if there is a relationship between changes in training participation rates and school rankings. This would involve comparing current and future rates of training participation and school rankings.

Finally, the field would also benefit from case study research involving school boards with a history of non-participation in ASBA sponsored trainings that have resolved to commit to participate in training for the benefit of students. Such research could provide rich insights into the complex and vast dynamics of the superintendent-board governance relationship and the outcomes, if any, of participation in training.

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University First-Time-in-College Students' Mathematics Placement and Outcomes: Leadership Response to Local Data

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Data-driven decision making is a critical leadership skill. This study describes how leadership at a four-year university used extant data to improve student outcomes. The University identified the high rate of first-time-in-college (FTIC) student withdrawal/failure in initial algebra courses as having a detrimental effect on other student success metrics such as student retention and completion rates. The study was initiated to determine how analysis of extant student data could enable leaders to better understand the problem, identify ways in which university policies and/or practices could be modified to increase students' pass rates in their initial math courses, and ultimately result in improved student outcomes. Data from four cohorts of first time in college students were analyzed to better understand the effects of the university placement practices on student outcomes, and potentially identify students who may be at-risk of failure to provide early intervention. The initial results indicate under-placement of female students in lower math courses at a statistically significant level, and potential use of students' high school GPA as an early-warning indicator of failure. The study highlights the importance of leaders monitoring and analyzing local data to assess the impact of current policies and practices on student outcomes.

***Keywords**: data-driven decision making, leadership, mathematics courses, placement*

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One of the hallmarks of effective educational leadership is continuous process improvement to increase student success (Gill, Bordon, & Hallgren, 2014; Mandinach, 2012). Educational settings vary in many ways including, but not limited to, student composition and needs, instructors' experience and expertise, and local resources. Leadership decision-making and practice must adapt to individual institutional needs, and therefore, must be rooted in local information and data. This study describes how leadership at a four-year university used extant data in a data-driven decision making process to improve student outcomes.

The University identified the detrimental effect of first-time-in-college (FTIC) student withdrawal/failure in initial algebra courses on other student success metrics such as student retention and completion rates, which were considerably lower than for other campuses in the regional system. This study was initiated to determine how analysis of extant student data could enable leaders to better understand the problem, identify ways in which university policies and/or practices could be modified to increase students' pass rates in their initial math courses, and ultimately result in improved student outcomes. It builds on research regarding difficulties in accurate FTIC math placement primarily at the community college level (Bracco et al., 2014; Burdman, 2011; Hodara & Cox, 2016; Jaggars & Hodara, 2013; Scott-Clayton, Crosta, & Belfield, 2014).), and research on the use of early warning indicators of failure for early intervention in K-12 schools (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; DePaoli et al., 2015; Hartman, Wilkins, Gregory, Gould, & D'Souza, 2011). In addition to improving FTIC student success, this study was also intended to provide an example of a four-year university analysis of extant data to inform policies and practices.

Literature Review

College and career readiness has been a major focus in K-12 education for the last decade. One of the goals of the federal initiative Race to the Top (2009) was that all high school students graduate prepared to be successful in college and careers. However, the rigor of K-12 curriculum standards vary across states, as do high school graduation requirements (Tepe, 2014). Different organizations describe college readiness from various perspectives resulting in dissimilar definitions (Rolfhus, Decker, Brite, & Gregory, 2010). Postsecondary institutions' entrance requirements vary, as do the students' skill competency requirements for entry-level courses (Tepe, 2014). These varying standards and requirements can make the transition from high school to college challenging, especially for less-prepared students (Scott-Clayton et al., 2014; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003; Wilkins, Hartman, Howland, & Sharma, 2010).

College Math Placement Practices

Given that students have such different levels of preparation, identifying the best initial college courses for students to take is an inexact science. The goal is to place students in the highest courses in which they are likely to succeed, but avoid enrolling them in courses for which they do not have adequate prerequisite skills (Scott-Clayton et al., 2014). Numerous studies have examined the accuracy of different placement criteria, as well as the outcomes for students placed in both remedial and credit-bearing courses, particularly at the community college level because of their more open admissions policies and the high percentage of students required to enroll in developmental (remedial) courses (Bracco et al., 2014; Hartman, 2017; Hodara, Smith-Jaggers, & Karp, 2012; Hughes & Scott Clayton, 2011; Scott-Clayton, 2012). Standardized test scores,

specifically the SAT and ACT, are most commonly used for placing FTIC students in English and math courses because most take one of these tests as part of their college application process, and the scores are readily accessible to institutions of higher education. This practice is important to note particularly as it relates to math because numerous studies report that overall, males consistently outperform females on the mathematics portions of standardized tests (Beekman & Ober, 2015; Combs et al., 2010). Since 1972, females have consistently scored significantly lower on the SAT-M than males (College Board, 2016). The accuracy of using these standardized tests for initial course placement has been called into question because of the potential gender bias, and the lack of correlation between scores and college achievement (Dorner & Hutton, 2002; Hartman, 2017). One community college study indicates that using these test scores for placement results in misplacing as many as 25% of students in initial courses (Scott-Clayton et al., 2014). Most of the misplacements are instances in which students are placed in courses lower than they were likely to be able to take and pass (based on other variables), also known as 'under-placement'.

Given that universities have a variety of selection criteria for admissions, it is valid to consider whether the same biases and/or misplacement decisions are prevalent in those institutions. While it is important for educational leaders to be aware of national trends, it is equally important for them to know the profile and trends for the specific student population at their institutions, carefully monitor the effects of using specific criteria on related student achievement and outcomes, and make informed decisions to promote student success (Mandinach, 2012).

Student Remediation and Support

In addition to more accurate course placement practices, supporting and retaining students in mathematics courses has also been a concern for post-secondary institutions. When it appears students do not have the prerequisite skills for specific entry-level courses, many postsecondary institutions enroll students in remedial courses to acquire the needed skills. However, these courses do not contribute credits toward students' degrees, and time and money is spent on courses that delay students' goal attainment (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Scott-Clayton et al., 2014). Postsecondary math achievement and success has presented a challenge for many students, and more students take remedial math courses than take remedial English courses (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010).

Studies have shown that, even when controlling for prior mathematics achievement, students who take remedial courses have lower completion/graduation rates (Adelman, 2004, 2006). In fact, a recent analysis of math course-taking in Florida colleges revealed that students who took remedial math courses did no better in completing credit bearing courses, and in some cases, fared more poorly (Park, Woods, Hu, Bertrand Jones, & Tandberg, 2018). These findings call into question the value of remedial courses and have renewed interest in identifying other strategies for supporting students who may not be prepared to take college math courses.

Support strategies, such as implementing summer boot camps to build prerequisite skills and concurrent enrollment in intensive support courses, have been implemented by institutions to improve student success (Hodara, 2013). Individual student support can be helpful, but often relies on student initiative and may not be sought or provided until the student has already fallen behind in or failed course work (Math Instructor, personal communication, March 28, 2016). Efforts to increase high school graduation rates over the last fifteen years have led many school districts to develop early-warning indicators of students likely to fail or drop out.

Considerable research has examined the effectiveness of using early-warning indicators in K-12 education to identify students who are at-risk of not succeeding, particularly across school transitions (as early as 6th and 9th grades) (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; DePaoli et al., 2015; Hartman, Wilkins, Gregory, Gould, & D'Souza, 2011). These studies have documented the importance of early, accurate identification of students who are likely to dropout or not graduate from high school, and intervene in time to get students back on track to success. Similar efforts to identify students, who may be likely to fall behind or fail their college entry-level math course, and provide early supports and interventions may help improve student success. In summary, the challenge for improving university math success is two-fold – first, to improve the accuracy of placing students in the highest entry-level math course in which they are likely to succeed, and second, to identify students at-risk of failing and provide effective early intervention and support to keep them enrolled and ultimately successful.

Specific University Placement and Support Practices

Four-year institutions of higher education typically have admission requirements that imply only prepared students are admitted. Yet, university students still struggle with math requirements, and the university is perhaps less focused on supporting the developmental needs of students than at the community college level. Nationally, algebra is considered a gate-keeper course across organizations.

While it is useful to understand national trends, it is critical to understand the specific concerns and conditions in any given institution to be able to identify areas for improvement. The University in this study was a regional four-year institution serving approximately 5000 students with a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs of study in west central Florida. As such it had a different FTIC population profile than most community colleges, and therefore, it was important to examine the University-specific student data regarding FTIC math placement and success. At the time of the study, the FTIC student population was approximately 64% female and 36% male, and the University math placement practice (policy) used solely ACT and SAT-M scores to place students in their initial math courses. While the University did not offer remedial courses, students whose prior math achievement did not appear to be adequate to enroll and be successful in College Algebra (MAC 1105 - the entry level credit-bearing course that met the math requirement for degree attainment) were enrolled in Intermediate Algebra (MAT 1033 - an entry-level math course, which could count as elective credit, but did not meet the math requirement for degree attainment). The University criteria for placing students in their initial mathematics courses (for the two courses examined in this study) were as follows:

- ACT – Students with an ACT score of 21 or above were enrolled in MAC 1105 (credit bearing); students with an ACT score of less than 21 were enrolled in MAT 1033.
- SAT-M - – Students with a SAT math score of 490 or above were enrolled in MAC 1105 (credit bearing); students with a SAT math score of less than 490 were enrolled in MAT 1033.

As described earlier, using prior math achievement data and/or placement tests to accurately place students in courses where they will be successful is an inexact science, and often students need additional support to succeed. While the University had a student support center, it relied on students to self-identify the need for academic assistance. In the fall 2016 semester, the University also began implementing an intervention support system for students who initially

struggle in math and English courses, but it relied on data that students were falling behind or failing several weeks into the course, which was often too late to recover and pass the course.

Student retention and completion rates at this University campus had been at least 10% lower than those on the University main campus (University X, 2016). Mathematics course-taking and success had been a particular focus for improvement. The first objective of this study was to examine the math placement policies, practices, and impacts on FTIC students at the University and to identify changes to improve student outcomes. The second objective of the study was to identify characteristics of students likely to struggle in their math courses and then provide support before students begin to fail. Accurately identifying students who were likely to need additional support as they began college coursework was an area that had potential for improving student retention and degree attainment. The results of this study contributed to achieving both of these goals.

Because the University served a different population of students than community colleges in general, and there were significant concerns about low retention and graduation rates, this study examined FTIC student math placement and success to evaluate and inform existing placement policies and practices. Extant data were analyzed to determine the relationship between criteria used for placement recommendation, course enrollment, and subsequent student success (passing a credit-bearing math course and subsequent year-two (Y2) retention) at the University. The analyses also informed the potential use of specific indicators to identify at-risk students for early additional math support.

The research questions for this study were:

1. What is the relationship between each recommendation criterion (ACT and SAT-M scores) and subsequent enrollment in entry-level math courses MAT 1033 and MAC 1105?
2. What is the relationship between each recommendation criterion and subsequent success (passing grade and Y2 retention) for students in entry-level math courses MAT 1033 and MAC 1105?
3. What is the relationship between students' high school grade point average (GPA) and subsequent success (passing grade) in entry-level math courses?
4. What is the pass rate for students who:
    1. qualified to take MAC 1105, but who enrolled in MAT 1033 instead?
    2. were recommended to take MAT 1033, but who enrolled in MAC 1105 instead?

Conceptual Framework

This study presents an example of analyzing extant student data to better understand the FTIC students' high failure rate in initial math courses at a specific institution, and as a result, identify potential modifications to the placement practices and use of early warning indicators to improve student success. The conceptual framework for data-driven decision making (DDDM) proposed by Mandinach (2012) guided this study. She defines a systematic, iterative process of using six skills at three different levels for using data to improve student outcomes. At the data level, practitioners collect and organize raw data relevant to the issue they are seeking to better understand. At the second level, the information level, they analyze the data for trends in participation or performance and then summarize the information by student groups. At the third level, the information is transformed to the knowledge level by synthesizing and prioritizing what these analyses mean, and used to make practice-related decisions to improve outcomes. The

researchers hypothesized that extant data the university collected during the students' application and enrollment processes could be used to better understand and address the FTIC students' high failure rate in initial math courses.

Methodology

Participants

The subjects in the study were FTIC University students enrolled in the 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 cohorts who had graduated from high school within the previous two years, and enrolled in either the intermediate algebra (MAT 1033) or college algebra (MAC 1105) courses their first year (approximately 1400 students). University individual student math achievement data (course passing), as well as transcript data (ACT, SAT-M, high school GPA) and demographic data were collected and analyzed.

Procedures

Overall, the analysis examined correlations between students' prior academic achievement variables and subsequent math course placement and success or failure. Data were also disaggregated by gender to determine whether there were significant differences on the basis of this demographic variable. The following extant data were requested for each FTIC student from the university Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE): gender, prior academic achievement and assessments (ACT and SAT-M scores), initial math course placement, final grade, subsequent math course placements and grades, retention to second year, and subsequent graduation date. Data were analyzed for correlations between criteria used for math course placement, high school GPA, math course success (passing grade), Y2 retention, and gender.

Students were separated by the FTIC math course in which they were enrolled. Correlation statistics using the recommendation criterion as the dependent variable and the success outcomes (initial course success, subsequent year two university enrollment) as the independent variables, were calculated for each recommendation criterion, and high school GPA. Recommendation criteria that indicated high correlations with student failure were identified for use as potential early-warning indicators to identify FTIC students who were likely to need additional support to be successful. Finally, students were separated by those who enrolled in a recommended course and those who did not, with descriptive statistics calculated to assess student success in the courses taken.

Findings

The initial analyses of the four cohorts of University FTIC students indicated several noteworthy findings regarding the University placement policies and practices, other useful achievement data such as high school GPA, and student placement in credit-bearing versus non-credit bearing math courses, particularly as it related to gender differences. These results informed the University placement practices and at-risk identification to improve student success.

Relationship between Placement Criteria and Initial Math Course Placement

Research question #1 focused on the relationship between each recommendation criterion and subsequent enrollment in MAT 1033 or MAC 1105. With some exceptions, the University ACT/SAT-M score guidelines were followed in placing students in their initial math courses. However, when examining enrollment by gender, there were notable differences. Table 1 indicates the proportion of female/male students in the FTIC cohort overall, and the proportion enrolled in MAT 1033 and MAC 1105. Proportionately, female students were overrepresented in the lower course (MAT 1033) and underrepresented in the higher course (MAC 1105).

Table 1

Proportion of Females and Males in FTIC Cohort Overall and MAT 1033/MAC 1105 Enrollment

	FTIC Cohort Overall	MAT 1033 Course	MAC 1105 Course
Female	62%	71%	58%
Male	38%	29%	41%

The over-representation of females in the MAT 1033 course could potentially be partially explained by the national trend of females generally scoring lower than males on standardized math tests. However, it is important to know, for this particular University FTIC student population, there was no statistically significant difference between males' and females' mean ACT or SAT-M scores. The general gender gap in standardized math scores would not account for the over-representation of females in the lower course (MAT 1033) at this particular University.

If, on the basis of her/his ACT/SAT-M score, a student was placed in a mathematics course higher than what s/he was qualified to take, the student was considered 'over-placed'. If, however, the student qualified to take the higher course, but enrolled in the lower course, the student was considered 'under-placed'. As shown in Table 2, a disproportionately high number of female students were under-placed into the MAT 1033 course, at a statistically significant level (p = -.0317). Too few students were over-placed in the MAC 1105 to make meaningful conclusions. However, it was worth noting more males were over-placed than females.

Table 2

Proportion of Students Who were Eligible to Take MAC 1105 but Enrolled in MAT 1033

	Eligible for MAC 1105 but Enrolled in MAT 1033	USFSP Cohort population
Proportion of Females	74.6%	62%
Proportion of Males	25.3%	38%

Note. X^2= 4.62; p = -.0317

Relationship between Placement Criteria and FTIC Math Course Grade

Research question #2 focused on the relationship between each recommendation criterion and subsequent success (passing the course). As shown in Table 3, statistical analyses for the study data set indicated there was no correlation between students' ACT or SAT-M scores and success (passing grade) in their FTIC math courses. The alpha level used as a significant criterion in this study was .05.

Table 3

Correlation between ACT and SAT Criteria and Math Course Score

	MAT 1033	MAC 1105
ACT Math and Course Score	$n = 257$	$n = 493$
	$r = 0.10$	$r = .007$
	$p = 0.10$	$p = 0.12$
SAT Math and Course Score	$n = 286$	$n = 574$
	$r = 0.01$	$r = .005$
	$p = 0.84$	$p = 0.26$

Math Course Final Grades by Gender

When analyzing final passing grades for the intermediate algebra course by gender, the data indicated the proportion of female students who earned passing grades in MAT 1033 was higher than males, at a statistically significant level ($p = .02$). When analyzing final passing grades for the college algebra course by gender, the data indicated that the proportion of female students who earned passing grades in MAC 1105 was higher than males, at a statistically significant level ($p = .012$; see Table 4). Additionally, Table 5 shows a higher proportion of female students earned an A- or higher in MAC 1105, though due to the small number of students, not at a statistically significant level ($p = 0.12$). The female students who took MAT 1033 and MAC 1105 were more successful than the males. This trend was consistent with national trends in terms of course grades.

Table 4

Proportion of Students Attaining MAC 1105 Passing Grades by Gender

	N	Proportion
Females	407	0.723
Males	274	0.631

Note. $p = 0.012$

Table 5

Proportion of Students Attaining A- or higher MAC 1105 Grades by Gender

	N	Proportion
Females	407	0.091
Males	274	0.058

Note. $p = 0.12$

Relationship between Placement Criteria and Y2 Retention

Since retention and graduation are the ultimate goals for FTIC students, the data analyses also examined the relationship between first-year math course enrollment and success, with year two university enrollment (persistence). For students who took either MAT 1033 or MAC 1105, the proportion of students who enrolled at the university in year two showed similar patterns. In terms of persistence by gender, there were no statistically significant differences for either course. Overall, the proportion of students who did not pass MAT 1033 or MAC 1105 and enrolled year two was lower than the proportion of students who passed MAT 1033 or MAC 1105 and enrolled year two, at a statistically significant level (MAT 1033 $p = .008$, MAC 1105 $p = .002$).

High School GPA Relationship to FTIC Math Course Success

Research question #3 focused on the relationship between students' high school GPA and subsequent success in entry-level math courses. Research has indicated that, in general, female students earn higher grades in high school and college courses than male students (Voyer & Voyer, 2005). In this University population, both for students enrolled in MAT 1033 and MAC 1105, the mean female student high school GPA was higher than the mean male GPA, at a statistically significant level, and reflects the national trends.

As shown in Table 6, there was a significant correlation between students' high school GPA and their success in FTIC math courses at this University. Specifically, students with a high school GPA of 3.0 or better were more likely to pass their FTIC math course. And even if the student's ACT/SAT-M course qualified her/him to enroll in MAC 1105, if her/his high school GPA was below 3.0, the student had less math course success.

Table 6

Correlation between High School GPA and Math Course Score

	MAT 1033	MAC 1105
High School GPA and Course Score	$n = 337$	$n = 675$
	$r = 0.32$	$r = 0.35$

Note. For both courses, $p < 0.001$

Course Success for Under Placed Students in MAT 1033 or Over Placed in MAC 1105

Research question #4 focused on math course success for those students who were under or over placed in their FTIC math course. There was no statistically significant difference in mean grades

between students who were under-placed in MAT 1033 and those who were 'correctly' placed on the basis of ACT/SATM scores, regardless of gender. A high proportion of females who were under-placed passed the course in comparison to males who were under-placed. There were too few students over placed in MAC 1105 to make any meaningful observations.

Conclusions

The analyses of extant local University mathematics data were informative for improving FTIC math course placement practices and subsequent student success. Although ACT/SAT-M scores were used exclusively for initial math course placement, there was no correlation between those scores and math course success. While expedient, the use of only ACT/SAT-M scores for placement purposes, and the possibility of significant numbers of students taking lower math courses than they are likely to be successful in as a result, was cause for concern. Refining University placement practices and specifically, using alternative, or additional criteria for placement, may be helpful to more accurately place students in credit-bearing math courses, and improve student outcomes. Several recent studies highlighting placement methodologies using multiple measures have been published and the university leadership examined the possibility of adopting similar systems (Barnett et al., 2018; Cullinan et al., 2018).

The under placement of FTIC female students (their ACT/SAT score qualified them to take 1105, but they took 1033) at a statistically significant level was important new information. These data findings were shared with University leadership, including the student advisement office. While it was not known from the study data collected whether student advisors had an impact on under-placement through their advisement practices, the data findings were shared with the advisors to heighten their awareness of the concern.

There was a statistically significant correlation between students' high school GPA and math course success. University leaders could use high school GPA as a factor to improve their math course placement system. In addition to considering GPA as a factor in the placement process, this information could be helpful for instructors to provide support for students whose high school GPA was below 3.0. Students who enter college with a high school GPA lower than 3.0, regardless of their ACT/SAT-M scores, may need additional support to succeed in their math courses. Low GPAs may also indicate the students need organizational or study skill support to supplement additional math support (Credé & Kuncel, 2008). Concurrent enrollment in a study support intervention may be helpful for these students.

In terms of Y2 retention, the high correlation of math course failure with non-retention was unsurprising because course failure results in non-credit accrual. It is important to note, however, that the analyses did not indicate math course failure was the reason students did not enroll for year two, rather it only established a relationship between passing the math courses and persisting to year two. Regardless, poor early math performance could be considered an indicator for identifying students who may need additional supports to persist.

Limitations

There were several limitations to the study. First, the study population consisted only of FTIC students who enrolled in a math course their first year. It did not include students who had been out of high school more than two years prior to enrolling in the University. The study population

also did not include FTIC students who did not enroll in a math course their first year. It is important to note all students in the 'freshman' class were not included in the study.

There are other math courses in which students may enroll, and these students were not included in these analyses. College Algebra (MAC 1105) is considered the 'gateway' course for higher mathematics required in most science-oriented majors. Only students enrolled in either MAC 1105 or MAT 1033 their first year were included in this study.

Finally, although four cohorts of students (N=1400) were studied, once multiple variables were included in the analyses, the number of subjects rapidly became too small to make meaningful conclusions. Subsequent data collection to include more cohorts would improve the power of additional analyses in this regard.

Recommendations

The findings in this study were unexpected by the University administration, and highlight the importance of leaders analyzing local data and examining the impact of policies as they are implemented locally to ensure unintended negative consequences are minimized. As student populations are dynamic, regular monitoring of student outcomes and data-driven decision making is a critical leadership practice. This study provided a positive example of data monitoring and analyses that can be applied to other institutional improvement efforts.

Further investigation of the causes of the disproportionate female under placement is recommended to improve female math success in particular. Additional investigation of the possible factors affecting female and male course enrollment decisions (such as mathematics confidence, prior mathematics experiences, prior external math supports) would be informative. FTIC female students outperformed males in both of the particular college mathematics courses in the study. Further investigation regarding the gender-related factors affecting student persistence (within each course), and success is also recommended.

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1. A Review of Research: To Develop a Conceptual Framework for Educational Partnerships

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The article revisits the literature on educational partnerships in an attempt to re-frame and update conceptual frameworks to be used by school and district leaders for partnership development and evaluation. It also synthesizes and analyzes empirical literature specific to developing educational partnerships or analyzing the strengths that contribute to the development of a conceptual framework - published between 1990 and 2018. Finally, the article presents perspectives of partnerships from education literature in preface to a proposed conceptual framework specific to educational partnerships. The article concludes with recommendations for advancing the literature on partnerships.

***Keywords**: Educational Partnerships, Conceptual Framework, Developing Strengths in Partnerships, Evaluation of Partnerships*

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Researchers agree that one of the critical challenges looming over secondary education is the need to guarantee learning opportunities for all students that will prepare them for the workforce and transition them into a high demand, high wage careers (Mann et al., 2018; McIver & Farley, 2005; Musset & Kurekova, 2018; Watters & Christensen, 2013). One way that educators resolve to meet this challenge is by creating partnerships with businesses and other community organizations (Bottoms, 2012; Castellano et al., 2003; Griffith & Wade, 2002). Over two decades ago, Tushnet (1993) found that educational partnerships with industry helped to connect students to the world around them, to their community's resources, and to the careers in which they will soon embark. In recent years, similar results on the benefits of school-industry partnerships were also published by Mann et al. (2018). Watters & Christensen (2013) and Musset & Kurekova (2018) discovered that the hands-on learning, associated with career and technical education, engaged students while also reinforcing conceptual understanding, but more importantly, their research showed that the hands-on learning, has more value when it occurs in the workplace. This means that working on real problems in actual job environments makes learning more relevant. These researchers also discovered that such experiences enriched learning results and prepared students to be knowledgeable, skilled workers (Musset & Kurekova, 2018; Watters & Christensen, 2013).

Significance of Study

Educational partnerships have been hot topics in popular, political, and professional literature (Baker, 1994; Mann et al., 2018; Musset & Kurekova, 2018). Partnerships have also been promoted in policy and legislation as seen in the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, the Higher Education Act of 1998, and the re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Baker, 1994; Barnett et al., 2010). For years, Departments of Education have promoted the implementation and sustainment of partnerships with grant programs (Baker, 1994). National policy initiatives for school-industry partnerships in Australia have made progress over the past 10 years (Torii, 2018). The Business-School Connections Roundtable (2011), the STEM Partnerships Forum (2017), and the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (2018) are a few of the initiatives implemented to strengthen school-community engagement to enhance student learning (Torii, 2018). Partnership with business organizations provide an avenue for accomplishing many of the goals set for educational institutions. They extend the walls of classrooms and provide relevance to ordinary lessons (Musset & Kurekova, 2018).

School leaders would benefit from a conceptual framework to guide them through partnership development and growth. Presently, school leaders are left to stumble through the role of school liaison to potential partners with little guidance. Practicing school leaders also need research to guide them in the craft of partnerships. Research on educational partnerships is needed for universities to use to educate school leaders on how to plan, develop, and sustain the partnerships. This present research is crucial to gain a better understanding of how partnerships work and how to foster their success. School leaders need guidance on how to create collaborative partnerships in their schools and to develop them for a variety of purposes.

Educational Partnerships Defined

Cardini (2006) defined partnerships as fundamental collaboration between at least two organizations for a joint purpose. Billett et al. (2007) described educational partnerships as a

strategy by which to comprehend and tackle concerns for building social capital. Jones et al. (2016) stated that employers engage in educational partnerships to build social and cultural capital for young people. Educational partnerships with business and industry have existed for decades (Watters & Christensen, 2013) and are described as "complex and varied" (Cardini, 2006, p. 398) and challenging to develop and sustain (Barnett et al., 2010). Watters & Christensen (2013) discerned that opportunities in the workplace environment, although difficult to maintain, enriched learning results and prepare students to be knowledgeable, skilled workers. Billet et al. (2007) cautioned on the complexity and challenges of educational partnerships. Some researchers suggest that a partnership should be regarded as a process rather than an event (Barnett et al., 2010; Grobe et al., 1990; Stanley & Mann, 2014).

Most partnerships are developed through trial and error, and no two partnerships are exactly the same in the manner in which they are enacted or sustained (Walters & Christensen, 2013). This diversity requires differences in the conceptualization and operation of partnerships. It also requires an understanding of partnerships and how to develop them from simple to complex.

Diversity in Partnership Arrangements and Frameworks

Cardini (2006) identified three types of partnerships in education: (a) inter-agency collaboration around a common problem; (b) collaboration between organizations and/or their specific agents to promote best practices; and (c) collaboration between public buyers and private providers. Cardini's partnership types hold distinct purposes and structures; therefore, they must be validated and analyzed differently.

Intriligator (1992) presented an organizational framework by which to establish and evaluate the success of educational partnerships. She wrote that partnerships are markedly different, but proposed that educational partnerships can be analyzed and described on a continuum as cooperative, coordinative, or collaborative. The continuum presented by Intriligator (1992) described cooperative partnerships as autonomous, short-termed arrangements where specific goals are accomplished. Coordination partnerships are intermediate or long-term arrangements to address tasks that are moderately complex; and collaboration partnerships are long-term, complex arrangements that address goals that require the collaboration of partners to achieve. She wrote that interagency objectives must be scrutinized in terms of 1) the amount of time needed to realize the goal; 2) the complexity of the objective to be accomplished; and 3) the extent to which the objective can be accomplished by the school and one or more interagency units. When objectives are analyzed during the planning period, the type of partnership needed is determined.

Barnett et al. (2010) stated that it was hard for a partnership model to portray all that partnership encompasses. The researchers described partnership development in three parts. The first facet of partnership development detailed was the level of involvement into the process that all partners give. The level of involvement described begins with simple support, and then moves to cooperation to achieve goals with shared decision making. If the partnership is strengthened and sustained, the final level of involvement is more complex and identified by true collaboration between the partners. The second facet of partnership development discussed by these researchers is the structure of the partnership, which begins with simple and moves to moderately complex and finally complex and intertwined. The third and final aspect of partnership development identified by Barnett et al. (2010) is the level of impact of the partnership in achieving its goals and objectives. The level of impact explains how the partnership changes the process or program.

The impact is conceptualized as a hierarchy moving from simple results; to changes in management and leadership procedures; then systemic educational improvement, and new policy development. Barnett et al. drew a typology of partnerships that closely aligned the three typologies presented by Grobe et al. in 1990. Barnett et al.'s topology provided the springboard for the development of the new conceptual framework presented in this manuscript.

Educational agencies were encouraged by Barnett et al. (2010) to evaluate the interdependence required to achieve the goals set forth in a partnership. The researchers referred to the concepts of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration, which were described by Intriligator (1992) as a way to measure the interdependence needed for each partnership. Barnett et al. (2010) proposed four partnership models in their conceptual framework on partnerships. If a school had the resources needed to achieve their goals in certain areas, then the easiest way to address it would be independently without forming a partnership. The simplest model proposed by Barnett et al. was the vendor model, which occurs when a school or school system contracts with an organization for a specific service or training. This type of enterprise usually reflects a short-term cooperative relationship. Once the contract is fulfilled, the vendor and the school could either terminate the association or advance to a higher level, or model, of partnership.

Another partnership model proposed by Barnett et al. (2010) is the collaborative model. It involves an "intensive and sustained mutual exchange and benefit" (Barnett et al., 2010, p. 25). The researchers described the goals and objectives within the collaborative model as more complex and the partners as being intertwined in the process. The linking agents in the partnership must establish credibility and trust within their own organization because they are often asked to make commitments that must be honored for the length of the partnership.

The next model discussed in Barnett et al.'s topology (2010) is the symbiotic partnership model, which depicts a relationship between two organizations that transcend mutual gains to an increased production of benefits for all participants. This model has a vision, shared goals, and individual objectives linked with each partner. A dependency on the participants describes this model. Barnett et al. (2010) describe the goals in this model as "extremely ambitious, yet somewhat ambiguous" (p. 27). A symbiotic partnership may employ a staff by the partnership, whether on loan by a partnering organization or recently hired, their primary duties are to the partnership. The fourth partnership model proposed by Barnett et al. is the spin-off model, which occurs when the partnership between a school and an outside organization gains momentum and generates enough activity so that it was able to become a viable, new organization that is separated from the original partners who formed it (Barnett et al., 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual framework through which to provide guidance for the development and evaluation of partnerships by any school or district leader. The framework was realized through the analysis of literature on partnerships and conceptual frameworks. The conceptual framework will aid the field with understanding how school partnerships are operationalized and sustained, which may assist in creating and enhancing similar partnerships. The framework may serve as a guide for other partnerships to use to evaluate their progress from simple to complex.

Method

The present study integrates findings of two literature reviews – a review of partnerships in education literature and a more focused empirical review specific to studies examining conceptual frameworks for educational partnership development and implementation. This review of literature used specific keywords that limited the search results. The first review included a review of 19 theoretical articles, a dissertation, and empirical studies that centered on the definitions of partnerships, the development and/or implementation of school-industry partnerships, partnership policy, and strengths or challenges of partnerships in journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, and dissertations published from 1990 to 2018 in Academic Search Complete, Education Full Text, EBSCO, and JSTOR databases. Findings from this review are used throughout the article.

The more focused, empirically based sections of the manuscript depict the second literature review that utilized five journal articles published in Academic Search Complete and JSTOR full text databases utilizing key words ‘‘school-industry partnerships,’’ “educational partnerships,” ‘‘conceptual framework,’’ “AND Australia.” Australia was used for an international voice on school-industry partnerships, because it offers a comprehensive educational system where, like in America, industry engagement is usually a part of careers education for all students (Torii, 2018). Unlike Australia and the United States, Austria, Germany, Netherlands, and Switzerland separate students into ‘dual systems’ of academic or vocational pathways in secondary school (Torii, 2018). It should be noted that articles addressing elements or conceptual frameworks of partnerships unrelated to partnerships that occur in educational settings were excluded from review. This review was open to peer reviewed and empirically based journal articles published between 1990 and fall 2018 that encompassed the major elements of an empirical study (i.e. introduction, method, analysis, results, discussion), because a shortage exists in high quality, methodologically sound studies on educational partnerships.

Results

A new conceptual framework was proposed based on research on school-industry partnerships and conceptual frameworks on parterships. The development of the framework is described in the next section. Then, the conceptual framework is presented and narrated.

Toward a Conceptual Framework for Educational Partnerships

Building on Barnett et al.’s framework on the types of partnerships that exist, the new conceptual framework describes the elements that foster the development of partnerships and a way to evaluate the strength of the elements within the partnership. While the research conducted by this group and by others in the field, provide findings that identify indicators that guide partnership development, the field needs a descriptive guide, grounded in field-based research to provide a foundation for partnership development between schools and other agencies.

In Griggs (2015) primary data from an internal program evaluation on a school-industry partnership provided by the school for a case study, and interviews with key participants in the partnership (e.g. school administration and business partners) were used to identify characteristics to describe and evaluate partnerships. Six elements were found to be responsible for the deveopment and success of the partnership studied. They were used within the new conceptual

framework to aid the leader in gauging the level of involvement and the strength of the partnership at the cooperative, coordinative, or collaborative levels.

The six primary elements identified by Griggs (2015) that foster partnership success and sustainability include (a) purposeful planning and flexibility in implementation, (b) shared values and common goals, (c) open and regular communication, (d) commitment, (e) trust, and (f) leadership. Their effect and potency increases as the partnership moves from simple to complex.

Figure 3 presents the framework visual (on right) and a description of the levels and characteristics (on left). A narrative description follows the figure.

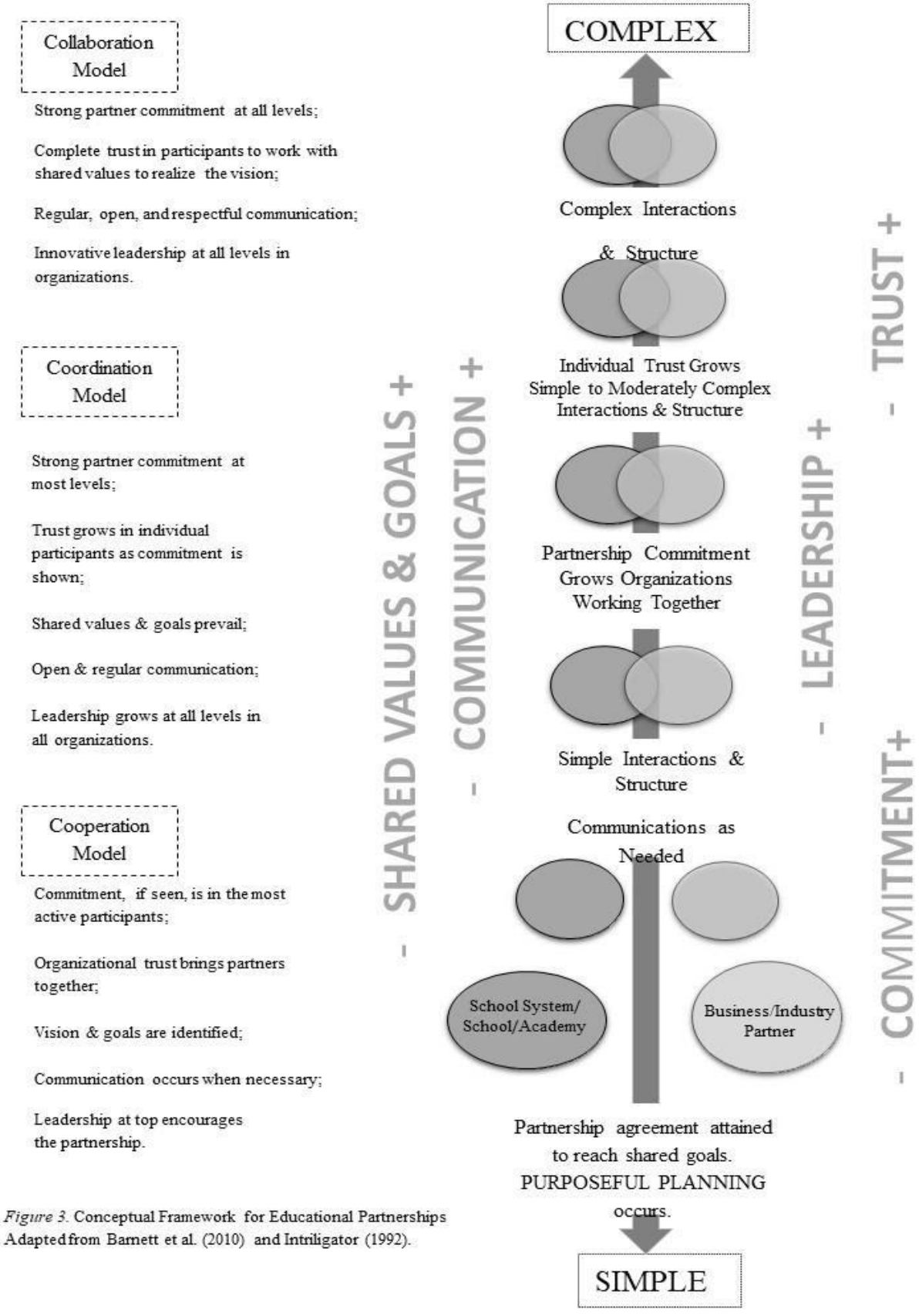


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework for Educational Partnerships Adapted from Barnett et al. (2010) and Intriligator (1992).

The Conceptual Framework Narrative

Cooperation, Coordination and Collaboration Explained with Examples

Three words have been associated with partnership development in scholarly research: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration (Barnett et al., 2010; Intriligator, 1992). Intriligator (1992) placed the three concepts on a continuum moving from cooperation, which is independent, separate interactions - to collaboration, decidedly interdependent, connected relationships.

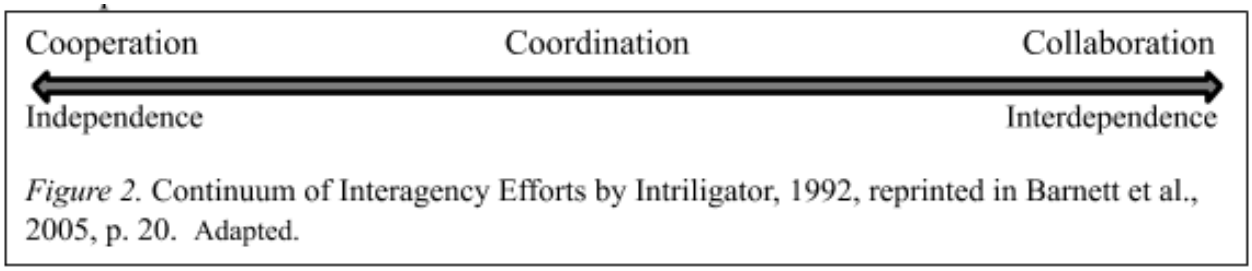


Figure 2. Continuum of Interagency Efforts by Intriligator, 1992, reprinted in Barnett et al., 2005, p. 20. Adapted.

Cooperation has been used to describe partnership where the organizations retained their autonomy as they worked together to achieve short-termed goals (Barnett et al., 2010; Intriligator, 1992). Often the short-termed goals were to gain new resources, services, and/or for teacher training. As shown on the present conceptual framework, cooperative ventures characteristically have been simple in structure, short in time requirements, and lack participant commitment. Rarely, do cooperative relationships include many of the other elements, which typify more complex partnerships (Barnett et al., 2010; Intriligator, 1992). Sporadic planning and infrequent communication exemplify the completion of the goals in a cooperative partnership. Organizational trust characterizes this level of partnership, which means that because the organizations are known and trusted, the participants are willing to trust one another. This type of partnership often possesses leadership approval, but lacks their involvement. Cooperation is the most prevalent partnership found in education and these cooperative endeavors rarely change or grow into another more comprehensive level of partnership engagement (Albrecht & Hinckley, 2012; Barnett et al., 2010). *Examples:* In the cooperation state of partnership, teachers were known to have asked local businesses and parents to do such things as: read to students on days such as *Read Across America Day*; allow the junior class to build the homecoming float in their barn; contract to purchase equipment or teacher training; host a city league tournament at the school; donate money for technology, or sponsor student activities.

Barnett et al. (2010) label a partnership more focused on shared goals and teamwork to achieve those goals as coordination. In this framework, a partnership at the coordination level is described as longer in term and requires more commitment and regular communication among the partners. The structure of interactions and achievements are described as moderately complex. Trust between the organizations moves from trust in each organization and their previous behavior to trust of the individuals. Employees believe in the vision of the partnership and become personally committed. Communication and participant commitment is increased each time the members came together to accomplish goals. Leaders emerge at all levels of the partnership. Leaders participate and become committed to the outcome in this level of partnership because the goals are important to the whole organization. *Examples* of partnerships in this stage of development include: industry partners who host internship programs that provide a learning

environment for high school seniors year after year; members of groups such as parks and recreation who partner with a local career and technical building construction program to engage in such activities as building an archery range or to replace picnic tables in the park.

The strongest type of co-organizational initiative with multi-layered participant commitment to common goals and a shared vision was labeled by Barnett et al. (2010) and Intriligator (1993) as collaboration. The conceptual framework presented in this manuscript describes collaborative partnerships as providing mutually beneficial exchanges between all organizations. The shared vision, mission, and goals guide the movement throughout the partnership. Communication is open and regular in all areas including planning, accomplishing goals, staying in touch, and reflecting on interactions. Commitment from all organizations is consistent. The goal is to succeed and every participant works toward that end. Trust is a palatable component at all levels of partnership, but is deep and individual in collaboration. New participants arrive into the partnership trusted, because they belong to the organization and quickly move to individual trust as others did before them. Leaders at all levels (student leaders, teacher leaders, and industry leaders) are active participants in the partnership endeavor.

The interactions and structures of collaboration in a collaborative partnership are described as complex. A partnership distinguishes itself as collaborative when elements such as time, resources, planning, shared values, common goals, human commitment, trust, communication, and leadership move the partners forward through the conceptual framework of partnership. *Examples* of a collaboration state of partnership development are an industry that supports a career-academy with regular instructional visits to the school by mentors within the company, and guided field trips; a medical hospital that works with high school interns to study a common problem, collect and interpret data and then report on the data in a medical journal.

This study proposed a new framework divided into three distinct types: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration, along a continuum from simple to complex interactions. Each type can be viewed as a model of partnership. In the new framework, cooperation, coordination, and collaboration are used to describe the facilitators of partnerships (i.e. planning, values and goals, interaction, communication, trust, commitment, and leadership). A relationship between two or more organizations can begin at cooperative and move up the continuum to collaborative as it grows, or it can begin and remain at any one of the levels. Any partnership involving education can be described by this framework and its six essential elements. Other elements can also describe a partnership, but the six identified in this research are pervasive throughout the continuum from simple to complex.

The Differences in the New Framework and the Topography Proposed by Barnett et al.

The typology that Barnett et al. (2010) proposed, moved partners from a simple structure to a complex spin-off model as a newly created organization. This researcher's experience indicated that nothing involving students ever separates from the school. Rather it can be a new part of the school, inclusive in the school, but never exclusive. The Vendor Model proposed in the typology certainly exists in educational partnerships, but there are many other types of cooperative partnerships that do not involve vendors or service purchased that can be inclusive to the cooperation level of partnerships. The new conceptual framework chose not to label specific models beyond cooperation, coordination, and collaboration, which cover all relationships.

The new conceptual framework proposes a continuum for partnerships which can be measured by growth in the six facilitating factors (a) purposeful planning and flexibility in

implementation, (b) shared values and common goals, (c) open and regular communication, (d) commitment, (e) trust, and (f) leadership. Partners can focus on strengthening any of the six factors in order to move up the continuum toward true collaboration.

Discussion

The collaborative process essential to partnerships nurtures a sincere sense of shared responsibility for the education of the students involved. Torii (2018) identified industry partnerships that align their vision and mission to the school's strategic plan as critical to success. Buy-in at all levels within the partnership is another step to reaching the potential of partnerships (Griggs et al., 2017). This was defined as building a 'culture of partnerships' by Torii (2018). However, the potential of a partnership may not be attained without a logical process to follow that guides growth as does the proposed conceptual framework from this study. It seems that everything done in education begins as a 'partnership;' therefore, defining a true partnership is hard to do. As mentioned earlier, partnerships are not all the same. Often, they are unclear in their vision or goals – with different external pressures, expectations, motives, and goals for all the partners. Without strength and growth in the (a) leadership, (b) purposeful planning, (c) communication, (d) commitment, (e) trust, and (f) shared values and common goals, the partnership becomes unstable, conflicted in the six characteristics, and often dissolves.

The conceptual framework was proposed to guide progressive movement toward goal attainment. First, the partnership formation is agreed upon by all organizations involved. Shared goals are identified and action steps are planned. Purposeful planning is important at this stage. During the cooperation stage, the organizations are working individually to achieve the identified goals. Conversations occur as needed to get things done. Individuals involved in the action are committed to seeing it through, but commitment to the partnership does not pervade all the players at this stage. The partnership is little more than an agreement. Trust is only at the organization level, because they have a good 'track record.' Leadership initiates and often encourages the partnership at this stage. The goals are simple in design and implementation.

Coordination is the second stage that partnerships usually take, although some partnerships begin here. At this stage, communication is regular and becomes a valued part of the partnership because of its ability to begin and perpetuate motion in goal attainment. Purposeful planning continues, but the participants are also encouraged to be flexible in their actions. Plans change when the actions are student centered. Participants become committed to the vision and goals. They do whatever it takes to achieve the shared goals. Participants value commitment given by others as they are committed to achieving the goals, too. This commitment builds trust in one another. Therefore, trust moves from organizational trust – where you are trusted because you belong to a trustworthy company; to individual trust, which is more powerful. Dhillon (2013) referred to trust between partnering organization as the glue that holds the partnership together. Leaders begin to emerge at all levels – students, teachers, partners, and administration. Most educational partnerships are sustained in the coordination level.

The third and final type of partnership on this framework is collaborative. This stage is characterized by open, regular, and respectful communication. The partners realize that communication connects the participants and ensures all programs run smoothly. Shared goals are now mutual goals that all involved value and strive to attain. The commitment level of all involved is strong and comprehensive. The participants see the value in the partnership and believe that they have a place in it and can make a difference. Purposeful planning is still important to carry the

partnership to the next level - plan the next steps, the next innovations, and any new partners. The goals and actions are complex and interconnect the organizations and the participants to one another.

The researcher offers a conceptualization of partnership that places the characteristics on a continuum from simple to complex, from weaker to stronger, based on a review of literature and conversations with multi-level participants in a school/industry partnership (Griggs, 2015). The elements on the continuum support stronger levels of partnership, which aid the partners in achieving the goals. This continuum of characteristics in the conceptual framework offers a tool for understanding the process of partnership development. The continuum of weak to strong, simple to complex partnerships provide leaders with a tool to be used as a ruler to evaluate and develop their partnerships.

Limitations

The depth and breadth of this study are the main limitations. In order to develop the specific conceptual framework envisioned to grow and evaluate educational partnerships, much of the literature on partnerships that was beyond the purpose of the study was excluded from the review.

Future Research

While there is much work to be done in the study of school-industry partnerships, Australia is a beacon for other countries to follow. There is a need for a clear 'How To' for leaders in developing and sustaining partnerships for K-12 schools. Many programmatic efforts lack a solid conceptual or theoretical base for operation. Researcher need to add to our theoretical understanding of partnerships by continuing to unpack ways in which partnerships are personally experienced by students, teachers, leaders and the outside partners. The studies should include participants from different backgrounds with different experiences. Through better understanding of programmatic activities and the people involved, we will be able to generate better understanding and sustainability of partnerships to improve education. In order for the transferability and dependability of the new conceptual framework to be determined, future case studies on partnerships that use the conceptual framework presented in this research to guide the partnerships' growth and to evaluate its strengths are recommended. A study to extend and enhance the development of the conceptual framework would strengthen the present research.

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"What about Your Kids and Your Husband?": Gender-Blind Sexism in Women Higher Education Administrators' Narratives

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Women leaders report facing many systemic inequalities such as unequal family responsibilities, differing and unfair expectations of them as leaders, backbiting from colleagues and subordinates, and a lack of support and encouragement. This qualitative research study's conceptual framework hinges on feminist narrative analysis research, focusing on women administrators' perceptions of gender's influences on their work experiences. Patterns in participants' narratives reveal gender-blind sexism, which is sexism that renders itself invisible or uneasily detectable, and a pattern of resistance to this and other oppressive experiences by developing overall transformative and feminist leadership styles. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand gender-blind scripts revealed in participants' stories about the intersections of gender and their work lives. Through sharing and analyzing participants' narratives, this researcher derived recommendations for equitable policies and practices in higher education settings.

Keywords*: women higher education administrators; gender; leadership; women leaders; narrative analysis research; gender-blind sexism; feminist leadership*

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Many research studies on women leaders compare women leaders to men leaders and describe gendered leadership stereotypes. Eagly and Johnson (1990) conducted a meta-analysis of the 162 available studies, conducted from 1961–1987, that compared men's and women's leadership styles. Eagly and Johnson found that leadership styles were gender stereotypic in laboratory experiments, and women tended to develop interpersonal and democratic styles while men tended to use task-oriented and authoritative approaches. Eagly and Karau (1991) conducted a second meta-analysis of 54 studies on men and women leaders in collaborative work settings, finding that men tended to take on leadership roles more than women did in short-term groups and groups completing tasks not requiring highly interactive collaborations. Appelbaum et al. (2003) and Kezar (2014) found that women were likely to serve as social leaders, encouraging harmony and understanding among group members and sharing perspectives. Many of these studies were conducted in laboratory settings with student participants rather than with actual leaders in real-world contexts.

Researchers have made cases for gender-neutral forms of leadership and rejected stereotypical ideas of masculine and feminine leadership. For example, Van Engen et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis of studies published between 1987 and 2000 found that men and women leaders do not differ in many important respects such as style and career trajectories. Rather than classify leaders as displaying more masculine or feminine styles, and thus, reinforcing social constructions of being a woman or a man leader, researchers found that those described as "effective leaders" displayed the best qualities of both sexes' "stereotypical" behaviors, making a case for androgynous leadership (Appelbaum et al., 2003; Helgesen, 2011; Sargent, 1981).

However, the vast majority of research on gender and leadership in the higher education context has sought to describe the differences in experience and approach of men and women leaders. Researchers found that women administrators tend to be less satisfied than men administrators because of salaries, lack of opportunities for promotions, and job duties (Fields, 2000; Fraser & Hodge, 2000; Redmond et al., 2017). Researchers have consistently discussed that women higher education leaders find themselves in a double bind: "As women, they are expected to be communal, collaborative, and democratic: but as managers, they are expected to be agentic and authoritative" (Haveman & Beresford, 2012, p. 125). If women display stereotypical feminine characteristics such "caring, consultative style, they are called weak and indecisive; when they adopt traditional authoritarian and directive behaviors, they are criticized for being too heavy-handed" (Bornstein, 2008, p. 172). These circumstances place women administrators in double binds that present varying degrees of adversity, depending on their circumstances. Women leaders report facing many systemic inequalities such as unequal family responsibilities, differing and unfair expectations of them as leaders, backbiting from colleagues and subordinates, and a lack of support and encouragement (Dunn et al., 2014; Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers, 2017).

This qualitative research study's conceptual framework hinges on feminist narrative analysis research, focusing on women administrators' perceptions of how gender influences their work experiences. Patterns in participants' narratives reveal gender-blind sexism, which is sexism that renders itself invisible or uneasily detectable, and a pattern of resistance to this and other oppressive experiences by developing overall transformative and feminist leadership styles. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand gender-blind scripts revealed in participants' stories about the intersections of gender and their work lives. Through sharing and analyzing participants' narratives, this researcher derived recommendations for equitable policies and practices in higher education settings.

Methodology

The researcher obtained appropriate Institutional Review Board approval and used approved consent protocol to explore the central research question: what do women higher education leaders' narratives reveal about gender's intersection with women's work lives? Participants were selected through a convenience sampling method, snowball sampling, whereby participants recommended other participants. The researcher interviewed, using open-ended prompts and follow-up questions, six participants who held director-level and higher positions at higher education institutions. Participants were asked questions about their work lives' intersections with their gender and prompted to tell stories about these intersections. Participants represented regions throughout the United States. Providing contextual information whenever possible, the researcher also used vague identifiers and pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Using a narrative analysis methodology, the researcher sought to discover intertextuality among the participants' narratives, focusing on common patterns of emergent themes and structures that revealed gender-blind scripts.

Qualitative research is quite different than quantitative research, and different constructs of reliability and validity are appropriate (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Goodley et al., 2004). For example, narrative research studies may have as few as one participant (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The authenticity of this qualitative study is underpinned by systematic and trustworthy processes. Transcription is interpretation and, thus, was methodically conducted with several re-listening sessions to create transcripts as close to the participants' original meanings as possible. Codes were systematically developed through first and second order analysis coding (Gioia et al., 2013) and subsequently themes emerged from these codes. Analyzing the emergent themes, the researcher provided extensive and rich descriptions of stories, often using participants' own words. The researcher engaged in member checking, creating collaborative relationships with participants, and conducted interviews in a conversational style, encouraging dialogue then and later during drafts of analyses. Clandinin et al. (2007) and Deyhle (1995) contend that researchers must collaborate with participants and treat them equitably and "well beyond the ethical considerations called for in formal processes and in signed commitments to protect participants from harm" (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 30). The researcher took steps to avoid reinforcing marginalization. Gready (2008) argued, "Voice can no longer, if it could ever really, be considered a simplistic form of power. … Voice without control may be worse than silence" (p. 147). As an ongoing part of this research methodology, this researcher kept a journal of progress, reactions, and potential researcher bias in this process, and then the researcher took action to ensure it was the participants' narratives and intended meanings that came through in the analysis and not simply the researcher's own agenda. This researcher reflected on her own positionality as a middle-class, genderqueer professional with multiple ethnicities as she analyzed these narratives, recognizing the "need to respect the authenticity and integrity of participants' stories, to see them as subjects creating their own history rather than objects of research" (Casey, 1995, pp. 231-2). Participants already have voices; thus, it is not the researcher's duty to give them voice.

Participants

Table 1

Participants

Pseudonym	Age Group	Position	Institution	Race
Maria	50's	President	Community College	Black
Rae	50's	Vice President	Community College	White
Angela	60's	Dean	University	White
Ashley	40's	Dean	Community College	White
Morgan	30's	Director	College	White
Jenny	30's	Director	Community College	White

Research Problematics and Limitations

There are limitations and problems in qualitative research and narrative analysis that will likely never be resolved. This study is limited because it does not make broad generalizations about populations, which many argue is an advantage of qualitative research (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Goodley, et al. (2004) posited that an advantage of narrative research is its "specificity not generalization – amenable to specific description and explanation of a few people rather than the representative generalities of a wider population" (pp. 97-8). Although people with similar social identities share comparable experiences and perspectives, qualitative studies' conclusions cannot be applied simplistically to everyone with similar identities. Still, this study has an element of transferability in relation to the larger context of the research conducted on this topic and to larger social and institutional issues (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin, et al., 2007). Further, though this study explores the intersectionality of gender and work lives, it is limited as its aims were not to analyze the intersections of all aspects of participants' identities and their work lives.

Theoretical Framework: Gender-Blind Sexism

Sexism is often discussed in terms of bias or discrimination based on gender. Women face the reality of living in a patriarchal society in which anything associated with women or girls or socially constructed as "feminine" is often debased and devalued. While women experience explicit forms of sexism and are reporting these instances more often as a result of the "#MeToo Movement," they also face sexism that is not specifically named and is the result of a patriarchal system that puts men at an advantage and women at a disadvantage in professional and social contexts. Stoll (2013) argued that sexism is rooted in systemic social practices and structures and cultural values. In other words, this is not simply a matter of individuals who are biased or sexist; it is a matter of systemic sexism. According to Broido et al.'s (2015) description of modern sexism, "women, as well as men, often mistakenly look at sexist dynamics one at a time, and do not recognize the constraints of an interlocking system of oppression" (p. 599). Sturm (2001) contended that instances of "second generation employment discrimination" included sexual harassment and "discriminatory exclusion;" importantly, Sturm's analysis of case law found that

"unequal treatment may result from cognitive or unconscious bias, rather than deliberate, intentional exclusion" (p. 460). Instances of sexist behavior are often the result of implicit biases, of which the people involved may not be aware (Swim & Cohen, 1997).

This study's feminist conceptual framework heavily relies upon Stoll et al.'s (2016) application of Bonilla-Silva's (1997) concept of color-blind racism to develop a framework to describe gender-blind ideology. This ideology

> serves to explain/justify women's subordination [that] underlies these [gender-based] inequalities. Furthermore, we believe this ideology is best understood not as the consequence of sexist attitudes on the part of prejudiced individuals, but as both the reflection of a patriarchal social system conducive to rape and sexual assault and the 'organizational map' (Bonilla-Silva, 1997) that guides how individuals act toward gender and gender inequality within that system. (pp. 28-29)

While Stoll et al. (2016) focused on applying this framework to myths about sexual assault, this researcher sought to apply this framework to women higher education administrators' narratives about intersections of gender and work experiences.

Results and Discussion

Applications of Gender-Blind Frames to Narratives

The researcher noted that the four gender-blind sexism scripts described by Stoll et al. (2016) emerged from the coding process and subsequent theme development. These were abstract liberalism, naturalization of sexism, cultural sexism, and minimization of sexism. Abstract liberalism was reflected in the participants' stories via descriptions of career "choices" and opportunities offered to men and women. One participant discussed a leadership development program at her institution with nearly all men participants, which is explained as women's lack of interest in the program. Naturalization of sexism and cultural sexism often overlapped in these narratives. Social constructions and biological explanations of motherhood pervade these narratives. Women were viewed as maternal in their leadership approaches and careers, often making sacrifices for their families to fulfill the cultural and biological role of mother. Cultural sexism most frequently appeared in the narratives with leadership being associated with maleness. Women did not "fit" the schema for leader—looks (e.g., maleness) or easily move in social circles of men—specific social gatherings to which women are not invited. The minimization of sexism were rationalizations for potentially visible sexism. For example, two participants discussed either experiencing or witnessing situations where women were denied promotions, and men administrators made excuses for this such as "protecting" the woman by not promoting her. In another case, the excuse was given that the women candidates did not interview well.

Conflation of Gender-Blind Frames

Gender-blind frames of abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural sexism, and minimization of sexism often overlap and/or conflate. Overall themes of invisibility and uncertainty about linkages between gender and work experiences pervade these narratives. This has been referenced and discussed in various ways in the literature such as the "glass ceiling" or simply "invisible barriers" (Diehl, 2014; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Díez et al., 2009; Moncayo Orjuela & Zuluaga, 2015). There may be an appearance of sexism or discriminatory behavior, yet the participant is unable to

say that the event or the experience is the result of bias. Nevertheless, there is a strong feeling that there is some form of bias or discrimination working behind the scenes. Morgan narrated a story about several interim administrators at her college. Of the four interim administrators, two were women, and two were men. The men were hired as permanent administrators while the women's positions were dissolved. Morgan related:

> Those who were most highly qualified were the two female candidates and had more longevity at the institution and had more experience. And it was very apparent across the campus who the more qualified candidates were. So in my cadre of individuals I work with, we thought there was some discrimination bias there.

When asked if she thought this situation were an example of implicit or explicit bias/discrimination, Morgan replied:

> It was an intentional decision to not hire the two female employees. It was in their mind a good ol' boys club kind of thing. I don't think it was an intentionally male/female thing. It was more of a comrade thing. It just so happened that those two male colleagues were friends and were more, had traveled in the same circles more frequently than the female leaders did. I think it was indirectly due to their gender. Socially though, I don't think those females would have been invited into that inner circle of executive leadership, so I can't say that it was directly but it was indirectly because of their gender. But that was confirmed to me that was the predominate decision because those individuals fit in better with the executive leaders' mindset and thought process and goals, where they thought the institution would be going, and that was the reason they selected those two individuals. They didn't say it was because of gender, but they said that is what they had gathered through interviews. They covered their tracks, and that is what was conveyed to us.

This narrative revealed multiple frames, including the naturalism, cultural, and minimization of sexism frames. The naturalism and cultural frames relate to the idea of "fit." These women administrators, despite their professional experience, backgrounds, and years of service at this institution, do not "fit in" as administrators. According to this participant, for example, the women administrators would not have fit in or have been welcomed at the senior men administrators' social events or informal gatherings. Diehl (2014) and Growe & Montgomery (1999) discussed the phenomenon where upwardly mobile women tend not to be invited to men administrators' social events, leading to these women not gaining the same social capital as upwardly mobile men do. These women did not fit into these men upper administrators' ideas about the institution's goals and direction while the men who they hired reflected the ideas the men upper administrators had for the institution's future direction. Morgan described the senior leadership team, composed of men, as covering "their tracks" through these rationalizations, and they minimize (minimization of sexism) the thoughts of several people on campus. This is not about gender, they explained; it is about these women not being good fits and about how they interviewed.

Rae told a story of being denied a promotion and the dynamics that played out between her and the man administrator who decided not to promote her despite a recommendation from a hiring committee.

> I applied for the position. … I went through the entire search, and I was told that I was the chosen candidate by my boss but that [senior administrator] was going on a [vacation], and he wanted to talk to me in two weeks before I was offered the position. So I thought, gosh. That was kind of like weird. What's that all about? Then I was told, 'He just felt a little worried about you. We're going to get a new vice president, and you're not in a tenured position. So he just wants to talk to you about it.' So the two weeks go by. I meet with him,

> and I go into his office. And I never so much feel like a powerless position at work. You know where this person in power is male quite frankly and, you know, in this position of power and I [am] walking in expecting one thing, and he tells me that he is cancelling the search, and he is waiting for the vice president to come. But [sighs] the way the whole situation was handled was awful, and really has nothing to do with your research. But what I am talking about is that experience and never really understanding why. You know, and wondering… and it all just seems like there's this big lie on the line that doesn't have anything to do with gender. But that situation when I was sitting there. I felt like it was gender. Because I have this powerful male, and I am in the room with him by myself. And I am speechless. And I can't even speak. I don't know why. I don't know why that happened to me, but it's like the word, 'Oh.' Like I didn't think I could… I didn't feel like I could speak up. I was so mad at myself when it was all over, and I walked out. Then what do you do? Do you call back and fight for yourself, but it's too late?

Swim and Hyers (1999) and Broido et al. (2015) discuss a variety of fears such as being retaliated against or shunned that lead to women's not responding to or confronting explicit or even these more implicit forms of sexism. Broido et al. pointed to the literature that suggests there is a "struggle between a woman's desire to challenge sexism and the social pressures not to respond" (p. 601). Moreover, multiple frames of gender-blind sexism are clear in Rae's narrative. Rae's story suggests elements of the cultural sexism and minimization frames. Though the hiring committee recommended Rae, the man administrator in this narrative plays the role of benevolent patriarch and canceled the search because he is "looking out for" Rae because she does not have tenure and there is going to be a new vice president. Glick & Fiske (1996) argued:

> benevolent sexism as a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial (e.g., helping) or intimacy seeking (e.g., self-disclosure). (p. 491)

Rae's narrative revealed that benevolent sexism's "consequences are often damaging. Benevolent sexism is not necessarily experienced as benevolent by the recipient" (Glick & Fiske, 1996, pp. 491–492). Rae's not being seen as the right person for this job because she did not have tenure (cultural sexism) and the rationalization for this decision (minimization of sexism) had serious consequences. She did not received a promotion for which she had worked and subsequently applied and was recommended.

Abstract Liberalism

Abstract liberalism manifested itself in participants' descriptions and stories about "choices" related to leadership or education and through ideas that all "have access to equal opportunities or have autonomous choice in matters of residence or access to resources" (Stoll et al., 2016. p. 30). Maria discussed choice in her narrative about her leadership trajectory.

> It was certainly more of a challenge for me than it would have been for a man who either had a wife, just like [my supervisor] at the time, who could just be home with the kid and expect them to move when he moved. That was not my situation and … I was unwilling to move them. Some people will pick their families up and just go for the next opportunity. I knew I wanted to be a president, but not at the sacrifice of my family. So I drew a circle around where I lived, and I said, these are the institutions that I'm going to keep my eyes on because I can drive to them and not disrupt my kids, but so yes, I think it is certainly a

> great challenge. I do think there are other people that choose and make different choices, but for me personally, I knew that I was going to be limited in my opportunities because I wasn't willing to pick up and move to the next state for that next job.

Maria's situation is indicative of what other researchers have found about academic women who seek career advancement. Researchers reported that women academics and women pursuing administrative careers must be willing to relocate in order to obtain positions for which others are competing and to advance their careers (Lepkowski, 2009; McLean, 2010). Rosenfeld and Jones (1987) found that women employed in higher education were less likely to relocate than men were, particularly near the beginning of their careers. Additionally, the willingness to relocate was about the same for men and women after they had been working in their fields for some time (Rosenfeld & Jones, 1987). Shauman and Xie (1996) found that women working in higher education who are also mothers are much less likely to move for career opportunities than men in general or women without children. Rosenfeld & Jones (1987) reported that "not just actual mobility, but also being perceived as potentially mobile can enhance career progress" (p. 493). Maria ultimately achieved her goal of securing a senior-level administrative position although she admitted that this was more challenging for her because of her lack of geographical mobility.

Some might conceive this as simply Maria's personal choice, which over-simplifies factors that lead to these types of decisions. Allen et al. (2009) discussed the challenging choices that women administrators must make while balancing their personal and work lives. They frame these "choices" as "personal." Although women certainly have agency, a patriarchal social structure masks the true extent to which these are simply personal choices. For instance, these decisions reflect Maria's construction of "a good mother." Mothers are expected to make sacrifices while fathers are expected to provide for the family, and these fathers would not necessarily see "moves" as sacrifices but obligatory for the economic good of the family.

Other participants challenged abstract liberalist practices. Jenny confronted the argument of reverse discrimination. The college attorney told her that she could not offer scholarships specifically designated for women or minorities. The college attorney implied that these scholarships give advantages to minority groups over others, leading to potential legal concerns. "And so, our general counsel … will not allow us to do a scholarship just for women, or just for a certain minority, and so one of the issues that I highlighted was why this was." She conducted her own legal research. "I looked at U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights as a primer on that." She challenged this prohibition because of her "interest in creating scholarships in fields where women are under-represented like CTE [career and technical education] fields." Despite no statute or policy against scholarships for women or minorities, the college attorney thwarted Jenny's efforts, which both minimalizes and denies gender and race as issues related to access to educational opportunities. Reverse discrimination as an ideology does not recognize systemic discrimination, which often keeps minorities and women out of higher education and tracks them away from particular careers.

Naturalization

Many societies commonly accept essentialist and biological explanations for women's "natural" characteristics. Stoll et al. (2016) argued, in applying the naturalization frame to gender-blind sexism, "Obviously, there is also widespread appeal for using this same logic when it comes to gender, although in the case of gender (as opposed to race presently), there tends to be far less stigma for privileging biological explanations of social differences" (p. 30). Participants

experienced the naturalization frame in relation to their identities as mothers. Jenny told a story about her experiences as a new mother and her views of larger societal issues.

> I think it's important to acknowledge some of the difficulties women have … who are pregnant or starting their families. Um… just because everyone is just really ginger around you. I recall people thought I had cancer or something like I was really delicate. I worry that I wasn't being given serious projects because of the idea that I would be going on maternity leave, you know, for twelve weeks. Because the idea that I wasn't invited to evening events and so forth with administration because people think, she's got young children at home, which I did, and it was a pain to have babysitters because my husband works at night.

Jenny recognized that others' preconceived notions about what women can do while being pregnant or mothers, in effect, hold women back. Acknowledging a need for equity, not just fair treatment for women, Jenny also saw this as a policy concern related to equal access to benefits that would assist employees as parents and workers.

Maria also experienced attempts at "holding her back" because of notions of mothers' natural roles. She told a story about a conversation with the administrator to whom she reported at the time. She told him that she intended to pursue a doctorate and to take a significant course load. She reported his response: "'Well, what about your kids and your husband?' And I just looked at him like, what, what are you saying to me?" His assumption was that Maria had a family to tend to, and focusing on her career and furthering her education were not things that she was at liberty to do. Maria talked about motherhood being an issue because "it is more acceptable for the mother to stay with them when they get sick," and there are responsibilities to take children "to places that hinders your ability to stay late or come in early." The naturalization frame infers that it is naturally a mother's responsibility/role to do these things despite possible career consequences, and men are not expected to make similar sacrifices for their children and families. These comments also reflect cultural sexism, demonstrating that Maria did not represent the "ideal worker/ideal leader" who is "a White man who is totally dedicated to the work and who has no responsibilities for children or family demands other than earning a living" (Acker, 2006, p. 448).

Cultural Sexism

The naturalization framework and cultural sexism framework are alike in many ways, but the cultural framework extends beyond biology. Cultural sexism reflects justifications for gender inequality based on cultural notions of gender differences. According to Stoll et al. (2016):

> The same logic used to buttress claims about gender and sexism using the naturalization framework is still present, but unlike naturalization, which views these differences as the outgrowth of organic or biological processes, cultural sexism views differences as the result of social processes that distinguish certain types of men and women. (p. 31)

Ashley suggested that being a woman influenced the way she leads. She attributed much of this to stereotypes and social and cultural constructions of being a woman and being a woman leader. Role congruity theory suggests that people positively perceive other people and groups when these people and groups display characteristics and behavior that match their stereotypical social roles (Eagly et al., 2000). Buckling (2014) and Eagly and Karau (2002) further developed this theory in their discussions of bias and discrimination against women leaders when social expectations for female behavior conflicts with behaviors or characteristics related to leadership. Participants in this study faced role incongruities and discussed how their characteristics matched social

expectations for women's behavior while recognizing consequences for women whose behavior does not match social expectations. Ashley narrated:

> I feel like there's an influence though in the way I lead. I think women lead differently than men lead. And I think that … we have strengths and weaknesses, and some are unique to gender to some extent. That's not always the case. But you know, that's maybe a stereotype to some extent, but I do feel like overall that women tend to be more compassionate leaders, and more understanding of other life circumstances that people that report to them may experience. And again, that's not always true, but I think, you know, for me it is anyway [with] the people that, that I've had as leaders. So I found that, um, that that's what has been my experience and I feel like I'm a compassionate leader and an understanding leader. And part of that is due to being a woman.

Ashley recognized stereotypes about women and men as leaders, and she saw herself and others fulfilling these stereotypes, reflecting both the naturalization and cultural frames of gender-blind sexism. Women are naturally "compassionate" and "understanding," yet she mentioned twice that this is not always true, suggesting that there is a cultural component related to these expectations. She shared further that this is likely something that people do not consider (e.g., implicit bias) and witnessed harsh reactions when women leaders do not fulfill stereotypes.

> Probably, and again, they probably do not even think; people don't realize that they expect. … Just to throw out a random example, say somebody's kid is sick, and they expect that their boss to be understanding that they're going to have to take all of this time off. I think that they would expect a woman leader to be more understanding of that than a male leader, as maybe a fellow mom or just somebody who is a woman and that, you know, they might have a man [supervisor and] think he just doesn't understand and have a woman [supervisor and] think she's a bitch, you know? Um, and, and I don't think people really think that through as being, I expect something different from a woman than a man. But I do think that that is true. … I think men, it's more acceptable for them to be more hardcore about things. … I think when you see a woman who really is strong and very assertive and, and that kind of thing, oftentimes she does get labeled or you know, people think that's, you know, a bad quality in a woman, and they think it's a good quality of the man. And I think that's still the case even now.

Ashley articulated the naturalization and cultural frames of sexism, even being enacted by other women in this case. Women are "supposed" to be more understanding of life circumstances and make more allowances for employees. When women violate these stereotypes, they are labeled a "bitch."

Reflecting a role congruent identity, Rae described herself as a "sensitive" leader/supervisor and was hesitant to attribute her kindness and sensitivity to being a woman although she explained why she believed this is a strength rather than a weakness.

> I think that sometimes that what can be misunderstood is sensitivity. … Maybe some of the characteristics that I have appear as a sign of weakness. When it's not, in fact, it's just the characteristics that I have. I don't know if it's based on gender. I sort of think it is. If you look at gender studies, every female is this way or every male is this way, as we know, stereotypically, you know, stereotypically, I am probably that stereotypical, sensitive… you know, I try to be really kind. You know, I'm not really aggressive. … I feel like that is misinterpreted many times… as a sign of weakness. I think it's misinterpreted, and I have to work at being over-aggressive. [Laughs] It's just not my makeup but, to me, I think it's unnecessary to think that someone has to be that way in order to be a good leader. …

> [Sensitivity is] very much a strength because I take the time to listen to people. I feel like it has made me because not just because of those characteristics I mentioned. I really like work people and help them develop. This is going to sound like I am being biased. Sometimes I get the feeling that some people are just really based on their individual selves. … And I don't know if that's because I am a woman or not.

Rae saw being sensitive, supportive, and kind as strengths for leaders, resisting gender stereotypes that suggest that these characteristics are feminine and, therefore, signs of weakness. Rae mentioned that subordinates and colleagues could misread her characteristics rather than see them as advantageous for a leader; she listens to and cares about others. However, women administrators are placed in a double-bind by the expectation that women leaders will be kind and empathetic when, for example, circumstances may call for transactional, directive, and situational leadership approaches.

Angela's narrative reflected the "tendency" for women to be collaborative, kind, and gentle in their approaches to supervising others while men leaders tend to be "tougher" and may come across as abrasive, which may be socially acceptable for men leaders but not for women leaders.

> I think women pay attention to things that men don't. For various reasons, including being socialized to please but also thinking about our own safety, I think we read a room more quickly than men do. Men have a tendency to be more direct, which sometimes gives the appearance of confidence but sometimes seems insensitive or harsh. I try to be direct and transparent but not cruel or uncaring. Male administrators are often viewed as just 'telling it like it is.' Women who are direct can be read as going against the stereotype that they need to be nurturing and compassionate. So for me, it's not that I want to emulate that type of male-oriented leadership model where emotion and kindness have to be sublimated because they're viewed as a sign of weakness. I want to learn from that model, but that's not exactly how I want to do things.

As a leader, she attempted a balancing act of being "direct and transparent" while also caring. Eagly (2007) suggested:

> Tension between the communal qualities that people prefer in women and the predominantly agentic qualities they expect in leaders produces cross-pressures on female leaders. They often experience disapproval for their more masculine behaviors, such as asserting clear-cut authority over others, as well as for their more feminine behaviors, such as being especially supportive of others. (p. 4)

This tension is echoed throughout these narratives as when Ashley discussed women leaders who faced challenges when asserting their authority or holding followers accountable. Despite these tensions, these participants described their leadership styles as more transformative and democratic leaders than their men counterparts.

Minimization of Sexism

Minimization of sexism can come in a variety of forms from denials that sexism persists in today's society to rationalizations for women's marginalization (Stoll et al., 2016). Stoll et al. (2016) used the example that women are less likely to pursue majors or careers in math and engineering, not due to sexism or women being systematically "tracked out of" these fields but "because women are just not as good as men at math and science" (p. 31). Morgan's experience reflects this in the selection of leadership development program candidates.

> There have been leadership academies and executive leadership academies, and the individuals I see going through those academies are predominately male. And those are academies where you would submit your resumes and applications. And then a committee goes through and selects them. And they have some sort of ranking criteria, and they are looking for individuals who would show good growth potential to become leaders at this institution. And they could see a good fit in different types of forward movement. So I almost feel like that selection process, I don't know what that criteria is, that selection process may be a little bit more, I can't say that for sure, but I would say that the majority, that predominately, I would say 80% of them are male.

Men being leaders or being seen as potential leaders is naturalized and deemed culturally acceptable rather than being interrogated in terms of the social, cultural, and historical realities behind these "choices." Morgan's example is constructed merely as an individual choice rather than an issue of access or tracking. Sexism is minimized through rationalizations of the lack of women's involvement in the academy due to their lack of interest and adeptness in leadership.

Conclusion and Implications for Further Study and for Policy

These women higher education leaders narrated stories reflecting all the gender-blind sexism scripts defined by Stoll (2013), and these scripts frequently overlapped. These instances often left the participants uncertain about whether a particular situation was related to gender; other times, it was clear to them that gender was a factor although unnamed. In both cases, these situations left unsettling feelings for the participants. This is not to say that the participants were disempowered or felt unsurmountable setbacks. These women possess substantial agency; after all, they all hold or went on to hold senior-level administrative positions at higher education institutions. Moreover, their experiences often led them to be mindful of the challenges that women and other marginalized groups face. Some of the participants made explicit connections between the challenges they faced related to being women to their own ethical and transformational leadership styles and practices; however, there are likely other factors such as personality and other experiences (e.g., positive role models) that influenced their leadership styles and practices.

This study suggests many topics for further research and implications for policy. The gender-blind framework developed by Stoll (2013) and Stoll et al. (2016) could be applied/transferred to other circumstances and to other groups of women. Future studies could focus on more diverse populations of women such as women leaders of color, LGBTQ leaders, and K-12 leaders. Researchers may discover ways that gender-blind frames influence the lives of both men and women. These potential studies along with this one could aid policymakers and higher education leaders in developing policies and engaging in practices to create equitable work environments with attention to supporting families and creating environments conducive to happy and productive work lives. These policies and practices include family leave policies that are supportive of all genders, equitable and fair hiring policies and practices, anti-discrimination policies, implicit bias training, and other periodic professional development focused on equity and inclusion topics. Equity and Inclusion Offices can be helpful in providing leadership for these initiatives and in developing strategic plans to create and maintain diverse and inclusive workplaces. Leaders must be willing to examine their own contexts, collaborate with all constituencies, and reflect upon their own implicit biases to develop policies and practices that make sense for their organization and that will lead to greater equity and better environments on their campuses. Cultures do not change overnight, so commitment to long-term investigations of

best practices for mitigating implicit biases is necessary because they cannot be completely eliminated. This study highlights the importance of interrogating gender-blind frames, which reflect implicit biases, calling attention to these, and acting to subvert the possible oppressive forces that they represent.

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The Need for a Broader Understanding of Data Under the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders

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The purpose of this study was to examine administrators' use of data, their perceptions of data, and what their expectations were in terms of teacher use of data. In conjunction with this examination will be a closer look at the new Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) to determine the connections as well as the disconnections to the way school leaders currently use data in their everyday practice and the standards of practice called for by the PSEL. A qualitative approach using interviews, focus groups, and document review was used to answer a question about the adequacy of current data-driven decision practices of school leaders in light of the new Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. Findings suggest that the participants in this study used data to inform their practice as it relates to the four PSEL standards focusing on instructional leadership. However, there was little evidence that administrators used data to inform their practice related to the other six PSEL standards related to cultural awareness, organizational culture and climate, and community awareness. As a result, we suggest that the new PSEL standards demand a broader view of data and its use in decision making.

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Data are defined in a variety of ways within the field of information science (Bates, 2005; Zins, 2007); however, it is perhaps best conceptualized as information that exists in the environment and is transformed into something meaningful, relevant, and useful for a specific, practical purpose (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Despite this theoretically broad conceptualization of data, in practice educators often view data exclusively as statistical facts obtained from quantitative measurements – most often assessments of student learning (Farrell & Marsh, 2016). But today's school leaders can no longer afford to view data in this limited manner. According to the recently adopted Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), school leaders must shift their focus beyond issues of curriculum and instruction. Now educational leaders must also attend to school and community culture, student and faculty well-being, cultural competence, and social justice.

The extent to which administrators' use of data can support fulfilling the broader responsibilities outlined by the PSEL is currently unknown. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine administrators' use of data in relation to the PSEL. This examination provides valuable insights to the field on how educational leaders might broaden their scope of data and its use as they are held accountable to new standards that reach beyond traditional instructional leadership concerns.

Data Use by School Leaders

Accountability for student learning drives the use of data for instructional decision-making purposes; therefore, the importance of using data to inform instruction and everyday decisions made in the classroom is well documented (Dunn, Airola, Lo, & Garrison, 2013; Marsh, Pane, & Hamilton, 2006; Schifter, Natarajan, Ketelhut, & Kirchgessner, 2014). Often, this use is focused on student achievement data which is readily available through various standardized tests – most often mandated by the accountability policies and delivered as classroom and school performance reports. In addition, there is a plethora of recent literature that addresses data use by teachers and school leaders. Almost all of this literature explores the use of data for instructional purposes. As part of their instructional planning and decision making, administrators use test scores, graduation rates, and similar academic indicators to evaluate teacher effectiveness and the status of their schools in relation to external accountability mandates (Lasater, Albiladi, Davis, & Bengtson, 2019; Hamilton et al., 2009).

Administrators also play a critical role in establishing the conditions necessary for effective data use within their schools (Lasater et al., 2019; Gerzon, 2015; Lange, Range, & Welsh, 2012; Sun, Przybylski, & Johnson, 2016). Sun et al. (2016) identified three leadership categories that promote and develop data use among teachers and school administrators: personal support, technical support, and cultural support. First, personal support refers to the role of principals in providing support through modeling or conferencing to help teachers understand how to use and make meaning of the data. Similarly, it is important for school leaders to be knowledgeable of data use, engage in a discussion with teachers about data, and offer the support that teachers need to fully engage in data-driven decision making (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). This will create a positive environment where data are valued and used effectively by teachers. With modeling, school leaders can assist teachers by observing teachers' use of data and explaining or demonstrating how to interpret, respond, or act on data (Marsh & Farrell, 2014).

Second, teachers need technical support which calls for providing teachers with adequate time, a working system of data collection and use, and professional development opportunities to develop data literacy (Sun et al., 2016). Along with professional development from the district,

school leaders play a critical role in supporting teachers in the use of data at the school level (Levin & Datnow, 2012). These professional development opportunities increase teachers' capacity to make meaning of students' data and change the classroom instruction accordingly. However, not having enough time is often cited by teachers as an obvious barrier to data use (Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007; Park & Datnow, 2009; Mandinach, 2012). Teachers indicate that they do not have time to be involved in the process of collecting date, analyzing data, and making decisions about instruction based on students' data.

Finally, to be able to use data, school leaders need to provide teachers with cultural support (Lasater et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2016). Research has emphasized the significant role of school leaders in developing and creating a culture of data use in their schools (Datnow & Park, 2014; Gerzon, 2015; Hamilton et al., 2009; Lange et al., 2012; Mandinach, 2012; Mandinach, & Gummer, 2013). This includes developing a system of collaboration, establishing a shared vision, and trust among teachers and school leaders in terms of data use (Gerzon, 2015). Fostering a school data culture also includes formulating goals and expectations for data use (Levin & Datnow, 2012), providing teachers with time, resources, and assistance to make meaning from data (Gerzon, 2015), building trusting and collaborative relationships with teachers (Levin & Datnow, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2004), and maintaining the sustainability of data use (Sun et al., 2016).

The PSEL Connections to Data

Administrators' use of data has been emphasized under the instructional leadership paradigm encouraged by the former ISSLC standards; yet, the PSEL not only emphasizes instructional leadership, it also accentuates cultural awareness, equity, community of care, and school culture and climate issues (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015). The NPBEA explains:

> The Standards have been recast with a stronger, clearer emphasis on students and student learning, outlining foundational principles of leadership to help ensure that each child is well-educated and prepared for the 21st century. They elevate areas of educational leader work that were once not well understood or deemed less relevant but have since been shown to contribute to student learning. (p. 2)

This augmentation of the standards requires school leaders to move beyond the realm of the instructional leader. The NPBEA (2015) charges that:

> …educational leaders must pursue all realms of their work with unwavering attention to students. They must approach every teacher evaluation, every interaction with the central office, every analysis of data with one question always in mind: How will this help our students excel as learners? (p. 3)

The NPBEA does not directly specify what types of data should be analyzed or what types of information should be sought; however, there is a strong call for socially just leadership. An effective leader is seen as one who not only understands the importance of good teaching and strong curricula, but also comprehends the essentiality of developing a community of care that is inclusive of all stakeholders (Smylie & Murphy, 2018). The broader scope of the PSEL is consistent with earlier calls from the field for an increased awareness of and responsiveness to social justice issues in 21st Century school leadership (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Similarly, there have been critical reviews of the PSEL related to leadership for equity (Farley, Childs, & Johnson, 2019) and leadership for community engagement through organizing to address political issues (Welton & Freelon, 2019).

The broader conceptualization of effective school leadership as outlined by the PSEL may call into question the adequacy of school leaders' current data practices. Principals currently seek out academic achievement data (e.g., standardized assessments, benchmark assessments, etc.), but do they seek out data sources that speak to the culture and climate of their school? Do they use data to address equity issues that exist in public education? Do they use data to interrogate the politics embedded in the greater school community? Are school leaders using data in ways that allow them to fulfill the job responsibilities outlined in the PSEL? Ultimately, the relationship between the PSEL and administrators' use of data is currently unknown. This represents an important line of inquiry as leaders seek ways to meet the demands of the profession and facilitate student, school, and community improvement.

Methods

This qualitative study is pragmatic in nature – using the constructs of interpretive description to address complex problems of professional practice (Thorne, 2016). A research design that allowed us to examine the experiences of school leaders in their use of data and compare those experiences to the PSEL was important. Thus, interview and focus group data, along with document analysis, were used to answer the overarching research question:

- How does the use of data by current practicing school leaders in Arkansas relate to the new Professional Standards for Educational Leaders?

To answer this question, two sub-questions guided analysis:

- What types of data/information are seen as important or valued by educational leaders in Arkansas?
- What types of data/information are required to understand and execute sound leadership decision making that reflect the PSEL?

Data Sources

There were three data sources used in this study. First, a focus group was conducted with eight building level leaders (i.e., three elementary, three middle school, one junior high, and one high school) in one large, urban Arkansas district. District administration assisted in participant selection for the focus group by purposefully selecting building level leaders who engaged in and led data use initiatives within their respective schools. The purpose of the focus group was to facilitate an interactive discussion amongst building-level leaders related to their use of data and the value they placed in data-informed decision making.

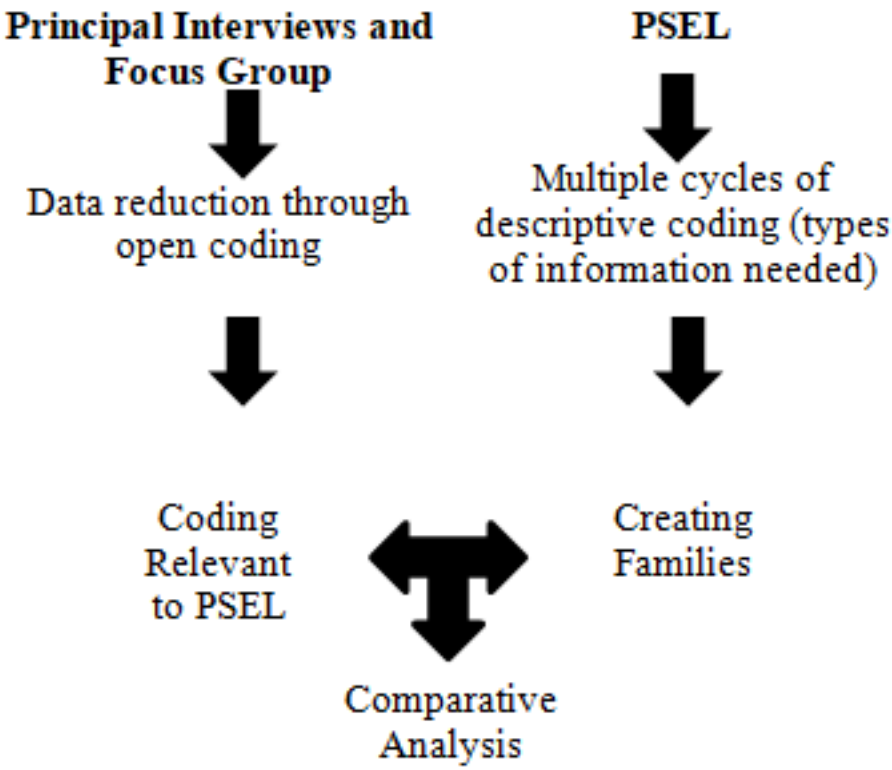
Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight school leaders from various regions of the state. School leaders spanning all grade levels participated in individual interviews. The participating leaders served in schools with enrollments ranging from 271 students to 582 students. Administrator experience ranged from 1 year to 15 years. The purpose of the interviews was to examine principals' views of data, the types of data they used, and the purposes for which they used data. Data from the focus group and in-depth interviews were analyzed using structural coding. In structural coding, a content-based phrase is assigned to data in relation to a particular research question (Saldaña, 2016) – in this study, research question one. Structural coding focused data analysis directly on the types of data valued by Arkansas administrators.

The final source of data was the PSEL document. Documents establish the interests, values, and ideologies of people and, therefore, should be examined critically to establish the

meaning of such social products (Saldaña, 2016). As the PSEL standards represent the values and expectations of the school leadership profession, an in-depth analysis of the standards provided a mechanism for better understanding the types of information (i.e., data) necessary for school leaders to successfully execute the standards. Document analysis involved coding the standards with terms or phrases that described the types of information school leaders would need to address a particular standard. After multiple cycles of coding, "families" were created to represent broader conceptual groupings of codes. The grouping of codes was similar to creating categories; however, the families allowed for any given code to have the possibility of belonging to multiple families as opposed to a single category. Finally, a comparative analysis between principal interviews, the focus group, and the PSEL document was conducted to compare and contrast administrators' use of data to the new PSEL standards (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Map of how the data analysis process was conducted with interview transcripts and the PSEL document as data sources.



Findings from the Standards

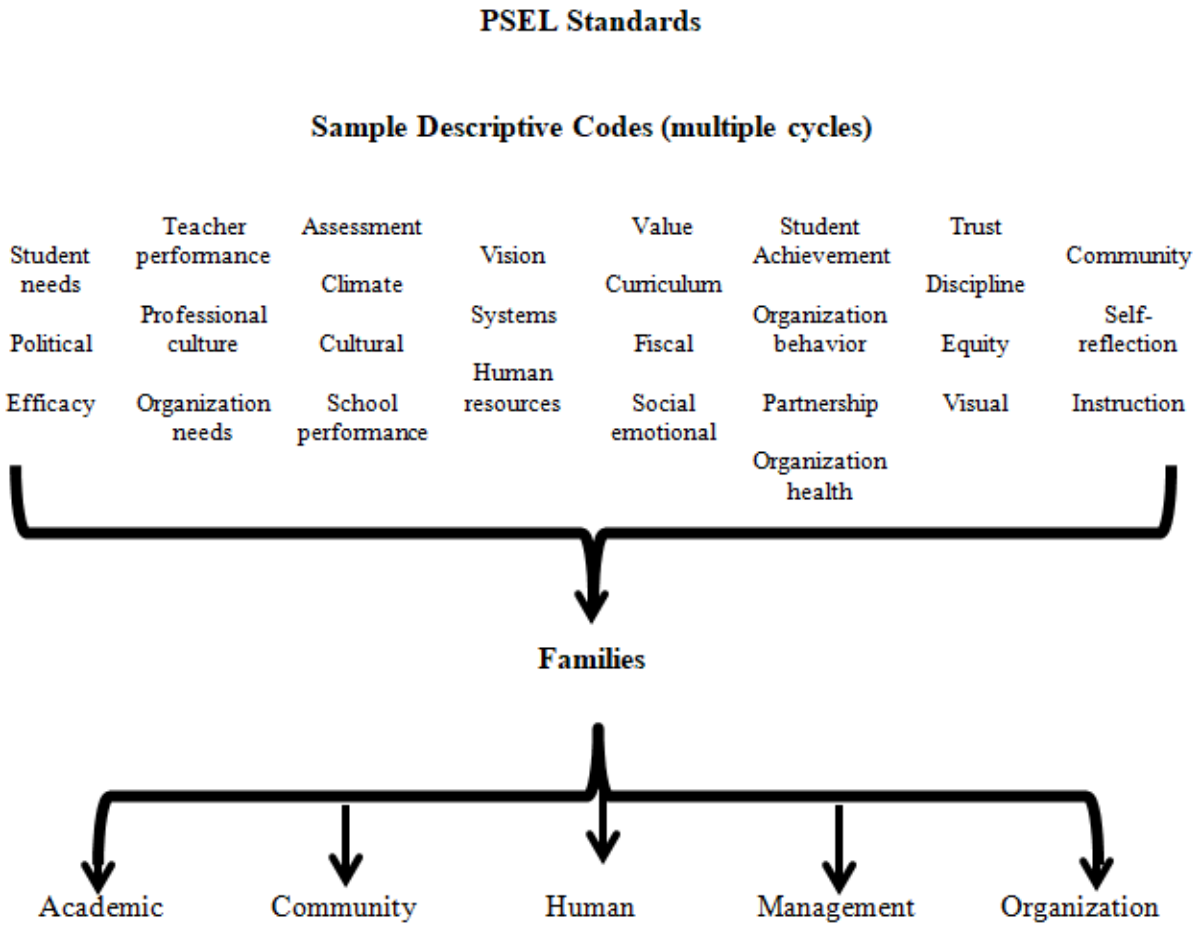
Analysis of the PSEL document revealed five "families" of codes representing the types of information necessary for school leaders to perform their responsibilities (see Figure 2). Some codes were used in multiple families. The five families included: academic, community, human, management, and organization. The "Academic" family represented information related to student

achievement and learning (e.g., assessment, student achievement, instruction, etc.). "Community" represented information related to community concerns (e.g., cultural, political, trust, value, etc.). The "Human" family represented information that could assist in understanding the human being (e.g., efficacy, trust, needs, etc.). "Management" reflected information pertaining to the management aspects of school leadership (e.g., fiscal, systems, instruction, organizational needs, etc.). Finally, the "Organization" family identified information related to how the school as an organization functions (e.g., organization health, organizational behavior, systems, professional culture, etc.)

Figure 2

Example of a sample of the codes used to analyze the PSEL and the five ensuing families.

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Using the families as an anchor in continuing our analysis, we organized the data to determine how the standards and families might be connected or related (see Table 1). For example, Standard 10: School Improvement had elements that spoke to all five families, and the "Human" family had connections to nine of the ten standards.

Table 1

Matrix showing the intersection of standards to families

Standards	Families - Types of Data/Information Needed				
	Academic	**Community**	**Human**	**Management**	**Organization**
1. Mission, Vision, & Core Values		X	X		X
2. Ethics and Professional Norms	X	X	X	X	
3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness	X	X	X		X
4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	X			X	
5. Community of Care and Support for Students		x	x		x
6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel	x		x	x	x
7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff	x		x		x
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community		x	x		x
9. Operations and Management			x	x	
10. School Improvement	x	x	x	x	x

Findings from the Field

Analysis of data obtained from the focus group and in-depth interviews with principals revealed three themes: using data to address curriculum, instruction, and assessment issues; using data to address student support; and, using data to address professional capacity and develop professional community. These three themes reflect the ways current school administrators described using data within their own professional practice.

Using Data to Address Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Issues

Participants often placed assessment data at the forefront of their instructional decision-making process. When school leaders were asked about why or how they use data, they most often responded with a direct emphasis on instructional purposes. Assessing the effectiveness of the taught curriculum, determining the effectiveness of the informal assessments used in individual classrooms, and aligning the curriculum to better meet the needs of students were reasons that administrators shared as being prominent in their decision-making processes. One middle school principal explained:

> …we utilize the previous year's data coming over to identify, "Okay, these kids are weak in this area." So, we really want to use that data to say, "How do we want to focus our upcoming year's curriculum in this content?"…If a child is struggling, through observations, through weekly formative type assessments, then they'll make recommendations there.

Participants also reported using assessment data to monitor students' progress. Administrators used achievement data to determine if students were adequately exposed to the curriculum, to schedule instructional interventions for students, and to sort students into instructional groups by assessed ability. One principal described this process by stating:

> Not all students are on the same level. They're not going to understand 2 + 2 = 4 until they know what the number 2 is. If the standard says you're teaching them 2 + 2, well you can teach them that all day long, until they understand what 2 is they're not going to get 2 + 2. That's where our data really drives our instruction….We just keep it [assessment data] on a Google Doc that they share between each other and they can put their kids' scores in, and then obviously it's on the data walls in her room. What it also helps us with in that data is when we start doing RTI groups we can sort that data off that spreadsheet and find out where our lower ones are and who needs the extra intervention.

Many times, multiple sources of data were cited by the participants as necessary to consider when problem solving and making instructional decisions. The term "drilling down" was used by principals when describing how they used multiple forms of data. As one principal stated:

> I mean when we're talking about really drilling down, we're not just looking at achievement data on like a MAP test or whatever. We're talking about, okay we use that baseline but then we go back and do all these other kinds of assessments with students that are falling below to see exactly down to the level of missed cues.…and when someone's reading, where are there comprehension issues or where are they breaking down at the word level?

As illustrated above, though most of participating principals described using multiple sources of data, they referred to multiple sources of student achievement or academic performance data – not data that might inform cultural awareness needs or identify community engagement issues.

Using Data to Address Student Support

Administrators described how they used achievement data to help support students. One way administrators used achievement data to support students was by ensuring they were placed in academic groups that met their learning needs. As one principal explained:

> We've been using MAP data for test results, literacy and math…and that has been very helpful for us because it can pinpoint those areas and tell us exactly what kids are ready to learn next, so that's very helpful in terms of teachers knowing where to target that curriculum and where to head with their kids, then also in terms of interventions, who needs more support and what do they need more support on.

This statement not only reflects how using achievement data might help students, but also suggests that using information about student's academic performance can allow teachers to collectively engage in data-based decisions, which could contribute to the professional capacity of teachers.

In addressing student support issues, some principals indicated that information beyond student achievement data was important. One middle school principal suggested that while there is need for using student achievement data to address student performance issues, there are other types of data that should be considered as well:

> For student accountability and teacher accountability, of course, the assessments and the testing. That would be the thing most everyone would look at….But we also have to take in consideration the attendance. What are the issues here, whether it's a sickness, these type [of] things. Just anything that would make a change in a student's behavior academically, we have to look into that.

Another principal shared that while she used formal data to make instructional decisions, she also valued more informal data:

> One of the common things that we see, kids struggling, maybe behaviorally. It's very important that we collect that type of data too. Kid's behavior has, maybe we've seen a change in it, really, really struggling, instead of a teacher saying this kid is just out of control, they won't do this and focusing on that, the actual behavior. I ask, what do you know about him. Any changes in his family? And so we start to drill down and start to have conversations about changes…Academically, the same thing. Why does this kiddo still not know his name, what else is going on?

In this study, student achievement data was a prevalent focus of administrators, but some administrators also considered other types of data important when trying to meet the individual needs of students. These other sources of data (e.g., attendance, discipline, etc.) were used once a problem was identified for a particular student. Administrators subsequently used this non-assessment data to develop more intensive, individualized interventions for students. This is in contrast to administrators' use of achievement data. Administrators used school-wide achievement data to inform core curricular and instructional decisions. Thus, it seemed that administrators valued assessment data when making core, school-wide decisions; whereas, they used non-assessment data primarily when addressing individual student needs on a case-by-case basis.

Using Data to Address Professional Capacity and Develop Professional Community

Throughout the narratives of the participating principals, student achievement data was consistently tied to the work of professional learning communities (PLCs) and professional development initiatives. School administrators saw the use of data to anchor PLC discussions as a

way to develop the capacity of their teachers and to allow for the increased relinquishment of instructional decision-making to teachers. In essence, PLCs were seen as the vehicle for teachers using data and developing greater capacity with data-based decision making:

> My expectations are for my teachers to feel comfortable enough to discuss. I expect them to meet and discuss, to talk about the students' needs, and actually, to address the students' needs based upon data...What I wish for my staff and for my faculty is that they develop a culture — and I believe that they have a culture — where they can share best practices of utilizing data that helps them to grow and feel confident as an educator.

While PLCs are considered a structure for professional development by many principals, there was also evidence that principals saw data as the fuel for making decisions about professional development that was outside of PLC activity. For example, one middle school principal talked about how data drove her decision to pursue professional development for her teachers in the area of writing instruction:

> Professional development comes from that [data]. We saw a need this year for writing….Okay, I need to budget money more so it goes towards this PD. I need to get my teachers in. And then, of course, that brings "do we do this during school, or we'll wait until this summer?"….That's what we're working on right now. It was from the data showing that we needed to improve our writing skills.

Achievement data represented a catalyst for professional development, and ultimately, school improvement. In fact, making schools more effective was the driving force for administrators' use of data in this study; however, student achievement data was the predominant type of data referred to when talking about school improvement. Overwhelmingly, school leaders' accounts of their data use referred to the importance of student achievement data as the main driver for school improvement efforts.

Comparing Administrators' Use of Data to the PSEL

The principal focus group and interviews produced data indicating that school leaders in this study valued using data to drive instructional decisions with a major emphasis on using assessment data to identify teaching and learning issues in their schools. There is a relationship between administrators' use of data and the standards; however, that relationship only partially reflects the content of the PSEL. Findings indicate a relationship between what is known about administrator use of data and the following PSEL standards:

- Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment;
- Standard 5: Community Care and Support for Students
- Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel; and
- Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers and Staff.

These four standards share the same emphasis in the interview and focus group data. For example, in Standard 5 – Community Care and Support for Students, the main emphasis is placed on supporting students by sorting them into like groups based on student achievement data (we related this to strand c – *provide coherent systems of academic and social supports …accommodations to meet the range of learning needs of each student*); however, the other strands of Standard 5 were not evident in the findings. For example, there was no evidence of principals using information that might help them make decisions about the demands of their school community (e.g., strand a – *build and maintain a safe, caring, and healthy school environment that meets the academic,*

social, emotional, and physical needs of each child; or, strand f – *infuse the school's learning environment with the cultures and languages of the school's community*, etc.).

In addition, administrators primarily used data consistent with the "Academic" and "Management" families of the PSEL; whereas, data related to the "Community," "Human," and "Organization" families were largely absent from administrators' discussions. This suggests that administrators currently use data that will support them in meeting the academic and management aspects of their positions; however, they seemingly do not collect or use data to guide the community, human, or organizational aspects of their jobs.

Discussion

Findings from this study reveal a disconnect between the manner in which school leaders currently use data to inform their practice and the types of information valued within the PSEL. School leaders in this study emphasized student achievement data as the dominant type of data they valued and the primary source of data used to guide school improvement efforts. However, the adoption of the new PSEL standards has challenged school leaders to move beyond traditional notions of instructional leadership, and analysis of data from this study suggest leaders must broaden their use of data to include the community, human, and organizational aspects of their positions.

The focus on student achievement data is likely reflective of various school accountability policies that have defined school success almost exclusively by standardized test data. Thus, being an instructional leader has often equated to finding ways to raise student achievement scores. Furthermore, educational leadership preparation programs have emphasized the use of student achievement data as a major part of becoming a successful instructional leader – often times to the extent that approaching data-driven decision making is done solely through the lens of standardized student achievement data. However, the PSEL has challenged the field to develop a broader understanding of what constitutes effective leadership:

> The Standards recognize the central importance of human relationships not only in leadership work but in teaching and student learning. They stress the importance of both academic rigor and press as well as the support and care required for students to excel. The Standards reflect a positive approach to leadership that is optimistic, emphasizes development and strengths, and focuses on human potential. (NPBEA, 2015, p. 3).

With the PSEL's added emphasis on the areas of well-being, cultural responsiveness, community of care, and meaningful engagement of families and community, school leaders and leadership preparation programs must carefully reconsider the types of data that might be important in meeting *all* of the PSEL standards.

The new PSEL standards call for a multi-dimensional view of data, and findings from our study suggest that there are other data sources school leaders school consider as they facilitate school improvement. For example, data on organizational health and community relationships could provide invaluable information related to student and community needs, and collecting data in these areas could help leaders fulfill the community, human, and organizational aspects of their positions. It could also help them foster academic optimism with schools. Academic optimism emphasizes the role of trust, collective efficacy, and academic press in the transformation of schools as organizations (Dipaola & Wagner, 2018; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). In the formula for creating academic optimism, the nature of the culture of the organization (i.e., trust and collective efficacy) is just as important to understand and address as student achievement (i.e., academic press). To understand trust and efficacy in an organization, a leader must look at data that will

reveal the nature of the culture of their school, the needs of the community that surrounds their school, and the performance of the teachers and students who form the core of the school's activities.

Finally, the PSEL necessitates that school leaders no longer view student academic achievement as the desired outcome of schools. In our study, even when administrators used non-academic data, their primary purpose for using this data was to address the academic deficiencies of students. Yet the PSEL calls leaders to think more holistically about their students, schools, and communities. In other words, the PSEL encourages school leaders to recognize that the desired "end" in schools is no longer simply academic achievement; rather, the desired "end" is student, school, and community well-being. From this perspective, the types of information school leaders need to evaluative their progress toward well-being for students, schools, and communities must move beyond standardized achievement data.

Conclusion

The PSEL offers a refreshing framework as school leaders face the challenging task of transforming schools into dynamic learning organizations that will produce the citizens, workforce, thinkers, inventors, and leaders of the future. The move toward a more comprehensive look at what goes on in schools and their communities holds great potential in making meaningful change in schools as they serve increasingly diverse communities. To truly respond to the standards, school leaders must continue to provide academic press by paying attention to student achievement data. However, they must also be willing to collect, analyze, and act on data to better address students' well-being and issues of social justice. Such data is essential for leaders as they development an awareness and understanding of the schools and communities they serve.

The disconnect between school leaders use of data and the current PSEL suggests that a new perspective on educational leadership practice is necessary. What would happen if school leaders used data related to school culture, faculty efficacy, and community perception with the same energy and intentionality as student achievement data? What would happen if data were used to think beyond the academic needs of students? What would happen if the field thought about instructional leadership in a more transformational way – a way in which the health of the organization and its people were prioritized *above* issues of grade-level proficiency, math scores, graduation rates, etc.? The PSEL presents an opportunity for school leaders, and those who prepare them, to redefine the term data and reconsider what data educators need to make sound decisions for sustainable school improvement. Student achievement is important and should remain so; however, the time has come to recognize that other types of information should be as deliberately and rigorously collected, analyzed and acted upon as student academic achievement data has been in the past.

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Increasing Elementary and Middle School Teacher Retention Through Meaningful Distributive Leadership Practices

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Distributive leadership is a prominent leadership framework within the twenty-first century. Focusing on authentic leadership opportunities, distributive leadership explores the unique interactions between leaders, followers and situations. Promoting teachers as meaningful leaders within a school setting, distributive leadership has been shown to have a positive impact on school improvement. As teacher retention continues to surface as a predominant concern in American schools, distributive leadership may offer a potential solution. This qualitative study identified various connections between distributive leadership as it impacts elementary and middle school teacher retention. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

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The construct of leadership is often welcomed with a multitude of definitions, perceptions, and experiences. Leadership in education is often misunderstood, as previous models emphasize approaches that place principals in the center of schoolwide change. As teams of educational leaders are often required to address the vast intellectual and emotional needs of students, teachers and the surrounding community, this perception of the principal as "heroic leader" is no longer acceptable (Yukl, 1999). In addition to developing procedures to support the day-to-day school operations, principals are often tasked with a multitude of responsibilities – ranging from ensuring student safety, developing efficient procedures for the day-to-day school operations, monitoring students' academic and emotional success, assessing teachers' instructional delivery, supporting families with locating community resources, revising educational policy, and providing a vision for the future. Given the expansive role of leadership within the school setting, no one individual is equipped to lead (Burke, Fiore, & Salas, 2003).

The role of the educational leader has likely never been so complex. At the same time, the role of the teacher is becoming increasingly challenging. Amidst national protests from teachers who are fed-up with the profession, teacher retention is gaining momentum as a profound concern. It's no longer just a hunch that teachers are frustrated. In 2012, the University Council for Educational Administration found that "16% of the teacher workforce, or almost 500,000 teachers, left their school each year" (Castro, Quinn, Fuller, & Barnes, 2018, p. 1). This statistic is especially alarming when we consider that "90% of the nationwide annual demand for teachers stems from when teachers leave the profession," (Castro, et al., 2018, p. 1). With a "10% decline in national teacher preparation program enrollment from 2004 to 2012," the future of the teaching profession is at risk (Castro et al., 2018, p. 1).

The future of the teaching profession is desperate for help. Teacher retention is a complex issue that likely will not be solved by one great idea. Rather, supporting teacher retention requires additional attention at the multifaced root of the concern. Addressing teacher retention may very well require the education profession to pull back the metaphorical curtain on effective leadership. Over the years, publication after publication has documented the tremendous connection between teacher retention and administrative support (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Glaser, 2003; Hirsch, Emerick, Church & Fuller, 2007; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005). It would be prematurely dismissive to overlook the impact of a supportive site administrator or principal. Additionally, the literature points to a distinct relationship between principal leadership and teachers' organizational commitment (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990; Koh, Steers, & Terborg, 1995; Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006). The notion of teacher commitment is frequently associated with teacher work performance and the overall quality of education (Dee, Henkin, & Singleton, 2006; Tsui & Cheng, 1999).

The definitive relationship between leadership and the teaching profession warrants further investigation in the discussion of teacher retention. In pursuing this conversation, one leadership framework has risen to the top. Distributive leadership has gained recognition over the past 20 years for its positive influence on principals' job satisfaction (Hulpia & Devos, 2009a). Labelled as the "hot item in the educational management literature" (Hulpia, Devos & Van Keer, 2010, p. 46), the distributive leadership framework offers insight into key aspects related to teacher retention.

Background of the Study

Ask a teacher or principal and they will tell you that retention is a concern. With projections estimating a dismal 200,000 teachers available for hire by 2025, the trends in teacher retention predict a gap of more than 100,000 teachers each year (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 3). Simply put, our schools cannot afford empty classrooms. Teacher retention may be most detrimental among our nation's struggling schools, where the cycle of poverty negatively reinforces teachers' decisions to remain in the classroom. Sutcher et al. (2016) identified a "vicious cycle" that "is often created in hard-to-staff schools" (p. 5). Such hard-to-staff schools "typically end up with a disproportionate number of relatively inexperienced teachers, who typically leave at much higher rates than other teachers" (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 5).

Increasing teacher retention will require an investment from within the educational system. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2007) could "reduce teacher turnover, and thus reduce the costs associated with teacher turnover" (as cited in Barnes et al., 2007, p. 5). Investing in teacher retention includes advocating for responsible leadership practices. Leadership has been associated with teacher retention throughout the literature (Borman & Dowling, 2006; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Hall et al.,1992; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kersaint et al., 2007; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Swars et al., 2009; Wynn et al., 2007). Specifically, distributive leadership may serve as a missing ingredient in the recipe to address teacher retention. While touted as an effective leadership framework, the research on distributive leadership is underdeveloped (Gronn, 2010). Therefore, additional research is not only warranted, but necessary to uncover the potential of distributive leadership in increasing teacher retention.

Review of Literature

Distributive Leadership

Distributive leadership has gained recognition in the education world as the "normatively preferred leadership model" (Bush, 2018, p. 535). The literature is extremely favorable toward distributive leadership as a framework of school improvement (Bush, 2013; Hallinger and Heck, 2009). Day et al. (2009) further identified a connection between distributive leadership and academic achievement, finding that "substantial leadership distribution was very important to a school's success in improving pupil outcomes" (p. 17). With its ability to promote meaningful configurations of leadership amongst capable teachers and staff, distributive leadership promotes such a collective interest and responsibility (Ritchie & Woods, 2007).

The distributive leadership perspective applied within this study emphasizes Spillane's (2006) definition. Spillane's (2006) definition addresses the unique interplay between school leaders, followers, and situations. In acknowledging the dynamic relationship between leaders, followers, and situations, Spillane (2006) identifies distributive leadership as a fluid framework, requiring continuous review and adaptation. As such, distributive leadership studies the practice of individuals operating within the organizational system and the patterns of interactions among those participants and factors within the school environment. With distributive leadership, multiple individuals work together within formal and informal roles to impact school improvement (DeFlaminis et al., 2016; Spillane, 2006). In this way, distributive leadership is viewed as "descriptive rather than prescriptive" (DeFlaminis et al., 2016, p. 9). DeFlaminis et al. (2016)

acknowledged that the distributive leadership framework "does not tell us how leadership should be distributed but asserts that it already is distributed" (p. 9). Recognizing that leadership is nonlinear, distributive leadership is a "framework for understanding leadership, which emphasizes the embedded, shared, and practice-oriented nature of organizational leadership" (DeFlaminis et al., 2016, p. xvii).

Spillane's (2006) definition of distributive leadership is greatly enhanced by the concept of leadership practice (Supovitz, D'Auria, & Spillane, 2019). Distributive leadership draws attention to the practice of interactions of leaders, followers, and the surrounding situations that impact a school. Focusing on leadership practice, highlights the ability of teacher leader actions (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). Specifically, there are five elements recognized as supportive of leadership practice within a distributive leadership framework (Supovitz, D'Auria, & Spillane, 2019). First, school organizations in a distributive leadership framework assume greater responsibility with "recognizing, positioning, and utilizing resources for leadership" (p. 9). In addition, successful distributive leadership schools will create a set of "leadership skills which emphasize enacting influence rather than relying largely on authority" (p. 9). Furthermore, such schools utilize leadership skills to "craft a set of organizational conditions" that positively encourage and support engagement and produce school improvement (p. 10). Emphasizing leadership practice requires that schools involve a "broader array of stakeholders as leaders" within the process of continuous improvement (p. 10). Finally, it requires individuals to navigate challenges that may arise with distributed leadership to promote meaningful school improvement (p. 10).

How might distributive leadership support teacher retention? Distributive leadership requires "a fundamental shift in the way formal leaders view their leadership roles and responsibilities when interacting with others" (Peters, Carr, & 2018, p. 33). Empirical evidence affirms that schools with only one identified source of leadership (i.e. – principal) experience poor performance and low morale (Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016, p. 153). Distributive leadership creates deliberate pathways to share and distribute leadership within a school (Bush, 2018; Harris, 2011). Leaders may be "individual, pairs or groups, formally appointed or not. They may lead for a long period or step up in response to a particular opportunity or need" (DeFlaminis et al., 2016, p. 11). As a framework, distributive leadership is not forced onto teachers by principals and supervisors. Rather, "[i]t is fostered through the interactions and relationships occurring among individuals throughout the school community on a daily basis" (Peters, Carr, & Doldan, 2018, p. 33). Distributive leadership may be arranged within three configurations: division of labor, co-performance, and parallel performance (Spillane, 2006). Utilizing an intentional dispersion of leadership responsibilities, distributive leadership has found success in improving organizational outcomes and increasing teacher satisfaction (Ross, Lutfi, & Hope, 2016, p. 162). The intentional dispersion of leadership present in a distributive leadership framework allows teachers to rise as key components of school improvement (Ross et al., 2016). Distributive leadership is especially impactful with school improvement due to the "multidirectional flow of influence that entwines the principal, teachers, counselors, and other organization members" (Ross et al., 2016, p. 159). This multidirectional flow may be recognized as empowering for teachers who are recognized for their talents and abilities to lead. Over multiple cycles, a school may develop a network of qualified teacher leaders. As leaders within the school, teachers participating in a distributive leadership framework gain the authority to actively participate within the decision-making process and impact authentic change. Thus, by seeking out the expertise of many leaders within a school, the entire organization is able to progress (Tahir et al, 2016).

Distributed leadership is a relatively new leadership framework, yet its research is underdeveloped (Gronn, 2010; Peters, Carr, & Doldan, 2018; Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016). As a proven framework of school improvement, distributive leadership may offer significant potential in the realm of teacher retention (Spillane, 2006, p. 30). The literature is conclusive that "leadership may support efforts to recruit, retain, and develop the best teachers and mitigate teacher turnover" (DeFlaminis, Abdul-Jabbar & Yoak, 2016, p. 84). As a recognized framework for school improvement, it seems likely that distributive leadership may also offer implications for teacher retention.

Teacher Retention and Attrition

The connection between teacher retention and administrative leadership is well documented in the research (Borman & Dowling, 2006; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Hall et al.,1992; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kersaint et al., 2007; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Swars et al., 2009; Wynn et al., 2007). Among the contributors, Ladd (2009) isolated teacher perception of school leadership as the most impactful working condition that impacts teacher retention. Ulrick (2016) found that "[t]eacher perception of leadership is a well-established predictor of attitudes associated with teacher decisions to stay or leave" (p. 435). Also present in the literature is the understanding that teachers experience more organizational commitment and greater levels of empowerment in their positions when administrators facilitate opportunities to partake in decision-making, support professional development, and promote community relations (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Urick, 2016).

While the presence of leadership greatly impacts teacher retention, the research is also clear that a lack of effective leadership or negative leadership poses a threat to teachers' decisions to remain in the classroom. In fact, negative leadership demonstrated by inadequate administrative support has been identified as one of the most detrimental factors involved with teacher attrition (Prather-Jones, 2011; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Other areas of leadership that have been found to present a negative influence include teachers' perceptions of reduced or limited autonomy, micromanagement (including the need to justify one's actions), and possessing a lack of power to impact or change school policy (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014).

Beyond leadership, there are other factors that influence teacher retention. In fact, the research clearly identifies a difference among elementary and secondary teachers. For example, elementary teachers are more likely to remain in the teaching profession than their secondary counterparts (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Hughes, 2012; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Murnane, Singer, & Willett, 1989). Middle school teachers are typically associated more with attrition due to concerns directly associated with adolescence (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Hughes, 2012). Additionally, experience or efficacy are commonly linked with teacher retention. Hughes (2012) found that teachers with less experience or knowledge about teaching were more likely to leave the classroom.

Research Questions

This qualitative study was informed by three guiding research questions:

1. What qualities of distributive leadership may improve teacher retention?

2. How do elementary and middle school teachers experience distributed leadership?
3. Do elementary and middle school teachers' current experiences with distributive leadership influence their desire to remain in the classroom?

Study participants provided invaluable data regarding the ways distributive leadership impacted teacher retention at one elementary and one middle school within the southwest United States.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

Phenomenology provided the theoretical framework and guiding methodology for this qualitative study. Phenomenology served as the foundation for this study by allowing the researcher to focus on the "complex, detailed understanding" of teachers' lived experiences with distributed leadership (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 46). The researcher constructed this qualitative study to withhold predeterminations or bias, in favor of understanding the lived experience distributive leadership created among elementary and middle school teachers. Utilizing data collected from elementary and middle school teacher in-depth interviews, the researcher was able to identify teachers' lived experiences with the phenomenon of distributed leadership. Synthesizing and refining the data allowed the researcher to produce a description of its universal essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The universal essence provided a composite description of the "what" and "how" regarding teachers' experiences working for the two principals practicing distributed leadership (Moustakas, 1994). Utilizing the data collected, the researcher was able to describe teachers' experiences distributive leadership; determine the qualities of distributive leadership that impact teacher retention; and identify whether or not distributive leadership would impact their decisions to remain in the classroom.

Methodology and Instrumentation

This qualitative study sought to identify the distributive leadership practices that may increase elementary and middle school retention. In so doing, phenomenology served as the guiding theory and methodology. Phenomenology provided an essential function by emphasizing participants' lived experiences that impacted their understandings and feelings regarding distributive leadership. In this study, the researcher sought to understand elementary and middle school teachers' lived experiences in working at a school where distributive leadership practices were prevalent.

As a research method, phenomenology provided the investigator with in-depth interview data to fully encapsulate participants' lived experiences. Phenomenology reflects Van Manen's (2014) assertion that its methodology reflects daily living. Van Manen (2014) proposed that a " phenomenological question may arise any time we have had a certain experience that brings us to pause and reflect" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 31).

The structure of this study reflected Moustakas' (1994) Transcendental Phenomenology Framework. Narrowing the focus from phenomenology to transcendental phenomenology allowed the researcher to focus on elementary and middle school teachers' lived experiences with distributed leadership over other personal interpretations (Moustakas, 1994). Data collected from the teacher in-depth interviews responded to two central phenomenological questions (Moustakas, 1994): "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?" and "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). Following each in-depth teacher interview, participant data was coded and

reduced into significant statements or quotes. Prior to coding, the researcher was careful to bracket her own interpretations and beliefs separately from the codable text. Utilizing the process of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994), the researcher examined data from elementary and middle school teacher interview transcripts to "highlight 'significant statements,' sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). Significant statements were subsequently combined into meaningful themes that represented all teacher participants. These themes were reviewed by the researcher to develop textural and structural descriptions to elucidate the experience of distributed leadership. Finally, textural and structural descriptions were combined to convey the full essence of distributed leadership as a lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Study Sample and Target Population

This qualitative study included elementary and middle school teachers from two schools within a district in the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona. As a large district, it provides instructional services to over 23,000 students. The district encompasses 29 schools (14 elementary schools, five middle schools, four K-8 schools, five high schools and the online high school). The district employs roughly 1,500 teachers to serve its students and families.

Criterion sampling was used among two schools to select teacher participants. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "[c]riterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experience the phenomenon" (p. 157). Working from this understanding, the researcher required several criteria of each teacher participant. First, elementary and middle school teachers were required to serve within the district as currently employed and practicing teachers. Second, each participant was required to work at one of two sites (one elementary and one middle) that were identified within a principal focus group as having leadership that demonstrated qualities of distributed leadership. Selecting teachers that worked at one of the two schools identified within the principal focus group was critical with ensuring the integrity of phenomenological research. This essential component speaks directly to the "data collection procedures that [involve] interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 77). Finally, teacher participants were chosen by research in accordance with their understanding of the study's purpose and willingness to participate.

Focus Group Participants. This qualitative research study took place at one elementary and one middle school within the school district that was the site for this study. As indicated, the researcher utilized a principal focus group to identify one elementary and one middle school where distributive leadership practices were evident. Aden Elementary School (AES) and Avery Adams Middle School (AAMS) (these names were used to replace the schools' actual names) emerged from an initial focus group on December 5, 2019 as providing climates to teachers where distributed leadership served as the primary leadership model. The principal focus group was conducted with 15 administrators. The school district's Assistant Superintendent of Education Services shared the focus group information with each of the elementary, middle, and high school principals to ensure equal access for participation. Of the 29 principals contacted, a combination of 15 principals volunteered to serve as participants in the focus group. As shown in Table 1, the 15 principal participants represented a varied mix of talents and experience. Table 1 shows that four principals represented the high school level, three were principals at the middle school level, and eight were principals at the elementary level. Gender represented a mostly even distribution,

with seven principals being male and eight being female. The principal with the largest number of years of experience (13 years) was HP2, followed by MP2 (11 years); MP1, EP5, and EP6 (10 years each); and EP1 with nine years. The remaining principals participating in the focus group had between seven and two years of experience; HP4 (7 years), EP2 (6 years), HP1 (5 years), EP3 and MP3 (4 years), EP4 (3 years), and EP7, EP8, and HP3 (2 years each).

Table 1 (Sulit, 2020, p. 127)

Focus Group Participants Demographics: Administrators

Participant	Years of Service	Gender
EP1	9	Female
EP2	6	Female
EP3	4	Female
EP4	3	Male
EP5	10	Male
EP6	10	Female
EP7	2	Female
EP8	2	Female
MP1	10	Male
MP2	11	Male
MP3	4	Male
HP1	5	Male
HP2	13	Female
HP3	2	Female
HP4	7	Male

Elementary and Middle School Teacher Participants. Thirteen teachers were interviewed within this qualitative study. As shown in Table 2, seven of the participants represented elementary teachers. Of the elementary participants, six were females and one was

male. Years of elementary teacher experience ranged from five – 25.5 years. The singular male teacher had 25.5 years of experience. The female teachers had five, eight, 12, 14, 18 and 23 years of experience. Each of the elementary teacher participants interviewed during this study taught general education, including reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. One elementary teacher was interviewed at each of the grade levels except for 4th grade, where two teachers were represented.

Table 2 (Sulit, 2020, p. 138)

Interview Participant Demographics: Elementary Teachers

Participant	Years of Service	Gender	Content/Subject Areas	Grade Teaching
ET1	12 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	4th
ET2	14 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	2nd
ET3	23 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	Kindergarten
ET4	5 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	1st
ET5	18 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	5th
ET6	8 years	Female	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	3rd
ET7	25.5 years	Male	General Education: Reading, Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies	4th

In addition, several middle school teachers were interviewed for this study. As shown in Table 3, six middle school teacher participants were interviewed. Four were females and two were males. Middle school teachers' experience ranged from 1 – 43 years. The two male teachers had 18 and 20 years of experience. The four females' experience were represented by one, 12, 13, and 43 years. Middle school teacher participants taught a multitude of content areas, including: Special Education (1), English Language Arts (2), Social Studies (1), STEM Applications (1), and Title 1 Instructional Specialist (1). Of the six middle school teachers interviewed, three taught 6th, 7th, and 8th grade; one taught 7th and 8th grade; one taught 6th grade; and one taught 8th grade.

Table 3 (Sulit, 2020, p. 139)

Interview Participant Demographics: Middle School Teachers

Participant	Years of Service	Gender	Content/Subject Areas	Grade Teaching
MT1	43 years	Female	Title 1 Instructional Specialist	6th, 7th, 8th
MT2	13 years	Female	Self-Contained Special Education	6th, 7th, 8th
MT3	1 year	Female	English Language Arts	6th
MT4	18 years	Male	English Language Arts	8th
MT5	12 years	Female	Social Studies	6th, 7th, 8th
MT6	20 years	Male	STEM Applications, Advanced Engineering, Video Production	7th, 8th

Field Testing

Prior to conducting in-depth interviews with teachers at Aden Elementary and Avery Adams Middle School, field testing was used among three currently practicing teacher instructional coaches from a Southwestern School District. The process of field testing was used to support the researcher with determining appropriateness of question wording and ordering. Field testing the questions permitted the researcher to determine if the participant responding would yield pertinent information related to each of the three research questions. Additionally, field testing allowed the researcher to practice the process of remaining neutral and open-ended during the interview process. In addition, field testing was used to refine the initial listing of codes from the researcher's codebook.

Data Collection: Focus Group

The principal focus group was conducted with elementary, middle, and high school administrators from the school district on December 5, 2019. Data collected from the principal focus group was pertinent for the researcher to identify a target sample for data collection. Fifteen SSD principals participated in a focus group to provide their viewpoints and attitudes regarding distributive leadership and teacher retention. During the conversation, the researcher jotted reflections from the principals' conversations. The researcher made note of principals' personal reactions, thoughts, doubts, and elaborations (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 94). The recorded conversation from the principal focus group was transcribed by the researcher. In addition, the researcher utilized analytic memoing to record her "reflections and thinking processes about the data" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 95).

Data Collection: In-Depth Interview

The researcher collected data from the teacher interviews between January 2020 and March 2020. All teacher interviews were recorded. Data collected from each teacher interview was transcribed by the primary investigator to ensure the researcher's ability to remain purely connected to the phenomenological methodology and serve as instrument of the process.

During the elementary and middle school teacher interviews, participants were asked open-ended questions to provide freedom with responding. Utilizing open-ended questions ensured that teachers were unrestricted with their responding to share additional information as needed to convey their experiences with distributive leadership. Elementary and middle school teachers responded to eight questions.

1. How would you describe the leadership at your current school?
2. Describe how teachers participate in leadership at your current school.
3. How have you personally experienced leadership at your current school? How have these experiences affected you? What thoughts stand out for you? What feelings stand out for you?
4. Describe your current principal's leadership style.
5. What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the teaching profession?
6. What other factors support your decision to remain in the classroom?
7. If you were a principal, what changes would you make to support teacher retention?
8. Having thought about leadership, what else would you like to share?

Data Analysis Procedures: In-Depth Interviews

Data analysis was conducted in accordance with Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for phenomenological analysis and representation as designated by Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 201). The researcher initiated data analysis by noting her reflexivity toward distributed leadership as a leadership framework. Subsequently, the researcher developed a list of significant statements to guide the initial process of coding teachers' lived experiences with distributed leadership identified within the in-depth interviews. After conducting multiple teacher interviews, the researcher modified and updated the original list of significant statements to include the most accurate representations.

Additional analysis of the data occurred through the process of horizontalization to review each significant statement as having equal value and "develop a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements" or codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201). Data analysis also reflected participant and peer feedback gathered at various points in the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 195). Initial categories and themes were continuously refined via analytic memoing. The primary researcher highlighted impactful quotes, numerated the frequency of codes and identified relating categories.

Significant statements were grouped into related categories or "broader units of information" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201). From there, themes were created to describe the experience of distributed leadership and identify meaningful clusters of data that removed repetition (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201). Textural descriptions of the elementary and middle school teachers' experiences with distributed leadership were documented with verbatim

examples. Additionally, the researcher created structural descriptions of the elementary and middle school teachers' experiences with distributed leadership to elucidate the "setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced" (p. 201). Finally, the researcher produced a description of the experience of distributed leadership that included both textural and structural analysis. This composite description or essence included meaningful commentaries and examples that highlighted the textural and structural descriptions of the elementary and middle school teachers' experiences.

Validity

The researcher included multiple validation strategies to address the researcher's lens, participant's lens, and reader's lens (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). The researcher triangulated multiple data sources from teacher interviews to address the researcher's lens and clarify reflexivity. Corroborating interview data from multiple sources allowed the researcher to ensure that teacher experiences were representative amongst multiple individuals.

Prior to conducting research, the primary investigator identified personal reflexivity to separate these values and experiences from the data. Clarifying personal bias or attitudes provided the ability for the researcher to separate her value-laden statements from the sample group.

After each in-depth interview, elementary and middle school teacher participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on initial codes from the researcher's codebook. Allowing for feedback during the initial coding process allowed the teachers to further impact how their experiences were recorded. Thus, participants were given the opportunity to "judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261).

Beyond the opportunities listed above, teachers were encouraged to supplement additional information related to their experiences. During the in-depth interviews, elementary and middle school teachers were invited to openly share additional information that remained previously unanswered.

Finally, the reader's lens was validated by including opportunities for colleagues to peer review the researcher's data collection process. Individuals selected for peer review were carefully chosen by the researcher as demonstrating expertise in both qualitative research and research methodology.

Reliability

The researcher utilized multiple procedures to ensure reliability and intercoder agreement within the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 265). First, two recording devices were present at each teacher interview to ensure accuracy with the production of reliable interview transcripts. Additionally, the researcher saved all data on digital files to enhance access of materials and ensure ease with crosschecking data. Digital files were saved on the principal investigator's password-protected hard drive to guarantee privacy of materials. Furthermore, the researcher developed a preliminary code list and codebook to enhance and support the process of data interpretation. The researcher's codebook was reviewed with multiple teacher participants and colleagues to promote reliability with the data. Finally, the researcher's codebook underwent multiple revisions to identify a conclusive set of codes.

Limitations

As with any research method, utilizing a qualitative analysis approach offered the potential to produce several limitations. For example, a potential limitation existed with the identification of teacher participants depending on teachers' preferences to participate or not participate in the study. Fortunately, the elementary and middle school teacher participants in this study were anxious to participate and volunteered freely. Similarly, a potential limitation existed with the identification of participants for the principal focus group. This was addressed by collaborating with the district superintendent to ensure an appropriate meeting date and time were selected. Furthermore, participation within the principal focus group had the potential to be hindered if administrators perceived that the study would identify weaknesses in their leadership. Fortunately, administrators expressed interest in participating within this research study and volunteered freely.

Beyond participant selection, another challenge that often occurs within qualitative research is the lack of consistent data that is received from participants. Conducting open-ended, in-depth interviews allows for potential differences in reporting between teacher participants. In qualitative research, it is essential to capture and report these differences. In order to capture the full depth and breadth of teachers' experiences with distributed leadership, the researcher conducted multiple and exhaustive in-depth interviews. A final potential limitation existed with the amount of time needed to conduct the in-depth interviews. The researcher overcame this potential obstacle by meeting teachers at times that were convenient for their schedules.

Research Findings

RQ1 Overall Summative Findings

Research Question 1 (RQ1) addressed the question: What qualities of distributive leadership may improve teacher retention? Accordingly, four interview questions were asked to address RQ1: IQ5 (What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the teaching profession?), IQ6 (What other factors support your decision to remain in the classroom?), IQ7 (If you were a principal, what changes would you make to support teacher retention?), and IQ8 (Having thought about leadership, what else would you like to share?).

In response to RQ1, six common themes were identified as qualities that may improve teacher retention: Administrative Support, Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities, Culture/Climate, Making a Difference/Joy in the Classroom, Leadership: Tough Stuff, and Balance: Work/Family (see Table 4).

Administrative support. Elementary and middle school teachers identified Administrative Support as a quality of distributive leadership that may positively impact teacher retention. Three elementary teachers and three middle school teachers described the importance of working for a supportive administration. Elementary teachers described the significance of their principal in maintaining an environment with open communication. Elementary teachers expressed perceiving an ease with communication with their principal leadership. In addition, elementary teachers described feeling supported with school initiatives.

Alternately, middle school teachers discussed the importance of a principal providing support as the instructional leader on campus. Middle school teachers identified the need for principals and administrators to provide guidance within the professional goal setting

process. Beyond goal setting, middle school teachers shared the need for leadership to build connections and create rapport with new teachers.

The literature also points to the significance that Administrative Support may provide in the discussion about teacher retention. Boyd et al. (2011) found "teachers' perceptions of the school administration" was the most significant factor in teacher retention (p. 321). Urick (2016) confirmed the significance of school leadership by identifying it as a significant predictor of whether or not teachers would decide to remain in the profession. Given the supportive nature of the distributive leadership framework, teachers may perceive the experience as positively impacting their decision to remain in the classroom.

Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities. Both elementary and middle school teachers discussed the significance of Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities as a quality of the distributive leadership experience. Of the participants, three elementary teachers and five middle school teachers voiced concern regarding the Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities associated with distributive leadership.

Both teacher groups described Extra Work/ Teacher Responsibilities as an over-filling their metaphorical "plates." Furthermore, elementary and middle school teachers described this extra work as including additional meetings before, during, and after school. Of note, both groups of teachers perceived Extra Work/ Teacher Responsibilities as being stressful.

There were several differences between the elementary and middle school teacher groups. For example, elementary participants perceived the additional work associated with distributive leadership as being unnecessary to their roles as teachers. However, middle school teachers commented about the additional work (or paperwork) being taken home. The middle school teacher participants perceived these additional chores as being "never-ending."

When consulting at the literature, Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities is commonly connected with teacher attrition – not retention. In actuality, the research shows that exaggerated amounts of work may cause teachers to leave the classroom (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kersaint et al., 2007). Alternately, Hughes (2012) found that minimizing teacher work can have a positive impact upon teacher retention. Therefore, administrators seeking to use a distributive leadership framework would be strongly encouraged to research healthy ways to support teachers with balancing the additional leadership responsibilities.

Culture/Climate. Elementary and middle school teachers identified the distributive leadership quality of Culture/Climate as potentially having a positive impact on teacher retention. Three elementary teachers and two middle school teachers discussed their positive experiences with Culture/Climate.

Elementary and middle school teachers recognized the significance of Culture/Climate but expressed its importance differently. Elementary teachers described the significance of relationships at their school and sharing a common feeling of being connected with their fellow teachers. Elementary teachers acknowledged their ability to make key decisions for the school. For elementary teachers, decision-making was heavily connected with their school's positive culture and climate.

Middle school teachers focused on their principal's ability to set a positive tone at their school, promoting a positive culture and climate. Middle school teachers discussed the importance of having an administrator check-in to connect with teachers in a positive manner.

Culture/Climate has been identified in the literature as being positively associated with teacher retention. Wynn et al. (2007) noted that school climate had a positive impact upon teacher retention. Such a positive work environment has also been associated with teachers'

organizational commitment (Dorman, 2003; Loeb et al., 2005; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2010). In a distributive leadership environment, teachers may experience greater support from colleagues and administrators. This additional support may encourage elementary and middle school teachers to stay in the classroom.

Making a Difference/Joy in the Classroom. Elementary and middle school teachers discussed Making a Difference/Joy in the Classroom as a shared quality within the distributive leadership environment. Specifically, five elementary teachers and three middle school teachers discussed a multitude of accounts surrounding their positive association with making a difference in their students' lives or experiencing joy in the classroom environment. Both teacher groups reflected expressed feeling an overall excitement to impact children's learning. Both teacher groups discussed feeling "passion" or "joy" when working with children.

Unlike the middle school teachers, elementary participants discussed their positive association with working in a classroom environment that allowed freedom of movement. Elementary teachers discussed their displeasure for working in restrictive environments, similar to those found in an office setting.

The literature offers connections between distributive leadership and job satisfaction. Distributive leadership has been positively and significantly related with job satisfaction (Torres (2017). Alternately, Hughes (2012) found that teachers may be more likely to leave the profession when presented with a mismatch between expectations and reality. Distributive leadership has the potential to foster retention by increasing teachers' involvement with directly making a difference in the lives of their students.

Balance: Work/Family. Three elementary and two middle school teachers identified Balance: Work/Family as a distributive leadership quality that impacts teacher retention. Both teacher groups shared their appreciation for experiencing balance between work and family life. Elementary and middle school teachers discussed the importance of having regular breaks in the summer and throughout the year to reconnect with family members. Both teacher groups expressed their appreciation of having flexibility throughout their work schedules to take their children to doctor appointments as necessary.

Middle school teachers identified the ability to pursue hobbies and interests as a benefit of having a flexible work schedule. In addition, middle school teachers described how extended summer breaks permitted additional travel with family.

According to the literature, personal reasons and marriage may influence teacher retention. Married teachers exit the profession 1.40 times greater than teachers who are not married (Borman & Dowling, 2008, p. 385). As principals distribute leadership among capable teacher leaders, they may be able to create a balance between work and family to improve teacher retention.

Table 4 (Sulit, 2020, p. 184)

RQ1 Overall Themes and Imaginative Variation

Elementary Teachers	Middle School Teachers
RQ1 Overall Themes	RQ1 Overall Themes
• Parent/ Community Support (6)	• *Administrative Support (6)* • *Extra Work/Teacher Responsibilities (6)*

• *Making a Difference/Joy in the Classroom (5)* • Teacher Support (5) • *Administrative Support (4)* • *Culture/Climate (4)* • *Extra work/Teacher Responsibilities (4)* • Instructional Shifts/Changes at the School (4) • *Balance: Work/Family (3)* • Salary (3) • Decision-Making (2) • Professional Development/Mentoring (2) • Previous Superintendent (2) • *Leadership: Tough Stuff (2)*	• *Culture/Climate (3)* • *Making a Difference/Joy in the Classroom (3)* • *Leadership: Tough Stuff (3)* • Valuing/Affirming Teachers (3) • *Balance: Work/Family (2)*
Imaginative Variation • Salary (3) • Previous Superintendent (2) • Leadership: Tough Stuff (2) • Leadership Turnover (1) • RED 4 Ed (1) • Generational Changes (1) • Previous Ambitions (1)	Imaginative Variation • Leadership: Tough Stuff (3) • Salary (2) • Personal Work Ethic (1) • Previous Role in Business (1) • Political Teaching Climate (1)

Note. Common themes between groups are italicized.

RQ2 Overall Summative Findings

Research Question 2 (RQ2) addressed the question: How do elementary and middle school teachers experience distributed leadership? Five interview questions were addressed with RQ2: IQ1 (How would you describe the leadership at your current school?), IQ2 (Describe how teachers participate in leadership at your current school.), IQ3 (How have you personally experienced leadership at your current school? How have these experiences affected you? What thoughts stand out for you? What feelings stand out for you?), IQ4 (Describe your current principal's leadership style.), and IQ8 (Having thought about leadership, what else would you like to share?).

In response to RQ2, the researcher identified four significant themes that elementary and middle school teachers shared in common to describe how participants experienced distributive leadership: Administrative Support, Teacher Leadership: Formal, Decision-Making, and Teacher Leadership: Informal (see Table 5).

Administrative support. Six elementary teachers and four middle school teachers described experiencing Administrative Support at their respective schools. Both groups reflected upon their appreciation of their principal leadership providing tangible resources and materials to enhance their teaching role. In addition, elementary and middle school teachers described their appreciation of being supported with relevant professional development to support their teacher efficacy.

Elementary and middle school teachers shared several differences in their views of Administrative Support. Elementary teachers described feeling supported by their administration in resolving questions about their school and district. At the same time, elementary teachers

described the need for administrative support with student behaviors. Rather, middle school teachers appreciated the way their administration removed barriers to teaching such as as angry parents and school politics.

The literature shows that organizational commitment increases among teachers who feel supported by administrators (Hulpia et al., 2012). Additionally, research shows a significant relationship between principal leadership style and teacher attrition, moral, and satisfaction (Thibodeaux et al., 2015). Given the collective and supportive role present within a distributive leadership framework, it is not surprising that Administrative Support was identified as a common experience between both teacher groups.

Teacher leadership: Formal. Seven elementary teachers and six middle school teachers shared their experiences with formal leadership at their respective schools. Elementary and middle school teachers shared similar experiences with formal leadership roles. Both groups described how Teacher Instructional Leaders (TILs) supported teachers and facilitated schoolwide operations. Additionally, both groups of teachers discussed the necessity of having a Leadership Team to ensure their schools functioned. Moreover, both groups discussed the role of teachers taking on leadership responsibilities with facilitating student clubs.

Differences among the formal roles existed between elementary and middle school teachers. Elementary teachers included an additional leadership role (Professional Learning Community Coaches) to support their school with becoming a PLC Model School. Elementary teachers also serve on committees as examples of their formal leadership. Alternately, middle school teachers shared how their school's Site Council serves as a formal role in making decisions.

According to the literature, "the formal distribution of supportive leadership among the leadership team [has] a positive significant impact on teachers' commitment to the school." (Hulpia et al., 2009b, p. 46). As a leadership framework, distributive leadership frequently includes formalized leadership roles to support school initiatives.

Decision-Making. Two elementary teachers and three middle school teachers described their overall positive experiences with decision-making. However, there were differences between the two groups. Elementary teachers discussed how decision-making is shared with a multitude of teachers. Additionally, when elementary teachers serve on committees, they ensure that all teachers have a voice in the decision-making. Alternately, middle school teachers focused on their ability to promote school improvement. Middle school teachers described how they influenced decision-making by researching topics of interest, instructional strategies, or innovative technologies that may support school improvement.

The literature is conclusive that decision-making is a predictor of teacher retention (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Boyd et al., 2011; Brown & Wynn, 2009; Horng, 2009; Weiss, 1999). Hulpia et al. (2009b) observed that "participation in decision-making increased people's commitment to the organization" (p. 46). The distributive leadership framework allows teachers to make decisions that impact their school. Having this type of authentic voice may encourage teachers to remain in their schools.

Teacher leadership: Informal. Two elementary teachers and three middle school teachers shared experiences regarding informal leadership at their campuses. Both groups of teachers discussed how teacher leaders naturally rise or "bubble-up" at their schools. Both elementary and middle school teachers perceived their informal leadership was encouraged and supported. Both groups expressed feeling comfortable with taking risks with assuming leadership.

One distinction emerged amongst the teacher interviews. Elementary participants asserted that their teachers were especially involved and aware of leadership opportunities within their school. This could potentially indicate a greater desire to assume informal leadership amongst elementary teachers.

The literature suggests that teacher leadership encompasses three components in relation to retention: coaching and mentoring, developmental tasks to improve learning and teaching, and the modelling of effective teaching (Harris & Muijs, 2003, p. 40). Distributed leadership offers opportunities for teachers to be involved with formal and informal leadership opportunities to impact their school.

Table 5 (Sulit, 2020, p. 233)

RQ2 Overall Themes and Imaginative Variation

Elementary Teachers	Middle School Teachers
RQ2 Overall Themes	RQ2 Overall Themes
• *Administrative Support (10)*	• *Administrative Support (6)*
• *Teacher Leadership: Formal (7)*	• *Teacher Leadership: Formal Roles (6)*
• Shared Leadership (5)	• Inclusive/Multidirectional Communication (5)
• Strong Leadership (3)	• Administrator Expectations (4)
• *Decision-Making (3)*	• *Decision-Making (4)*
• Teacher Support (3)	• Direct Communication/Not Warm and Fuzzy (4)
• *Teacher Leadership: Informal (3)*	• Visionary Leadership (4)
• Consistent Expectations (2)	• Decisive Leadership/Action- Oriented (3)
• Leadership: Tough Stuff (2)	• Leadership Turnover (3)
• Culture/Climate (2)	• *Teacher Leadership: Informal (3)*
• Student-Centered Leadership (2)	• Balance: Teaching Role (2)
• Extra work/Teacher Responsibilities (2)	• Micromanagement (2)
• Rebuild (2)	
Imaginative Variation	Imaginative Variation
• Rebuild (2)	• Leadership Turnover (3)
• Administrator Relationship (1)	• Previous Leadership Experience (1)
• RED 4 Ed (1)	• First Year of Teaching (1)
	• Student Teaching Experience (1)
	• Previous Experience at Previous School (1)
	• Previous Work Relationship (1)

Note. Common themes between groups are italicized.

RQ3 Overall Summative Findings

Research Question 3 (RQ3) addressed the question: Do elementary and middle school teachers' current experiences with distributive leadership influence their desire to remain in the classroom? Accordingly, one interview question was addressed with RQ3: IQ5 (What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the teaching profession?).

In response to RQ3, the researcher utilized teacher participant data collected from IQ5 (What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the classroom?) to identify three themes. Elementary and middle school teachers shared that distributive leadership impacted their decisions to remain in the classroom in either one of three ways: Positive Impact, Negative Impact, or No Impact (see Table 6).

DL/Positive Impact. Roughly half of the elementary and middle school teachers who participated in the qualitative study identified distributive leadership as positively impacting their decision to remain in the classroom. Of the thirteen participants, four elementary and three middle school teachers described distributive leadership as having a positive impact.

Both teacher groups reported an overall positive response with distributive leadership. This positive connection may have been bolstered by self-proclaimed fears of experiencing micromanagement. Elementary teacher and middle school teacher participants shared that teachers working in other schools within a Southwestern school District experienced increased micromanagement and reduced teacher autonomy.

Two significant differences surfaced between the two teacher groups. Elementary teachers valued their current administration's encouragement with pursuing formal and informal leadership opportunities at their school. Alternately, middle school teachers focused upon their administration's student-centered decision-making.

DL/Negative Impact. Approximately one-sixth of the teacher participants identified distributive leadership as negatively impacting their decision to remain in the classroom. Of the thirteen teachers who participated in the qualitative study, one elementary and one middle school teacher described the negative aspects related to distributive leadership.

While maintaining negative experiences, the two teachers shared no other similarities. The elementary teacher participant described having a lot on her metaphorical "plate" that extended beyond the teaching role. Alternately, the middle school teacher shared the frustration of his campus valuing test scores and assessment over the social and emotional aspects of children.

DL/No Impact. Approximately one-third of the participants identified distributive leadership as having a minimal or no impact on their decision to remain in the teaching profession. Two elementary and two middle school participants stated that distributive leadership does not affect their decision to continue teaching. One elementary and one middle school teacher shared that they would rather transfer schools within the district over succumbing to a negative situation with an administrator.

While the teachers in this group were similar in their overall perspective of distributive leadership, the data identified one significant difference. The middle school teacher falling within this category explained how he alters the learning environment to teach in a way that offered flexibility. This teacher shared that chooses to instruct elective courses that do not carry the same level of academic rigor and stress.

The elementary and middle school interview data surrounding RQ3 (Do elementary and middle school teachers' current experiences with distributive leadership influence their desire to remain in the classroom?) demonstrates the complex nature of distributive leadership as it relates to teacher retention. Data collected from this study reveals a nearly even split between DL/ Positive Impact and DL/Negative Impact at the two schools. These results are consistent with the literature that confirms the complexity surrounding distributive leadership and teacher retention. Research shows that distributive leadership is difficult to define (Bennett et al., 2003; Bolden, 2011; Hartley, 2007; Timperley, 2005). Without a clear or consistent definition of distributive leadership, it is difficult to measure its impact on teacher retention. Additional

confusion arises as the nature of extra work commonly associated with a leadership role may be viewed negatively by teachers (Lumby, 2018). If distributive leadership is viewed as creating extra work for teachers, distributive leadership may be negatively associated with teacher retention. Furthermore, concerns surface with the profession's overemphasis of evaluating distributive leadership using data from student test scores (Woods & Woods, 2013). This study replicated concerns from the literature as DL/Negative Impact and merit further exploration.

Table 6 (Sulit, 2020, p. 246)

RQ3 Overall Themes

Elementary Teachers	Middle School Teachers

IQ5: What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the teaching profession?
 	
• DL/Positive Impact
  • Appreciates positive leadership/ fear of micromanagement at another school
  • Hopes to impact newer teachers to assume leadership roles
  • Administration supports culture and climate of the school
  • Appreciates being able to take-on leadership roles
• DL/Negative Impact
  • Would consider leaving due to extra work associated with leadership; may consider staying due to strong teacher support
• DL/No Impact
  • Not sure/ would be willing to transfer schools or stay regardless of leadership
  • Not returning due to personal reasons/ not impacted by leadership
	IQ5: What impact does leadership have in your decision to remain in the teaching profession?
	
	• DL/Positive Impact
	  • Appreciates positive leadership/ fear of micromanagement at another school
	  • Positive experiences offset her previous beliefs from student teaching
	  • Feels supported by administration
	• DL/Negative Impact
	  • Would leave if academic pressures increase
	• DL/No Impact
	  • Would transfer to another school
	  • Adjusted his teaching environment

Implications for Practice and Research

Implications for Practice

This qualitative study sought to identify qualities of distributive leadership that may positively impact teacher retention. Results from this study contributes to the education profession in a myriad of ways. First, this research brings forth the need for school leaders to understand the impact of distributing leadership and moving towards principals serving in a more supportive leadership role. Second, the obtained research provides opportunities for principals and district leaders to obtain deeper insight into elementary and middle school teachers' motivations for remaining in the classroom. Third, this study provides principals and district leadership with

feedback regarding teachers' perceptions of leadership. Fourth, educators may develop an understanding of the benefits and drawbacks related to the distributive leadership framework. Fifth, this research responds to the complex principal role by supporting multiple individuals as leaders with experience and ability. Sixth, implications from this research strongly suggest the need for administrators to increase their ability to collaborate and network with community members and stakeholders to support teacher retention. Finally, this study contributes to the scholarly research regarding distributed leadership and its impact upon teacher retention.

Recommendations for Practical Applications

The data presented from this qualitative study reflects personal accounts from elementary and middle school teachers. Administrators and educational practitioners may benefit from careful reflection of this data to make timely decisions that impact their teachers, principals, and community. Given the connection between leadership and teacher retention, administrators or district leadership may conduct an internal investigation of teachers' attitudes and perceptions of the leadership at each of their schools and at the district office. Given the connection between sharing leadership and the distributive leadership framework, educational leaders may wish to conduct an internal analysis of how teacher leadership is shared at each school to determine commonalities and positive behaviors. Specifically, district leaders may seek to evaluate schools' procedures for selecting, sharing, and recognizing teacher leadership. Furthermore, district leaders may create a task force committee that includes principals and teachers to address positive solutions for minimizing the extra work commonly associated with distributive leadership. District leaders seeking to minimize the impact of teacher attrition may conduct an internal investigation regarding the impact of principal and administrative turnover between the school and district levels. Further investigation may include the exploration of administrator attitudes pertaining to the principal role to identify how this may negatively reinforce teachers' decisions to remain in the classroom and avoid the principalship. Finally, K-12 institutions may conduct an internal investigation of administrator preparation programs at the district level to support readiness of future principal candidates.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional research may enhance the understanding of distributive leadership as a framework for supporting teacher retention. Continued research may support the understanding of distributive leadership that includes larger samples of elementary and middle school teachers. Furthermore, additional research of distributive leadership as a supportive framework to enhance teacher retention may be conducted that includes the perspective of high school teachers. Additional research may be conducted to determine how teachers' perceptions of the principal role impacts their desire to remain in the classroom. Further research is needed to explain how principal turnover impacts the effectiveness distributive leadership as it impacts teacher retention. Finally, additional research may support the understanding of teachers' perceptions regarding the extra work commonly associated with distributive leadership.

Conclusion

The research regarding distributive leadership weaves a complex tale of a framework with significant possibilities. As a model widely praised in the literature for impacting school improvement, it seems likely that distributive leadership would have the same impact upon teacher retention. To date, little research has pointed to distributive leadership as a supportive framework for increasing teacher retention.

This qualitative study sought to identify qualities of distributive leadership that may improve teacher retention. Participant data suggests mixed results regarding the effectiveness of distributive leadership. The data yielded results that were divided nearly in half. Roughly half of the elementary and middle school teacher participants welcomed the additional responsibility and ownership for their school and responded positively to the distributive leadership framework. Yet, other the other half of teachers responded negatively or were not impacted at all. This demonstrates the complex nature of distributive leadership and suggests opportunities for further research. Educators seeking to support teacher retention may further explore the implications for practice and research to identify areas of investigation that may enhance their schools and district.

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Navigating the In-Between: Defining the Third Space for Educational Leadership Programs

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Because the role of the principal has changed dramatically, preparation programs have adapted to better prepare these leaders. This study examines one program using surveys and interviews of completers. Results showed that these leaders found themselves in an uncomfortable new area, what we deem "the in-between." Using the theoretical framework of the third space, this qualitative study found three areas defining this space: sense of self, transition of thinking, and complexity of the third space. Deconstructing this space with the realization that it is an area for growth and meaningful dialogue should be an aim of principal preparation programs.

***Keywords**: Principal Preparation Programs, Third Space, Sense of Self, Transition, Principal*

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> The education field is finally embracing school leadership as an essential ingredient in reform, worthy of investment in its own right. Facing pressure to have all children meet high standards, states and districts increasingly are recognizing that successful school reform depends on having principals well prepared to change schools and improve instruction, not just manage buildings and budgets. (Mitgang, 2012, p. 15)

National recognition of the pressures facing educational leaders in their complex roles has resulted in a shift in the focus of principal preparation programs. Whereas in the past these positions were often viewed as purely building or personnel management, the understanding of the complexity of these roles and the skill sets required have expanded to become a more realistic portrayal of what is needed. As noted by Mitgang (2012) in the opening quotation, the principal today not only has to worry about safety, financial, and maintenance concerns, but also must be able to increase student learning, create a collaborative and professional learning environment, and build school and community partnerships. They must be, as McKibben (2015) stated, "lead learners." As the understanding of this job has developed, principal preparation programs (PPP) have evolved to equip aspiring leaders to be ready for the challenges of the role. In this paper, we examine completers of one educational leadership program to determine their readiness for the work. In our qualitative study, we discovered these candidates viewed their learning as influential but were finding themselves in a new space, what we deem "the in-between." Using the concept of the third space, we delve into their sense of self, their transitions of thinking, and the complexity in the in-between and provide a conceptual framing for creating programs that incorporate this third space as a place for leadership candidates to grow as individuals and as a community of leaders.

Literature Review

To begin, it is important to discuss the ways in which educational leadership is defined and the current expectations of these roles. School leadership has a strong impact on student achievement, second only to classroom instruction in school-controlled variables (Leithwood et al., 2008; Marzano et al., 2005). The most common term, though somewhat overused, is that the principal is an instructional leader. Instructional leadership includes setting high expectations, developing a strong mission and vision, providing necessary resources, protecting learning time, and providing instructional support and professional learning (Blase & Blase, 1999; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hattie 2009; McEwan, 2003). Louis et al. (2010) stated that a principal should be able to redesign the organization to increase collaboration and monitor the work of the teacher.

Principals today also must contend with changing societal norms. Indeed, school leaders will face issues surrounding the topics of increased enrollment of minoritized students, increased enrollment of students whose first language is not English, extreme poverty, and bullying. In a study addressing challenges principals face, Wise (2015) identified six major issues including the following: lack of financial resources, home/community issues, test scores/accountability, instruction/assessment, lack of time, and too many responsibilities. As seen in the diversity and span of these issues, principals need the capacity to create strong learning environments while balancing the critical needs of the community.

The demand for highly trained principals has led to the revision of principal preparation programs (PPP) across the nation. A 2007 Wallace Foundation Study (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) examined exemplary pre- and in-service programs. Exemplary programs contained several components, including an emphasis on instructional leadership and school improvement, student-

centered instruction with a problem-based focus and a mix of theory and practice, performance-based internships, and portfolios with feedback from university and P-12 school mentors. These programs have a coherent curriculum aligned with national standards led by faculty who are expert practitioners and follow a cohort model. Finally, the goal of the PPP is to find the best candidates through targeted recruitment. Graduates of the principal preparation programs discussed in the Wallace study self-rated significantly higher than their peers rated them in the areas of building collaborative learning environments, professional development, utilization of data, engaging staff, leading change, planning for improvement, re-designing schools, and continuous learning. Most notably, graduates of these programs were more positive about their abilities to be effective principals.

In their efforts to improve principal preparation, the Wallace Foundation has been at the forefront in revision of principal preparation programs. In their 2010 report, Louis et al. confirmed that leadership has the second greatest school related impact on student learning with quality classroom instruction being the highest influence. A review of school leadership found no evidence of school improvement without strong leadership (Leithwood et al., 2008). This influence is indirect in that the principal's actions affect the teachers, which ultimately affect the students (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2008; Marzano et al., 2005). According to the Partnership for Excellence in Education's Top Ten Issues to watch 2020, there are three components to this revision. First, there should be quality courses with on-the-job experiences. Secondly, university-district partnerships should be established and strengthened. Then, changes in licensure requirements and accreditation comprise the third component.

In a 2016 Wallace Foundation study, Davis synthesized reports from four key organizations, including the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), The School Superintendents Association (AASA), the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). The first theme was that district leaders are dissatisfied with principal preparation programs. Superintendents ranked university preparation the lowest in key areas such as instructional leadership and building collaborative teams. Feedback from university officials indicated there were areas where they felt the need to change their structures for principal preparation. All agreed that strong university-district partnerships were important but were lacking, thus forming the second theme.

The third theme stated that the work in principal preparation programs does not mirror the true work of principals (Davis, 2016). The investigation indicated the need for real-world applications in the curriculum and suggested that professors for these courses should be current or former effective principals. The report also highlighted clinical preparation as a key component, which was defined by AACTE as full school-based integration that allows candidates to be involved in all facets of the school in authentic leadership work. This includes working with adults and engaging in reflective practices. Candidates are to be effectively mentored by supervisors in the field and university professors.

The final theme of the Wallace 2016 study dealt with university procedures that impede change (Davis, 2016). This could include lack of funding, faculty resistance to change, and the desire on the part of superintendents for practitioner-led teaching. This is often difficult at the university level because the salary for these practitioners would be lower, and the desire by the university for a terminal degree may limit who is qualified to teach. The study closes with the theme that reinforces the need to be proactive in improving principal preparation. Many do this through licensure requirements and accreditation of programs. As noted in the Wallace report, "Many respondents felt that the state legislators and policymakers have very

little knowledge or investment in education, let alone principal preparation, leading to bad and un-actionable policies" (Davis, 2016, p.15). Superintendents argued that their expertise should be part of these processes so that the outcomes do not hinder the principal pipeline.

Mitgang (2012) examined principal preparation with the goal of teaching, recruiting, and retaining "school leaders who are knowledgeable, highly skilled and relentless" (p.10). These lessons encapsulate themes in the Wallace study (Davis, 2016), beginning with rigorous selection processes that aim to identify whether candidates have relevant experience and the aptitudes and dispositions to lead school improvement. Another lesson calls for relevant instruction that enables the candidate to improve instruction and lead change. The course of study educates participants to use systems thinking, communicate clearly, coach teachers, utilize data, set high expectations, and provide professional development. These programs emphasize internships where participants are actively involved in the leadership process.

Similarly, Sutcher et al. (2017) examined the key factors of effective principal learning programs in a study published by the Learning Policy Institute. They established the need for partnerships between the university and the district with the goal of targeted recruitment. Successful programs include a cohort model and field-based internships. The curriculum is problem-based, connecting theory to practice. Finally, the focus is on creating collegial and collaborative environments centered on school improvement. As the authors indicated, "Developing excellent principals who can set direction, develop people, redesign organizations, and lead instruction requires a system of high-quality preparation and professional development" (Sutcher et al., 2017, p. 2). Principal preparation programs must take this into consideration when developing or revising their programs.

Lastly, we also know that the art of reflection is an underlying component in the literature for principal leadership. Reflection is a process that practitioners use to learn through their experiences (Dewy, 1933). Over the years, models have been developed to define the steps of this process (Gibbs, 1988; Johns, 2009; Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1991). These models have been researched and proven effective for practitioners to gain insight, knowledge, and a deeper understanding of the complexities of their work. The process of reflection is especially valuable for building new knowledge for individuals entering the practice of school leadership. All the models suggest identifying an event or incident that might be novel or new to the practitioner, providing a concrete description, and then reflecting on or thinking deeply about what occurred, what was learned, and how things could have been handled differently. Using a framework for what is learned, such as the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), helps to advance the skill set needed for practice as effective school leaders.

With this literature in mind, the authors of this paper re-created one principal preparation program in Georgia and utilized interviews, focus groups, and surveys to determine the effectiveness of these revisions. For background on this program and certification, in June of 2015, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission published new Educational Leadership Program Guidelines. These guidelines are aligned with the Georgia Educational Leadership Standards (GELS) and based on input from educational leadership faculty across the state. The GELS are aligned the Professional Standards for Educational Leadership (PSEL) and with the Georgia Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES), the tool utilized to measure performance of educational leaders in the state of Georgia. This particular program is located at a large university in northeast Georgia that serves students in rural, urban and suburban areas. The program includes six courses and utilizes a hybrid model of both online and face-to-face instruction. All classes are

led by current and former principals, as well as central office leaders. The students in this study are gaining Tier 1 certification, which allows them to be assistant principals. Students also complete a 250-hour performance-based internship with a site supervisor and a university professor. Persons who want to be in the role of an assistant principal must have Tier 1 certification and then complete Tier 2 to become a principal. A Tier-2 candidate must complete 750 hours of internship and must align these performances to leader dispositions with the idea that a candidate may have the knowledge to do the work but not necessarily the disposition to carry it out successfully.

For the purposes of this paper, we examine the Tier I certification program and its impact on emerging leaders, but even with all these studies in mind, what we discovered was that there still was a gap in terms of program content, internships, and then the first year(s) of leadership experiences. From previous studies, we understood what material should be covered in a program and we increased the number of clinical hours, as we saw the importance of applicable experiences. What was missing, however, was a literal and figurative third space. It is this liminal space that becomes the mechanism for navigating and applying the content. What is absent from the literature, then, is the methodological approach to these programs rather than the content or approaches to andragogy/pedagogy and leadership in theory.

Theoretical Framework

For our theoretical framework, we employ the concept of the third space, which was theorized by Homi Bhabha (1994) as a decolonizing, linguistic space. For Bhabha (1994), the third space provided "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (p. 2). Particularly for "dissonant, even dissident histories and voices," the third space was a place to deconstruct identities and culture in an effort to also deconstruct dichotomies of power and oppression, particularly in relation to the dominant culture (i.e., white, middle class, heterosexual, Christian) (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5). As he further described, "The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 3). The third space is not an easy space in which to exist—deconstruction and examination of binaries, of identity as related to power and oppression, is difficult work, but it is necessary in order to create change (Anzaldúa, 1998; Bhabha, 1994). As Bhabha (1994) stated, "Being in the 'beyond,' then, is to inhabit an intervening space … But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revision time … *to touch the future on its hither side*" (p. 10). This third space is uncomfortable and yet is the locality where change truly happens.

Many scholars have applied the theory of the third space to K-16 classrooms and to educator development (O'Meara et al. 2019; Pereira, 2019; Steele, 2017; Zeichner, 2010). In reference to the classroom, for example, Kawalilak et al. (2017) noted, "It is within these spaces where potential resides for co-creating knowledge in support of collaborative, engaging, learner-centered communities" (p. 142). Scholars have used the third space as a description of how we can change education and our educational communities to be places where social justice is at the crux of pedagogy and policy. We say this, of course, with the understanding that third spaces, as theorized by scholars such as Bhabha and Anzaldúa, were envisioned as places where

those who had been oppressed, those who were underrepresented, could begin to deconstruct dominant ideologies to allow room for change. We do not want to take away from the third space as a tool for dismantling dominant ideologies, but we do want to recognize its value in applying similar approaches to education. As a mirror of society, our educational system in the states, for instance, has a history of oppression and misuse of power to provide continuing privilege to students, teachers, and leaders from dominant cultures.

In applying this approach to classrooms, educational programs, and educator preparation, we recognize that this same approach can be applied to leadership programs as well—and should be. If we are seeking educational change, then we need to extend this to our principal and leadership preparation programs. After all, if change stops at the level of the teacher, then the obstacles these teachers face in truly developing democratizing educational practices will be too large of a burden to bear. We argue, then, that to create leadership programs with the power to truly initiate educational change, a third space approach to such programs can help potential and nascent leaders discover more about their leadership identity, form a community of leaders dedicated to initiating change, and develop a group of leaders with the tools necessary to impact educational policy at more macro levels. At the same time, we recognize the complexity and difficulty of future and current leaders existing in these third spaces, as these liminal spaces can be frustrating and scary. Yet while professional and state standards are important, one-size-fits-all approaches to leadership are not going to result in leaders with the potential to catalyze the changes needed in our educational system to increase opportunities for students, their families, and their teachers.

Methodology

The data for this ongoing qualitative case study is based on one year and includes focus groups with program completers one year after completion and survey data from in-program participants and completers. Surveys included Likert-scale questions focused on state and national standards and program logistics, as they were originally developed for general program improvement, and they included open-ended questions on program improvements. We then based the focus group questions on an expansion of the initial survey data. Focus group interviewees included six program completers, four females and two males, all of whom are currently employed in leadership positions. To garner participation, program coordinators emailed past participants to assess who would be willing to participate in a focus group to discuss the impact of the program on their leadership work one year after program completion.

In terms of data analysis, the three authors initially read all transcripts and then met to discuss potential codes. After an initial review of the transcribed interviews, we emphasized six areas where we chose to code the data using in-vivo coding to remain true to the participants' voices (Saldaña, 2013), and we all returned to the transcripts to code accordingly. These codes included voice, perspective/lens, mindset, andragogy, agency, and collaboration. After initial coding, we met again to discuss potential themes emerging from these codes, and then re-coded the data based on themes, creating charts outlining these themes and then reviewing where themes merged across our three individual analyses. The focus group and survey data were generally very supportive of the program, but one overarching theme and three subthemes emerged from the interviews. As our candidates embraced new roles, there was a discomfort in this new area, what we call the "in-between" or third space, which became our overarching theme. Like most institutions, schools exist in dichotomies, but there is always

that third space. This is not a bad place to be; in fact, it is necessary. Yet candidates expressed trepidation in this space, and they had a low level of consciousness to the complexities of the role. Given this discovery, we went back to the transcripts and coded for three subthemes, which included transition of thinking, sense of self as a leader, and complexity of the position.

Findings

Sense of Self in the 'In Between'

What we found as we analyzed our data is that candidates found themselves in a liminal space, where they were not quite sure who they wanted to be as leaders, and they were not quite sure of their roles. As candidates started in their position in this new space, it was evident that this was an unfamiliar place for these individuals despite the level of success in their principal preparation program. Their sense of self as a leader was not yet developed. Sense of self is a person's way of viewing themselves, their beliefs, and abilities in whatever situation (Combs et al., 1999). We all have many beliefs about ourselves, which we gain from our life experiences. As a leader, sense of self impacts the way we make decisions, interact with people, and run the organization. Respondents lacked confidence, were somewhat naïve, and were not prepared for the complexities of the role. It was also evident that they were navigating in this third space and growing this sense of self with their experiences and responsibilities in their daily interactions with their stakeholders.

While in this third space, respondents began to develop their sense of self through experiences and building awareness. For the first time, they understood that they had a voice and they were part of the conversation about making changes and improvements. This is an unfamiliar position for many of our respondents. When asked what was surprising about their job, one respondent indicated the following: "Being a part of the leadership conversations with the admin team regarding colleagues that I was not previously a part of those conversations, performance-based conversations about and strategizing about instructional weaknesses on our faculty." Another commented, "Understanding that you have a voice that matters to others is a revelation." One respondent said it was the first time "…that you have face time and you have the opportunity to lead meetings and to make suggestions that can improve our effectiveness in schools and just really having , feeling like you have the opportunity and the voice to contribute in a meaningful way." As program participants moved into leadership roles, they were learning that their voices mattered, at the same time they had to learn how to utilize that voice to make changes.

Indeed, respondents in the in-between lacked a positive sense of self as leader and suggested that they were naïve about the new work (Combs et. al., 1999). As one respondent stated, "I guess I've been a little disillusioned, and now it's been eye opening just to understand the obstacles that leaders face every day." Another commented, "…you're a little idealistic of how you're going to change the world and help all kids and be the best leader ever. The day-to-day things that really actually happen in the school, it's more realistic perspective I think now." In this liminal space, respondents find that though they have learned much, there is a vast expanse of information for which they have little or no experience.

The program provided respondents ways to see how supervisors, colleagues, students and parents view their work as a leader, which influences their sense of self in this position. As one stated, "I learned a lot from Tier 1 the program in that understanding that the community stakeholder group is really crucial to continuous school … As a classroom teacher, you get a little

siloed in that you're responsible for those that are in your four walls." In this space, respondents are beginning to understand how their function coincides with the larger groups of staff, parents, and community, as well as understanding the part they will play in contributing to goals such as improving school performance.

As they gain experiences, how others see them as a leader also contributes to their sense of self (Combs et.al., 1999). Respondents had confidence that others saw them as supportive and approachable. One explained, "I think they would describe me as approachable just based on the number of times they come into my office…I think that they are comfortable coming to me with questions and know that I will stop what I'm doing and help them with even the smallest things to make their day a little bit easier." How respondents see themselves as leaders is reflected in how teachers and staff start to depend on them in this new role. While in this in between, they find themselves willing and eager to perform whatever tasks necessary while they begin to sharpen their focus. They have not yet figured out what their niche is as a leader, so they stay with what is comfortable.

In developing their sense of self as a leader, respondents frequently reflect on their experiences. They understand that with experience comes knowledge and a positive sense of self as a leader: "I really don't think until you have an opportunity to get in and do it that you can, in any way, understand how you're going to impact your team members or your committee members." Reflection was an essential component of the PPP observed.

In finding their sense of self, partially through these opportunities to continuously reflect, candidates noted a growing sense of efficacy as leaders. As one respondent said, "I feel like we have made some progress towards true collaborative planning and that we're really fostering that reflective mentality of let's try this, even though it's not something I've ever done before. And then, let's collaborate." They all agree with this statement made by one of their peers, "the program has given me a sense of assuredness with going to administration and asking to make changes in the sense that I feel like something is not working." Although the work is challenging, they are making progress and attribute this growth to their experiences and the opportunities they had during the internship as well.

Transition of Thinking in the 'In Between'

As candidates' transition into this new space, ways of thinking changed in a myriad of ways. Deepening understanding of policies and law, gaining new perspectives on leadership, and working with adults on a new level contributed to this transition of thinking. One quotation particularly captures this transition:

> I used to think that leadership was the people who worked really hard and stayed really late and were willing to do anything that people asked. And I think my understanding is now that leadership is inspiring others to be the ones who work late with you and are willing to try new things and jump in the deep end, as well. It's not just about being the hardest working person. It's about being a magnet that gets other people to do similar work alongside you, I guess.

As seen in this participant's words, transitioning to the third space changed the binary perspective of leadership to a better understanding of the many lenses involved in these roles.

A deeper understanding of school law and polices was a consistent theme highlighting the uncomfortable part of being in the third space. One respondent stated, "You just look at things differently. Whereas, when I'm at the car ride line, you're putting scenarios through your head.

What would happen if?" Though candidates expressed deeper understanding, apprehension over the application was apparent in many responses, particularly in the area of special education. This was captured by one respondent saying, "Yeah, especially special ed laws. I'm nervous. It's like every time I open my mouth, I'm like let me check that." Entering this new space creates context for policies and procedures not deeply considered or understood before the changeover.

For those moving from the classroom, transition to the third space is described as a challenge in that they felt comfortable in the classroom but not as confident in coaching teachers. Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of teacher evaluation. It is often eye-opening when effective teachers turned administrators visit classrooms and observe different levels of instruction. One participant stated,

> … but now as I'm going in, and I'm observing and I'm evaluating teachers and realizing that your three levels, you have your rock stars, and you have your really good teachers that might just need a few things to be going from good to great, and then you have the other ones that you just really need to be on their team to help them grow and develop.

There is the complex mixture of desire and anxiety around helping teachers improve by providing the necessary tools, and leaders recognize but are unprepared for the shift between pedagogy to andragogy.

Working with adults in this new space provides challenge for new leaders, as seen in this participant's quotation:

> So, the most difficult transition has been working with adults and working through the communication in order to achieve a successful outcome, and whether that be working through a deadline, delegating tasks so that you have trust that it's going to be done to the level in which you want to put out a high quality product or whatever you're doing. And it's also understanding how others communicate and receive information and learning how to do that with adults, I think, has been the hardest transition. Spending years in the classroom, you hone your skills on being able to communicate with students and with young learners, but it's a whole different bottle of wax.

There was anxiety around getting reluctant teachers to buy into an initiative. They express surprise that colleagues might not follow up on deadlines, are not receptive to change, or even refuse to get involved. And again, this shift creates anxiety, as previously these leaders felt confident in their skills in the classroom.

Respondents agreed that the program helped in easing into this third space from hearing the diverse voices of their colleagues in the program. Collaboration with leaders from different schools, districts and levels proved beneficial. Cooperatively learning about initiating change, building cultures, and developing mission and vision was enhanced by hearing voices from rural and suburban school districts. Candidates left the program with a sense of efficacy, but then enter into this third space with varying levels of confidence and anxiety.

Complexity of the Third Space

As noted above, then, this third space for these candidates is a space of learning and growth as related to their sense of selves as leaders and their definitions of the role of school leaders. In part, their role is liminal in the sense that they are new leaders, most of whom are in roles where they are assistant principals—roles where they are not classroom teachers, but they are also not the head of the school. They have to learn, then, to navigate a role that by its very definition is "in-

between." Several participants noted the difficulty of navigating this role, but the following participant described this particular issue as being one of the most difficult:

> I would say that one of the hard things for me has been, or the most difficult, and I don't know that it's necessarily unique is the idea of shared leadership and trying to increase the capacity of those around you, but people can be.,. They may have less attention to detail or may do things in a way that wouldn't be the way that you would do them. So, I guess letting go of some of that, especially when you're on an administrative team and there's blurred lines of who's doing what. And you don't want to step on their toes, because you're not officially an assistant principal. And you want to be helpful, but you don't want to just run with, "Oh, here, just let me do that. I'll just get it done." So, trying to play the... to be a good team player without being overbearing, I would say. I've been careful not to be overbearing. Does that make sense?

These new administrators are trying to figure out these "blurred lines" between educator and leader, and it is more complex than many of them initially realized when first taking on these positions.

This role sometimes comes to a head, as new school leaders try to navigate their vision of this role with the reality of it. In addition, they are struggling with the dichotomy created between the teacher/leader roles—a binary that should not necessarily exist. As noted above, leaders struggle with how to move from pedagogy to andragogy and how to navigate the world of adult learners when they previously felt more comfortable in a classroom setting. What they realize, though, as they move forward in these roles is that the roles of teacher and leader are intertwined and interrelated. As one participant noted, it took a while to realize "I'm having to influence teachers, which would then therefore influence students." As another asked, "How can I help my teachers to see what the kids in their class need, and then how can I give my teachers those tools so that they can serve their kids academically and increase their academic achievement in that way?" They are learning, though, that this new role is more complex than the teacher/leader dichotomy would present. This is evidenced by comments of many of our participants, but this particular student described it aptly in the following quotation: "I think the most difficult part has been just all of the roles that I have to play and not anticipating how overwhelming all that can be when you have to wear so many hats and work with so many people, and then the expectations that you have from a lot of people." As they move forward in these roles, though, they begin to recognize that they have to move out of these binaries. As one participant noted, "a lot of times, teachers tend to fit in their little box and stay in their niche. But when you're bringing opportunities to them as a leader, because you have that chance to do that, I think that that has allowed me to impact far more learners than I've had a chance to impact in the past." Here, this leader is recognizing the importance of merging teaching and leadership—teachers are leaders and leaders are teachers and moving past the binary is important for truly making change in a school environment.

Discussion

Again, the important element that these leaders are recognizing is that this third space is a location in which they can learn and grow as leaders, but it is also a space in which they can invite in their colleagues and work through the difficult work of education. This is not necessarily a space from which we strive to move on, but it is the very place where the difficult work occurs—a place where leaders should learn to reside in what is a sometimes uncomfortable necessity.

Educators strive to meet the needs of the whole child. Successful administrators must see the whole school. The notion of instructional leadership is multi-faceted. They must set the mission and vision and work collaboratively with their faculty in order to create a positive learning community. They must monitor instruction and evaluate teachers. They must manage crises that may happen during the school day. They need to be visible and they need to build relationships with partners and the community. Setting high expectations and setting strategic goals for school improvement are imperative. On top of that, in most scenarios they do have to "manage building and budgets" (Mitgang, 2015). The intricacies of the work of educational leaders assures they are often in this third space.

It is evident that principal preparation programs are changing to prepare leaders for this changing world. What is not evident is whether these leaders gain the tools for navigating this third space, this in-between. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015) specify numerous actions needed for successful principals. Standard 10i requires effective leaders to "manage uncertainty, risk, competing initiatives and politics of change with courage and perseverance, providing support and encouragement, and openly communicating the need for, process for, and outcomes of improvement efforts" (p. 18). This standard speaks to that uncertainty. Principal Preparation Programs can provide simulations or case studies for dealing with ambiguity, but we posit that the uncertainty of the in-between becomes reality on the job. With all the improvement, there is no one-size-fits-all leadership preparation program. That said, infusing this theory of the third space into principal preparation programs might benefit candidates helping them anticipate dealing with and being comfortable with this ambiguity.

With our focus on standards and results, however, this third space is not always seen as vital to the success of our leaders because our focus is on the day-to-day, which is important. Some may see the time for self- and group-reflection as less pertinent to the daily logistics. It is this very self- and group-reflection, though, that makes the community as a whole stronger: "theories of hybridity of the post-colonial world assert a different and arguably more potent resistance in the counter-discursive practices they celebrate" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 184). The internal and group focus on sense of self and shifts in thinking, along with recognizing the difficulty and complexity of residing in such a space are part of the process that makes a leadership team that much stronger. The potential of such spaces spans far beyond to impact the very culture and climate of a school as well. In reference to the world of the third space, Dunlop (1999) noted the following:

> By accepting multiplicity of voice, the intertwining of speech and silence, ellipses, autobiography and fiction, it seems possible to create new discourses that cut across gender and ethnicity. This language of pedagogy may be found through the discourses of interculturalism. These discourses acknowledge differences, as official tenets of multiculturalism would have us do, but they also seek to find places of understanding, some borderland or third space between cultures, by enabling the learner to find or recognize the "other" within her/himself. (p. 59)

While Dunlop was referring specifically to classroom pedagogy, we see the importance of the intercultural conversations and self-reflection on these topics as just as important for our current and future leaders. The program studied here provides a space where they create these support networks—places to reflect but also dialogue with one another even after the program ends. Nationally, our leadership demographics do not match the students for and with whom they are working, and this place of self-discovery and dialogue with colleagues is vital to ensuring that these intercultural conversations and self-introspection occur. If we do not take the time to live

within these spaces, then our leaders may struggle to reach our students and their families on a deeper level.

Conclusion

As seen here, our purpose is to stress the importance of integrating this literature and framework of the third space not only into the context and materials of Educational Leadership programs but also into the underlying structure. The framework of the third space as a place of complexity needs to be fundamental to the development and presentation of these programs.

We recognize that there are limitations to this study in that we interviewed and surveyed a small number of participants, and generalization cannot and should not be drawn from one small sample. This research needs to continue with additional cohorts and graduates from Educational Leadership programs. In addition, we plan to expand this study to include supervisors of program graduates. Moreover, this is not meant to provide a one-size-fits-all approach to educating K-12 leaders, and this should not be the goal. Rather, we hope that this study contributes by providing possible frameworks for program development and program revisions.

We recognize, as well, that district-level support is vital to the success of new leaders. And while we know that many districts have strong programs in place, others may have fewer resources with which to mentor and support their incoming leaders. As one of our participants noted of his experience as a first-year leader and his district's training, "There's no formal induction or even informal. I was thrown to the wolves." It is not only important for new leaders to have this support in place, but what this support looks like is also key. We need to recognize the importance of providing spaces for change and reflection both within our programs and within that first year of leadership and beyond. The third space is not only a place to reside in during one's program, but it extends beyond this to encompass leaders new and veteran as a space where they can learn alongside of one another, in a changing culture, climate, and environment.

This leads us into our final point, which is that there is much research to be done on the third space as a space for cultural reconstruction, and this is another topic for further research. This space, however, allows for these much-needed conversations to occur about the impact of power, privilege, and oppression from a leadership perspective. Originally developed as spaces to deconstruct dominant culture, this focus for the third space should continue, as many of our leadership spaces are confined by dominant ideologies. While much work has been done in this area, it is still an area that needs continual focus and refinement for educational leaders to be prepared to lead in the 21st century. This is of most importance now, as leaders grapple with the unknown of safely re-opening schools due to Covid-19 and issues of social justice that have surrounded us in the past months. As Bhabha (1994) reminded us, "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (p. 208).

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EdD Educational Leadership Admission Policy: Program Access, Equity, and Diversity

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Professional doctorates are a growth area in academia, specifically the EdD in educational leadership. The proliferation in programs has given rise to concerns relating to variations in program equity, and student diversity. This conceptual study utilizes theoretical critical analysis of extant data to reach conclusions about current admission policy and practices from America's fifty totally online EdD educational leadership programs in relation to program access, equity, and diversity. Considering admission policy and practice serve as functions of gatekeeping for entrance into the program, this conceptual study sought to determine which admission practices facilitate program diversity and identify potential scholar practitioners. Results indicate that the specific measures traditionally used to assess potential applicants (e.g. GRE/MAT) are currently applied in over 50% of online EdD educational leadership programs. Suggesting that more holistic approaches to the admission process have yet to be embraced by EdD online programs. The relationship between program access, equity, and diversity and admission policy and practice is an area needing further research.

Keywords*: Doctor of Education (EdD); Professional Doctorate (PD); Admission Policy; Access; Equity; Diversity; GRE*

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The lack of racial and ethnic diversity in graduate education in the United States has widely been identified as problematic (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009). In 2017 African Americans, Latinos, and American Indian comprised 13.31%, 17.79%, and 1.25% respectively of the U.S. population but received 8.8%, 7.8%, and 0.5% of the doctorates awarded that year (IES.NCES, 2020) (see table 1). Racial representation varies by academic study, and in this paper the focus of concern is the EdD educational leadership program where African American, Latino, Asian American/Pacific Island, and Native American are underrepresented (Council of Graduate Schools and Educational Testing Service, 2010; Kaufman et al., 2013; Griffin & Muñiz, 2015). Future graduate students will come from the Gen Z population, ages 21 and below. Our future students are increasingly racially diverse White (50.9%); Hispanic (25%); Black (13.8%); Asian (5.3%); and 2+ races (4.1%) (U.S. Census population, 2019). This upward trend of racial diversity is not a new phenomenon. In fact, in 1987, The National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration highlighted the need for programs to proactively respond to the nation's increasing diversity by recruiting students of color, reflective of student diversity demographics. Current statistics suggest that there has been little movement to achieving this target over the three decades (see Table 1).

In 2015, the American Educational Research Association filed an amicus curiae brief in the U.S. Supreme Court's reconsideration of *Fisher v. University of Texas*, first initiated in 2008. The Supreme Court's 4-3 decision (2016) upheld the University of Texas admissions policy and affirmed the consideration of race as a factor in higher education admissions. The science presented in research amicus briefs in *Fisher* spoke to the limitations of race-neutral approaches alone. Speaking for AERA, President Levine drew attention to the critical role of rigorous social science research to inform admission policies and developing practices that best foster student diversity and its educational benefits on college campuses (Levine, 2016).

Since 1949, admission policy and practice has been based on two measures of a candidate's academic ability: grade-point averages (GPA) and standardized test scores. Both of these admission practices have been identified by scholars as a hinderance to program diversity (Mountford et al., 2007; Ward, 2007; Griffin & Muñiz, 2015; Posselt, 2015; 2016). Currently, it is not uncommon for doctoral programs in educational leadership i.e. EdD and PhD programs, to have similar requirements for admission (Jones et al., 2019; Storey & Fulton, 2016). This is of concern for two reasons. First, the admission model neglects to take account of the fact that a professional practice doctorate serves a different student body i.e. working professionals, and has different program outcomes from a PhD (Posselt, 2015; 2016; Storey & Fulton, 2016). Second, that the basic assumption behind the traditional admission policy is that students with the greatest academic ability are the most likely to do well in course work and subsequently in a career in academia. Leading to concern that traditional graduate admission policy and practice are more related to a candidate's potential for academic success than for professional practice success. Research in this area shows that although previous grades and test scores are effective in predicting future academic success, the relationship of these measures to career success whether as a scholar or a professional practitioner in the field is negligible (Mountford et al., 2007).

Limited research exists for guiding faculty making doctoral program admission decisions, specifically there is a paucity of guidance for educational leadership faculty in relation to admission practices (Young, 2008; Posselt, 2016). This paper adds to the literature by examining traditional decision-making models commonly used in EdD educational leadership programs, reviews admissions requirements for fifty online EdD educational leadership programs, and provides admission models to address current concerns related to access, diversity, and equity.

The purpose of the present paper was to (1) examine processes of policy development and implementation that led to the current EdD educational leadership program admission policy and practice; and (2) examine how effective admission policies and practices are in promoting program diversity. In both cases the inquiry adopts a decidedly critical approach.

Table 1

2016-2017 Doctor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity of student.

Total	% of the population	% of doctoral degrees	Nos of doctoral degrees awarded
White	61.27%	67.5%	107,443
Black	13.31%	8.8%	14,067
Hispanic	17.79%	7.8%	12,493
Asian/ Pacific Islander	5.67%	12.8%	20,344
American Indian	1.25%	0.5%	744
Two or more races	2.62%	2.6%	4,166
Total Doctoral degrees awarded			181,352

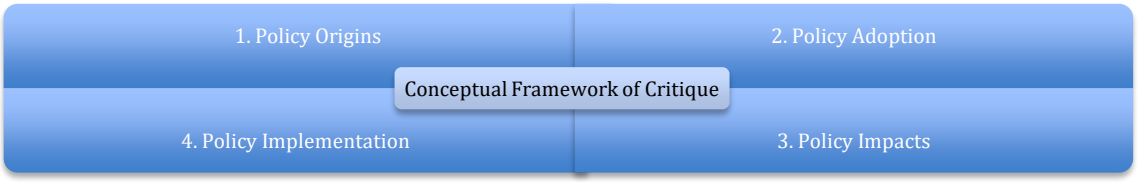
Adapted from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2020

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frame for this analysis integrates stage theory (Blaikie & Soussan, 2000; Levin, 2001) and significant work from the literature describing doctoral programs admission policy and practice. Levin's (2001), and Blaikie and Soussan's (2000) four-stages conception of the policy cycle was used as the structural framework for this study (see Figure 1) and the literature describing doctoral programs admission policy as the framework of critique. This model takes account of diverse roles that a range of actors plays in the policy process (Fallon & Paquette, 2009). It also reflects the multi-staged, developmental, and iterative nature of policy making and analysis. The two critical constructs are seen as interlinked and guided the process for: (a) developing research questions, (b) selecting literature and data, and (c) analyzing and interpreting data and literature.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model



Review of Literature

The literature presented here is organized into three areas. The first area discusses the origin and adoption of graduate admission policy and practices. The second area discusses research focused on the impact of traditional admission policy and practices on program diversity, and the third area discusses policy and practice which have been found to be effective in promoting program diversity.

Admission Policy Origins and Adoption

Despite the fact that campuses have central offices of Graduate Admission, admission policy, practices and decisions are often made at the departmental level by committees representing individual programs (Griffin & Muñiz, 2015; Posselt, 2016). Faculty are the key drivers, and while faculty may claim to be guided by ethical goals like rewarding merit and representing diversity, their admissions practice instead upholds the status quo (Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Posselt, 2015; 2016).

Traditionally, departmental admission decisions are grounded on objective indicators such as verbal reasoning scores, quantitative reasoning scores, and analytical writing scores submitted by the applicant as a result of taking either the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test or the Miller's Analogy Test (MAT), and subjective judgments regarding a student's potential based on their past credentials, or anecdotes from faculty recommendations (Young & Young, 2010; Ward, 2007). A typical admission protocol for most educational leadership doctoral programs is to require applicants to submit an official transcript of undergraduate and graduate coursework; information according to academic predictors such as standardized test scores; previous programs grade point average; letters of recommendation; and letter or application or personal statement.

Mountford et al., (2007) point out that whilst these measures are used by many graduate programs, they may not fully capture the skills and dispositions necessary for successful leadership. The results of a meta-analyses (Kuncel et al., 2010) indicate that while standardized tests applied in America (GRE/MAT), are predictors of research productivity, citation count and degree completion, the positive correlation ranging from 0.120 to 0.220 is low. Despite this low correlation standardized tests or intelligence tests have been traditionally used by higher education institutions.

The original purpose of the tests was to determine the mental age of a person (Boake, 2002), not the absolute level of intelligence or the probability of success in academia or professional employment. In particular, these tests measure one or more of the following domains or cognitive abilities: reasoning, spatial ability, memory, processing speed and vocabulary. The measurement of these skills involves the use of the working memory (Kaufman et al., 2013) and consequently the tests do not measure specific knowledge or problem-solving skills or strategies, but the differences between individuals when processing information. According to data from ETS, the test's quantitative score i.e. measuring math acumen correlates closely with gender and ethnicity and that African Americans score 200 points below white people. Giving rise to concerns that such tests may hinder diversity and inclusion efforts. For example, ETS data reveals that members of underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups score lower on the GRE than white men and Asian men do (Hagedorn & Nora, 1996).

Despite concerns expressed over several decades a review of universities that offer online EdD programs (n=50) suggest that of 56% of the EdD programs require the GRE (or GMAT/MAT).

Figure 2

Online EdD programs requiring the GRE

GRE Required	GRE Not Required
Andrews University	A.T. Still University of Health Science
Boise State University	Arizona State University
Concordia University, Chicago (GRE/MAT)	Aspen University
Fordham University (GRE/MAT)	Baylor University
Grand Canyon University	Drexel University
Indiana University	Edgewood College
John Hopkins School of Education	Lamar University
Kennesaw State University	Liberty University
Morehead State University (GRE/MAT/GMAT)	Maryville University
Nova Southeastern University (GRE/MAT)	New Mexico University
Regent University	Northcentral University
Sam Houston State University	Northwest Nazarene University
Texas A&M University, Commerce	Rowan University
Union University	St. Thomas University
University of Arkansas-Fayetteville	Trevecca Nazarene University
University of Florida	Trident University International
University of Huston	University of Dayton
University of Illinois (Highly recommended)	University of New England
University of Massachusetts	University of St. Francis
University of Missouri	Vanderbilt University (GRE optional)
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	William Carey University
University of Northern Colorado	William Howard Taft University
University of South Carolina (GRE/MAT)	
University of Southern California (GRE/MAT)	
University of the Cumberlands (GRE/GMAT)	
University of West Florida (GRE/GMAT/MAT)	
University of West Georgia	
Valdosta State University (GRE/MAT)	

Source: 2020 Online Doctorate in Education (EdD) programs guide.

Research and literature highlighting issues of equity and access relating to standardized tests has been in the public domain for decades and yet over 50% of online EdD programs focused on professional practice and the development of scholar practitioners require the GRE/GMAT/MAT. This is in spite of the fact that in 2003, the outcome of US Supreme court cases, Grutter v. Bollinger and Gratz v. Bollinger clearly affirmed institutional responsibility to develop sound policies and practices that can lead to fair and effective admissions decisions (Mountford et al., 2007). Nevertheless, higher education institutions have a reputation for moving slowly and perception of the prestigious nature of a high GRE as a measure of innate intelligence continues to be prevalent amongst faculty. (Posselt, 2016). Hall (2017) argues that this is a misleading assumption. In a study of 280 graduate students there was no evidence of a correlation between GRE scores and

time taken to complete the degree, and the number of first-author papers the students published. Still, some EdD faculty are loathe to abandon the GRE believing it to be a symbol of program prestige and rigor (Mountford, 2007, Posselt, 2015; 2016).

Policy Impact on Program Diversity

A major concern impacting future educational leadership program applicants is the opaqueness of program admissions criteria, and the lack of clearly articulated guidelines necessary for acceptance (Appleby & Appleby, 2006' Posselt, 2016). Guidance as to recommendation letter content or personal statement is seldom available and admission assessment rubrics indicating weighting given to each program admission criteria tends not to be in the public domain. Faculty are rarely held accountable for the program's admission policy. This is particularly impactful to certain groups of students who do not have a family history, or know few colleagues who have successfully applied and been accepted into a doctoral program.

The literature also suggests that GRE scores of underrepresented students, on average, tend to be lower than those of their peers (Tapia et al., 2003;). This may lead admissions committee members to perceive underrepresented students as less academically skilled than their peers and unable to handle the rigors of the program. Several scholars (Hagedorn & Nora, 1996; Aspray & Bernat, 2000; Tapia et al. 2003) reiterate that GRE scores are standardized tests and as such are imperfect predictors of success for students of color. These scholars recommend that admissions committees place greater emphasis on other indicators of student potential in an effort to increase student diversity. Such an approach increases the investment of faculty time in the admission process and may be consequently unappealing (Griffin & Muñiz, 2015; Posselt, 2016).

Young and Young (2010) in a study of one educational leadership doctoral program found that a level playing field fails to exist for certain national origins (i.e., African Americans and Asians) when this playing field is measured, at least in part, by percentile scores from the Miller Analogies Test (MAT). They compared admission decisions based on gender and national origin and concluded that African Americans and Asians were less likely to be admitted to a doctoral program because of their MAT scores. They recommended that less weight be given to the MAT score and more weight be given to GPA for Asian and African Americans because GPA captures years of experience than one test score.

The financial cost of preparing and applying for a graduate program can be significant. For example, if a prospective program applicant takes a GRE prep course prior to taking the GRE the cost will amount to several hundred dollars, and if a prospective program applicant cancels taking the exam due to feeling unprepared, they will be refunded only half of the original GRE test cost. As the GRE test can be taken once every 21 days, up to five times within any continuous rolling 12-month period (365 days), and scores on specific tests can be saved or cancelled (ETS. GRE, 2020) it places some program applicants at a distinct advantage if they have the financial capital to cover the cumulating costs (Tucker & Uline, 2015). In addition to the test and purchasing practice materials expenditure there is also the program's registration fee to consider. Overall, applying to a graduate program requires a large investment of time, energy, and available funds which can be a prohibitive burden for some prospective applicants.

Effective Policy and Practice in Promoting Program Diversity

Admissions committees autonomy can vary depending on institutional policy and formal law (Posselt, 2016). Nevertheless, over the last four decades there has been a growing discussion of alternative or complementary admission practices that would enable EdD educational leadership programs to attract a wider pool of applicants by reducing barriers that discourage some students from historically underrepresented groups from applying for admission (Tucker & Uline, 2015). One such approach is the developmental two-stage admission model, commonly known as the comprehensive or multidimensional approach. Applicants are first screened by standards which focus on academic competency without consideration for minority status or other background or other personal factors. The second stage of the selection process focuses on the remaining pool of eligible applicants. At this stage, faculty must choose from the subgroup of eligible applicants who will best advance the educational philosophy and objectives of the institution, the profession and society applying both academic and non-academic criteria. Childers and Rye (1987) concluded that a multidimensional approach (e.g., essay activity, structured interviews, small group activities), although time consuming, provided faculty members with a greater chance of selecting students who would complete the degree and afforded students with lower GRE/MAT scores to showcase intangible strengths.

Advocates for comprehensive admission practices include Milstein (1993) who proposed including a written essay and interview focused on leadership and values in addition to traditional measures of prior academic accomplishments; Machell et al., (1994) who promoted structured interviews and other activities related to identifying leadership aptitude; Painter (2003) who advocated for activities that require use of applicants' leadership qualities and potential rather than individual test scores; and Mountford et al. (2007) examined the predictive validity of traditional academic and personal screening practices for admitting students in educational leadership doctoral programs found that personal screening measures such as interviews, writing samples, and problem-solving activities were more accurate predictors of performance the program than traditional measures such as the GRE or GPAs. Although faculty are concerned that writing samples are subject to gaming and also time consuming to review (Posselt, 2016, p.55).

Yet, traditional measures for admission continue to dominate as we have seen from the review of online EdD programs. In their study of EdD educational leadership program admission policy and practices, Tucker and Uline (2015) found that the most common assessment being used for program admission continued to be the GRE at 67%; another 10% of educational leadership programs required the MAT; and 21% of educational leadership programs did not require any exams for admissions. For educational leadership programs, Tucker and Uline (2015) recommend that faculty use a variety of assessment strategies such as demonstrated leadership strengths, interview, and portfolios.

Implications for EdD Educational Leadership Programs

The above critical policy analysis of extant literature and data offers several implications for EdD educational leadership programs. Generally, analysis suggests that professional practice doctoral programs should develop an admission policy that is attentive to considerations of excellent professional practice augmented by scholarly knowledge; and to the development of future education leaders representative of the student body they serve in order to fully comprehend the needs and obstacles marginalized groups of students face daily both at school and in the

community. It is imperative that EdD program admission policies meet this need by ensuring that their admission policy is valid, reliable, inclusive, and without bias.

When an admission policy broadens criteria to include non-cognitive constructs, it will improve practices of educational equity in the admission process (Pretz & Kaufman, 2015). Kuncel, Kochevar, and Ones (2014) suggest that programs assess indicators related to academic coursework, persistence, and motivation because these areas are related to program completion. Marrero (2016) studied 81 doctoral students in a psychology program and noted that the recommendation letter asked the rater to evaluate the candidate's ability on indicators such as academic performance, collaboration, commitment, writing ability, and research potential as opposed to research abilities and work habits which are the traditional character traits required by educational leadership dcotorates (Young, 2005, 2007). Tucker and Uline (2015) recommend that faculty use a variety of assessment strategies such as demonstrated leadership strengths, interview, and portfolios. The following admission practices could also be added to this list: stakeholder selection panels, and prior demonstrated leadership accomplishments.

Whilst the two-stage development admission practice is a step in the right direction the two stages should be reversed to place personal criteria before traditional criteria utilizing a tool developed by ETS focused on evaluating applicants' personal attributes. The ETS® Personal Potential Index (ETS® PPI) helps programs make admissions decisions by providing standardized, applicant-specific information on core personal attributes. These include knowledge and creativity; resilience; communication skills; ethics and integrity; teamwork; and planning and organization (ETS. GRE, 2020). The company developed this test in part as a response to calls for alternative measures of student potential for long-term achievement that is not captured by GRE (Miller & Stassun, 2014).

Research indicates that educational institutions have sought to increase the overall diversity of student populations to reflect the overall diversity of society (Hagedorn & Nora, 1996). Yet, in her research on graduate admissions Posselt (2016, p.72) warns that whilst many faculty feel a strong obligation to remediate underrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos in their programs inequality remains. Posselt suggests this is partly due to faculty's entrenched views relating to prestige of high GRE scores, and uncertainty as to legal parameters regarding admission discussions around race. Finally, Posselt found that some faculty felt uncomfortable raising the subject of race, because their colleagues would find it a controversial issue (p.161).

Conclusion

In this study, critical policy analyses was utilized to address two research questions: (1) what processes of policy development and implementation led to the current EdD educational leadership program admission practices; and (2) how effective are the admission practices in promoting program diversity? The findings from this study suggest that despite research showing that traditional admission measures are inadequate for increasing student diversity, and assessing potential program success many programs still rely upon traditional admission criteria as evidenced by the reviewed 50 fully online EdD educational leadership programs.

Continuing the tradition of having the GRE as an admission requirement for a professional practice doctorate may reflect the perception by some faculty that GRE scores are both equitable and effective measures of merit, failing to appreciate that using quantitative measures can disadvantage students from underrepresented backgrounds. Possibly, unintentionally, faculty are perpetuating rather than mitigating EdD educational leadership program diversity. Posselt (2016)

points out that faculty seldom question the traditional admission policy as it successfully mirrors the program's faculty. This is a systemic challenge that according to Posselt (2016) requires a systemic response.

Traditional admission policy should be reviewed and revised to include screening processes focused on identifying student potential to lead educational organizations. Interviews (online or face-to-face), professional practice experience, instructional leadership portfolio, problem solving/communication scenario, and personal information are all appropriate admission practices for a professional practice doctorate.

Educational leadership faculty are charged with a moral imperative to challenge inequities and promote and enact ethical admission practices that increase diversity in EdD educational leadership programs. The challenge to all program faculty whether delivering a face-to-face, hybrid or online program is to implement admission criteria avoiding cultural or racial bias.

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Crisis Leadership and the Impact of Opioids on Schools and Students: Perspectives of School Leaders in Rural Appalachia

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Many students in rural U.S. schools are experiencing trauma and adverse childhood experiences due to circumstances relating to the opioid crisis. A moral imperative presents itself to school principals and other educational leaders to make context-specific decisions that are responsive to the trauma experienced by the students in their schools. This case study investigated the lived experiences of 12 rural school leaders from five school districts in Appalachian Ohio. Specifically, we examined their experiences with opioid-related issues in their schools. This research recognizes the needs of school principals and assistant principals as they lead in a time of challenges and chaos due to opioid-related issues. As a focus of our analysis, which prioritizes a crisis leadership approach, we examined principals engaging in a practice of bricolage to "make do" in the midst of the ongoing crisis. This collective case study presents critical cases through in vivo themes that emerged from the data: 1) "No Longer Surprised," 2) "Going Down the Rabbit Hole," 3) "I Don't Know What Could Prepare You," and 4) "We Made Decisions We Thought Would Help." The implications consider ways in which practitioners, preparation programs, and policy makers can reconsider professional preparation, ongoing trainings, and funding models to integrate opioid awareness and crisis response capacity.

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Opioid abuse and overdoses have continued to increase in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). As a result, many school-age children are facing trauma and significant adverse experiences due to the impact of opioid misuse on the part of people close to them. A moral imperative presents itself to K12 public school principals and other educational leaders to respond ethically and meaningfully to the trauma experienced by the children in their schools. This study investigated rural Appalachian educational leaders—principals and assistant principals—concerning the way in which they perceive the impact of the opioid crisis on their schools, district communities, and leadership practices.

Currently, the degree to which school principals engage decision-making and problem-solving frameworks to respond to this crisis is unclear and undefined. Data from this study present important considerations for policymakers, practitioners, and preparation programs serving rural communities. We attempt to understand the processes of meaning-making in which they engage when encountering the complexities that surround the opioid crisis in their communities. Analyzing the narratives of leaders who face firsthand the turbulence and chaos of the crisis allows us to understand how they mobilize available resources and what resources they are lacking.

We examined rural principals and assistant principals as they engage in crisis leadership involving opioid-related issues in their schools. Within the context of this study, we define *crisis* as unexpected and atypical series of events that generate high levels of uncertainty and are perceived to threaten the order and routine of an organization, such as a school (Johnson, 2018; Griffin, 2014). Situating this study within the rural Appalachian counties of Southeast Ohio (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2018), the leadership practices of the participants gather meaning from the context-specific issues (Starr & White, 2008) that impact their schools and students. The primary question of this study was: What do the stories and practices of rural school leaders tell us about their schools and school communities in the midst of the opioid crisis? Implicated in this inquiry is a concern for how rural school principals perceive and describe their practice of "making do with whatever" in order to respond to the needs of students that they see impacted by the opioid crisis.

Theoretical Considerations

Rural Leadership

In rural school leadership, principals can face quandaries on a regular basis in which conflicting and competing values converge in their schools. As Kline, White, & Lock (2013) have noted, "Professional experience is a critical component for gaining confidence to work in these settings" (p. 1). Many scholars have acknowledged the importance of placement for aspiring teachers as a means of preparing future educators for practice in rural environments (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Kline et al., 2013; Zuckerman, 2019). As well, exposure to the issues within the context of the local setting, such as those relating to the opioid crisis, is critical for educational leadership. School principals and other district leaders in their practice must engage "context-specific challenges in addition to those commonly experienced in schools" (Starr & White, 2008, p. 1).

Context-specific challenges resulting from the opioid concern require a leadership that extends beyond the standard knowledge base models of school administration (Jenlink, 2001). As Jenlink noted the challenges of educational leadership today demand that the preparation-practice relationship be "situated within the practical surrounds of the school" (p. 66). When opioid abuse and addiction define *the practical surrounds* of the school, leaders must engage in a practice of

decision-making and problem-solving that is often outside of the scope of their preparation and experience. In other words, the epidemic of opioids has created context-specific challenges in schools for which school leaders were not prepared (Jenlink, 2001, 2006; Kline et al., 2013; Zuckerman, 2019). The subsequent sections present a theoretical framework of crisis leadership and its relation to a praxis of *bricolage* in regard to responding to schools and students that have been impacted negatively by the opioid crisis.

What Is a Crisis?

The opioid epidemic is often described as a *crisis* (Alexander, Frattaroli, & Gielen, 2017; HRSA, 2019; Kurland, 2018; NIDA, 2019). Crises are often events that are sudden and unanticipated; they can be economic, informational, destructive, reputational, and violent (Mitroff, 2002). Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2007) defined a crisis as a "specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organisation's high-priority goals" (p. 7). As well, according to Griffin (2014), crises can be viewed as internal or external and can be described as *incidents* or *issues*. The levels of uncertainty and threat to the school's goals require school principals and other educational leaders to engage in what has been called *crisis leadership*

Crisis Leadership

With this definition in mind, Johnson (2018) purported that there are two critical factors to both crisis and crisis leadership. These factors are (1) the *impact* of the incident or issue on the organization and (2) the *resources* which need to be dedicated to the response to the incident or issue (Johnson, 2018). Pearson and Clair (1998) and Johnson (2018) have identified three defining characteristics of crisis leadership: (1) facing critical challenges that the leader has not previously faced; (2) facing these issues without complete knowledge of the cause, the impact it will have on their organization, or how to remedy the situation; and (3) making decisions or taking a course of action immediately and in the moment.

Bricolage as Crisis Leadership

To meet the complexities and uncertainties of a crisis requires leaders to take action that is equally dynamic. Such a leadership is dependent upon a praxis of bricolage (Jenlink, 2006; Kincheloe, 2008; Lévi Strauss, 1966). Bricolage is often viewed as practice of "making do" in which leaders cobble together or patchwork the responses and resources needed to meet the needs of the organization. Bricolage has been defined as "some extraneous movement" that occurs when something or someone moves "from its direct course to avoid an obstacle" (Lévi Strauss, 1966, p. 16). In this is implied that the leader as *bricoleur* is one who "is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project" (p. 17). On the contrary, bricolage requires that the leader "always make do with 'whatever is at hand'" (p. 17).

Applying bricolage to the school leader, Jenlink (2006) noted that the work of the *bricoleur*—the practitioner of bricolage—is within the practical and context-specific space of the school. Here the school leader "must draw from a diverse set of knowledge and method, forming a bricolage of practice that is cultural and politically responsive to the needs of the school and

events of the moment" (p. 61). Similarly, Young and Eddy-Spicer (2019) have recognized bricolage as *the necessity of improvising*, stating, "Strategic bricolage entails leveraging existing financial, political, and human capital resources to nurture innovation. To manage all of that requires the evolution of relational capacity that recruits the individuals and organizations involved into a collective effort" (p. 8). Leveraging existing resources *at hand* will become significant in considering the capacity of principals to respond to the chaos and concerns of the opioid crisis in their schools.

Methodology

This collective case study (Stake, 1995, 2006, 2008) examines the way in which K12 school leaders in rural Appalachia perceive the impact of opioids on their students, schools, and stakeholders. Collective or multiple case study is an "instrumental study extended to several cases," done so "in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition" (Stake, 2008, p. 123). As a research approach we designed the study as an instrumental case within a single larger bounded and integrated system (Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995). As such, the study was concerned with the binding concept of how principals in Appalachian counties with high opioid-related incidents of overdose view their role in responding to the needs of students affected negatively by crisis. We used a researcher-developed questionnaire protocol designed to provide open-ended questions to prompt participants to share their stories and elaborate on their experiences as crisis leaders that routinely face opioid-related issues.

Selection of Cases

As Stake (1995) has clearly stated, "Case study research is not sampling research" (p. 4). However, we saw it necessary to engage in a purposeful sampling of rural K12 principals to ensure participants' ability to provide information-rich responses. According to Patton, "Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 53). To accomplish this, we identified and selected twelve school leaders from 5 districts in southeast Ohio with the highest occurrences of opioid-related overdoses (Ohio Department of Health, 2016). All participants were licensed, practicing school administrators with first-hand experience in schools impacted by opioids that were located within Appalachian counties (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2018).

Participants

Participants selected were practicing K12 public school principals within Ohio counties with the high *Death Rates per 100,000 Population* (Ohio Department of Health, 2016). Twelve participants, including principals and assistant principals, participated in this investigation (see Table 1). These individuals were representative of pre-school, elementary, middle, and high schools. Sharing their stories and perceptions about addressing student needs, they provided information-rich data about their praxis of bricolage, as well as how they conceptualized student needs and their ethical decision-making relating to the opioid crisis.

Table 1

Participants

Pseudonym	Level of School	Position	Gender
Rob	High School	Principal	Male
Sandy	Elementary	Principal	Female
Kenneth	High School	Principal	Male
Chad	High School	Asst. Principal	Male
Frank	Middle School	Principal	Male
Angela	Early Childhood	Principal	Female
Samantha	Elementary	Principal	Female
Anthony	Elementary	Asst. Principal	Male
Wayne	Elementary	Principal	Male
Lisa	Elementary	Asst. Principal	Female
Jeffrey	Middle School	Asst. Principal	Male
Hank	High School	Principal	Male

Data Collection

The primary mode of data collection was the qualitative interview. We utilized a researcher-developed, semi-structured interview protocol in our design. Qualitative interviewing seeks to make meaning and provide in-depth understanding, especially to underrepresented populations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2015). Seeking depth and detail, follow-up questions and probes were used when necessary to keep the conversation going while clarifying ambiguities (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 96). This process allowed us to make the relevant and meaningful interpretations central to case study (Stake, 1995, 2006, 2008).

Analysis

Case study requires that researchers interpret of the stories shared by studied populations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995, 2006). Procedurally, the analysis included both first cycle and second cycle coding. In the process, we first coded transcriptions independently, then together compared codes for similarities and patterns to ensure consistency. To accomplish this, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and field notes were also used as data sources. Subsequently, we entered transcriptions into MaxQDA, which served as a data organizing medium, labeling responses with initial codes that were subsequently grouped into code families, and separating participant responses into emerging patterns (Saldaña, 2016). This system of identifying patterns evident in the setting and expressed by participants is a common qualitative strategy of analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). These patterns served as a starting point to analyze and assess the central research questions stated earlier in this research. In Rubin and Rubin's (2012) view, this implies arranging the data into "topical markers" that permitted us to "combine what different interviewees have said about the same concepts" (p. 224).

We then sorted responses by significant patterns and identified units of meaning, shared experiences, and common perceptions that related to one another (Patton, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). This process allowed thematic units based on patterns of participating principals'

experiences and perceptions to emerge. Resultantly, these emergent and categorical themes were formed as the primary catalyst for analysis and discussion.

Trustworthiness

Validity and trustworthiness included researcher reflexivity, field journaling coupled with thick rich description, inter-rater reliability, and individual and joint interpretation of data. According to Glesne (2016), thick description provides qualitative researchers the opportunity to move beyond the mere phenomenon of the study (i.e. *thin description*) to a completer and more complex interpretation of participant experiences and perceptions. Specifically, trustworthiness through triangulation and inter-rater reliability consisted of both researchers participating in prolonged and persistent interviews, interviewing at multiple sites and various participants, taking notes and making observations in the field, and debriefing immediately after each interview. Throughout we were attentive to whether or not the phenomenon and/or binding concept remained the same in the various sites and interactions of the study (Stake, 1995, p. 112).

Context of the Inquiry

According to the general findings of 2016 Ohio Drug Overdose Data Report, opioids were linked to 86.3% of all drug related deaths in the state of Ohio. Fentanyl and related drugs claimed the lives of 2,537 people; heroin accounted for 1,444 drug-related deaths; and 564 individuals overdosed on prescription opioids. While deaths due to prescription opioids from 2015 to 2016 were down by an estimated 100 incidents and heroin deaths remained somewhat consistent, deaths involving fentanyl rose by more than 1200 (Ohio Department of Health, 2016). Unintentional overdose deaths due to fentanyl and related drugs alone took the lives of approximately 540 males and 225 females between 25-34 years of age, and approximately 450 males and 175 females between the age of 35-44 (Ohio Department of Health, 2016). This age range represents 1,390 deaths of individuals that typically have school-age children (this does not include 15-24 or 45-54 age range).

In the Appalachian region of Southeast Ohio, the opioid epidemic has equally been an increasing concern. Much of the story of this crisis is chronicled in Quinones' (2015) book, *Dreamland*. As Monnat (2015) reviewed, "*Dreamland* is structured as a series of overlapping revelations about America's pain revolution, Purdue Pharma's aggressive marketing of OxyContin® in the late 1990s, the appearance of the first pain clinics (a.k.a. 'pill mills') in Appalachia" (p. 1). Specific to this study, we focus on the southern counties of Appalachian Ohio, such as Adams, Scioto, and Ross. According to the Ohio Department of Health (2016), these counties have held some of the state's highest Death Rates per 100,000 Population at 28.4-42.5.

Findings

Findings are clustered into four thematic units based on narratives shared by the twelve participants (Patton, 2015). These themes are explored under the following *in vivo* category subheadings: 1) "No Longer Surprised," 2) "Going Down the Rabbit Hole," 3) "I Don't Know What Could Prepare You," and 4) "We Made Decisions We Thought Would Help." Respectively, the themes characterize (1) the arise of distinct concerns that leaders must confront due to opioids, (2) the chaotic nature that can emerge in the practice of the leader when dealing with opioid-related issues,

(3) the lack of preparation for addressing the issues created by the opioid crisis, and (4) the ethics of doing whatever a school leader perceives is necessary to respond to student and school concerns. As such, each of these themes speak to the participants' shared or collective views in regard to their practice as a bricolage of leading in the chaos of the opioid crisis.

"No Longer Surprised"

The first theme concerns the notion that for these leaders "normal has shifted…the shock value has gone from it" when referring to the impact of opioid crisis on their schools and students. When questioned about the normalcy of the situation, participants spoke about the crisis as a phenomenon that has introduced a new standard in the educational concerns for schools. For participants, the crisis had in many ways become *normal*. In the words of pre-school principal, Angela, "The shock value has gone from it." There had been a time in the participants' schools when the event of a child losing her or his parent to a drug overdose would have generated a notable and distinctive concern throughout the entire school community; however, now it was becoming a part of what they commonly deal with as educational leaders. Although, school leaders struggled to come to terms with the state of their schools in crisis, for them, they were simply no longer shocked by the effects of the opioid crisis. As Angela stated,

> We're becoming very normalized to children not being in the home with their parents. We have cases of children being with grandparents and even great-grandparents now—having these children due to parents either being just strung out and not present, incarcerated, in and out of rehab so kids are being tossed around between different family members with grandparent. All due to opioid abuse. Mom gets out, comes home, leaves again. Now, I'm with aunt because grandma can't do it anymore—those kinds of things.

Similarly, participants' concerns were not only about parental absence or children being raised by grandparents or other family members, they also recognized that children now know more than they should about opioids and the inner workings the emerging culture of the crisis.

One principal and assistant principal, Samantha and Anthony, both related a story about a girl in third grade coming into the school office to fill out the paperwork to enroll her younger sibling in kindergarten. From their perspectives, the responsibility that this third grader held was both necessary and somehow ordinary. Likewise, Angela commented on a four-year-old preschooler that "educated her teacher very well on drugs and different types of drugs" and how what she referred to as drug people and police officers often watched their home and that her family "sometimes would leave and not come back for several days because people were watching their home." In Angela's estimation, this was a phenomenon that school principals were experiencing more and more.

All participants articulated a perceived connection of opioids to poverty. In their minds, there was a level of poverty and then, below that, there was a more extreme level of *opioid poverty*. Each case revealed occasions that principals acknowledged as distinct correlations between the opioid crisis and the idea that there were "more children lacking the basic everyday things" that their own or other children had. This concern included basic necessities; utilities such as clothing, electricity, running water, supplies for school; reliable transportation to and from school; and parental supervision. In the words of another participant, her own children would "not even think twice about signing up for an extracurricular activity or participating in a sport" while, due to opioid abuse and addiction, some children lack the basic resources to attend school functions regularly.

In Angela's case, she more fully described a major concern of her perception of the relationship of opioids to poverty. In her narrative she told how she and a teacher were very concerned about things a boy in first grade had been saying about his living environment. She shared that they had reasons to suspect that mother was addicted to drugs, i.e. opiates. She described bringing the boy in to talk to him. In her words, "I was shocked. I've probably been very naïve and sheltered in my life, but honestly, I just could've cried. This little first grader came in wearing mom's clothes, and he talked about wearing mom's clothes just like my kids talk about wearing [brand names]."

Angela shared that she asked him several questions about home. In her conversation with her student she learned that he lived in a camper without electricity, using only candles for lighting and sleeping bags for heat. The student shared with her, "We have great candles that we use in our camper." She noted that throughout her visit with the student he was "the happiest, smiling little boy." Angela noted that principals must be aware that children can be defensive if they think someone is "going anywhere towards their mom." For this reason, her awareness of the mother's opioid abuse presented a difficult nuance to her consultation and intervention planning with the boy.

One high school principal, Rob, shared a specific narrative about a commonly expressed concern—parents being unable to pick up their children from school due to being under the influence of opioids. In multiple incidents, Rob had felt obligated to notify state troopers that a parent had left the school with their child and were driving under the influence. In one example, the parent was too impaired to even give her signature on the school's sign-out page.

Also, for Rob, understanding the commonplace nature of the phenomenon of addiction and abuse meant relating to it in a pragmatic manner. He stated,

> I eat a banana in the mornings to get my day going. You know what I mean? They have to do heroin to feel normal. That's awful. Shooting up in front of your kid is terrible. I've talked to kids, and they're like, "Yeah, my dad did that in front of us all the time." I just can't imagine that, but I think some parents are disengaged. I think some are trying the best they can, but they have to do that to be normal for that day.

Rob's response to this was given in the context of concern and compassion for not only the student but the parent as well. However, it speaks to the normalcy of similar events that spanned each of the case sites studied.

Willingness to provide students in these situations the resources beyond and outside of basic academic programs suggested that these educators had a shift in their understanding of the normality of the crisis and the poverty-related needs that, based on their perceptions, accompanied it. As a result, participants had established student-oriented "stores" where students could obtain everyday essentials. For example, one district had created a clothing bank, that the principal referred to as "OurMart." Others had set up rooms adjacent to the office to provide coats, gloves, and socks, as well as instructional supplies and toiletries in these situations.

Similarly, elementary school principal, Sandy, noted that her building and the district maintained a food pantry and offered a service which provided students with a backpack of groceries every Friday to "get them through the weekend." These programs and provisions were staples in the districts where we interviewed principals and hinted at the normalcy of what school leadership accepted as a routine practice of "making do" in the chaos of the opioid crisis.

Dealing with students' hunger or their lack of other basic needs, such as heating, were issues that participants listed as part of their routines as school leaders. As one principal reflected, "When you are worrying about a student who had only had cold ravioli from a can the night before,

how well they are performing on a test or a report card becomes secondary." As well, the principals in this study recognized that teachers and other educational staff had become acutely aware of the personal necessities that their students lack. This recognition was evident in their narratives as they struggled to make meaning of how the opioid crisis had become integrated and normalized as part of the culture of the school.

"Going Down the Rabbit Hole"

Leading schools in the milieu of the opioid crisis is, as one high school principal called it, like "going down the rabbit hole." This *in vivo* theme exemplified what the participants experience when dealing with the myriad issues that arise from the epidemic. All participant narratives described the impact of the opioid crisis on their students and school in terms of "chaos" and "turmoil." Whether principals felt caught up in the drag of daily drudgery of dealing with dilemmas or simply working in the gray areas of decision making the chaotic nature of the crisis was both implicit and explicit. Both narratively evident and readily apparent in the facial and bodily expressions of the participants, we recognized through their stories the impact of the chaos on their practice.

In this theme, we address the work principals do in the wake of the chaos of the crisis. Participants shared their frustration with the mandated and legislated expectations of educational policies versus the reality of lived experiences as educational leaders working with children impacted by opioids. Collectively, they summarized the way in which the extremes they confronted daily as school principals in the midst of the opioid crisis extended far beyond the routine work and typical resources of instructional leadership. As one high school principal, Kenneth acknowledged,

> Here's the challenge that doesn't show up with the Department of Education. There's the real world and then there's their expected world—the expected world is we're supposed to do uninterrupted walk-throughs and evaluations. And while these *are* important—I'm *supposed to be* an instructional leader—there are the times I get caught up in what I call "Going Down the Rabbit Hole." The minute I step into the office I have kids coming in with unforeseen situations.

Kenneth operationalized his meaning of *the rabbit hole* by telling us that recently he had "ended up dealing with a pornography case." His narrative revealed that the students had been manufacturing pornographic videos to generate money to purchase opioids. He said the situation was another case of "sliding down the rabbit hole" due to the need to involve the sheriff's office, the students' parents, and the complexities of the legal aspects of the case. In his words, regarding the consequences of the students' actions, "we had to determine what the in-school consequences were, and then we had to distinguish what should be out-of-school consequences." Additionally, he noted that there were aspects that were beyond his purview "because it was off campus" including "the dissemination of the pornographic materials across state lines." In Kenneth's rabbit hole, this was "all related to opioids that lower inhibitions."

Kenneth's tone and body language throughout the interview suggested frustration and no suggestion of hope. It suggested that he was resigned that things would ever be different for him as it was in that moment. As with the accepted chaotic nature of the new normal, the rabbit hole presented principals with a perceived turmoil and disorder brought into his school by the opioid crisis. As was the case with other participants, Kenneth accepted that the unexpected and

unpredictable challenges were now simply a part of his job as the school leader and therefore implicit in his role as principal.

Similarly, Jeffrey, a middle school assistant principal, addressed a number of the same issues as Kenneth and others. He shared, "In the past couple of years I've made more referrals for counseling than I think I ever have before." Jeffrey noted how opioids were "definitely impacting their education and the school environment." As he stated,

> You're put in a situation where a lot of times your hands are tied, and you can't help. You try to get outside counseling agencies involved, but we're already struggling to find spaces for counselors that come in on a daily basis. We're seeing *that many* kids here in school. We had a counselor and a student meeting in the concession stand. It's to that point. It breaks your heart.

Jeffrey's narrative reveals the manner in which the chaos and confusion of the opioid crisis even impacts the physical space of the school. At each of the interview sites, any available space—e.g. conference rooms, concession stands, cafetorium stages, and storage areas—were now being occupied by outside counselors and community services needed in the schools to work with students. For example, one participant had created a special area in her office for students to come and "hang out" while deescalating from traumatic or critical events that had happened at home but had manifested in the students at school.

For the participants in this study, "Going Down the Rabbit Hole" represents the difficulty in maintaining a safe and orderly school in the disruption and distraction encountered in realities of the opioid crisis. Although the school leaders were committed to responding to student needs by whatever means necessary, they voiced an explicit frustration with the daily, incessant concerns that emerged from the chaos of the opioid crisis. In the principals' narratives, we found a correlation between issues in *the rabbit hole* and the participants' sense of being inadequately prepared to address the new normal of the opioid crisis.

"I Don't Know What Could Prepare You"

As building principals, the participants expressed a major concern in regard to their preparation for decision-making and problem-solving for opioid-related issues. Participants articulated a collective perception that the chaos around opioids created divergent and unique dilemmas that they had never had to confront earlier in their careers as educators. In their shared narratives, there was a sense of not being prepared for the demands that the crisis had placed on them regardless of time in the profession. As one participant eloquently stated, "I don't really know what could prepare you—specifically, for dealing with the opioid situation—because it is so different." Among the numerous issues that participants enumerated, they had felt under prepared to manage were mobilizing community assets and resources, strategies for responding to social and emotional concerns among students, and school-community relations in regard to public perceptions of the impact of opioids on schools. Also, participants articulated the more salient concern of what legal routes to take regarding aspects of parent rights, guardianships, and what options they had to protect the student.

One elementary school principal, Sandy, admitted that initially she did not know how to contact the courts or mobilize legal resources. In particular, being prepared for custody issues relating to grandparents raising students without legal custody or having a parent restrained from seeing a child by a court order were indicated as concerns of all participants. As one participant

noted, principals entering the field to face the opioid crisis "can only [be prepared to] do so much and then they just have to get in there and do it."

Additionally, Sandy spoke to the need to "just be willing to ask a million questions and know that you're not going to know all the answers" when it came to the impact of opioids in her school. She suggested that new principals have to be resourceful and often depend on their own better judgement to know how to figure things out. In her own words, "I don't know . . . you just have to be sensitive to students' needs. Is that something you can teach?"

Participants spoke of learning "on the fly" or "in the moment" when addressing discipline concerns with students who had been influenced by opioid-related activities. In Sandy's words, "Dealing with the realities of this crisis is something that we just have to figure out and see what's going on." She offered an example of facing challenges that she had not previously faced or been prepared to address. The incident she shared involved three second-grade students engaged in what she characterized as a game of *Extreme Cops and Robbers*. As Sandy communicated, three boys had been in what a teacher perceived to be a fight at recess. After the teacher brought them to her office, the teacher told her, "Two of them had the one pinned down, and they were yelling, 'Give me the heroin, motherfucker! Give me the heroin!'" In Sandy's discussion with the boys they informed her that they were acting out a scenario that two of the three had witnessed.

Through her story she related her exasperation of not knowing exactly what to do in a situation such as this. She shrugged her shoulders and held out her hands and asked, "So, what do you do about it? They can't be punished because they're talking about drugs, because everybody in their house talks about drugs, and they're eight years old." Her response reflected the manner in which she engaged in bricolage, or making do, in the situation in the best way she knew how.

Many participants that expressed a feeling of not being equipped for the nuances of trauma and crisis leadership when entering schools as educational leaders. In Anthony's words, "I thought I was supposed to be an instructional leader. And that is what we are taught in school that we are supposed to be instructional leaders." Similarly, Samantha noted, "Fortunately or unfortunately, whichever it is, probably more of our focus is on meeting families' basic needs than it is instructional leadership with teachers." These quotes indicate that working with families of students that had been impacted by the crisis often detracted their attention from the work of instructional leadership. However, due to the opioid crisis leaders are often forced to focus more on meeting the basic needs of families and the students that have been impacted by addiction and abuse. Instead of allocating resources for teachers, many times participants found themselves working to respond to unexpected issues, many of which were outside of the capacity of their preparation and experience.

"We Made Decisions We Thought Would Help"

Participant experiences often center on how principals respond to opioid-related issues by mobilizing the available and often limited resources they have at their disposal. Being a crisis leader in a rural and often under-resourced schools, principals encounter situations that require them to "cobble" together solutions that seem right to them for the given circumstances. Language used in the shared stories of educational leaders' experiences and perceptions often inspired images of triage on a battlefront or constructing a shelter out of reclaimed materials. Their responses to the opioid crisis were often impromptu and based on working with what resources are available, rebounding off the hard realities of students enmeshed in the complexities of trauma and turmoil

within the opioid crisis. As *bricolage*, this process of *cobbling* together a response to student needs based on available resources was commonly shared among participants.

In the case of one assistant principal, Chad, we saw how the work of a bricoleur further demonstrates the way that crisis leaders often have to make do with the resources at their disposal. His case represents the way in which the shared lived experience with a homeless and emotional student who had been directly impacted by the opioid crisis. As Chad disclosed,

> We had one boy that was here (he's no longer here). We went the distance with him. He was homeless. He would shower here in the school locker room. The principal gave him two huge bags of clothes because he had no clothes. But also, he had to have a job. But we have a district policy where you can't leave school to go work, because if one does, everybody does it. Due to this his attendance was an issue, too. We tried to get him to get to school regularly and on time. So, we changed our policy to help him. We were willing to do whatever we could to get him graduated.

Participants shared how they had gone to great extents to advocate for students, including petitioning the superintendent and working out special schedules to make it possible for students to take online classes. Also, principals had gone as far as helping students find jobs or responding to their calls from home but also worked to ensure students had a way to and from work or school. In one participant's words, "We were trying to get the student away from and out of that opioid element."

Another participant shared a time that a student had called her during a time of a domestic disturbance involving the student's mother and the mother's boyfriend. During the violent opioid-related event, the young student called the principal for help, telling her, "I'm at home, but mom's boyfriend is tearing up the house and we've called the police and I'm scared. Can you come get me?" The participant and her assistant principal responded to the child's call, relating that the student was waiting with "a blanket, a backpack, everything" when they arrived. In this incident the mom pleaded with the principal to take the student home with her. As the participant shared, "The little girl went home with me and spent the night." Since, due to the crisis and trauma of opioid-related incidents in her home, the student has had to spend two additional nights at the principal's house on different occasions. The assistant principal had expressed how he had felt a moral responsibility to "make decisions that we thought were going to help."

Furthermore, participants represented leaders who engage in a praxis of bricolage often by seeking out "every available resource that [one] possibly has" for impacted students. At times, principals must often rely on resources with which they initially may not be familiar. Principals had to be knowledgeable not only of children services but also local mental health services and to network with local businesses and other community members willing to assist students. Among these are legal resources, for example court administrators, that can become advisors with the most extreme cases. They were willing to do home visits and had even work to take students out of traumatic situations. In the words of one participant, "You just have to keep digging and digging for more ways to help, so there's definitely a moral obligation to help those most in need."

Discussion

Given that the opioid crisis is not an acute event or incident, but instead is a chronic issue, crisis leaders are faced with persistent uncertainties, ongoing concerns due to the lack of predictable preparation for response, and the need to frame immediate courses of action on a constant basis (Johnson, 2018; Pearson & Clair, 1998). In the process, the opioid epidemic has reached a level of

sensationalism in the media and popular culture; however, the impact it has had on organizations such as rural schools and their communities has no less been *sensational*. We propose that this dramatic aspect is driven in part due to national concern and in part due to the chaos created by opioid addiction and overdose rates, such as those in the particular cases of this study.

Although the principals in this study were committed to being instructional leaders, their stories revealed a deeper concern for extending the meaning of that concept to include responding to the turmoil and turbulence surrounding their students and schools in the midst of the opioid crisis. Primarily, this collective case study addressed how rural school principals in a specific region of Appalachia frame and actuate their responses to student needs impacted by the context-specific challenges of the opioid crisis. This is especially important to note in considering the principals' responsibility to develop academic and social programs for students. Their work requires that they ensure an organizational culture that is a safe and orderly environment for learning often in an environment of chaos (Griffin, 2014; Johnson, 2018; Ulmer et al., 2007).

Nevertheless, the findings of this study also emphasized the complexities of school leadership in terms of how principals engage their practice as a form of bricolage (Jenlink, 2006; Kincheloe, 2008; Lévi Strauss, 1966). Leaders as *bricoleurs* and leadership as *bricolage* are terms that speak to the manner in which the school administrator functions as a social *handyman* "who makes use of the tools available to complete a task" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 131). As Jenlink defined it, the bricolage is "a construction that arises from the reflexive interactions of . . . different types of methods in relation to the social contexts, cultural patterns, and social actions . . . that comprise the daily events of the school" (p. 54). The complexity of the experiences and perceptions for participating school leaders manifested through their narratives in various ways. As school leaders working with chronic opioid-related issues, the participants often were required to "keep digging and digging" to "make do" with what was at hand to intervene for students. Making spaces for outside counselors or other agencies and interventions, brokering community jobs for students, acting as caregivers, and pushing the boundaries of district policy to accommodate student needs are all illustrations of *bricolage leadership* that participants expressed.

Participants described their roles in terms of dealing with regularly occurring issues that were once not so routine, of addressing the chaotic and sometimes frustrating work that goes into coordinating resources to address a number of opioid-related disruptions in the school environment, and of simply making do with the resources they can mobilize to respond to student and school needs. These rural principals recognized that this was often a makeshift response and consistently acknowledged their lack of preparation to confront the complexities of the concerns and challenges that opioid-related issues can present.

Additionally, these leaders noted other common practices in their bricolage leadership that included creating resource centers, such as school stores for clothes and supplies, peanut butter and jelly carts or food packs, and personally delivering food boxes to student homes. At other times, they noted how they face unanticipated crises that require them to make decisions that impact their students socially, emotionally, and academically. Examples of these situations included instances when students needed to find jobs or alternative residents or needed additional emotional support to help them cope when the crisis has affected them in the classroom.

Recommendations

Findings from this study provide critical implications for preparation, practice, and policy. As such, we offer four primary recommendations. First, preparation programs serving aspiring rural

principals and other educational leaders need to initiate ways to capitalize on support from community-based partnerships. This means ensuring that principal program candidates have first-hand, sustained experiences in school communities that are experiencing the types of issues that opioid addiction and abuse create. As an example, leadership preparation programs can foster relationships with school communities that include classroom teachers, students, community members, and local businesses to provide educational services to students in rural communities. Rural schools and university-based programs must collaborate to share information and other field experiences that provide candidates with proactive, practical opportunities beyond classroom theory and the limited possibilities that most internships or clinical placements offer. Asset mapping and appreciative inquiry models are strategies that could be integrated into these place-based practicums; however, creating occasions for aspiring school leaders to witness firsthand the realities and complexities of the impact of opioids on a school and the students would be a primary goal. We see schools and university classrooms alike as democratic sites for processing, critiquing, and discussing these types of partnerships.

Second, based on participant comments, the training of school and district leadership in trauma-informed practices must be made a priority. Similarly, professional development, including trauma-informed care, must not only aid classroom teachers but also school leaders in the appropriate ways to respond to students impacted by trauma and other adverse childhood experiences. These training opportunities must create spaces for school and community leaders to contemplate and discuss strategies and innovations to disrupt the long-term impact of opioids on the students in their schools. A significant amount of resources has been invested in medical and health responses to the opioid crisis, nevertheless the support to aid schools is greatly lacking. Policymakers, funding agencies (i.e. grantors), and legislators must start to recognize K12 schools as organizations on the frontlines of this epidemic. This means supporting schools in the work of creating ongoing programs of community-based interventions and social advocacy for both their students and their citizens. Professional development should guide educators on a path to discover new ways of adequately engaging in this type of response-oriented pedagogy. The primary goal should be one of breaking the cycle of opioid poverty and cultures of chaos in school settings and not merely treating it as an acute problem.

Third, preparation programs, practitioners, and policymakers must begin the work of reimagining the current models of resource allocation (at the state, local, and federal levels). According to the participants of this study, they entered the principalship unaware of the channels of district, county, and state entities that they would need to contact and negotiate in order to respond to the needs of their students. This investigation has offered some insights into the types of community and regional resources available to schools and the importance of asset mapping for school leaders. Developing partnerships between the school and community organizations should become a focal point of preparation and policy for school principals and other school leaders.

Finally, policymakers, under the guidance of experienced educators, must work to ensure student-based programs for rural and under-resourced school districts. For instance, the initiation of various types of youth intervention programs are missing from the dialogues with rural principals in this study. Many of the programs the participants do mention either take a deficit-oriented approach or are simply too reactive and not responsive enough. Wrap-around services and the provision of on-site counseling for students and staff must become a priority—and it cannot be incumbent upon the schools and the communities to mobilize these efforts. Policy at the state and federal levels must be a priority if educational leaders are expected to successfully accomplish the work of being instructional leaders and effecting change.

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Equity-Minded Leadership: How School Leaders Make Meaning of Building Mindsets and Practices

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To enhance society through equitable educational attainment, efforts are being made in school districts to investigate practices and student data to provide more equitable opportunities for the students and families they serve. Given the importance of school leaders and their impact on student achievement and school climate (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2004), it is imperative to understand how school leaders develop and sustain mindsets and behaviors toward equity. This study highlights the Superintendent's efforts around equity using focus groups and individual interviews with school administrators.

Keywords*: School leader, equity, educational administration, school principal*

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To enhance equality in society through equitable educational attainment, efforts are being made in school districts across the nation to investigate current practices and student data with the goal of providing more equitable opportunities for the students and families they serve. Given the importance of school leaders and their impact on student achievement and school climate (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2004), it is imperative to understand how school leaders develop and sustain mindsets and behaviors of schools or personnel toward equity. Successful (and, conversely, underperforming) principals can impact teaching and student achievement; and these effects are likely to be the greatest in underperforming schools (Leithwood et al., 2004). Further, in their study of schools of excellence through a lens of Hoy's academic optimism, Brown, Benkovitz, Muttillo, and Urban (2011) noted, "the outcomes of interest are better in schools where principals support, model, and monitor a teamwork approach, a balanced approach, a strong sense of purpose, and an insistent disposition to assure that all students are served well and that all are encouraged to perform at their highest level" (p. 57).

Since 2015, school leaders in Southeastern Virginia have worked collaboratively throughout their region to deepen understanding and enhance efforts to intentionally improve success for all students using an equity mindset. Division leaders coordinated two regional conferences for superintendents, school board members, and hundreds of school administrators. Together, these school leaders explored interventions, shared strategies, and developed personalized plans to implement in their schools and offices. The conferences were grounded in the work of Blankstein, Noguera, and Kelly (2016) that focused on five principles of leading for equity including, "getting to your core, making organizational meaning, ensuring constancy and consistency of purpose, facing the facts and your fears, and building sustainable relationships."

The school division that is the focus of this study has been making equity work an intentional priority for the past several years. Under the direction of their Superintendent, there was a non-negotiable expectation that all school leaders incorporate equity concepts and interventions to meet the unique needs of their schools and offices. This expectation was communicated at several points over a two-year span with participation and outcomes monitored through analysis of subgroup proportionality in academic and behavioral measures such as graduation and completion rates, participation in rigorous coursework, disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. These intentional actions not only resulted in more awareness and conversations being held about the specific needs at each school, but also in more proportional representation in rigorous classes at the high school level, a more intentionally equitable approach in identifying students' giftedness, and a shift in the mindset of the school leaders who have embraced this work. This study highlights the impact the Superintendent's efforts around equity had on the students, its school leaders, and the school division. Researchers gathered data from focus groups and individual interviews with school administrators from throughout the division.

Literature Review

The United States of America was founded on the principle of equality, and public education is an important vehicle in propagating equality. Equity in public education breeds equality in society, and the lack of equity in public education exacerbates societal inequality (Oaks, 2005; Sacks, 2007; US Department of Labor, 2017; Vallas, 2009; World Bank Group, 2018; Yeskel, 2008). To break the cycle of social inequity, public education must ensure equal opportunity to all citizens regardless of background or demographics. Disproportionate exposure to educational rigor can decrease realization of individual potential and limit upward mobility through higher education,

the workforce, and the military (David, 2008; Education Trust, 2010; Parker, Ciluffo, & Sapler, 2017; US Department of Labor, 2017). Great strides have been made in enhancing educational equity; however, demographic factors still affect educational experience (Nation's Report Card, 2017). Stratification of students is a social, educational, financial, and moral problem (World Bank Group, 2018) that must be addressed through enhancing equity in public education and ensuring each child is provided opportunity to reach his or her potential (Oliver, 2012). Not only does each student prosper when provided support in reaching individual potential, the school also benefits through enhanced performance on multiple school-wide measures (Blankstein, Noguera, Kelly, & Tutu, 2015).

United States educators have increasingly embraced the undertaking of educating the country's diverse population (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001; Title 1, 1967). Educational initiatives have driven the focus in public schools and mandated improved student learning for many generations (Rowlett, 2013). Accountability systems, often federally mandated through legislation such as No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act, are now in place to encourage equity in public education. These legislative actions encourage educators to seek best practices that meet the needs of today's diverse classroom populations. For some time, school officials have realized the importance of monitoring the progress of student subgroups (Rowlett, 2013); they are now beginning to value the heterogeneity within subgroups and striving to understand and meet the unique needs of individual students.

Impact of Leadership

Social justice development, as it pertains to education, starts with a philosophical or conceptual framework discussion of the practical view of what social justice is in education. Social justice is concerned with examining situations in which individuals are marginalized to seek ways to include students who are traditionally segregated (Theoharis, 2007). Based on a continuum of changing perceptions or assumptions for promoting social action, social justice involves critical evaluations of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or ability (Carlisle, Jackson, & George, 2006; Hytten & Bettez, 2011). Social justice leadership interrupts oppressive school practices to empower student groups historically disenfranchised (Boske, Osanloo, & Newcomb, 2017). This occurs through holistic and authentic approaches that require a knowing of one's self, empathy including passion, understanding, and interconnectedness, and the ability to value other people's lived experiences to move closer to critical consciousness. (Boske, Osanloo, & Newcomb, 2017).

Through transformational leadership, administrators can serve as catalysts in realizing equity. Extant literature emphasizes the importance of principal leadership in encouraging change and improving student outcomes through high-impact intentions, such as equity (Caudle, 2014; Hattie, 2015; Velasco, Edmondson, and Slate, 2012; Walker & Slear, 2011). Leaders are charged with providing the necessary resources, instructional support, communication, visible presence, and atmosphere to support effective and engaging teaching (Caudle, 2014) and are thus often recognized for the failure or success of the school (Tui, 2016). However, school success is also directly attributed to the school leaders' being student-centered (Hill, 2014). Principals must, therefore, intentionally establish a culture of equity within their building that ensures individual student needs are understood and met. By promoting talented individuals from all demographic groups, school and district leaders are then better positioned to understand a wide variety of student needs, enhancing each student's chance to succeed educationally, economically, and socially (Blankstein, Noguera, Kelly, & Tutu, 2015).

While ensuring student and school success is the principal's responsibility, it cannot be accomplished alone. The principal must enlist the support of stakeholders by establishing a shared vision for improvement (Tui, 2016). Through clarity, collaboration, example, and encouragement, principals can establish a learning environment permeated with caring adults supporting student needs. The influence of caring staff members is a notable consideration in equity endeavors; when students feel understood and valued, their behaviors and choices change (McCormick & O'Conner, 2015). When teachers and counselors respond to principal expectations and encouragement, equity is enhanced in areas such as rigorous coursework participation rates (Porter, 2017).

School Climate

As adult and student behaviors transform, the school's organizational climate is enhanced. This positive school climate plays an essential role in reaching current educational requirements and attaining thriving school improvement outcomes (Velasco et al., 2012). Hoy, Tarter, and Hoy (2006) named the combined impact of collective efficacy, faculty trust, and an academic emphasis as academic optimism. As schools seek to achieve positive school climate and a culture of academic optimism, the impact on the overall learning environment improves. Students learning in a culture of equity, where expectation for success is prevalent, are more likely to strive for and achieve higher academic outcomes such as participation and success in rigorous coursework and exams (Pearson, 2014). Positive school climate can be leveraged to enhance equity in academic achievement (Maxwell, Reynolds, Less, Sobsiac, & Broomhead, 2017). Schools where students feel safe, engaged, and connected to their teachers have smaller wealth-predicted disparities in academic achievement and enable more social mobility. Equity-enhancing climate can be facilitated through engaging activities, relationship building, anti-bullying policies, and consistent discipline among racial and ethnic groups (Blad, 2016).

Administrative professional standards indicate that educational leaders are expected to maintain educational settings that demonstrate equity and cultural responsiveness (Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, 2015). To do so, administrators must not only ensure a positive school climate that encourages belonging among all students, they must also ensure equitable instruction, participation, and achievement. Efforts to provide instruction appropriate for each student, often called differentiated, individualized, or personalized instruction, assist in addressing racial inequality through recognition of heterogeneity among and within races. Investigating the success of each student and providing equity-inducing interventions with consideration of the student's response to those interventions furthers a school's ability to provide instruction appropriate for each child, thus fostering equity. When participation and achievement gaps exist within schools, efforts should be made to diminish and eventually eliminate them. Some students do not know they have the potential until someone who believes in their abilities tells them they do (College Board, 2014). While challenges persist, benefits are attained when educators proactively seek to ensure educational equity through increased participation in advanced level courses (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). Principals seeking to increase proportional representation in rigorous coursework should consider sharing specific data reflecting their school's representation rates with their faculty and setting goals to diminish any participation and achievement gaps that exist. The principal should provide frequent, systematic, and intentional efforts throughout the school year using a variety of staff members to encourage students who may not otherwise enroll in advanced courses (Porter, 2017).

Great schools are child-centered learning environments where human dignity is valued. When principals establish a culture of respect for diversity and individualized student support, achievement soars. When school leaders and staff combine relationships with data-informed decision making, they improve the outcomes for their students (Porter, 2017).

Methodology

This study relied on qualitative data analyzed through an interpretive research paradigm to explore central office and school level administrator perspectives on the journey being made toward increased equity in a school division in the southeastern part of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Building level and central office level administrators were oriented into the equity journey through seminars, regional equity conferences, and planning meetings. Data for the study were collected via individual interviews and focus groups.

Research Site

The school division serves over 39,000 students in a community of approximately 234,000 residents. It is a suburban school division located near military bases and has 47 public schools serve the city which is comprised of urban, suburban, and rural overlay districts bridging the divide between a large urban center and a rural community. The school district serves a student body that is 49% White, 33% Black, 8% Hispanic, 7% two or more races, and 2% Asian. All other races comprised less than 1 % of the student population. Students with disabilities comprised 16 % of the student population, economically disadvantaged students 36 %, and English Language Learners 3 %. The division is located near several military bases; 1990 of the students come from active duty military families.

The community is located near colonial settlements and is thus steeped in history. As part of the U.S. South, some of the region's history presents an obstacle to educational equity. Current members of the community have first-hand experience with Massive Resistance, and many of these citizens may have children teaching in the division and grandchildren or great-grandchildren attending schools in the division. The community, nestled between an urban center and rural expanse, must overcome equity issues associated with both urban and rural constituencies and appreciate the need for different approaches to equity in schools at the urban end of the city compared to schools in suburban or rural portions of the city.

Research Team

The research was completed by a four-member research team consisting of one higher education representative from outside the school division and three persons working within the school division. The design of the research team brought a distinct perspective to the research due to the access afforded the research team because three members of the research team had been members of the school division for many years in multiple roles and understood the narrative of the division's story. The representatives from inside the school division, through their embedded roles, could provide a unique lens to the equity journey and provide valuable perspective to the process of enhancing equity. Their inside knowledge was an asset to the research being conducted. The higher education representative could bring an additional perspective outside the division to develop a comprehensive narrative. The higher education representative had been

involved in the development of the regional equity conferences, providing insight into the school division equity journey. The four-member team increased the trustworthiness of the interpretation of the research data and decreased researcher bias.

Participants

Participants for the study were division administrators predominately from the division equity steering committee; additional participants were also invited based upon significant strides made with equity initiatives in their schools. The administration equity committee was charged with steering the division equity efforts and planning one of the regional equity conferences. The committee was chosen by the Superintendent, the Superintendent's cabinet, and central office directors. The research team acknowledges the potential for a homogenous sample in that those chosen were already engaged in these efforts. Future research might explore those who did not self-select involvement in equity efforts, aside from their typical job responsibilities. Administrators participating in the study were contacted by email, and those interested in participating selected a focus group interview or individual interview. Participants consisted of two Black males, six Black females, four White males, and 10 White females. The research questions used to direct the study were:

1. How do educational leaders make meaning of equity in their work?
2. What knowledge, dispositions, and practices do they leverage and value?

Research questions for the study set the parameters for the interview question creation. For the individual interviews, 13 questions were created (See Appendix A). For the focus group interviews, five questions were asked of the participants with one researcher facilitating the conversation and one observing and the other as a silent observer to the nonverbal cues, participant demeanor, and overall behaviors of the participants individually and within the group. Focus group interviews were conducted at a time and location decided by the research team. Individual interviews were conducted by one member of the research team at a time and location determined by the interviewee.

All interviews were recorded with permission of the participants and transcribed by an outside transcription agency. After transcription, each member of the team engaged in initial data coding for all interviews and focus groups. From this initial open coding the research team discussed the emerging themes challenging and expanding each other's perspective using the context of the interviews and participants' words as guidance. This included the evolution of the belief systems administrators encountered intrinsically and extrinsically, the lessons learned, outcomes of the equity journey as described by the participants as they engaged in their equity work, and future steps proposed for their equity journey.

Findings

In answering the two research questions focused on how leaders make meaning of equity in their work. The knowledge, dispositions, and practices educational leaders found valuable in doing uncovered two main thematic categories. First, participants described how they have built the foundation for the work through relationships, an organizational focus, common language, expected mindset and behaviors, and moved beyond seeing the students as subgroups to the individual. Second, participants described how they will sustain the efforts by breaking down barriers and building bridges and articulating next steps.

Part I: Building the Foundation

Relationships. The most salient, foundational consistency among all focus groups and interviews was the importance of authentic relationships with students, staff, and other stakeholders. By building respect and understanding for one another and learning the personal stories of those who are showing signs of struggle, administrators and staff were better able to personalize support for students and one another. Administrators mentioned the need to have courageous conversations to spark relationship building and develop an appreciation of human individuality. One administrator quoted James Comer, saying "No significant learning takes place without relationships." Another indicated the importance of trust saying, "It goes up a level when you've got that trust and love and people enjoy working for you and enjoy working together. That just makes it even better for kids."

A principal mentioned the powerful impact educators have on students' lives when students realize an adult is pushing for their success. "Knowing that people care for them and are trying to get them to be in a better place" positively impacts students' lives. When asked how each of these administrators became leaders, nearly all mentioned key teachers, great mentors, good leadership models, and feeling comfortable and supported in school. By intentionally providing these interpersonal supports to today's students, they are forwarding the cycle of success and building leadership potential. There is power in having teachers that "believe in teaching students and not subjects…individuals that wanted you to find that genius that was instilled deep inside of you."

Relationships are developed in a culture of humility and respect established through leadership modeling, conversations, and clear expectations. One leader said, "This work is all about moving one step closer to our kids and changing the world one student at a time. That is what we are all about." Leaders are encouraged to lead by example and "be the model you want others to see" and "understand the importance of every job in the school." Many mentioned the importance of being approachable and open-minded with those they serve. It is important to support and encourage one another in building leadership capacity, which will have a positive impact on the teachers and students throughout the division. During focus group conversations, the researchers noticed this humility and inner-organizational desire to learn from one another.

Organizational Focus and Senior Leadership Commitment. Superintendent leadership for equity is complex due to the organizational, personal, and occupational contexts they encounter during their tenure as superintendent (Roegman, R., 2017)**.** Context matters as superintendents seek difficult equity-focused leadership in their districts (Roegman, R., 2017). The Superintendent established equity as a priority in this school division and provided many division leaders with common experiences prior to this research. Numerous professional development opportunities provided focus on the concept of equity. Central office administrators worked to initiate conversations with building administrators regarding the importance of meeting individual student needs with an equity mindset. These conversations were expected to be emulated at the building level. The district administrators worked collaboratively with eleven neighboring districts in two annual "Excellence through Equity" regional conferences attended by all the participating district's administrators.

These conversations evolved into equity plans of action ad the building level. During the focus groups and interviews, administrators shared specific equity outcomes they planned to address in their buildings; reducing the number of office referrals and suspensions, better proportional representation in AP, honors, gifted identification and special education. One administrator stated "We expect every one of them [students] to meet our expectations and we're

going to do whatever we can to bring them to our expectation. We're never going to lower the expectations, but we're going to do everything we can to give them [students] the resources that they need to achieve and not only to achieve here, but to be prepared to compete once they go out into the real world."

A Common Definition. After establishing the division-wide priority of equity and identifying specific outcomes where equity needed to be addressed, the division recognized the importance of having a common definition of equity for all to consider and used "Providing students what they need to be successful academically and socially." The following personalized descriptions of equity demonstrate the mindset expected throughout the division in bringing the culture of equity to the teacher and student level. Administrators in this study shared these descriptions of what equity meant to them:

- Making sure you are doing your job for everyone.
- You've got to look at what each child needs and meet them at their needs with an understanding that not all students need the same things, the same resources, the same teachers.
- Making sure that we provide exactly what students need in order to meet success.
- We are no longer just teaching the masses.
- Equity isn't always equality.
- It's a mindset. It's a culture shift.
- Looking at where that student is now, and where they want to be, and what is it that we need to provide for that student to get that student to that goal.
- Always keeping in mind that all students don't have the same goal. They don't all start from the same place.
- Equity means getting everybody to reach their potential.
- It's reaching those kids who aren't learning for whatever reason.
- Equity is removing obstacles or barriers to ensure that all students are on a level playing ground.
- It's not leaving anybody behind.
- Equity is one step at a time. It's one conversation at a time. It's reflection. You know, over and over and over again. And it's a lot of trust that if we do what's right for kids, then we're going to improve our practice.

Expected Mindset. The Superintendent made it very clear that equity may look different in every school and department throughout the division. An administrator observed, "We're all at different places in this idea of equity, and we have to recognize that everybody else that we interact with is at different levels, different resistance, different acceptance, and meeting people where they are in that particular level and offer them the resources or the options." The division's next step was getting every administrator on board with this work. As the division developed common language and beliefs, they unified their voices and were better able to work together to establish a culture of equity.

In the words of study participants, "The things we have in common are a passion for kids and education. I think every single one of us believes this is our life's work." There is value "treating people respectfully and with dignity. Everybody has a story. Everybody has humanity. They want to do well. Our job is to help them." "By clarifying that we have an expected mindset inclusive of equity, we enable our students and staff to rise to "both the standards and the expectations for our students." Participants gave examples of this enacted such as important

conversations on equity, grading practices, interaction with families, and deep examination to determine root causes.

Expected Behaviors. In this school district, clear directions and expectations were provided by the Superintendent and his staff. To set the tone, administrators understood that in "every single situation, there are multiple opportunities to create a more equitable environment." One division expectation was engaging in courageous conversations that brought differing perspectives to the forefront. "Some of the conversations are hard. Some of the conversations are very easy." Ensuring this equitable environment relies heavily upon the opportunity and willingness to bounce ideas off one another and a willingness to do something different until you find what works to reach the students.

In conversations led by central office administrators over the course of two years, building administrators were provided opportunities to solidify expected equity behaviors. Trainers took time to teach the behaviors, vocabulary, and expectations. They differentiated instruction for elementary, middle, and high school administrators and gave opportunities for trainees to reflect and collaborate with one another. Additionally, participants analyzed specific school and division data with equity in mind.

The model used to train leaders was then utilized at the building level. Administrators discussed with teachers how to best approach and encourage students. Through personal and professional connections with students, teachers were able to embrace the students' uniqueness, provide quality differentiated instruction, and meet individual needs. Administrators indicated a need to get "teachers to be open and receptive to engaging and interacting with students from many walks of life." They also discussed the vulnerability of sharing stories, as one principal said, "We are trying to personalize it for our staff, being brave enough to share our own stories of who we are and where we came from; share the challenges that we've encountered and allowing our staff to share those challenges too." Another administrator reported, "It is an evolving story in our school, but we are moving forward. Whenever we hit resistance, we tried to be respectful, but at the same time, we were showing data, having personal conversations, and talking about the benefits of building those relationships." Another principal said,

> When they walk through the halls or they come through the doors, they belong to us. We spend just as much time, if not more, than their parents or guardians spend with them. It's our job to let them know there is nothing that you can't achieve. It doesn't matter what you look like. It doesn't matter what your socioeconomic status is. It doesn't matter whether you get free or reduce lunch. It doesn't matter. You can achieve all of your goals if you're willing to invest. If you can, invest in your school. Your school is going to invest in you. Together, we work in achieving your goals. The sky is the limit.

Beyond the Group to the Individual. Initial conversations led school leaders to expand the concept of equity. "It's looking at somebody specifically and individually. Are we making sure that we are giving them what they need?" As mental health issues, drug addiction, and bullying spill over into education, students are coming to school with a different set of circumstances. "Equity is really looking at the landscape of the child. Where they've been, what they're bringing to the table, and then trying to advocate for doing things differently. Trying to say, 'Just because we've always done it this way doesn't mean it's the right way.' What can we do to really look at the student?"

These conversations obviated a shift in mindset "We never looked at data or kids this way before." "We've spent 15 years telling teachers to teach the standard, to focus on the content to the exclusion of developing the relationships." Now, administrators in this study reported

conversations asking, “Tell me the story of this child. What do you know about this child?” “That number is important but you don't focus on that as much as you focus on the stories behind that number.”

Schools began looking at subgroup data for improvement and accreditation purposes years ago, but this division recognized that equity groups expanded beyond the traditional gap groups. Although income, race, English Language Learners, and special education status remain important subsets of the student population that need to be supported and monitored, division leaders identified additional groupings that must be considered when ensuring equity. Study participants also identified students from military families, those living with extended family members, children with overprotective parents, youth who are gay or transgender, learners from unhappy homes, those suffering from high anxiety or trauma, and victims of parental codependence. These unique subgroups may necessitate new supports; for example, students with overprotective parents may have developed learned helplessness and may need to learn to be independent and have self-confidence. This work ultimately revealed that needs within any subgroup vary and must be explored at the individual level.

This appreciation for individuality extended beyond the student level, to the staff level as well. Tiered supports must be provided at all levels of the organization. Students, staff and administrators each bring a different set of strengths and have varying needs. “We really do need to find ways to tailor the needs of staff so that we can accomplish the ultimate goal of equity and achievement for our students. Teachers and other employees enter their work at different places of readiness. Just recognizing that and providing the same thing to everyone will not get us where we need to be.”

Administrators must be cognizant of staff differences and “make sure they have what they need so that they can do their job.” This may require differentiated professional development and conversations. “It didn't need to be a school wide in-service session on how to write fewer referrals. It needed to be conversations with five teachers who are writing 75% of our referrals. And to give them more tools to be able to resolve conflicts with their students. Or it needed to be those five, or those ten students who needed to have a mentor, so that they could have a place to explode in a professional way, or in an appropriate way, and not in a classroom.”

As individual staff needs were accommodated, they began personalizing supports at he student level. Staff utilized focus groups and PLC to “talk about kids very intentionally” and to develop a plan for intervention, extension, or whatever that child needed. They discussed “what's really happening in our classrooms? What can we do differently to try and help students be successful?” Even in high-performing schools, there are students, be they few, who are not yet successful. Equity work ensures that supports are extended to those students. “If we're only talking about 10, 15, or 20 kids…that matters to the 15 or 20 kids.”

Part II: Developing the Continued Journey Through Equity

Infusing equity throughout a school division is not an overnight process. It takes time and must be done intentionally. The administrative challenge is to create a division-wide vision that helps the building leaders understand the importance of equity and the why behind equity work. The division in the study needed to strategically plan for the roll out of the equity work to ensure that support from the top of the organization would reach students in every classroom. This division began their equity journey by providing administrative training combined with collaborative

efforts with other leaders from throughout the region to bring in experts and provide a venue for discussions and growth around equity.

As administrators began taking what they learned from the training to the building level, they determined that the process for ensuring equity was different in every setting. They described it as a process that needed to "be nurtured" and "grown slowly", and in some cases subtly, until it became part of the school's culture. The culture and climate in the building drive the speed and specifics of equity work. It is the administrator's responsibility to ensure that the culture and climate gradually shift toward a more equitable mindset. When a large gap exists between the school's current climate and the climate needed to ensure each student's success, the pace of the work needs to be adapted along the way. Administrators also identified the need for time, money, and training to be dedicated to these efforts. "I've gotta have time to make a big deal out of it and I've gotta be able to spend the time working with my staff and listening to my staff...it's gotta be something you nurture and it grows"

Administrators realized that as they listened to their staff, enriched relationships, and built trust, adults in the building began to "feel comfortable coming in to talk about whatever the issue might be. They might come in upset or mad or looking for support, and then have a little bit more awareness when they leave." As the conversations became more frequent and natural, "it became less taboo to talk about" equity, and growth was evident. "We started out really small and we've grown that and it's just amazing to see the culture in this building and how it shifted when it comes to focusing on desired behaviors and things we want to see…and reinforcing positive behaviors as opposed to attending to the negative." This work allowed leaders to move conversations from "We are doing well, you should be so proud." to "How can we be better?"

Obtaining Teacher Buy-In. Some staff members were "more accepting of the equity discussions" than others. Each teacher's level of respect toward his/her leader may play into their acceptance of the common goal. For those who are not accepting, administrators must be patient and continue to model reflective practices and passion for individual student success. Although administrators realized the importance of establishing buy-in among all adults in the building: teachers, custodians, the nurse, support staff, and clerical staff, "if you sat around and wait for everybody to be on board you would probably not get anything done."

Leaders must ensure teachers that equity does not lower expectations, it means helping individual students rise to expectations. "The biggest challenge is changing the mindset of some of our staff members, who may not realize that they're bringing their own personal experiences or baggage to the table. These experiences impact their instructional techniques." By better understanding their own story and those of the students, they are better able to realize "the way that they're teaching may not be the best way for every student in that classroom or they might assume that students have these experiences that they're coming to the table with and take things for granted." The connection to the individual is a critical step needed for quality equity work to reach all students.

As the work progressed, administrators noted that teachers "mentioned a need to know more about what's going on with the kids outside of school. Teachers haven't asked for that information before." Administrators in the study are now reporting teachers asking, "What does that look like in my classroom? And what do you need me to do to make that happen? They want to know, How do I make this happen in my class? What do I need to do in terms of differentiation? What do I need to do in terms of making sure students who are of other races, or ethnicities, or orientations feel comfortable in my classroom? I think I am making them feel that way, but how do I know that I'm making them feel that way?"

As teachers begin reflecting on these questions, there was a palpable "shift from the administrator saying, 'This is what we are going to do for these groups' to teachers asking 'What do we need to do for these kids?'" This shift in thinking opens the door for administrators to introduce data and research. "I spent a lot of time last year collecting data, looking at data critically, talking to teachers, and seeing what teachers had to say, what they understood about equity, talking to students on our in-service days. I sent a lot of surveys out. I was trying just to gather as much information as I could about discipline, about student perception, about school culture, about teacher perception, about our scores, everything that I could get my hands on."

Breaking Down Barriers and Building Bridges. Understanding the barriers principals face in promoting equity in their schools is essential. "Understanding the kinds of resistance, the levels of resistance, and the ongoing nature of resistance allows leaders to anticipate and steel themselves as they commit to an equity-oriented agenda (Theoharis, 2008). While changes in teacher mindsets and openness toward individual student stories were encouraging to the division on their path toward equity, there were also barriers that hindered progress. A major barrier that some leaders faced was denial that inequity existed. There were teachers that did not believe some students experienced school and life differently than others. There were staff members who did not yet recognize the role their own personal experiences played in their perception of others and how those perceptions affected their interactions.

Employees at high-performing schools were often slow to accept the need for equity work: test scores were high, benchmarks were met, and the clear majority of students were successful—and were nonminority. In these schools, the need for equity came as an epiphany, highlighting the importance of everyone, even when the group excelled. Teachers were challenged to look beyond the success of the many to identify and support the few still in need.

Administrators and staff at different places in their own equity journey also affected the division's journey. No two schools were alike. Each had a unique history and group dynamic. "There's no one solution to fix the equity issue because every community is so different and the needs are so different." "To say that all schools have embraced this would not be an accurate statement." The division was tasked with determining what was non-negotiable throughout the city and what was flexible within and among schools by acknowledging while all were working toward equity and proportionality, that each school and staff had unique needs.

Administrators identified the variety of staff backgrounds and perspectives as another barrier in the path to equity. "I think that in my work, the toughest thing that I have to do is get past the fact that we all come with our own biases and breaking down our own personal walls to really get down to the root of what a person needs in order to be successful." "There are people who cannot see the problem. They don't see it as a problem. It's just not something that they connect with." "This is a very difficult and sensitive process. Not everyone is going to be able to embrace this with open arms because it really forces everyone to look at themselves. I think that having the courage to do that, as a division and as individual schools, speaks volumes for us."

The division also had to ensure that equity did not get lost among "too many initiatives, concurrently or over time." Building administrators faced a similar barrier in struggling to create time for equity work among competing issues; "We're wasting time that we could be using to focus on instructional issues, or trauma issues, or equity issues, because we're keeping the building running." Equity required intentionality on the part of administrators who were "constantly having to put fires out." Administrators began breaking the barrier of competing issues by "presenting it in a fashion that helps people realize that it's a culture shift. It's not an initiative. It's a mindset."

The division has begun the arduous process of breaking down the barriers to equity—altering belief systems and perceptions, reducing fears, and building bridges. Administrators shared substantial indicators of the change taking place. “My vision, or the division's vision, is becoming OUR vision. Now, my teachers are believing in the process and becoming facilitators of the process, and that is having such a positive impact on what we are trying to do.” “We are really just in the beginning stages. I’m very proud of what we’ve accomplished thus far. I don’t know if we can consider ourselves successful yet.” “We are in the making. We are a work in progress…I know we have the courage to do this work, and I’m proud of that.”

Defining the Future. There is evidence to suggest that equity work in this school division is beginning to take hold and is resulting in a shift in mindset and beginning to impact student outcomes throughout the organization. Considering next steps is a critical step in keeping the momentum going in the right direction. This school division recognizes that there is a need for intentionality in considering the personal, social, and emotional needs of the students and staff they serve. The following steps are currently being implemented to facilitate and continue these efforts:

- Incorporate equity conversations, strategies, and reminders in various Professional Development opportunities.
- Incorporate equity goals in school improvement procedures.
- Create a district leadership team that intentionally coordinates equity, PBIS, and RtI encompassing concepts of tiered supports.
- Intertwine equity work into the existing academic tiered systems of supports framework that addresses the behavioral and academic student performance.
- Provide timely, relevant data in user-friendly formats to aid in decision-making to help determine the right supports for the right students.
- Determine ways that existing practices could be refined, combined, or streamlined to improve efficiency.
- Ensure sustainability of equity efforts as division leadership changes occur.
- Seek and share resources that building personnel could utilize as they strive to create a more equitable culture in their school, e.g., a ‘toolbox’ with ideas of resources and options for teachers and leaders to consider.

Discussion and Implications

As school leaders in this district described, two important components of leading work focused on improving equity and outcomes are how a foundation is built and the how it is sustained and nurtured. It is important to note that this journey was not seen as linear by participants, but rather as an experience that will require reboots and revisiting. As staff and leaders change, new challenges arise, and new policies are created, organizations will need to potentially rebuild the foundation and determine updated next steps.

Because organizational and societal change will alter both the equity challenges that arise and the staff addressing those challenges, a framework has been established to ensure the division has the capacity to continually cultivate equity. The framework for sustainability focuses on a tiered system of supports to address student and staff needs; a problem solving model that can be used to respond to changing student, organizational, and societal needs; and a team structure that ensures intentionality of action and coordination of efforts across the division.

A Division Leadership Team was established to ensure equity efforts proceeded from the established mindset to the classroom operational level. The team is comprised of assistant superintendents who oversee curriculum and instruction as well as student services, administrators from most central office departments (e.g., Human Resources, Special Education, Information Technology, Staff Development, Pupil Discipline, Program Evaluation, and School Improvement Planning), and building administrators at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The team meets monthly to review data, problem solve, and plan for tiered supports to meet the needs of the district's students and staff.

The Division Leadership Team has measurably enhanced capacity for implementing tiered supports that cultivate equity and is working toward defining its role in establishing systems and practices that directly improve identified student outcomes. The tiered approach to support individual and organizational success naturally flows from the district's enhanced appreciation of diversity of background, experience, passion, and aspiration

The balance of relationships and structures emerged as critical and considering how to ensure leaders are committed to both was an important discovery. The participants in this study noted relationships as a key to building the foundation in equity work. These school leaders organically used "we" when speaking about their leadership teams and schools and most acknowledged the importance of the leader in this work through example and commitment but were humble in sharing their own success stories. The leaders in the study, in many cases, excelled in both building relationships in their own contexts, but importantly also in creating structures and expectations that took beliefs to action. These leaders were also adaptive in their actions, and able to navigate complex contexts of their district and schools.

A critical finding in both building and sustaining this work was the focus on collaboration and trust. Several participants noted that this work takes trust and time. Some also noted there is a continuum of acceptance of the need for this work. Challenging conversations with specific staff who are not consistent with the expected mindsets and behaviors of the organization were critical, but also easier when relationships and trust were firm.

Finally, beliefs are not enough. Action is necessary and the intentionality of the actions by senior leadership, leaders, teachers, and staff were noted as critical ingredients. Although indirect, influence from the senior leadership of a district permeates to school leaders who can nurture these beliefs and actions with teachers, who directly influence students and student learning.

As we considered the voice of participants, we began to envision a model for developing equity in schools and school districts. Modeled after Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, we consider each level necessary before advancing upward. The model, however, is not linear in that individuals and organizations will find they have slipped down and need to rebuild or re-engage with a level. The foundation exists with non-negotiable mindsets and behaviors that are collectively developed, and intentionally communicated. Next, trust and relationships must be built and nurtured. Third, members of the organizations must explore equity and their personal stories, which requires a sense of risk and vulnerability. Fourth, members must be guided to examine the impact of one's story on the organization and consider how the collective narrative of stories of these individuals create the tapestry that is the organization. Each of these levels work toward the apex of achieving equity for all children.



Division leaders from this school district created and modeled the use of resources and training materials for building-level leaders. Following the administrative trainings, building-level leaders were provided copies of all materials for their consideration and potential use in their schools. Some building-level leaders were comfortable providing training using the materials provided. Other building principals called on the division trainers to help facilitate equity training(s) for their teachers and staff based on specific needs at each setting. These precise, intentional steps resulted in visible shifts where beliefs shifted to evidence of more equitable actions observed in the schools.

Recommendations

Analyzing how one school district made the journey to increased equity will assist other educational leaders in creating a plan for equity for their division or school. This analysis can support school leaders in understanding the complexities of the equity issues faced by student groups and their communities and provide insight for school leaders into how to meet those needs. Influencing the perspectives of educators, students, and communities by building an equity mindset is necessary to bring real change and a more equitable educational environment for all students.

Recommendations for Colleges and Universities

For those that could attend a college or university, exposure to differing perspectives, other than the one they had growing up within their community and cultural group, is imperative to their human growth. This exposure is not to determine how the citizenry should view the world but to

provide varying perspectives to expand their thinking. Colleges and universities influence a portion of the next generation of citizens and therefore have a responsibility to their students and the world to expand thinking through exposure to varying perspectives. This extends beyond future educators to all programs offered and has increasing importance as the demographics of this country continue to change and the world becomes more globalized. Cultural tolerance, and an understanding of social justice will be necessary for effectiveness in all career paths but especially critical to educators.

All teacher and leadership education classes should have equity embedded. Society is changing therefore, so are public schools. Increased diversity should not incite fear, but promise and opportunity to seek increased understanding of different cultures. How can we effectively teach and seek authentic relationships with parents and teachers if we do not seek to explore our cultural and racial perceptions? School and district leaders cannot put structures in place ton ensure equity without knowledge of their personal perceptions and how these academic and nonacademic beliefs may assist or hinder their ability to raise the expectations and performance for all students.

Colleges and universities must develop culturally responsive, authentic leaders. Authentic leaders know themselves and their perspectives as well as how each impacts their decision-making. These leaders build relationships and trust among their stakeholders while challenging perspectives and how they view each other to build a climate of understanding and humanity. Leaders must have a passion for this work along with a clear vision and common vocabulary embedded throughout their equity initiatives. These leaders must possess the ability to examine data as a way of starting the conversation in a non-threatening environment that is safe for open conversations but consider that data also has a face as we see students within their culture but also as individuals. Leaders must be adaptive and recognize the need for non-negotiables but be adaptive and flexible in the process, knowing this work is a journey and there will be stakeholders that will resist the process. Leaders must overcome barriers that arise by leaning on the relationships and trust among stakeholders, to develop and implement effective equity action plans.

Future educators must face their perceptions and beliefs. In this way, education leaders can build capacity for instilling equity in their classrooms, schools, and districts. Education programs can utilize autobiographies or journals recording incidents of inequitable policies, procedures, discourses, and practices, hopefully, leading to improved education outcomes (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). Colleges and universities must lead the way, in ensuring future teachers and school leaders expand their equity mindset.

Recommendations for Practice

Courageous school leadership at the district and school levels is required to build equity in the public school system. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) theorized,

> To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what they hold dear—their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking—with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility…people push back when you disturb the personal and institutional equilibrium they know. (p. 2)

Establishing equity requires a plan that may make internal and external stakeholders uncomfortable. Structuring relationship building, data sharing, action planning, and

communication among stakeholders must be a part of the plan to build momentum toward equity. Structured planning, transparent action, community involvement, and data analysis will further the progress toward equitable outcomes.

Trust matters and takes time. Trust is essential to the relationship between the leader and those they lead (Beard, 2013), and building that trust among all stakeholders must be an intentional focus. Public school districts must hire and promote leaders who are deeply aware of their how they think and behave in context, (Beard, 2013, p. 102) and are therefore able to develop that trust, establish authentic relationships, and have courageous conversations that create critical consciousness. They must seek teachers and leaders who appreciate stories of other staff members, students, parents, and the community and build empathy of each other's lived experience. Employers who understand the value of relationships and the critical nature of equity will further the success of students, staff, schools, and districts. Leaders must model expected behaviors and build systems and structures to support the work and overcome the barriers that exist.

School divisions can begin the equity journey by having administrators examine their own ideologies, prejudices, and biases they bring to their school before introducing equity to their teachers and staff. To be an effective school leader as the population becomes more diverse, leaders must understand their biases and know how to assist others in facing theirs, to provide a school environment with equitable power. This cannot be a superficial process but a true analysis of their thinking and their ability to recognize theirs and others biases. By keeping equity journals (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015) or experience videos (Boske, Osanloo, & Newcomb, 2017), school leaders can examine and record instances of racism and other inequities in all their environments especially in schools to raise their awareness and build critical consciousness. Systematic discussions of incidents of inequity and ways to avoid them can assist in building an equity mindset.

School leaders must understand oppressive forces and discourses that lead to social and cultural reproduction in society and schools to build a social justice view of the world. This would lead to increased dialogue and construction of division and school plans to confront instances of inequities in the school environment through discourse, customs, and ideologies. Completion of this work by administrators prior to introducing it into the school environment will raise not only their awareness but also comfort with discussing equity issues.

In addition to working on perceptions, building administrators must create academic and nonacademic structures to improve student outcomes. Equity must be a part of the infrastructure and expectation in the school. Besides using the data highlighting gaps for students, discussion of how all students will gain academically in this process is a crucial conversation to have, with a plan of action developed from open conversations by all school actors. Teachers will ultimately decide equity success because they connect to the students, parents, community, and leadership. Without the key teachers on board helping to push the initiative of equity, it will fail. Not all personnel have to agree, but identifying the key players and having them, a part of the change process along with identifying how to implement equity within the school environment will move the process.

Data begins the discussion of which students are not achieving and whether practices exist that devalue minority students as opposed to policies that increase academic and personal self-image. Elimination of policies that bring to light the question of whether everyone should be educated and to what extent must be a priority. Instead, the question should be if students are the priority, what structures exist to ensure the academic success of all students or to limit it?

It is important that at the school and division level beliefs about equity are aligned. It must be a division focus for sustained success and consistency among schools. As administers are transferred from school to school or to central office, how can they be effective in any school or central office positions without the knowledge of equity and cultural awareness of how to tackle these issues. As the population in America continues to change this will be a challenge that can no longer be ignored.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several areas that require further research to help to operationalize how a school division can build more equitable practices. On the central office level examining how divisions complete the process of equity audits to analyze policies and procedures to ensure equity for the students they serve. This audit process will be the foundation of the equity work in the division and their commitment to the journey. In addition, staff development opportunities from the division level focused on equity require study into how useful the administrators find the information and how they utilize it in their school buildings and departments after the training.

Research into how school leaders build networks and relationships among teachers and staff, specifically how they support the work for the benefit of their students. Leaders and teachers need to widen their toolbox of interventions for equitable practices with a systematic structure they can develop as a part of their toolbox for equity. Also, an area to study would be principals who seek to build capacity in equity beliefs and mindsets including how they train their assistant principals to carry out this important work as the next division or building leaders.

Conclusion

As school districts grapple with how to incorporate equity work into the culture of their organization, they might consider the steps taken by the school division in this study. Working collaboratively with other school divisions and providing regular administrator training and resources proved to have a positive impact on school outcomes and resulted in more equitable mindsets being evident throughout the organization. The school division also recognizes the journey has not ended and this work will continue and impact all facets of their work.

The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, stated, “Equity efforts reflect an evolving society. Individuals from all walks of life communicate constantly, both verbally and non-verbally. These on-going interactions can enhance or humiliate, change lives for the better, or crush aspirations in their wake. Every individual has the potential to add value to our world. Therefore, we aim to implement equitable practices in every aspect of the schools and workplaces in our division.” The role the superintendent plays in incorporating equity work throughout a school division was highlighted by participants as unique and necessary. The Superintendent, said, “This is our most important work. We must account for all students. For equity to become part of a division’s culture, there needs to be true buy-in from every level of the organization. We must use data and schedule regular follow-up conversations to ensure we are having a positive impact on our students”.

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When Technology Works: A Case Study Using Instructional Rounds and the SAMR Model

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Billions of dollars are spent each year in the United States on technology for schools, and researchers in this case study wanted to determine the degree to which individual computing devices (ICDs) enhance the learning experience of students in grades six to twelve. The leadership practice of instructional rounds (City, Elmore, Fiarmen & Teitel, 2011) combined with the SAMR model (substitution, augmentation, modification and redefinition) (Puentadura, 2014) of technology integration was utilized in this case study to capture how ICDs are being used and the impact this use is having on learning. This method detected use rates far above what had been documented in the literature. By observing 27 randomly sampled classrooms and over 500 students in the case study district, researchers observed how ICDs were being used at the middle and high school level. Observational data analyzed using the SAMR model revealed that 84% of students were using the ICDs and of those, 86% were using them at higher levels of the model (i.e. modification or redefinition). Researchers also interviewed 45 students across eight focus groups. Focus group responses were culled for common themes, some of which included student reports of several learning enhancements as well as some problematic issues.

Keywords: one-to-one device, case study, focus groups, technology

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With advances in technology, educators must ask how (or if) a given advancement can benefit teaching and learning. Schools and districts have considered the use of individual computing devices (ICDs) for their students. Responses to this technology range from not using ICDs at all, having students bring their own device, to districts purchasing an ICD for each student. Many districts have chosen this third strategy, and some estimated six years ago that the annual cost for that decision would rise to as much as $19 billion across the United States (Nagel, 2014). That estimate was a bit high, the cost has probably approached $11 billion in 2019, and few are successfully measuring its impact (Sadwick, 2019). That said, the use of ICDs is rising. In 2008, Abell (2008) and Borja (2006) found that 24% of districts in the US were implementing ICDs. By 2010, the implementation rate had increased to 37% (Nagel, 2010) and in 2015 the number of implementing districts had ballooned even further to more than 50% (Molnar, 2015). In 2019, 76% of district administrators report having ICD's for at least some of grade levels they serve (Mouhana, 2019).

What is driving these decisions to implement technology through the use of ICDs? According to Towndrow and Vallance (2013), three factors have recently influenced educational decision makers and administrators to purchase technical infrastructure to support ICDs in their institutions and schools: ubiquity (technology is everywhere in society), utility (ICD's are very useful for both teacher and student) and the prospect that technology can act as a change agent for the improvement of the organization (Towndrow & Vallance, 2013). All three factors were relevant especially when viewed as interrelated.

Despite districts' large investment in ICDs, controversy exists regarding what value the technology brings to the learning environment (Koba, 2015). For example, one study characterized teachers who integrated technology as also having a high sense of self efficacy, but also identified barriers for others such as lack of training and lack of time to implement well (Pi-sui, 2016). Another study cited the benefits of technology for students to research via the internet, access social media for learning purposes, and organize classes via Google classroom. In that study, however, others raised concerns about technology problems, students engaged in off task behavior, and faulty referencing (Laronde & Waller, 2017).

Financial investments of this magnitude as well as the professional learning, training, and coordination that may accompany it, demand evaluations that capture the impact of ICDs. District responses to evaluation of technology integration vary from seeking none at all to thoughtful and in-depth inquiries into practice. One moderately sized and ethnically diverse district in the Midwest falls into the latter category. They partnered with researchers to discover what effect, if any, ICDs have had on teaching and learning in their district? Following the purchase of ICDs for each sixth to twelfth grade student, researchers designed the present study to evaluate the impact of the ICDs on student learning. More specifically, researchers sought to answer two specific questions on behalf of the district and to add to contribute to knowledge base of the field:

1. Upon direct observation in classrooms, to what degree is the addition of an ICD enhancing student learning in grades six through twelve?
2. When asked directly, what do students report as the value or lack of value of having an ICD?

Literature Review

Influence of ICDs

Technology has certainly impacted current practice in education. Tierney (1988) was an early investigator in the research of the computer's influence on the development of students' intellectual capacities in a world where ICDs were becoming more common. The Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow (ACOT) study focused on the use of computers to support student thinking. The study measured student growth and development of academic writing skills over time. Using student interviews and observations of student writing while using the computers, the study found that students showed an "expanding repertoire of planning and revision behavior" (p. 1). Tierney (1988) also reported that students commented on an improved ability to make more revisions because the computer-generated text and skills were retained in the classroom setting. Subsequent to Tierney's pioneering research, others have conducted studies to capture the importance and adoption of ICDs in schools. For example, Groff (2013) gave insight about the reason for integrating technology by posing this question, "How can today's schools be transformed so as to become environments of teaching and learning that makes individuals lifelong learners and prepare them for the 21st Century?" (p. 1). Answering this question becomes imperative for educational leaders who ask their districts and communities to support ICDs financially. Additionally, however, Groff pointed out that educational leaders must also consider the "outer world" transformation, advances in the learning sciences and educational technology as additional events before fully responding to the question above.

Lessons Learned

Research can inform the use of ICDs in education. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) adopted an ICD technology initiative in 2014. The lessons learned for this district's adoption and implementation were threefold: (1) Urgency is no excuse for poor planning; (2) Be wary of one size fits all solutions; and (3) Don't play favorites with vendors (Education week, 2014). Other initiatives captured additional lessons. For example, the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI) launched in 2002 put an Apple iBook in every seventh and eighth grade student's hands to prepare students for the 21st century (as cited in McLester, 2011). Texas and Michigan followed with their own initiatives. The impact on the students however, has remained inconclusive. Standardized test scores in the state of Maine revealed an elusive connection between achievement and the use of ICDs (McLester, 2011). Yet Wilson, from the One to One Institute, pointed out that these pioneering initiatives were important even though they were largely a hit and miss access to technology for students (as cited in McLester, 2011).

The One to One Institute (2015), in cooperation with the Greaves Group and the Hayes Connection launched Project Red in 2010. The project's purpose was to improve student achievement while evaluating the total financial impact of technology on state budgets. They recommended the following when adopting and implementing ICDs to increase student achievement and/or return on investment (ROI):

- Incorporate change leadership consistently throughout the entire process.
- Make professional learning and effective use of technology high priorities for administrators and teachers.

- Use technologies such as social media, games and simulations to engage students and encourage collaboration.
- Personalize learning for all students through frequent, appropriate use of technology integrated with curriculum and instruction in all classrooms and other learning places.
- Use ongoing online (formative) assessments to gauge student learning and then tailor instruction for personalized learning experiences (Hanowald, n.d.).

Recommendations from projects like Project RED provided important steps to take so that ICDs can impact student learning. Groff (2013) wisely advised districts, however, that the trajectory of any organization needs to be planned and customized for the distinctive milieu, goals and vision of the district, school or system.

Teacher and Student Voice

As the use of ICDs in schools continued to proliferate throughout the country, interest in student and teacher voice regarding the effects intensified. According to Storz and Hoffman (2013), teachers were greatly impacted by ICDs. They found that ICDs influenced teaching while presenting many new opportunities and challenges. Responses from students and teachers revealed changes in teaching style with less whole class instruction and increased small group/individualized instruction. Yet some students suggested that their teachers were doing less teaching and resorted to "mostly projects, the packet…. what you got to do, when it is due, what it is about. You teach yourself" (Storz and Hoffman, p. 8). Students agreed, however, that availability of ICDs provided easy access to the resources needed for class and that because of the ICDs, they had more creative ways and opportunities to demonstrate their learning (Storz & Hoffman 2013).

More recently, Varier et al. (2017) found support for the benefits of ICDs in elementary, middle and high school settings. Themes that emerged included opportunities to enhance 21st century learning, transition to a learner-centered instructional environment, opportunities for immediate formative feedback, and increased efficiency and student self-direction. Varier et al. (2017) also found that some devices are more suitable for different academic environments or levels of schooling and that internet connectivity was an important consideration. These two factors have become more important with the nearly ubiquitous use of ICDs in academic activity as Google Docs and other collaboration applications becoming practically universal in schools. In fact, Varier et al. found that a district's decision to use applications such as these led to increased use of the device. Further, as students became more self-directed, independent and collaborative in the learning process, teachers could direct instructional time to assess student understanding while students were engaging in tasks. Teachers indicated a greater ability to provide immediate, constructive feedback closely linked with possible student achievement (Varier et al., 2017). Students and teachers overwhelmingly recommended ICDs, and the authors suggested that "continued innovations in technology devices and infrastructure can potentially meet both practical and 21st century learning needs" (Varier et al. p. 985).

Impact on Student Learning

While causality between ICDs and student achievement is rare in the literature, recent studies like those conducted by the one to one initiative (One to one institute, 2020) and Varier et al. (2017) indicate a greater amount of evidence demonstrating ICD's positive impact on student learning.

Claro's results (2013) in Chile showed some promise for ICD use and technology integration. In this work, teachers with technical assistance during classroom instruction were able to support student learning objectives, while those classrooms without the technical assistance did not. Additional research shows that ICDs had the potential to impact multiple dimensions of learning – specific or alternate experiences, distant communication, connection, collaboration, mobility, access, personalization, flexibility, and alignment with the digital world (Varier et al., 2017; Lowther et al., 2012). ICDs and other technology related purchases by districts and schools correlated with student competence with technology (Lei & Zhoa, 2008) and tolerance for risk taking (Pautz & Sadera, 2017).

Qualitative case studies examining the use of ICDs through classroom observation and student focus groups are a rare but do exist. In addition to Varier et al. (2017), Kirkpatrik et al. (2017) did an extensive questionnaire-based study in Canada in which a main finding was the positive impact of iPad on inclusion of students with special needs. In addition, Maich, Fanshawe and van Rhijn (2017) examined elementary classrooms through a focus group of educators and found that the ICDs were in use 31% of the time observed. Teachers also reported positive attitudes towards the devices by students. In another case study of iPad use, Kaufman and Kumar (2018) discovered that high school juniors and seniors reported "changes in communication, collaboration, learning strategies, as well as accountability and independence when learning with iPads" (p. 454). Finally, Higgins and BuShell (2017) interviewed teachers and observed classrooms and found that teacher and student relationships were positively affected by the introduction of ICDs. This present study extends and contributes to the research as it delves deeply into the teaching and learning process through qualitative inquiry using a specific classroom observation protocol and student focus groups.

Conceptual Framework

This study examined how students experience the introduction and integration of ICDs as part of their learning at the middle and high school level in the case district. To capture this, researchers combined two conceptual frames: instructional rounds protocols (City, Elmore, Fiarman & Tietel, 2011) and the SAMR model (Puentadura, 2014). Authors here used the former to develop a classroom observation protocol and the latter to analyze those observations as well as responses from student focus groups (see Appendix A).

City, Elmore, Fiarman & Tietel, (2011) described the concept of the instructional core which posits that in order to alter the level of student learning, change will only occur if there are improvements in three critical, interdependent realms: the level of content, the teacher's knowledge and skill, and student engagement. They expand on the work of philosopher David Hawkins who described the core as "the 'I' (the teacher), the 'thou' (the student) and the 'it' (the content)" (as cited in City et al, 2011 p. 23). These three pieces interact to form the instructional core. Instructional rounds protocols establish procedures for observing classroom instruction, specifically the instructional core. In this work, therefore, if adoption of an ICD initiative is coupled with the proper conditions and prerequisites involving preparation, planning and pedagogical support then we can expect that teachers will use the technology in ways that impact student learning.

City et al. (2011) also delineate seven principles of the instructional core as follows:

1. Increases in student learning occur only as a consequence of improvement in the level of content, teacher's knowledge and skill, and student engagement.

2. If you change any single element of the instructional core, you have to change the other two.
3. If you can't see it in the core, it's not there.
4. Task predicts performance.
5. The real accountability system is in the tasks that students are asked to do.
6. We learn to do the work by doing the work, not by telling other people to do the work, not by having done the work at some time in the past, and not be hiring experts who can act as proxies for our knowledge about how to do the work.
7. Description before analysis, analysis before prediction, prediction before evaluation (p. 23).

It should be noted that this study focused primarily on the third, fourth, fifth and seventh principles. Principles three, four and five are applied in the classroom observation protocol which captured teacher actions, student actions, content and task (see Appendix A). Principal seven was applied in the data analysis along with the SAMR model (see Data Analysis below).

In addition to the instructional rounds, researchers also analyzed classroom observations and focus group responses through the lens of the SAMR model (Puentadura, 2014). This model classifies technology integration into four progressive levels of integration: substitution, augmentation, modification and redefinition.

At the substitution level, technology acts as a direct tool substitute, with no functional change. For example, using a fillable PDF as opposed to a traditional worksheet is using the ICD as a substitute for more traditional pedagogy. At the augmentation level, technology acts as a direct tool substitute with functional improvement. The spelling and grammar check features of word processing programs represent augmentations when compared to pen and paper composition. To experience modification, the technology allows for significant task redesign. Google docs which can be shared with other collaborators, allowing for real time co-construction of a document modifies the task of collaborative writing. Coauthors of a text can work on a piece at the same time but in different locations or not at the same time, but the document is truly shared. Finally, at the level of redefinition, the technology allows for the creation of new tasks, previously inconceivable. Well beyond a traditional hard copy term paper, composition with ICDs can incorporate hypertext and video links, accessible by the click of a mouse for the reader. These compositions can also be published in the form of blogs or in online chat rooms. These kinds of tasks were inconceivable 30 years ago and would not be possible without student access to ICDs. (Puentadura, 2014; see also Appendix A).

The SAMR analysis allowed for the evaluation of differentiated gradations of technology integration as opposed to merely observing if the ICDs were in use or not. Using these two conceptual frames, instructional rounds and the SAMR model, in concert is a unique contribution of this research in terms of both data collection and analysis.

Research Methods

The overall method employed in this work is a qualitative case study evaluation (Yin, 2009). Researchers used this method to produce findings for the two middle schools and a high school in the case district through classroom observation and student focus groups. The larger phenomenon taking place across the country is the inclusion of ICDs and the impact of that decision on the teaching and learning process. Marshall and Rossman (2006) argue that the qualitative researcher

must make this connection to a larger phenomeon to build rationale for their work. What is not common in the literature is taking an evaluative look at the decision to implement ICDs and its impact in a specific setting through a qualitative lens. In fact, using of the instructional rounds protocol (City, Elmore, Fiarmen and Teitel, 2011) in conjunction with the SAMR model (Puentadura, 2014) to produce evaluative results is a unique methodological contribution of this study.

Study Context

The case district, located in the state of Michigan in the United States, spent $22 million on instructional technology to provide an ICD for every sixth through twelfth grade student. Central to the messaging from the leadership involved this metaphor: "devices were not to be $1,000 pencils." Put another way, ICDs could not merely replace traditional instructional methods that added little value to teaching and learning. Instead, the district sought to use the technology in ways that enhanced instruction. The purpose of this case study evaluation, therefore, is to collect and analyze data related to this initiative to determine the extent to which that vision was realized.

Moderately sized with just under 7,000 students and ethnically diverse, this district presents an excellent opportunity for a case study evaluation. In fact, its diversity resembles that of the United States: 9.3% Asian, 2.1% African American, 36% Hispanic, 3.5% from two or more races, and 49% Caucasian. The district's free and reduced lunch rate is 55% (State of Michigan, 2019).

Data Collection and Participant Selection

Data collection on the first research question, (to what degree is the addition of ICDs enhancing student learning) involved direct classroom observation using the instructional rounds protocol. Researchers felt it important to directly observe the teaching and learning process and did so by entering 27 randomly selected classrooms in grades six through twelve. School buildings were made aware of the study and knew the dates of researcher visits but did not know which of the 200 classrooms would be visited. With an average class size of 19 students, this involved direct observation of 27 teachers and over 500 students (State of Michigan Database, 2019).

The observation process took two researchers into each classroom for 15-minute intervals. During that time, each researcher independently recorded observations using a specific protocol (see Appendix A) focusing on the following questions derived from the third, fourth and fifth principles of the instructional core:

1. What is the teacher doing? Saying? With whom?
2. What are the students doing? Saying? How are the students interacting?
3. In what content are students being exposed/engaged? What is the nature of the content?
4. What is the activity students are asked to complete/accomplish to learn the content?

Researchers derived and adapted these questions using the conceptual frame from the instructional rounds protocol developed by City et al. (2011).

Researchers collected data on the second research question (what do students report as the value or lack of value of having individual computing devices) by engaging students in focus groups. A random selection of 45 students distributed into eight focus groups across the middle and high school levels met with researchers. Parent permissions were first obtained per the research plan approved by the University's Institutional Review Board before any students were contacted. Students also had the opportunity to assent or not to assent to the study (see Appendix B & C for

consent forms). Student responses to pre-determined questions in a semi structured interview (see Appendix D) were audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis. Researchers limited follow up questions and kept them related to topic so that each group had a similar experience.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study investigated the phenomenon of introducing ICDs into the classrooms of sixth to twelfth grade students. Specifically, two research questions served as focal points: Upon direct observation in classrooms, to what degree is the addition of ICDs enhancing student learning in grades six through twelve? When asked directly, what do students report as the value or lack of value of having individual computing devices? Having collected these data sets, both researchers analyzed individual data collections separately. Researchers met later to compare and synthesize individual findings into their final form.

Classroom Observation. As indicated, the classroom observation data used an instructional rounds protocol which focused on the instructional core: the interaction between teacher behavior, student behavior, content and instructional tasks (City et al., 2011). Additionally, the data were then analyzed using the SAMR model: substitution, augmentation, modification and redefinition (Puentadura, 2014). In the highest two levels, modification and redefinition, the student is involved in higher-level learning and critical thinking indicative of transformational learning. These levels have also been connected to the higher-order thinking levels of Bloom's taxonomy (Netolicka & Simonova, 2017). One area of analysis sought to determine how frequently students engaged in modification or redefinition when observed.

To check each other's work, the two researchers intentionally did not discuss the classroom observation data until each had an opportunity to examine the data individually based on individual notations. This process included an examination of all notes taken to look for important data points or pieces of evidence. Researchers also looked for the SAMR levels independently before discussing findings together, tracking the highest level of SAMR in each classroom observed.

Once that had been completed, researchers engaged in the following collaborative steps grounded in the instructional rounds process (a protocol in which each researcher had been trained and had facilitated in the field):

1. Collaborative analysis: researchers compared individual notes and shared individual insights with each other. Researchers also interrogated the data, looking for patterns and evidence to support these insights.
2. Collaborative prediction: researchers clustered the data points to make predictions about the students, the school and the district related to ICD use. For example, what percentage of the time were students be expected to use their ICD during the day?
3. Collaborative evaluation: this formed the summary of our findings overall, making sure each statement could be backed with observed data.

These three steps, following the data collection above, applied the seventh principle of the instructional core, "Description before analysis, analysis before prediction, prediction before evaluation" (City et al, 2011 p. 23):

Student Focus Groups. Responses to the semi structured interview questions in student focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. Analysis was guided by the work of Marshall and Rossman (2006), and began with reading participant responses and placing them into two large categories: comments that indicated ICDs were supportive and enhancing of the learning process, and comments indicating that ICDs were detrimental to the learning process. A second reading of

the responses yielded an additional category: comments indicating that ICDs have little to no impact on learning (see Table 1). Within each of these three categories, researchers gleaned common themes (Marshal & Rossman, 2006), described in greater detail below.

Findings

Classroom Observation

Classroom observations revealed high rates of ICD use at the higher levels of the SAMR model. Researchers observed ICD use in 84% of the classrooms for instructional purposes. Furthermore, of those classrooms that employed ICDs, 86% used them for instructional tasks involving modification or redefinition, the highest two levels of the SAMR model. This far exceeds the 31% level of use in the Maich et al. (2017) study cited above.

Examples of redefinition or technology that allows for the creation of new tasks that were previously inconceivable were of particular interest. For example, math students used a program entitled "ALEKS" that adaptively moved each student individually to problem sets in their zone of proximal development (Liudmila & Solomonovich, 2017). Each math student engaged in a personally customized practice set of problems, complete with links to learning supports that would not be possible without ICDs. Another notable example was in technology education. Sixth grade students worked with both the ICD and a desktop computer simultaneously to build unique applications, using designing and coding skills. Students in social studies collaborated with each other on digital presentations in class or from home to create a fictional nation based on natural resources and production possibilities.

Examples of modification, or technology that allows for significant task redesign, were also present, particularly in the area of assessment. Teachers obtained real-time, formative assessment data to drive instructional decisions; students could access this data as well. During writing instruction, students collaborated via Google Docs while also using Easy Bib to document their work, all while getting feedback from the instructor. Substitution and augmentation examples, while perhaps not as interesting, did serve to make learning more efficient, for example, by storing all handouts in Google Classroom for easy and continual access at student convenience.

Within the instructional rounds' analysis protocol (City et al., 2011), researchers attempted to predict the student experience. The prompt, "if you were a middle or high school student in this district, what would you experience?" created an opportunity for prediction. Researchers made the following predictions based on data gleaned from classroom observations:

1. Almost every student will have an ICD every day. In fact, researchers did not observe a student without an ICD during visits to the buildings.
2. The rate of instructional technology use will likely be 80% or higher in the secondary schools of this district.
3. Google Classroom, Google Docs, and other applications will be part of daily teaching and learning.
4. Teacher and student acumen with ICDs will likely improve with continued use and support.

Based on collective observation and analysis, researchers feel confident that these predictions will be evident in secondary classrooms across the district.

Student Focus Groups

As indicated above, researchers classified student comments about ICD use in the categories of supportive, detrimental or having no impact. Table 1 below shows the overall summary by middle school (MS) and high school (HS):

Table 1

Classification of Student Comments

	Supportive	Detrimental	No impact
Middle School	60.3%	21.6%	17.9%
High School	67.2%	20.3%	12.5%

The overall comparison of supportive to detrimental comments shows students reporting the former at a ratio of three-to-one. Thus, a majority of students made comments supporting the inclusion of the ICD into their learning experience, reinforcing other findings in the research (Maich et al., 2017; Kaufman & Kumar, 2018; Kirkpatrick et al., 2017).

Supportive Themes. A majority of student comments revealed themes supportive of ICD use such as increased efficiency, creative engagement and learning supports. For example, the theme of efficiency came through from a middle school student who stated: "Homework is easier to do because you just have to open your computer, click on classroom and you would see if you have any homework." Another middle school student noted the ease of organization when stating, "I'm not losing work because everything is in the same place, and I don't lose track of anything."

Creative engagement also surfaced as an important theme, especially with competitive review games, as one high school student indicated, "With everyone having an (ICD) it's just easier to review that way. And it's competitive too so it makes people want to engage more." A middle school student noted how engaging and accessible ICDs made certain projects: "In the past few weeks in history we've been doing a video project, and all of us being able to go on (ICDs) allowed us to work on different stuff and find information and do it all individually." The ICDs created engagement by encouraging a future perspective as well, as noted by another middle school student: "I think it's helped our learning a lot because in our future careers were going to be using technology a lot, so it's good to get used to it now."

Finally, using ICDs as a learning support was also a prevalent theme, as noted by a middle school student: "It's easier because if you're absent from the class. . . the teacher can post last week's videos and you can watch it on your own time." A high school student commented that watching videos at one's own pace and taking notes made learning more accessible. Moreover, another high school student expressed how access to ICDs for all students addressed equity issues: "I think that also for some people at least there's definitely a socioeconomic factor that goes into it. I know a lot of people with lower incomes don't have access to technology at home; certainly, I think that chrome books enabled them to." Since focus groups were conducted after ICDs had been in place for five semesters, researchers anticipate that these themes will continue, if not improve over time.

Detrimental Themes. While the majority of student comments were supportive of ICD use, some students noted issues such as distractibility and perceived loss of instruction. One high school student described the distractibility issue this way, "You just can't help yourself but go on

like a game website when you're supposed be doing something that you know you're supposed to do." Closely related to distraction was also the issue of procrastination as noted by a high school student: "There's more procrastination. . . you can do it at home if you did not get to where you need to be in class."

Other students noted their perception that instruction was being lost. One student stated, "They (teachers) give us no direction on what we need to do online and so it's just a bunch of assignments, and you're just like what am I supposed to do you're giving me no direction. You end up not learning." As indicated, detrimental themes represent the minority of comments, but also reinforce research reviewed (Kirkpatrick et al, 2017).

No Impact Themes. Closely related to this loss of instruction for those comments noted as detrimental, students also noticed when teachers merely used the ICD as a substitute for something they could have done traditionally. As one student noted: "I have a class every day that we could do stuff on paper and she could actually teach but everything is online. Seems like busy work." Similarly, another middle school student noted: "They have us do it in Excel when we could just do it on paper." Though comments such as these were far less frequent than supportive comments, they may illustrate the metaphor of the ICD being used as a $1,000 pencil.

Discussion

Based on the conceptual framework, researchers used the instructional rounds protocol to examine the instructional core: the interaction between teacher, student and content (City et al., 2011). The addition to the instructional core in this study was the introduction of an ICD for each student. This phenomenon changed the behavior of teachers and students and impacted teaching and learning. Classifying classroom observations using the SAMR model (Puentadura, 2014) enabled researchers to capture the degree of that change.

From classroom observation and student reports in focus groups, ICD's are being used at high rates and in the upper levels of the SAMR model in this district. Since research has linked the SAMR model with Bloom's Taxonomy (Netolicka & Simonova, 2017), this implies students are likely learning at higher levels. Furthermore, students can identify the benefits of these devices on their learning with most of their comments depicting ICDs as supporting instruction. This serves as important evidence directly from the student that ICDs supported their learning.

Classroom observations also gave researchers an opportunity to view what kind of instruction was taking place when ICDs were not in use, and it was generally of high quality, revealing two insights. First, teachers did not necessarily feel compelled to use the ICDs even on a day when they knew researchers would be in the building. Second, and closely related, teachers appear to be using the ICDs strategically, meaning that if another instructional strategy made more sense given the context and progression of the lesson sequence, then that strategy was used.

Implications

Researchers believe that based on the literature, this case represents a relatively high degree of technology integration, especially after two years of implementation. Others in the field have pointed out concerns about potential waste of resources that have been dedicated to these kinds of initiatives (Koba, 2015). With an 80% or greater ICD use rate observed during instructional rounds and over 60% of student comments indicating that ICDs supported their learning, resources earmarked for this initiative have been well invested. Furthermore, students have acclimated to

ICDs as part of their learning experience. Very few were unprepared to use it in class (e.g. ICD not charged), and none were observed without the ICD. With continued professional learning supports and reflective practice, teacher and student acumen with the technology will likely grow.

Researchers also noticed a tentacle effect with the implementation of ICDs into the instructional program: (i.e. other positive consequences that resulted from ICD integration). For example, ICDs facilitated collaboration between students and with their teachers. A shared Google Document can be a platform for collaboration at any time of day or evening, for example. Teachers also shifted more of the instruction to a student-centered model knowing that each student has access to the ICD. And, as observed with the ALEKS program described above in high school math, this technology enabled profound differentiated instruction, certainly because of the adaptive nature of that particular program, but also because of the individual and continuous access afforded by the ICD.

Conclusion

This study, like most, comes with limitations. The case was limited to one district and three schools (two middle schools and one high school), and therefore extrapolating findings beyond these schools would be inappropriate. Also, though a random selection of secondary students within the district were observed, researchers did not survey all students within the district. Finally, The ICD in this case was a Chromebook which had been chosen by the case district. We did not study the use of other kinds of ICDs to make any comparisons.

Although case study insights are by design limited to the case under review, the researchers posit the use of instructional rounds (City et al., 2011) along with the SAMR model (Puentadura, 2014) as a method of evaluation for technology integration. The review of the literature did not reveal this model being employed, and given the robust findings obtained, researchers believe that it can serve as a useful model of evaluation for districts as they integrate technology.

The next logical step for a potential follow-up study would be to talk to the adults in the district through semi-structured interviews of teachers and administrators. Also of note, when gaining permission to speak with students, some parents wondered if their opinions would be sought. Given that the community financed the initiative through a tax supported bond, one could argue that discovering their perceptions of its success or failure could have value. And of course, it would be worthwhile to question school and district leaders on the leadership and/or change model employed during this implementation process. When something is effectively implemented, it bears asking how this took place.

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Constructive Destabilization within the Liminal Space: Doing, Debriefing and Deliberating in Mixed Reality Simulations

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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how educational leadership students journeyed through liminality within simulation experiences. The doing of the simulation, the subsequent debriefing, and the final deliberating of the experience defined the entire simulation experience within the context of this study. Data sources included simulation and debriefing observations, participant reflections, and interviews.

Participants within the simulation experience experienced constructive destabilization within liminality and negotiated this disequilibrium to develop new concepts, skills, and attitudes. The mixed reality simulations provoked vulnerability, difficult emotions along with regulation, and paradoxes that participants negotiated toward an emerging leader identity. Yet, navigating this turbulence was the necessary process toward a reconstituted leader-self. The process of journeying through this liminal state of constructive destabilization was necessary to facilitate growth and leadership development.

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Liminality is an in-between phenomenon. It is a place of movement, change and emergent ways of being. As learners undergo the cognitive process of assimilation and accommodation, their prior knowledge and skills are reformulated into a different configuration or schemata (Myer & Land, 2005; Land & Ratteray, 2017). Liminality explores the states of *betwixt and between* through which one travels in any life event (Turner, 1987). Used by van Gennep (1908/1960) to associate ritual and rites of various passages in a society, the notion of liminality has also been attributed to individuals who "fall in the interstices of social structure; are on its margins" (Turner, 1969, p. 125). Liminality enables individuals to pass from one position to another (van Gennep, 1980), often within a community of individuals who are bound together through the passage (Turner, 1969).

The exploration of liminality in educational settings, specifically in the study of leadership, is a relatively new field (Guinemas Costa & Pina, 2013). Liminality integrates ways of thinking and doing within a specialized body of knowledge such as leadership (Yipp & Raelin, 2011). Liminality is also a process through which individuals can forge new identities while their cognition is transformed (Piro & O'Callaghan, 2019). This process of transformation is a turbulent one in that emerging school leaders must navigate their emotions while they shed identities as classroom teachers and construct new identities as principals or district supervisors (Rattray, 2016).

The state of liminality can be explored through simulations (Piro & O'Callaghan, 2019a, b). A simulation can be viewed as "a simplified, dynamic, and accurate model of reality that is a system used in a learning context" (Sauvé, Renaud, Kaufman, & Marquis, 2007, p. 253) and within the current study, a mixed reality simulation experience was used. According to Milgram and Kishino (1994), mixed reality environments lie in the middle of a continuum between actual reality and virtual reality. With this emerging technology, mixed reality simulations allow people to practice skills and rehearse strategies with avatars (Dieker, et al., 2013; Dieker, Straub, Hughes, Hynes, & Hardin, 2014).

Previously, we explored mixed reality simulations embedded in a community of practice and found that educational leadership candidates traversed three learning spaces: separation, liminal and emerging professional portals (Piro & O'Callaghan, 2019b). The purpose of this current research was to explore more deeply the liminal space of mixed-reality simulation experiences.

Literature

The literature is bound in liminality, constructive destabilization, and the three D's of the simulation experience: the doing of the simulations; the debriefing after the simulations; and the deliberating that occurred following the simulations.

Liminality

The concept of liminality emerges from the field of anthropology (Turner, 1967; 1987; van Gennep, 1960). Coming from the Latin word *limen* (Meyer & Land, 2005), it suggests a threshold through which one crosses, as within rites of passage (van Gennup, 1960). Recently, the notion of liminality has been applied to professional learning in police education (Rantalalo & Lindberg, 2018) and teacher education (Piro & O'Callaghan, 2019a; Cook-Sather & Alter, 2017). Liminality is a process which shapes cognition (Soderburg and Borg, 2018) as the individual actively engages

in the formation of a new identity. Traveling through liminal spaces is a turbulent journey in that the emerging self will shed previous concepts and construct new identities (Guinemas Costa & Pina, 2013).

Threshold concepts are portals within liminality that enable learners to deeply understand concepts that lead to transformative ways of knowing (Land & Rattray, 2017). The threshold concepts become an integral part of the learners' identity, such that further learning without the threshold concepts is impossible (Tucker, Weedman, Bruce, & Edwards, 2014). Recent research suggests that individuals traverse several transition points to attain threshold concepts as they move from difficult emotions, doubt and troublesome knowledge to transformative understanding (Irving, Wright & Hibbert, 2019). Liminality cannot be divested of the emotions that are aroused when individuals confront previous concepts or identities that do not fit with the emerging new paradigm or professional lens (Irving, Wright & Hibbert, 2019). The key to unlocking this transformation is using emotions as mechanisms to access liminal spaces coupled with reflection on the process (Hay and Samra-Fredericks, 2016). Otherwise, individuals may be halted in their progression toward attainment of concepts if their anxiety results in panic or anger (Gilmore & Anderson, 2016).

Mixed-reality simulations provide a vehicle to scaffold the journey through these liminal spaces as students experience contextualized professional situations and they reflect on their response to them (Piro & O'Callaghan, 2019a, b). Yipp & Raelin (2011) posited that threshold concepts in leadership should focus on those "meta-competencies" that help leaders understand how to process their lived experiences toward new ways of thinking. Mixed-reality simulations allow emerging leaders to role-play these meta-competencies, such as learning to conference as an educational leader, while students dialogue with their peers and instructor on their actions within the contextual situation (Yipp & Raelin, 2011).

Liminal State of Constructive Destabilization

The utilization of mixed-reality simulations in leadership preparation may create emotional turmoil while the leadership candidate is challenged to apply new concepts and skills in novel situations (Fanning & Gaba, 2007). Research on leadership development that is rooted in adult cognitive development posits that leadership awareness, leadership self-efficacy, self-awareness, leader identity and leadership knowledge, skills, and competencies are key components of the developmental process (Day & Dragoni, 2015). To facilitate the developmental process, leadership candidates need experiential lessons that foster meaning-making and cognitive shifts (Reams, 2017). The constructive developmental theory applied to leadership focuses on making meaning from disorienting dilemmas that create cognitive disequilibrium (Keegan, 1994; Torbet, Fisher & Rooke, 2004). Reflective inquiry on this state of disequilibrium is pivotal to developing new concepts, skills, and attitudes (Reams, 2017). The process of journeying through this liminal state of constructive destabilization is necessary to facilitate growth and leadership development (Kegan, Lahey, Fleming and Miller, 2014). Within the current study, this journey was established through the 3 D's of doing, debriefing, and deliberating.

The 3D's of Doing, Debriefing, and Deliberating in Mixed Reality Simulations

Simulations have been used for training purposes in fields such as aviation, the military, and medical fields for decades. In the field of education, however, the application of simulations is

relatively new (Bradley & Kendall, 2014; Dieker, Rodriguez, Lignugaris/Kraft, Hynes, & Hughes, 2013; Kaufman & Ireland, 2016; Shaffer, Dawson, Meglan, Cotin, Ferrell, Norbash & Miller, 2001). In this study, we refer to the mixed reality simulation experience as having three components: the performance of the simulation (the Doing); the feedback following the simulation (the Debriefing); and the reflection after watching the performance video (the Deliberation). Each of these are addressed.

The performance of the simulation as the *doing* part of the simulation experience is in the initial component of the mixed reality simulation experience. Recently, simulations have gained momentum in educator and school leadership preparation. To maximize learning in simulation-based curricula experiences, "safe spaces" are required for participants to take risks in the simulation and to fail if necessary, to grow professionally (Hall & Tori, 2017). Mixed reality simulations within educator preparation provide an embodied learning process (Lindgren & Johnson-Glenberg, 2013) that may be enhanced by communities of practice, such as in a learning laboratory where emerging leaders may practice leadership skills while minimizing risks to humans (Dieker, Kennedy et al., 2014; Dieker, et al., 2013; Piro & O'Callaghan, 2019a). Leadership students may make mistakes and receive focused feedback to improve their skills (Dalgarno et al., 2016; O'Callaghan & Piro; 2016; Piro & O'Callaghan 2019b) and explore the liminal process of becoming a leader.

A key ingredient that is often overlooked in a simulation-based learning curriculum is the *debriefing* process. The debriefing process may be the most critical component to facilitate the connection of theory to practice and to clinically process the experience (Decker et al, 2013). Despite the critical importance of this component, a review of the literature indicated that only a limited amount of studies have focused on the debriefing process for simulations (Hall & Tori, 2017). Furthermore, the field has yet to identify evidence-based effective models of debriefing. Models of debriefing focus on three phases:1) description of the event; 2) analysis/analogy of the event; and3) application. Some reflection can happen naturally after an event but is often unsystematic and does not go beyond description (Fanning & Gaba, 2007).

A skilled facilitator or coach enables the leadership candidate to unpack these layers of underlying assumptions through the debriefing process. The first phase of the debriefing process is a description of the events that occurred by the participant; the second phase is identifying the emotions it aroused from the participant/group or emotional content of the discussion. The final phase is the analysis of the different views of each participant and how they contribute to the whole—the generalizability and application of the experience and evaluation of behaviors (Fanning & Gaba, 2007). A skilled facilitator gauges the participants' needs and pivots the discussion towards the learning objectives of the simulation. Immediately after the simulation, when emotions are raw, the skilled facilitator defuses the emotions and guides the participants to detach their feelings from the event so that it can be analyzed rationally (Hall & Tori, 2017).

Dismukes and Smith (2000) posited three levels of debriefing performance. High level is where the participants debrief themselves and the facilitator plays the role of catalyst by asking open ended questions and then, artfully using silence. Participants create their own prescriptions for change. Intermediate level is when the facilitator must be more involved, though the participants can mostly discuss on their own performance. Techniques for this level are rewording or rephrasing, raising questions or asking a member to comment on another's response. Low level is when the facilitator is most involved because participants are disinclined to respond and must explicitly model analysis or identify strategies. The key component to the debriefing process is the

skill of the facilitator or coach as they guide the participant through the event to foster reflective practice (Hall & Tori, 2017).

In the final component of the mixed reality simulation experience, participants engaged in reflection of the doing of the simulation and debriefin*g*, known as the d*eliberating* part of the simulation experience. Reflective inquiry enables the leadership candidate to access the internal operating system that contains their underlying beliefs and assumptions as well as personality traits (Reams, 2017). As noted by Reams (2017):

> One of the highest leverage activities for developing leadership capacity is conceptualized as being able to enable leaders to take a perspective on their "internal operating systems." These self- systems are made up of layers of structures of interpretation, meaning making and the ordering of experience that goes on inside of us. Learning how to "get on the balcony" or take a perspective on this operating system involves examining what has previously been unconscious, habitual, or assumed. These elements determine the range and depth of choices and behaviors available to leaders, which can be unpacked in layers as we evolve our perceptual capacities through developmental stages. (p. 339)

A skilled facilitator or coach guides the leadership candidate through the reflective inquiry process and assists the emergent leader in decoupling the emotional response from the situation or issue (Hall & Tori, 2017). It is through deliberating on the internal operating systems underlying their cognitive processing of the situation or issue at hand, that the leadership candidate gradually traverses liminal spaces towards attainment of the threshold concepts (Reams, 2017).

The doing of the simulation, the subsequent debriefing, and the final deliberating of the entire experience defined the entire simulation experience within the context of this study. The purpose of this study was to explore how educational leadership candidates journeyed through liminality within simulation experiences**.**

Method

This collective case study (Creswell, 2007) studied the phenomenon of liminality through mixed reality simulations with educational leadership student participants. The case was bound by graduate students registered in a cohort model of an educational leadership program and participation in mixed reality simulations. The research question that guided the study was:

> What are educational leadership students' perceptions of liminality as they developed conferencing skills within the mixed reality simulation experience, which included performing the simulation, debriefing on the simulation and deliberating about the simulation?

Setting

This study took place at a university located in the northeastern United States within a program that is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). The research studied graduate students in an EdD program in Instructional Leadership who added on a year-long educational leadership certification program. Two courses in the educational leadership certification program used mixed reality simulations within their curriculum as part of their year-long clinical experiences and coursework. These courses included one mixed reality simulation per course per semester focused on learning to conference as an educational leader as a focused threshold concept for the simulation related to learning to conference with a parent and with a

teacher. The foci of the scenarios were written by Mursion (Mursion®, 2020). The guiding rubric used for performance outcomes and for observational purposes for the study was written by the authors.

Mixed Reality Simulation Lab

The setting of the study was the mixed reality simulation laboratory of two consecutive graduate level educational leadership courses which used simulations to practice conferencing skills as an educational leader. The simulation laboratory used technology developed originally as TeachLive at the University of Central Florida and commercialized by Mursion®. Mursion® is an avatar-mediated training simulation system that operates with a "human-in-the loop approach" [that] combines digital puppetry (Nagendran, Pillat, Kavanaugh, Welch, & Hughes, 2013; Hunter and Mapes, 2013; Mapes, Tonner, & Hughes, 2011) with basic Artificial Intelligence processes. The scenarios used in the simulations provided the graduate-level educational leadership participants opportunities to practice various communication skills, such as delivering difficult news to a parent (semester one) and coaching a struggling teacher (semester two) within a conferencing scenario. The focus for the first scenario and second scenarios are described in Table 1.

Table 1

Focus of the Simulation Scenario

Simulation Scenario Focus
Seminar 1- Deliver difficult news. Conduct a principal/parent conference and deliver the difficult news to parents that their student must be suspended for fighting.
Seminar 2- Assist a struggling teacher to use more student talk in the classroom. Conduct a principal/teacher post-observation conference and create a plan of action to increase student talk in the teacher's class.

The mixed reality lab consisted of a real classroom with a semi-circle arrangement of desks for students around a computer and large TV screen which had a connection to Mursion® and their simulation specialists, people trained in the outcomes of the specific scenarios who are represented as avatars on screen, the virtual component of the simulations. Participants sat in front of the TV screen which displayed a typical office environment resembling a conference room and stated, "begin simulation" and later "end simulation." Participants engaged with the on-screen live avatar who performed as a parent in semester one and as a teacher in semester two. The participants conducted the 15-20 minute simulation while their peers and mentors watched in the fishbowl arranged classroom and experienced approximately15 minutes of debriefing following the simulation in two consecutive semesters of an academic year. In the second semester of the study, the final simulation was conducted wholly online in the Zoom conferencing platform due to social distancing related to Covid 19. However, within the Zoom format, the simulations and debriefings

were viewed by all participants, university mentors and the researchers as in the previous live performances within the simulation lab.

Sampling and Participants

A collective case study selects specific participants to understand various perspectives related to the phenomenon of study (Creswell, 2007). A purposeful sampling procedure was used (Creswell, 2007) to understand the perspectives. The total population of a group of EdD students (*n*=6) in an Instructional Leadership program also pursuing an add-on certification program for educational leadership at a public university in the Northeast of the United States were the sample. The first parameter to identify participants included membership in the educational leadership cohort involved in two seminar classes related to the clinical experience which had simulations as part of the curriculum. The second parameter was participation in the simulation laboratory focused on scenarios related to conferencing as an educational leader in two subsequent semesters in an academic year. While informed consent was acquired from all members of the course and from the university supervisor coaches— faculty assigned to individuals within the clinical component of their year-long fieldwork, who conducted the debriefings— only the students were included as participants in this research and the focus was on the student participants' learning within the simulations as the phenomenon of study.

Demographics

Three male and three female Doctor of Education students in their third years of an Instructional Leadership program identified as white (*n*=5) and Blatinx (*n*=1) with an average of 11.3 years of teaching. Table 2 illustrates the demographics.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Total Years Teaching	Self-Identified Gender	Self-identified Race//Ethnicity	Educational Level for All Participants	Year in Program
Heather	10	Female	White	EdD student	3
Will	5	Male	White	EdD student	3
Deidre	14	Female	White	EdD student	3
Frank	8	Male	White	EdD student	3
Jay	17	Male	Blatinx	EdD student	3

Fiona	14	Female	White	EdD student	3

Data Collection

Data collection initiated in October 2019 and culminated in June 2020. There were three data sources: 1) video and live observational data of the simulations and after simulation debriefings; 2) reflections following the simulations; and 3) semi-structured interviews. Table 3 demonstrates the data sources as they relate to the research question.

Table 3

Research Question and Data Source

Research Question	*Data Sources*	*Per Participant*	*Total*
What are educational leadership students' perceptions of their learning and their development of conferencing skills as a result of the mixed reality simulation experience, which included performing the simulation, debriefing on the simulation and deliberating about the simulation?	Observations of simulations	2	12
	Written Reflections	2	12
	Interviews	1	6

Observations

Simulations and subsequent debriefings were initially observed live for each simulation and then later, were observed via the captured video. Following each simulation, the video data were uploaded into a Google Drive account. Figure 1 illustrates the screen within screen view used to capture the TV screen that displayed the adult avatar and the participant during the simulation, and the class and university supervisor observing the process from behind and from the sides of the laboratory classroom for the debriefing. As a result of the screen within screen observation data, researchers were able to see the participant and avatar simultaneously, noting both behaviors and reactions.

Figure 1
Recorded view of simulations in laboratory



(Gundel, 2018). Reprinted with permission.

A researcher-created observation protocol informed by the simulation rubric created for simulation observations (Piro, 2017) was used for observing the simulations and after simulation debriefings. We used the rubric to construct field notes on each participant and for every simulation and debriefing session to provide focus for data collection. The rubric identified and defined various performance and dispositional outcomes for the simulated conference such as developing an opening, gathering information, sharing information, making a plan, maintaining a positive relationship, accepting emotions, and maintaining meeting flow—all components of the simulation conference for both scenarios in the study. We added mentor and peer notes to collect data regarding the debriefing and reflective field notes as part of this data collection process. The protocol was used for the initial observation of the simulations and for the subsequent captured video observations. The observation protocol is depicted in Table 4.

Table 4

Observation Protocol

Performance Category	Criteria	Definition	Sample "Look-fors"	Mentor/Peer Comments	Reflective Notes
Behaviors	Opening	Candidate immediately establishes a context for the meeting.	"The purpose of this meeting is…" "Today, we will be discussing…" "We are here today to review…"		

Gathering Information	Candidate asks parent for pertinent information.	"What is your understanding of the situation?" "What are your thoughts on your performance?" "Is there anything else you would like us to address?" or "Are there other goals you would like to see us address?" "What worries you? What can I help you with?" "Do you have any ideas about ways we can…"
Sharing Information	Candidate explains the situation from his or her point of view using evidence to support explanation.	"My concerns are…" "I noticed that…" "I'd like to describe my understanding of the issue. Can you confirm your understanding?"
Making a Plan/Problem Solving	Candidate suggests potential solutions to the situation while incorporating parent's or teacher's ideas if possible.	"Based upon our conversation today, a plan of action is…" "I'd like to suggest some possible strategies…" "Some learning opportunities here are…" "Let's make a plan of action together…" "Let's follow up on _____ to _____."

Dispositions	Maintaining a Positive Relationship	Candidate is encouraging, friendly, and personable regardless of the parent's or teacher's behavior by showing appreciation for his/her efforts, using positive language, and creating rapport.	"I hear how important _____ is to you." "You do _____ well." "I can see how you support your child/students by…"
	Accepting Emotions	Candidate expresses empathy for parents' emotional state by listening carefully and empathetically and accepting emotions.	"I hear how this could be difficult." "I understand your point of view." "I appreciate your willingness to try something new although it might be difficult."
	Managing Flow	Candidate propels the momentum of the conversation by maintaining movement between each criterion. Keeps to allotted time frame.	"Okay, let's move on…" "Very good. Now…" "Next let's discuss…"

Piro, J. (2017). *Observational Protocol for Conference Simulation.* Adapted from Walker, J. & Legg, A. (2017)

Reflections

Video data of the simulations and debriefings were collected and sent from Google Docs via an email link for participants to view and analyze to create reflections. Twelve reflections of post-simulation reflections were collected. The reflections were written by participants following the simulation and debriefing each semester and subsequently, after viewing their own performance videos which were acquired by the screen-within screen video capture system. Each reflection asked participants to analyze the elements of the simulation and the debriefings and to set goals for future conferences. Reflections were typically four pages long.

Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were developed from a researcher developed protocol (Galletta, 2013) targeting liminality in learning. Following the year-long observations and reflection documents, the interview protocol addressed the emerging data analysis within the mixed reality simulations, the debriefings they received from their university mentor coaches and classmates, and their subsequent reflections. Six semi-structured interview data were collected from participants. The interviews lasted from 62 minutes to 90 minutes with an average interview time

of 68 minutes. Interviews were collected in the form of VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) conferencing services via Zoom.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) was used for all three sources of data**.** Data analysis began with observations of the simulations and debriefings. Reflections were the second data source analyzed in each semester of the study and interviews were the final data source analyzed. Familiarization and deep immersion into the data occurred for each data source, including reading observational field notes, reflections, and interview data multiple times, writing reflective notes, writing researcher memos, and conducting ongoing data meetings (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Saldana, 2016). We worked systematically giving equal attention to each form of data and looking for relationships and patterns across the data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Manual coding of the observations and reflections included deductive codes related to the literature on liminal learning (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014) and inductive codes, with *in vivo* initial codes connected to both (Miles, et. al, 2014), finally being reduced to categories and patterns (Saldana, 2016). A codebook containing each code and category was linked to actual participant words, ensuring that abstractions and reductions were explicitly grounded in participant utterances, adding trustworthiness through an ongoing data trail. Categories that were developed from the codebook were used to inform the interview protocol. Last, the data from the interviews were compared with the categories from the observations and reflections for relationships and commonalities (Saldana, 2009). The final step of data analysis was the development of four typical themes that represented all data sources and were representative of all participants, and these themes resulted in an overall finding statement. Table 5 demonstrates the data collection and analysis process.

Table 5

Data Collection and Analysis Process and Calendar

Simulation 1	*Debriefing 1*	*Reflection 1*	*Ongoing Data Analysis*	*Simulation 2*	*Debriefing 2*	*Reflection 2*	*Interviews*	*Data Analysis Concludes*
Review of videos and analysis began.	Review of videos and data analysis continued.	Review of reflections and analysis continued.	First and second level coding occurred.	Review of videos and data analysis continued.	Review of videos and data analysis continued.	Review of reflections and analysis continues. Codes from simulations, debriefings and reflections inform interview protocol.	Interview data further inform data analysis. Third level codes developed.	Finding statement and themes developed.
October and November 2019	October and November 2019	December 2019	December—March 2020	March and April 2020	March and April 2020	May 2020	May—June 2020	July 2020

The two adult avatars, Mr. Mullin (the parent-avatar) and George (the teacher-avatar), are named and designated within the findings with an asterisk to distinguish the avatar from the participants within text. Each data source is designated within the narrative following the quote or paraphrased material. An "O" demonstrates that the data came from observation one or two. An "R" demonstrates that the data source was a reflection, one and two. An "I" designates data emerging from an interview. Participant pseudonyms are also identified with the data source. Data sources and participants are noted in the finding narratives as illustrated in Table 6

Table 6

Notations of data source, participants, and avatars in findings

Data Source	*Observation of Simulation*	*Reflection after Simulation*	*Interview*
Designation in Narrative	O1 or O2	R1 or R2	I
Designation of Avatar with Data Source	*O-2-Mr. Mullin (parent avatar) *Ethan (student from scenario in semester 1 who had engaged in a fight.)	*R1-Mr. Mullin (parent-avatar)	*I-George (teacher-avatar)

Note: an asterisk * designates an avatar to differentiate with participant names within text.

T**rustworthiness, Limitations and Conclusion**

Institutional Review Board protocols were observed for this study. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with the participants and data collection, over a full academic year. Data triangulation occurred with multiple forms of data— observations, reflections, and interviews— increasing credibility of this report (Creswell, 2013). A chain of evidence was used to establish dependability (Yin, 2009). Confirmability was obtained by detailing each step and procedure of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study is specific to this study site and participants and does not attempt to generalize to other contexts. However, the study site is a CAEP accredited university and other universities with similar curricula using simulations for educational leadership preparation may find the results inform their own programming. Researchers had no instructional connections to the participants within this study. However, this research was conducted at the researchers' university site.

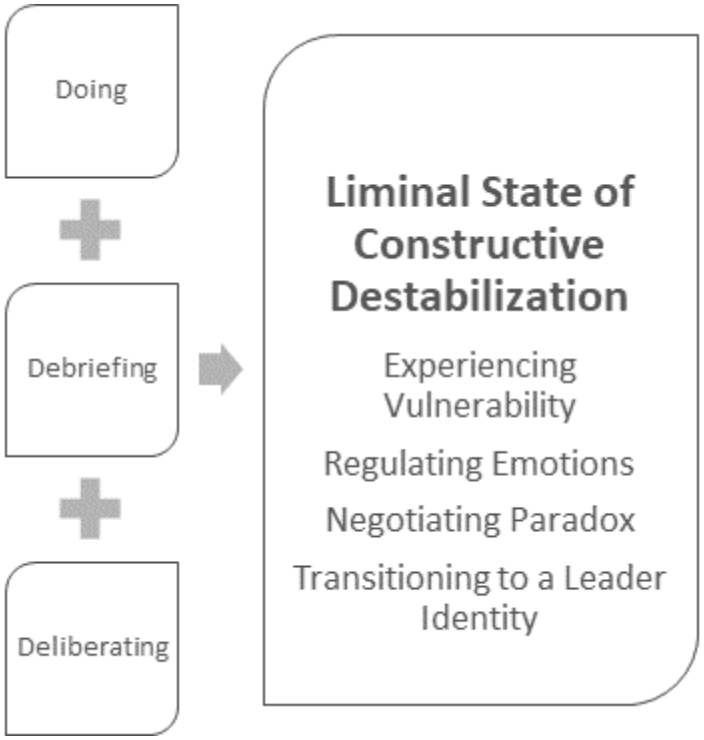
Findings

One finding statement with four related themes was developed. The finding statement was: *The doing of the simulations, the debriefing after the simulations, and the deliberating about the simulations led to a liminal state of constructive destabilization* (Kegan, Lahey, Fleming and Miller, 2014). Four themes supported the notion of experiencing constructive destabilization

within liminality: experiencing vulnerability, managing emotions, negotiating paradox, and transitioning to a leader identity. Figure 2 illustrates the findings.

Figure 2

Illustration of Findings



Liminal spaces are noted for their turbulence as former ways of knowing and one's sense of identity is shed, leading to new roles and new skills. Liminality is a place of transformation and change; a state of between-ness and movement from the earlier self to a new and repositioned self (Meyer & Land, 2005). Previously, we suggested that liminality was a transition phase, one that occurred between the pre-liminal student identity state and the emerging leader identity (Piro & O'Callaghan, 2019b). Part of this shifting sense of identity as an educational leader involves a reconstitution of the self towards leadership as participants developed and acquired new knowledge (Meyer & Land, 2005). Change is troublesome. Though it moves the learner to a more complex position in the learning process, growth requires "challenges, perturbations and disruptions" (Doll, 1993, p.14). As part of this troublesome nature of learning within the simulations, the debriefings and later, as they deliberated on their performances and set goals to improve, the participants moved through a space of disequilibrium that, while it was uncomfortable, was manageable. We identify this sense of turbulence within the liminal moments of the simulation experience as constructive destabilization (Kegan, Lahey, Fleming and Miller, 2014, nd).

Constructive destabilization involves "being regularly, though manageably, in over your head" (Kegan, Lahey, Fleming and Miller, 2014, nd). It necessitates an acknowledgement of one's inadequacies in performance, stretching one's capabilities and finding oneself in a destabilized sense of identity. While the destabilization of one's identity is difficult, it is also constructive, in

that recognizing the gap between one's performance and where one wants to be professionally can be diminished (Kegan, Lahey, Fleming and Miller, 2014, nd). The doing of the simulation in a fishbowl setting with peers and university supervisors watching the performance, the subsequent debriefing in front of the same, and the final deliberation on both, facilitated this constructive destabilization and provided development opportunities to demonstrate new capabilities. Participants experienced destabilization while performing the simulations and while receiving feedback in the debriefings, and even while reflecting at a later point. However, the three steps of the process—the doing, the debriefing and the deliberating—also served to construct and restore equilibrium and to develop leadership behaviors. Doing, debriefing and deliberating the simulations were both destructive and destabilizing *and* constructive and stabilizing. We suggest that constructive destabilization is a liminal process. Liminality through constructive destabilization was identified through four themes: experiencing vulnerability, regulating emotions, negotiating paradoxes, and transitioning to a leader identity.

Experiencing Vulnerability

The notion of vulnerability within pedagogy—experiencing challenges and difficult emotions within the classroom—has been suggested to enhance teaching and learning (Brantmeier, 2013; Booth, 2012; Thompson, Moss, Simkins & Woodruff, 2019). To experience vulnerability is to be "open to criticism or attack" (Cloud, 1992, p.95). Vulnerability is having the courage to show up and be seen despite emotional exposure and risk; vulnerability allows students to be curious and explore more of who they are or are becoming (Brown, 2017; 2018). Vulnerability was experienced by participants in the initial performance of the simulation and the subsequent debriefing, and even in the viewing and deliberating of their performances at a later time.

Performing the simulation—the doing of the conference simulation—was the first area of vulnerability. Participants, within a fishbowl classroom structure, performed the conferencing simulations in front of classmates and university peers; in effect, these performances and feedback sessions were not private learning formats, but social learning events. Learning to be comfortable, to make mistakes, to operate and problem solve, to be responsive to the avatar emotionally and also accomplish the content within the confines of the scenario expectations, was enormously risky for participants. Yet, without the risk of the performance and the subsequent possibility of making mistakes, there would be little growth and development of new skills.

Secondly, participants received feedback through a debriefing session immediately following the performance of the simulation, and that feedback was given within the group dynamic of classmates and university supervisor mentors. Unlike private feedback sessions, these debriefings were provided to the individual participants within this group dynamic.

Last, it was during the video analysis and reflection where participants re-lived their doing and debriefing of the simulation and it was through their deliberations—reflecting upon the simulation experience and debriefings— that vulnerability was experienced one last time. The doing and the debriefing of the simulations were captured on video and sent to the individual participants so that their deliberations about the video, while done privately, highlighted the social nature of their learning. Deliberating on the video performance of the simulation and debriefing resulted in reflections that demonstrated vulnerability as part of participants' destabilization and reconstitution within the liminal space of the simulation experience.

Jay noted upon analysis of his video that doing the simulation in front of others was "cringeworthy." In his second reflection, he stated, "As I was laying out the post-observation

agenda, I was bombarding him [the avatar] with so much information, when I was done with my unintended monologue, *George did not know how to respond, and simply said, 'Was that a question?'" Jay reflected that another "cringeworthy" moment was when he spoke over the avatar during the conference. " *George was explaining his rationale for the lesson, and I rudely interrupted and asked, 'Can you be specific?'" A peer provided feedback to him in the debriefing that he had interrupted the teacher-avatar in the conference and suggesting to Jay that he may want to consider giving the teacher-avatar a bit more space to elaborate. After watching the video and within his second reflection, Jay "re-lived" his mistake. "I am aware of this impolite habit of speaking over a person. *George got the impression that his reflection was insignificant to our conversation. Again, this is not the best way to establish a caring relationship with a colleague."

Discussing his debrief (I), which he said, "did not go well," when peers and his university supervisors made suggestions, Will admitted that being in the educational leadership cohort was wonderful but that there was an added pressure to being in the fishbowl lab and having others give immediate feedback on his performance in the simulator. He related that he was immersed in the simulation while it was occurring but that he was always aware of the others around him in the lab. Later, upon watching his video, Will related his intense reaction to watching the simulation and debriefing again. He admitted to his palpable vulnerability. "My human reaction was I want to run away and curl up in bed" (I). Later, as he watched his video when he already knew the mistake he had made previously in the simulation, he added, " I am watching it unfold. I want to grab myself and say, 'no don't do that'" (I).

Yet, these moments of vulnerability and the destabilization that occurred as a result of deliberating also led to a constructive outcome and to a deeper understanding of an emerging leader identity. Jay realized that the simulations allowed him to reflect upon his craft. Speaking about his performance, Jay said, "Whether I winced when I saw myself talking over *George, or when he took out his mobile phone to program the meeting dates, the simulation gave me feedback. Feedback is a form of care." He added that when his peers provided insight into areas of development, this insight advanced his leadership style to be able to foster future authentic relationships with colleagues and students. His vulnerability, to perform and to hear the debriefing in front of his peers and university supervisors, led him into a sense of destabilization, but he emerged with a deeper sense that the feedback was a form of care that he would not have received without the experience. Mentioning the Johari Window, developed by Luft & Ingham (1961) which allows people in groups to understand and enhance communication and to increase self and other perceptions, Jay stated, "Feedback is source of professional growth because it provides information about areas of strengths, needs, and Johari blind spots." In effect, Jay's sense that the feedback was caring assisted him to reconstitute the experience and reconstruct a more growth-oriented view on his vulnerability.

Will also mentioned the growth that occurred through experiencing vulnerability as a result of doing the simulation and debriefing with colleagues. "The thing about the simulations is that without them, you might never find out what was misread, misunderstood. Never find out if your intentions were conveyed" with the avatar (I). Additionally, the value of the debriefing, though difficult, helped him push through his sense of vulnerability. After a difficult simulation and knowing that his debriefing was up next, Will later reflected that "Here at this university, we finish that thing. You have to turn around and face immediate feedback" (R2). Regarding the debriefing, Will stated, "Having to sit there and face it, it is a good leadership practice. You have to face the criticism. Even if you know there will be criticism— you hear it and you hear some alternatives" (I). Further, Will related that having his classmates around him during the simulations was how

real leaders would be in a real context, that the words he said were consequential within the simulation just as they were in real life. " The words you say are meaningful, in the real world you must be in the moment." He added, "All the eyes are on oneself just pushes you to be more accountable to what you say in the moment [in the simulations]. Once you make a statement it is live; it is real. It is important because it is reality" (I).

Participants experienced vulnerability as they performed the simulations. Additionally, they became comfortable with mistakes and critiques during debriefing. Last, participants relived their vulnerability as they viewed videos of their simulations sessions and deliberated on their own performances. Yet, these moments of vulnerability and their disruptive and troublesome nature led to a reconstitution of the experience and subsequently, growth toward their emerging leader identities.

Managing Emotions

Being able to self-regulate and manage others' emotions, evaluating strategies to maintain or change an emotional response and monitoring emotional states are all processes of emotional regulation (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Further, managing one's emotions requires staying open to both pleasant and unpleasant feelings to learn and adapt one's own behaviors (Mayer, et al., 2016).

Simulation one was designed so that the participants would need to deliver the difficult news to the parent-avatar that his son, *Ethan, would need to be suspended for fighting per the school policy. The parent-avatar, *Mr. Mullin was confused, sarcastic and even angry when participants delivered the news. Yet, as part of the expectations of the simulation, the participants needed to continue the conference by developing a collaborative plan of action with the parent-avatar and maintaining a professional and respectful demeanor. Each of the participants recognized his or her own emotional reactions as a result of the difficult conversations. Deidre acknowledged that she needed to stop avoiding conflict as an educational leader. She stated, "I need to be a little more assertive; confrontations are definitely not something I enjoy and therefore, I avoid them" (I). However, from the simulation, Deidre also realized that calmly redirecting the conversation toward a resolution was a skill that she hoped to practice and acquire. (R1).

Heather sighed heavily when discussing the debriefing sessions. "It was stressful. But such a valuable experience. More people should have access in how to stay calm, focus on the conversation goals, remember who it is supposed to be about" (I). Yet, the anxiety of going through the simulation and debriefing had its upside—growth. "Despite all the anxiety I would do it again in a heartbeat. It was the perfect set-up for getting what we needed. Watching everyone, watching ourselves" (I).

Frank reflected on his own and the avatar's emotions when he considered feedback from his debriefing (R2). "I have to remember that it is okay to drive an uncomfortable point home without worrying about hurting someone's feelings. As a school administrator, I have to be able to deliver tough news in a timely and effective manner so that students are receiving the best education possible." He continued, " I do not want to build the reputation of being a 'nice pushover.' I want to be respected and taken seriously as an administrator and teacher leader. I should not be worrying about getting to an unpleasant situation." Frank continued to discuss his emotional reactions within the debriefing of the simulations. "I think that in the moment, the critiques felt like a gut punch. In the moment of the debriefing, the critiques destroyed me" (I). Having reflected upon the debriefing, Frank was able to add some perspective. " In hindsight,

I am so glad I got some negative critique. We are fearful of gut punching each other and that reciprocity—you might get that back yourself" (I).

During simulation one, the avatar-parent was agitated that *Ethan would need to be suspended for fighting. However, because of Heather's strong opening and calm manner, the parent-avatar appeared to understand, then acquiesce. Heather stated that she had conducted a thorough investigation and spoken with *Ethan and other students and that *Ethan was forthright and honest about what occurred. She told the avatar-parent, "Kids make mistakes. We want to keep *Ethan moving forward" (O1). By acknowledging that she took the perspective of helping *Ethan to grow and move on, she was able to keep the avatar-father calm and rational and these dispositions seemed to lessen his agitation (R1). Later, Heather recognized how difficult these processes were when she wrote, "I think that the most challenging part of contentious meetings for me will always be to not take things personally and to remain calm and professional" (R1).

Fiona was conscious of her own emotions when the parent-avatar made sarcastic remarks to her in simulation one. "*Mr. Mullin referred to school disciplinary policies as things that people have never read before." Fiona continued, "I was aware of his snarkier comments, his sarcasm and my emotional response" (R1) , but calmly stated, "We offer you the same confidentiality that we offer all students and parents. Confidentiality is non-negotiable" (O1). Fiona reflected that her intuition was to accept the parent-avatar's anger, and to use the words, "I understand your surprise. I understand your anger. I hear that from you" (R1). In the debriefing following the simulation, peers noted that she had validated *Mr. Mullin's emotions with her comments. This validation had the effect of disarming the parent-avatar's anger leading to a problem solving stance (O1).

Will deliberated upon his intentional change in emotional regulation with the simulation in semester two. "As opposed to the previous simulation, where I was nervous, hesitant, and rather defensive, I decided to approach this scenario in a more collegial and friendly manner" (R2). He found this simulation more natural and successful in that he maintained a positive and friendly demeanor. However, watching the video provided less comfortable emotional reactions. Will described watching his video of the simulation and debriefing as "cringey." "It is difficult to watch yourself. All the emotion rushed right back to the surface" (I). Will admitted that he had a visceral reaction to the avatar. Will had watched the avatar engage with his classmates and he found him to be irritating. "I felt inferior, intimidated, a little angry because I watched him give a hard time to my loved peers" (R2). But, with his second simulation, he managed his irritation and evidenced a professional disposition. "I flipped it. I had to manage disgust. That was the reality. You won't like every parent or teacher. I had a set of goals to accomplish" (I). Will added that it was the protocol (the written scenario and rubric) that "saved the day." "Sticking to the plan, where you are going, the goals, this needs to be accomplished. So being angry was not going to help me get to them. That helped me manage my emotions. I had a place to go" (I).

The nature of the public performance of the simulation within the classroom lab and the subsequent debriefing in the same setting seemed to have amplified the emotional discomfort of participants. Additionally, participants reflected that the subsequent viewing of their simulations and feedback produced further stress and anxiety. Yet, the heightened emotional reactions preceded and guided participants into regulation of their own emotional state and also helped them to assist the avatars' emotional responses within the simulations.

Negotiating Paradox

Simulations that resulted in successful problem solving required planning *and* flexibility. Planning is a hallmark of leadership (Kaufman, 1992), as is both behavioral and cognitive flexibility (Mumford & Connelly, 1991; Reiter-Palmon, 2003; Zaccaro, 2002). Being able to both plan for the simulation and remain flexible to adapt during the simulations suggests that negotiating this paradox was a key component of participant's experiences. Managing paradoxical tensions demands that leaders appreciate that both polarities are achievable and negotiating paradoxes may lead to improvement in performance and learning (Lavine, 2014; Waldman, Putnam, Spektor, & Siegel, 2020).

It was through the experience of the simulation, the debriefing, and reflective deliberation that participants recognized a learning paradox— the need to both plan for the conference and to be in the moment, to improvise and to remain flexible. Frank was a planner but stated he was not proficient at improvising. "The simulations helped me to remember to stay in the moment as best I can. The practice of being in the moment will allow the creative problem solving to occur" (I). He reflected that the debriefing from his university mentor helped him. During debriefing, the mentor had suggested that Frank should allow himself to pause, to collect himself, and only then to respond (R2).

Deidre reflected that planning for the conference, especially knowing school policy, was paramount.

> There were a few instances where I felt unprepared to answer the question and then, the avatar jumped right in. This was a particularly valuable lesson for me; you certainly don't want to give the parent the idea that you don't know what you are talking about. In a real parent meeting, I would now know to take a quick look back over school policy and any information I had on an incident before the meeting started (R1).

Yet Deidre also recognized the importance of improvisation within the simulated conference when she stated that "Having an agenda for the meeting while still remaining open and flexible will help to ensure that things don't drag on our get out of hand" (R1).

Jay discussed his use of his paradox of planning and improvising when he stated he wanted to be present in the moment to receive information from the avatar. "Nel Noddings calls it motivational displacement. Even if you have an agenda, you displace your motive so that you are ready to receive" (I). Being present to hear the actual words and intentions of the avatar was part of connecting with people. He continued. "Be ready for displacement of yourself in case you get a new issue that must be addressed for that moment. You don't prepare for the obvious, but for the unexpected" (I).

Fiona described herself as a habitual planner who would plan her way through the principal/parent conference (R1). She entered the simulation with a set of prepared notes and an agenda to share information and plan with the parent-avatar per the simulation rubric. She assumed the agenda would be a clear way to establish the shape of the conversation. In debriefing, a classmate provided feedback that the planned conference, while organized in that Fiona clearly outlined the steps for *Ethan's suspension, was a bit "too intense" for the situation (O1). Later, Fiona recognized the organic nature of the conferencing and that she would be called upon to "engage in improvisation" in future conferences, to balance the planning she had developed prior to the simulation (R1).

Will intentionally began his second simulation, the teacher post-observation conference, with some looser guidelines, while still attempting to achieve all the steps of the conference. He

asked *George to provide him with the goals for the lesson he had taught to gauge the teacher-avatar's assessment of his own classroom activities. He felt that having the teacher acknowledge his own challenges and then using that as a platform for constructive dialogue was more useful than introducing the teacher's challenges void of his own reflection (R2). However, upon video analysis, Will noted his lack of inquiry and specificity with the teacher/avatar. Will felt he rushed the planning part of the conference and that he had hurried through this portion of the scenario, wrapping it up without coming to clear closure with the teacher-avatar. He wished he had followed up on *George's self-perceptions. Later, he felt similarly when he "shortchanged the teacher and me by not making a clear plan" (R2). Will's reflection seems to indicate that he had purposefully planned for a more improvised conference with the teacher, but that he may have planned more concretely for certain parts of the scenario—specifically, by allowing the teacher to disparage the initiative for more student talk in the classroom per the scenario but then, by not following up with specific plans for future implementation of the initiative, that he may have been too flexible with the teacher (R2). In debriefing, a classmate asked Will if perhaps he should have been more structured with the teacher when providing feedback by suggesting that increasing student talk was a school initiative (O2). Will later reflected that "I could have struck a stronger balance between listening to the teacher and affirming his concerns, and also advocating for an initiative that had been vetted by the faculty" (i.e. increasing student talk in the classroom) (R2).

Learning to negotiate the paradox of planning and remaining flexible within the simulations was a common experience of the participants. Transforming the opposing polarities of planning/flexibility to be simultaneously achievable goals helped them to develop generative options for their emerging leader identities.

Transitioning to a Leader Identity

Developing a new identity involves understanding one's conflicting and diverse lived experiences to create a sense of a coherent self (Ricoeur, 1991; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Developing and adopting a leader identity is a central process of becoming a leader (Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb, 2011). Shaping one's leader identity requires a personal identity transformative process involving the incorporation of leadership as part of one's self-concept (Richardson & Loubier, 2008). Professional identities, such as educational leader identities, include the development of professional norms and values integrated into the personal sense of self (Ng, Nicholas & Williams, 2010; Schlomo, Levy & Itzhaky, 2012). Transitioning to a leader identity as a part of the doing, the debriefing and the deliberating of the simulations was a fourth theme of this study. We recognized emerging leader identity with participants in several ways: focusing on students to make decisions and to communicate; using leader language; and problem solving in the moment of the simulations.

Progressing from a teacher to a leader identity was difficult work. Fiona described the doing of the simulations as an amplifier of her transition to a leader identity. "I was coming at the simulations with so much doubt. If I failed at them, then this might be a sure fire sign that I am not cut out to be an administrator" (I). This notion of self-doubt in her emerging leader identity seemed to be intensified while performing in the simulation. However, Fiona said that experience of trying on the leader identity "was a valuable experience for me. I saw it as an opportunity to learn more about myself" (I).

One focus for an emerging leader identity from the simulation experience was noted when participants explicitly acknowledged the use of mission to guide their choices within the

conferences, and specifically, to be student-oriented in their conferences. When asked about simulation two, Heather stated how she managed the confrontation with the teacher-avatar. "Focusing on students, using that as a way to keep meeting positive" (I). On follow up, she reflected that this approach was true for simulation one, as well. She stated that the debriefing had helped her to be aware of her tone of voice, her body language. Peers also suggested she focus on students (O1). "For simulation one, keeping the focus on the student with the parent was important. This is why we are here, make things better for the student. Common ground and go from there" (I). The feedback Heather received following the debrief in simulation two also helped her to remain student focused. She stated she was mindful of focusing on student learning with the teacher-avatar (R2). Her goals for simulation two were to "Focus on the student. Help the teacher-avatar to come to his own conclusions. To guide him so that he had ownership of the ideas" (I).

Deidre used students' needs to guide her plan of action in simulation one and to provide feedback during the debriefing with Heather. During debriefing (O1), Diedre provided feedback to Heather that recognized her efforts, despite the contentious conference, to stay focused on the student, *Ethan. "You continued to come back to *Ethan in terms of services so that *Ethan would not be penalized academically." Later, Heather acknowledged the debrief, saying "Keeping focused on the student is a piece of advice I will always remember. Even in a suspension meeting, the student's needs should be paramount" (R1).

Participants' use of language was another identifier of an emerging leader identity. Frank acknowledged a change in language and how that language helped him to identify as a leader. "Even the prep for the simulation helped to change my thinking, my identity. How am I going to think about this scenario? It is not just thinking as an educator, but as a leader in the school" (I). His language transformation was evident in the way he described what was important for each scenario. "Uphold safety, rapport, standard, confidentiality in the first scenario to a more extreme level as the leader; With scenario two, it was more about rigor, rapport, high expectations of teacher and learners" (I).

Problem-solving in the moment was another indicator of an emerging leader identity (Piro & O'Callaghan, 2019). Problem-solving in the moment was a difficult disposition to acquire. During the second simulation, Deidre acknowledged areas of improvement in her performance upon reflection. Her performance and debriefing upon video analysis captured her mistake, upon which she later reflected. "One mistake I made during the session was bringing up the other students involved in the incident. The avatar kept bringing up the other participants (as I am sure parents do in real situations) and I fell for the trap" (R1). Diedre's reflection notes the significance of problem-solving within the simulation as an educational leader

In the debriefing following a simulation where the avatar-parent was upset that Heather would be suspending his son for fighting, Heather problem-solved in the moment by keeping the avatar-parent focused on policy, rather than the fight and who was at fault (O1). Heather spoke to the parent avatar about the school policy for fighting and explained that finding fault was not the main driver of the consequence. The problem was being involved in the fight. Heather focused on the school policy, not on finding fault. In the debriefing, a peer noted Heather's choices. "It is interesting how you separated fault from involvement in the fight. You framed the suspension as an opportunity for *Ethan to think about what happened. It gave meaning to the suspension as restorative rather than a punishment" (O1).

Developing a leader identity is part of the transformative process of self-change and self-appraisal for people moving from teacher to leader roles in schools. Participants changed their personal views of themselves as they practiced leadership skills in transit to a new group

membership of educational leaders (Keefer, 2015; Kiley & Wisker, 2009, 2010). Doing the simulations, receiving a focused debriefing, and deliberating on their performances required the participants to tackle the doubts about the practice of leadership (Hawkins & Edwards, 2017) as they developed a new identity as a school leader.

Implications and Recommendations

Liminality is "a transformative state in the process of learning," (Land, Rattray, & Vivian, 2014, p.201) which— by prompting learners' understandings of themselves and their identities, their assumptions and values, and their cognitive grasp of concepts— may have both cognitive and affective implications (Rattray, 2016). Within the process of liminality, individuals forge new identities while their cognition and skills are transformed (Piro & O'Callaghan, 2019). This process of transformation is a turbulent one in that emerging school leaders must navigate their emotions as they shed identities as classroom teachers and construct new identities as leaders (Rattray, 2016). It may be easier to understand the liminal moment in simulation learning by understanding what it is not. It is not stable or fixed; it may even be turbulent. But, this instability provides the catalyst for growth and change. The mixed reality simulations provided the space for destabilizing ways of being and the reconstructing a newer leader identity.

The doing of the simulation, the subsequent debriefing, and the final deliberation enabled constructive destabilization within the liminal space of learning and provided development opportunities to demonstrate new capabilities and skills. Constructive destabilization within the simulation experience may be considered to be deliberately developmental (Kegan, Lahey, Fleming and Miller, 2014, nd). Within the simulation experience, participants experienced a destabilization process and then reconstituted their newer, developed sense of leader identity within the liminal learning space. People grow through both challenge and support (Kegan, Lahey, Fleming and Miller, 2014, nd). A deliberately developmental process acknowledges personal growth through turbulence and provides a safe place for passing through the difficult liminal state.

During the doing of the simulation and the subsequent debriefing, and even in the viewing and deliberating of their performances, participants experienced times of vulnerability. Judith Butler (2004, 2009) investigated *corporeal vulnerability* as the vulnerability of the human body; that others respond and react to the human body itself, but that some individuals are not affected by this corporeal vulnerability to the same extent as others. Vulnerability may be situational (Mackenzie, Rogers & Dodd, 2014). The simulation experience creates this situational form of vulnerability. The public performance of the simulation and the very essence of feedback within debriefings gives rise to a situated corporeal vulnerability.

Adopting vulnerability as a lens through which to understand student performances within mixed reality simulations may help programs to understand the connection between continuing to learn within the personal and social risks of the simulation experience, as well as the emotional volatility that occurs. Vulnerability is also relational (Goodin, 1985). Helping students to understand what makes them vulnerable and to whom and helping them to cope through the vulnerability of the simulation experience through strategies that suggest ways to deal with the challenges of stressful events (Moos & Billing, 1982) may assist them to cope with this inherent vulnerability. These strategies might involve seeking support from peers and mentors; discussing emotions with mentors or counselors; or journaling or using reflective processes such as the ones used in this study. Even avoidance strategies, such as using distraction by engaging with one's friends or taking the time to do activities of interest, may help to decrease vulnerability and stress associated with the simulations.

Programs can use the vulnerability lens to develop strong debriefings, as well. The actual simulation performed, and the debriefing in front of peers and mentors, generates risk to one's reputational areas and exacerbates this vulnerability. At the highest level of debriefings (Dismukes & Smith, 2000), the facilitator is the catalyst for change by asking open ended questions and then by using silence to develop student initiated problem-solving. Educational leadership students may create their own goals for change, leading to agency and fewer feelings of vulnerability as a result of this deliberation process. Future research might investigate this highest level of debriefing and which coping strategies most help students to understand and negotiate the vulnerability they experience while learning to conference in simulations.

Participants experienced strong emotions and learned to regulate those emotions as part of the simulation experience. Emotional regulation involves managing one's and other's emotions, evaluating strategies to maintain or change an emotional response, and monitoring emotional states. Emotional regulation may be both automatic and conscious and effortful (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Through cognitive reappraisal, educational leadership students might employ conscious emotional regulation experience by intentionally changing their thinking to re-consider an emotional situation from the simulation or debriefing, and then, to decrease its emotional impact (Lazarus & Alfert, 1964). Learning to be aware of one's emotions and how one regulates those emotions during the simulation experience, perhaps through a mindfulness intervention, may be a deliberate effort by programs to encourage the understanding of emotional states and ways for students to use cognitive reappraisal methods.

For example, Cristea, Szentagotai Tatar, Nag, & David (2012) described having students watch an emotionally upsetting video and then practicing a reappraisal method to help them to foster their own emotional regulative functions. In the case of simulations, programs might similarly offer videos of previous simulations for students to consider possible dysfunctional emotions that may arise in the performance of future simulations. Dysfunctional emotions, which are self-defeating, may be reappraised to more functional emotions, "which would still allow the person to engage in goal-directed behavior, albeit experiencing psychological discomfort" (Cristea, et al. 2012, p. 551).

Additionally, to foster educational leadership students' sense of well-being through emotional regulation, programs might provide continued mentoring, both during debriefing of simulations, but also as part of the deliberation process. After students view the simulation experience, mentors might inquire "What sorts of feelings emerge from this simulation? How might these feelings change over time" (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008). These questions allow using difficult emotions to facilitate thought and plan for future simulations. Finally, programs might focus on increasing awareness of *emotional display rules* as leaders within difficult conferences (Ekman & Friesen, 1969), which are "the need to manage the appearance of particular emotions in particular situations" (p. 137). Display rules may encourage or discourage leadership students to experience or express emotions (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006) following simulation experiences, especially within the deliberation stage. Emotional regulation interventions (Gross, 1998) may help students to reinterpret the emotions they experienced during the simulation to better understand challenging situations, such as those they experience conferencing with parents and with teachers, to become goal-directed even when they are experiencing psychological discomfort (Cristea, et al, 2012). Future research geared toward emotional regulation interventions would determine those that have the most impact on educational leadership students working within simulations.

Participants used successful problem solving that required planning *and* flexibility The paradox between planning and improvisation demonstrated cognitive flexibility (Spiro & Jehng, 1990). Cognitive flexibility is "the ability to spontaneously restructure one's knowledge, in many ways, in adaptive response to radically changing situational demands" (Spiro & Jehng, 1990, p.165). The ability to hold paradoxes simultaneously and continue to function resonates with the notion of complexity leadership, where leaders learn to manage uncertainty and to resonate to respond to new conditions as they arise (Friedrich, 2010; Suedfeld & Grannatstein, 1995; Waldman & Bowen, 2016; Waldman, Putnam, Miron-Spektor, & Siegel, 2019).

A polarity management model (Johnson, 1992; 1998) helps educational leaders to understand paradoxes that require ongoing negotiation. Developing a polarity management mindset may help prospective educational leaders to navigate contradictory outcomes within the mixed reality simulations and then, to transfer that mindset into practice as a leader. Teaching divergent thinking and cognitive flexibility for the simulation outcomes as an explicit objective when introducing the simulations may encourage learners to value paradoxical goals and processes. Helping students to identify areas of the simulated conference that are necessarily paradoxical, such as achieving focused planning and also expecting to use flexibility within the simulations, by holding discussions about ways to achieve both sides of the paradox will likely encourage this form of cognitive flexibility about the simulations. Research on leadership paradox within simulations is a viable next step for making explicit cognitive flexibility and polarity management strategies within simulations.

Participants experienced emerging leader identities by focusing on *students* to make decisions and to communicate, using leader language, and problem-solving in the moment of the simulations. Educational leaders must believe that every student can succeed as part of their professional mission and nurture that belief with others (Skrla, Scheurich & Johnson, 2000). Just as effective school leaders help other educators prioritize and choose the most successful strategies for their students (Ragland, Asera & Johnson, 1999), participants in the mixed reality simulations helped the parent-avatar and teacher-avatar focus on what was best for the *students* involved in their conferences. When the discussion became difficult, focusing on students and using student-focused language to facilitate the decisions provided the connection to communicate what was most important and to continue problem-solving with the avatars. This focus on the students typifies the type of complex processes involved in adopting the norms of the profession of educational leadership (Ng, et al. 2010). A transformed sense of leader identity appeared to emerge from the successful combination of student focus, use of language, and problem-solving within that student-orientation.

An implication for educational leadership programs is that helping students to learn to conference with adults is challenging and if the focus is on navigating difficult conversations as they were in this study, a strategic remedy is to focus on students and student learning as beginning and ending points, and additionally, when the conferencing becomes difficult or when opinions diverge. Using rubrics with clearly prescribed elements that expect leadership behaviors such as rapport building, involving others within the plan of action and accepting emotions, all with a focus on students will likely nurture successful educational leadership conferences. Similarly, curricular emphasis on leader mission, visioning and student-orientation used within educational leadership courses will hold value for students working within simulations as they learn to conference and develop a leader-identity.

In line with the notion of liminality as a state of *betweenness*—in this study, between student and educational leader identities— participants negotiated the leadership skills of

conferencing as they experimented with new versions of the leader self (Beech, 2011). Furthermore, the idea of *becoming* an educational leader, being in transition as participants took on new roles of leadership, arose in the findings. Traversing the liminal space is challenging. We found that participants experienced constructive destabilization during the process. The themes of vulnerability and emotional regulation suggested a certain fragility to the process. Programs must guide students through the turbulence of the liminal learning space (Piro & O'Callaghan, 2019b; Rattay, 2016) or they may be tempted to abandon their emergent identities as educational leaders due to the challenges that are inherent in the mixed reality simulations.

Conclusion

The mixed reality simulation experience fostered cognitive shifts toward leadership thinking and skills within a community of learners who were bound together through a challenging liminal passage. Participants within the simulation experience experienced constructive destabilization (Kegan, Lahey, Fleming and Miller, 2014) within this liminality and negotiated this disequilibrium to develop new concepts, skills, and attitudes (Reams, 2017). The mixed reality simulations provoked vulnerability, difficult emotions and paradoxes that participants negotiated toward an emerging leader identity. Yet, navigating this turbulence was the necessary process toward a reconstituted self. The process of journeying through this liminal state of constructive destabilization was necessary to facilitate growth and leadership development. Constructive destabilization may be a perennial liminal state for all leaders—there are always incidents or issues that arise that are unplanned, unparalleled, and emotionally challenging within an educational leader's professional experience. The 3D's of doing, debriefing, and deliberating within the mixed reality simulation experience may provide future educational leaders with a cognitive method to foster meaning-making and cognitive modifications (Reams, 2017) through constructive destabilization as they shift their identity from teacher to leader.

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Class Size: Perceptions of K-3 Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents in a Rural, Midwest State

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Identifying an appropriate class size is an important decision public schools face as they weigh balancing their budget with the impact class size may have on student achievement. This study examined perceptions of South Dakota kindergarten through third-grade teachers, elementary principals, and superintendents concerning optimal class size and the extent to which they felt the following factors influenced their optimal class size selection: classroom experience, class size research, financial implications, classroom management, and instructional quality. 97 superintendents, 73 elementary principals, and 264 elementary teachers in South Dakota were surveyed.

Teachers provided significantly smaller optimal class size estimates for all grade levels (K-3) than principals and superintendents. Teachers, principals, and superintendents revealed class size research had little influence on their choice about optimal class size whereas instructional quality was identified as the most influential factor. Only superintendents identified financial implications to be a predominant factor influencing their optimal class size selection. This research reveals the discrepancies in perceptions among teachers, principals, and superintendents regarding optimal class size and the factors influencing their optimal class size selection. This information has the capacity to provide state governments and school leaders the insight needed to develop class size policies and professional development opportunities to build a common approach to addressing class size while reflecting on best practices identified in class size research.

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Identifying an appropriate class size is an important decision public schools face as they weigh balancing their budget with the impact class size may have on student achievement. A vast amount of research has been conducted in this realm with one of the more influential studies being the Tennessee STAR study (Filges et al., 2018; Pate-Bain et al., 1997; Weili & Lehrer, 2011). Much of the research regarding class size reduction (CSR) does not dispute that smaller class sizes influence student achievement gains. The argument predominantly lies in how large of an impact CSR has on student achievement gains and how small classes need to be to realize gains (Biddle & Berliner, 2008; Bosworth, 2014; Fan, 2012; Filges et al., 2018; Weili & Lehrer, 2011).

In 2015, South Dakota's Governor created the Blue Ribbon Task Force to evaluate the state's funding formula and to make recommendations on its inadequacies (Soholt & Sly, 2015). The results of their work laid the groundwork for an entirely new funding formula centered on a student to teacher ratio (Soholt & Sly, 2015; Woodmansey, 2017). Unlike California's legislation that specifically targeted funding to reduce class sizes to 20 or fewer students to increase student achievement outcomes, South Dakota took an approach on a student to teacher ratio based simply around creating a new funding formula (Sims, 2008; Soholt & Sly, 2015; Woodmansey, 2017). South Dakota's funding formula establishes a target number of teachers by dividing the district's fall enrollment by the target student-to-staff ratio. South Dakota established the following population ranges to serve as the target student-to-staff ratio: a) less than 200 students equals 12 students to one teacher, b) between 200 and 600 students equals a sliding scale between 12 students to one teacher and 15 students to one teacher, and c) greater than 600 students equals 15 students to one teacher (Woodmansey, 2017). However, this funding formula is not sufficient for all schools in South Dakota. In fact, 44.3% of school districts had an opt-out in place for 2019 to support their general fund expenditures (South Dakota Department of Education, 2019).

Funding initiatives that encourage schools to reduce class size without considering other contextual factors may not align with what research demonstrates to be best practice. Although research on class size reduction (CSR) as a means for boosting student achievement returns uneven results, the research consistently reveals that CSR is associated with gains in achievement for students in some contexts (Biddle & Berliner, 2008; Bosworth, 2014; Filges et al., 2018; Hattie, 2012). It is therefore imperative school leaders and policymakers reflect on available CSR research to guide decisions about class size.

Theoretical Frameworks

Expectancy Theory

This study is framed through the theoretical lens of expectancy theory which is a motivational theory developed by Victor Vroom in 1964 (Caulfield, 2007; Vroom, 1964). According to expectancy theory, the amount of effort or action a person will take to accomplish a task depends greatly on their perceived ability to accomplish the task (Hamington, 2010, p. 677). Expectancy theory provides a robust framework in which to explore the perceptions of educators as class size may impact teacher efficacy in larger classes (Laine et al., 2000). That is, teachers' levels of effort and motivation may depend on their perception of how well they can manage their classes' size (Solheim & Opheim, 2019). Because experiences often shape perceptions, a teacher's choice about the optimal class size is likely influenced by their experience and perceived ability to manage larger classes.

Furthermore, expectancy theory helps explain why states have invested significant amounts of money to reduce class size as it has been assumed small class sizes net better teaching and therefore higher student achievement levels (Salgado et al., 2018). However, according to expectancy theory, this relation may only hold if class sizes are aligned with teachers' expectations about the size of class they are prepared to teach (Salgado et al., 2018).

Self-determination Theory

This study also leans on the theory of self-determination, which emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation in human behavior (Wagner & French, 2010). When looking at the role class size plays in student achievement levels, it is important to not only reflect on student motivation to learn but also the teacher's motivation to teach.

Higher pay may motivate teachers extrinsically to accept teaching in larger class sizes but may result in lower student achievement if they do not adapt how they teach (Laine et al, 2000). According to self-determination theory, a better way to motivate teachers is to focus on intrinsic motivation through developing competence, connection, and autonomy. Therefore, a high teacher efficacy developed through quality professional development may promote a teacher's intrinsic motivation to teach in a wider range of class sizes effectively (Althauser, 2015; Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011; Lee et al., 2012; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

The expectancy and self-determination theories establish a framework for understanding how various factors may influence the perceptions of educators concerning optimal class size. This research explores superintendents', elementary principals', and kindergarten through third-grade teachers' perceptions of optimal class size and their ratings of how much their perceptions are based upon the following factors: experience, research, financial implications, classroom management, and instructional quality.

Review of Related Literature

Seminal Class Size Research

Although class size reduction (CSR) may not always result in gains in student achievement, a majority of CSR research suggests that small classes have the greatest effect on increased student achievement in the primary grades, when class sizes are reduced below 20, and for gap groups, more specifically, minority and economically disadvantaged students (Biddle & Berliner, 2008; Bosworth, 2014; Fan, 2012; Filges et al., 2018; Finn & Achilles, 1999; Hattie, 2012; In-Soo & Young, 2009; Lapsley et al., 2002; Molnar et al., 1999; Reichardt & Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, 2001). In these contexts, reductions in class size appear to benefit students.

However, understanding the way CSR is defined is important for interpreting the literature about its effectiveness. Discussion and reflection on research become cloudy when small class size is expressed as either a 15:1 student-teacher ratio or a 30:2 student-teacher ratio. Both examples suggest a per pupil-teacher ratio of 15:1, but a classroom with 30 students and 2 teachers looks much different than a classroom with only 15 students and 1 teacher (Filges et al., 2018; Lapsley, Daytner, Kelly, & Maxwell, 2002). Indiana's project prime time serves as a good example of how a lack of distinction between these two ways of reporting class size can cause a CSR initiatives to

largely become a reduction of the per pupil-teacher ratio through the use of a classroom aide (Biddle & Berliner, 2008).

As school districts reflect on available research to guide policy on class size and potentially explore CSR initiatives, it is important to understand the dynamics of CSR efforts to help determine what is effective. In a review of Wisconsin's SAGE program, Molnar, Smith, Zahorik, & Wisconsin University (1999) concluded that except for language arts and mathematics performance in second-grade, classrooms with a 30:2 student-teacher ratio performed as well as classrooms with a 15:1 student-teacher ratio (p. 106). However, more recent studies have indicated that adding aides to classrooms is often not effective. Biddle and Berliner (2008) found that preliminary results from Indiana's project prime time indicated smaller gains for larger classrooms assigned to two teachers (p. 20). In addition, Tennessee's project STAR indicated that regular size classrooms (22-25 students) with an aide did not produce any better achievement results than regular size classrooms without an aide (Biddle & Berliner, 2008; Filges et al., 2018; Finn & Achilles, 1999; Reichardt & Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, 2001).

Financial Implications

While creativity in resource allocation may help to meet the basic requirements for CSR reform in a cost-effectively way, deviating from what research suggests as best practices in CSR will likely net undesirable student achievement results (Solheim & Opheim, 2019). That is, introducing classroom aides may not result in increased student achievement. Likewise, when classroom space becomes limited, creative thinking may lead to proposals for shared space among two teachers (Solheim & Opheim, 2019). This may solve classroom space woes, but according to Biddle and Berliner (2008), doing so may defeat the desired achievement results.

CSR efforts require careful planning and consideration for associated costs paired with an honest reflection of what research says is the best practice for utilizing CSR as a means for improving student achievement (Mathis, 2017). The most promising results for instituting CSR initiatives will come when school leaders who understand the budget and dynamics of their schools are involved in the planning process (Achilles, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast, & SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2005). No matter the creativity utilized in implementing CSR, policymakers must evaluate and understand the inevitable upfront and ongoing costs associated with CSR programs (Mathis, 2017).

Teacher Efficacy, Quality, and Recruitment

Teacher quality has an elusive definition that cannot be described as simply holding a certificate obtained through a teacher preparation program (Hattie, 2012). Furthermore, an evaluation of key characteristics for highly qualified teachers described within the previous federal mandate of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) demonstrated these characteristics had no consistent connection with student achievement gains (Phillips, 2010). However, Phillips (2010) did observe increased student achievement with extended teacher training or specialization.

When CSR policies are implemented, developing teachers through quality professional development may offer the greatest opportunity for improving the quality of teachers on larger staffs. Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis found that professional development has an effect size of $d = .62$ regarding its impact on student achievement. Professional development paired with teacher mentoring also has fostered increased teacher efficacy (Klassen et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2012;

Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Therefore, policymakers and district officials contemplating CSR may see the most impact of these policies if they provide professional development opportunities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the perceptions of superintendents, elementary principals, and kindergarten through third-grade teachers concerning what they believe is the optimal class size for kindergarten, first-grade, second-grade, and third-grade, and to compare these groups' ratings of how much the following categories influence their perceptions: their experience, their knowledge of research on class size, their concern for financial implication, the teacher's classroom management ability, and instructional quality or ability to improve student outcomes. Understanding the differing perspectives of school personnel regarding optimal class size and the factors they view as most important for informing these perspectives may help administrators craft better policies and professional development opportunities for their staff.

Research Questions

A quantitative survey was distributed to K-3 teachers, elementary principals, and superintendents (Appendix A). The information collected on the survey was designed to address the following research questions.

1. What are the differences in K-3 teachers', elementary principals', and superintendents' perceptions of optimal class size for grades K-3?
2. What are the differences in the factors these groups report as influencing their optimal class size perceptions?

Methodology

Population

The population included South Dakota K-12 public school district superintendents, elementary principals, and kindergarten through third-grade teachers during the 2019-2020 school year. At the time of this study, there were 149 public school districts in South Dakota. There were 149 superintendents, 247 elementary principals, and 2,274 teachers coded as a self-contained classroom teacher for either kindergarten, first, second, or third grade ("Address List Principals," 2019; "Address List Superintendents," 2019; J. Nelson-Stastny, personal communication, December 17, 2019).

In 2019, 40 school districts had a K-12 enrollment of 601 or greater, 80 school districts had a K-12 enrollment between 200 and 600, and 29 school districts had a K-12 enrollment of 199 or less ("History of State Aid," n.d.). South Dakota distributes state aid to schools based on a student to teacher ratio of 12 to 1 for K-12 enrollments of $\leq$ 199 students, between 12 and 14 to 1 for K-12 enrollments between 200 and 600 students, and 15 to 1 for K-12 enrollments $\geq$ 601 students. Every district superintendent, elementary principal, and kindergarten through third-grade self-contained classroom teacher was offered the opportunity to take the survey except for those employed in the first author's district.

A power analysis was conducted based on a similar dissertation to ensure adequate power (Rasmussen, 2015). Utilizing GPower 3.1, it was determined a total sample size of 339 superintendents, principals and teachers was needed with an effect size (f = .17) to achieve a power of .8 with alpha at .05.

Data Collection

The survey used in this study contained demographic questions, including the respondent's position within their school district, how many years they served in their current position, and the K-12 enrollment range of their district. Following the demographic portion of the survey, respondents were asked to identify what they believed was the optimal class size for kindergarten, first-grade, second-grade, and third-grade. Finally, respondents were asked to rate on a four-point Likert scale how much the following factors influenced their choice for selecting the optimal class size for each grade level evaluated: personal experience, research on class size, financial implications, classroom management, and instructional quality. Respondents could choose from a range identified as (1) no influence, (2) somewhat influenced, (3) strongly influenced, and (4) extremely influenced.

Superintendent and principal names and email addresses for the 149 public school districts in South Dakota were available through the South Dakota Department of Education. Superintendents and principals were emailed a letter of invitation containing a formal request to participate in the study and directions for participating in the study by clicking an embedded hotlink to access the survey through Qualtrics. Also included in the email to elementary principals was a letter of invitation to teachers, which the elementary principals were asked to distribute by forwarding an email to kindergarten through third-grade teachers in their building. Consent to participate was implied by the completion of the survey.

After two weeks, a follow-up email was sent to superintendents and elementary principals expressing gratitude to those who had participated in the study and reminding those who had not completed the survey to please do so. Elementary principals were asked to please forward a reminder to their teachers serving in kindergarten through third grade.

Validity and Reliability

A survey matrix (see Appendix B) and pilot study were created and implemented to establish validity and reliability. The survey matrix includes the fifty sources used to identify common themes within the review of literature. After the survey was created, it was vetted by three educational experts before being sent to the researcher's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval.

Findings

Perceptions Regarding Optimal Class Size

Analyses of variance showed statistically significant differences were present between the perceived optimal class sizes of teachers, principals, and superintendents at all grade levels, K through 3 (Table 1). Games-Howell post hoc analyses indicated no statistically significant differences were present between superintendents and principals for any grade level.

Teachers reported significantly smaller optimal class sizes than principals for all grade levels (kindergarten, $p = .009$, first grade, $p = .02$, second grade, $p = .034$, third grade, $p = .008$). Teachers only differed from superintendents in their optimal class sizes for kindergarten, $p = .003$, for which teachers' optimal class sizes were smaller than superintendents (Table 1).

Table 1

Optimal Class Size Mean Responses Among Job Positions

Grade Level	Superintendent		Principal		Teacher		*W*	*p*	*η2*	*df*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*				
K	17.62	3.090	17.62	3.008	16.47[ab]	2.264	8.77	< .001	.044	2
First	18.59	3.188	18.75	2.803	17.78[b]	2.315	5.47	.005	.027	2
Second	19.34	3.412	19.67	3.019	18.68[b]	2.722	3.98	.021	.019	2
Third	20.02	3.611	20.88	3.197	19.59[b]	3.007	4.79	.010	.021	2

[a] Significant difference between teachers and superintendents, $p = .003$.
[b] Significant difference between teachers and principals, $ps < .05$.

Influences Impacting Optimal Class Size

Analyses of variance indicated statistically significant differences were present between ratings provided by teachers, principals, and superintendents for all influencing factors except class size research (Table 2). Games-Howell post-hoc tests indicated there was only one significant difference between principals and superintendents. Superintendents rated financial implications significantly higher than principals, $p = .002$. Superintendents also rated financial implications significantly higher than teachers, $p < .001$.

For the remaining three influencing factors, teachers' ratings were significantly higher than those given by principals: prior classroom experience ($p = .008$), classroom management ($p < .001$), and instructional quality ($p = .002$). For all three factors, teachers' ratings were also higher than superintendents' ratings, all $ps < .001$.

Table 2

Influences Rated as Impacting Optimal Class Size

Influences	Superintendent		Principal		Teacher		*W*	*p*	*η2*	*df*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*				
Classroom Experience	2.43	.999	2.74	1.000	3.53[ab]	.719	60.74	<.001	.247	2
Class Size Research	1.92	.886	1.97	.881	1.86	.980	.52	.595	.002	2
Financial Implications	2.57	.945	2.07[c]	.948	1.82[a]	.866	23.34	<.001	.103	2
Classroom Management	3.01	.669	2.97	.833	3.40[ab]	.743	15.36	<.001	.066	2
Instructional	3.37	.618	3.49	.626	3.77[ab]	.446	20.95	<.001	.101	2

Quality

[a] Significant difference between teachers and superintendents, *ps* < .001.
[b] Significant difference between teachers and principals, *ps* < .01.
[c] Significant difference between superintendents and principals, *p* = .002.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether teachers, principals, and superintendents had different perceptions of optimal class size, and to identify differences in the factors they rated as influencing their class size perceptions. The data analysis shows that superintendents, elementary principals, and K-3 teachers differed in their perceptions of optimal class size for kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade. The Games-Howell post-hoc analysis helped clarify where these statistically significant differences existed.

Superintendents and principals shared a common view about optimal class size. Significant differences existed between principals and teachers at each grade level, and between superintendents and teachers for kindergarten only. In all cases that differences were present, teachers provided significantly smaller optimal class sizes than administrators. These differences likely exist due to the different job roles these people have, which lead them to consider different factors when making these estimates. The administrators' experience as a classroom teacher may have also influenced their perceptions, which may potentially serve as rationale for the difference between superintendents and teachers regarding kindergarten estimates.

An analysis of the factors educators rated as influencing their choice about optimal class size revealed that teachers, principals, and superintendents viewed the class size research factor similarly. Further examination of this factor shows this to be one of the lowest influences among teachers. This suggests teachers, principals, and superintendents in general rely very little on class size research when evaluating optimal class size. The lack of recent research of the magnitude of Tennessee's STAR study may provide some rationale for minimal attention to this particular influence (Filges et al., 2018). It is also plausible educator perceptions rely more on their personal experiences than research, as prior classroom experience was rated as fairly influential for superintendents, principals, and teachers.

A consistent theme throughout the literature on class size is that teacher efficacy, quality, and recruitment are important concerns for schools when evaluating class size (Reichardt & Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, 2001). In this study, instructional quality was rated as the most influential factor impacting optimal class size for superintendents, principals, and teachers. It is evident all educators share an equal concern for how class size may impact instructional quality. Even though high ratings were given by all groups, teachers rated this factor as especially influential. Teachers also provided higher ratings than administrators for classroom management concerns. According to both expectancy and self-determination theory, attention should be given to teachers' self-efficacy for providing instruction and managing larger classes, as this may impact instructional quality as class sizes grow (Laine et al., 2000).

Research has indicated class size reduction is an expensive initiative (Achilles et al., 2005; Filges et al., 2018). With the exception of superintendents, financial implications were reported to have little influence on optimal class size selection. By the nature of their role, superintendents likely weigh more on the impact reducing class size will have on the budget. Superintendents must have a systemic perspective when making decisions, and superintendents are ultimately

responsible for balancing a budget that is oftentimes in the millions of dollars (Decman et al., 2018).

Research from seminal works such as project STAR have provided state governments and school leaders with common themes to inform class size policy and action. Similarly, this research offers school officials a new lens in which to evaluate class size policy. Furthermore, it gives first-hand insight into how administrators and teachers report how key themes within the literature impact their perceptions about optimal class size. This in turn has the capacity to guide critical conversations about state funding, class size research, as well as shape professional development opportunities to enhance teacher success in all class sizes.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the results of this research, school districts evaluating optimal class size should carefully vet factors influencing perceptions of all educators in the school system (Solheim & Opheim, 2019). Administrators should be aware that teachers may have different priorities. For example, teachers are not responsible for balancing a budget funded by the taxpayers of their community. However, teachers should be informed about budget constraints and how class sizes impact available dollars (Higgins & Paul, 2019).

Superintendents might consider creating a committee involving teachers and principals to discuss budget implications in relation to class size as well as review findings from class size research (Decman et al., 2018). This may help build transparency in the budgeting process while also reducing tensions during negotiations. Additionally, intentional committee dialogue about class size research and the budget will help keep all educators focused on making research driven decisions which was shown to be of minimal importance to all educators in this study.

Classroom management had a large influence on all educator perceptions when evaluating optimal class size. Introducing teacher aides to the classroom may assist with classroom management concerns and potentially boost teacher efficacy. However, research has shown this to have a minimal impact on student achievement (Balestra & Backes-Gellner, 2017). Administrators should reflect on the purpose and expected outcomes for adding teacher aides to the classroom (Balestra & Backes-Gellner, 2017). A better approach to healing classroom management concerns and building stronger teacher efficacy is through job-embedded professional development (Althauser, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Findings from research conducted by Choi and Kang (2019), suggest collaborative group professional development where teachers collaborate and have the opportunity to share ideas may provide the greatest impact on increasing teacher efficacy.

Limitations

While this study was deemed to have adequate power, it serves as a small sample in a rural Midwest state. The trends established in this survey research may fluctuate when replicated in other rural and urban areas across the nation. An assumption was made that respondents interpreted the survey questions in the same manner. Slight deviations in interpreting each question, specifically regarding factors influencing optimal class size choice may limit the claims that can be drawn from the information collected. A qualitative component such as an interview process may help clarify teacher, principal, and superintendent perceptions.

Recommendations for Future Research

Appendix C reveals an observable trend that as district enrollment grew so did the estimates for optimal class size. It may be worthwhile for future researchers to examine if a correlation exists between district enrollment and optimal class size estimates. We also recommend further studies that explore the ramifications tight budgets may have on influencing school district decisions to increase class size. A final recommendation is to study teachers', principals', and superintendents' perceptions of the effectiveness of teacher aides on student achievement in elementary classrooms.

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Appendix A
Class Size Survey



Default Question Block

Q1. Please select the option which best describes your current role in your district.

- ○ Self-Contained Kindergarten Teacher
- ○ Self-Contained First Grade-Teacher
- ○ Self-Contained Second-Grade Teacher
- ○ Self-Contained Third-Grade Teacher
- ○ Elementary Principal
- ○ District Superintendent
- ○ Other (e.g., art,music, PE)

Q2. Please identify how many years you have served in your current position.

- ○ 0-6 years
- ○ 7-15 years
- ○ 16 or more

Q3. Please select the K-12 student enrollment range for your school district.

- ○ 0-199 Students
- ○ 200-600 Students
- ○ ≥ 601 Students

Q4. Please select what you believe is the optimal class size for a kindergarten classroom by sliding the bar to the left or right.



Q5. Please select what you believe is the optimal class size for a first grade classroom by sliding the bar to the left or right



Q6. Please select what you believe is the optimal class size for a second grade classroom by sliding the bar to the left or right.



Q7. Please select what you believe is the optimal class size for a third grade classroom by sliding the bar to the left or right.



Q8.

To what extent did the following items influence your decision in identifying optimal class sizes for kindergarten through third grade?

	No Influence (1)	Somewhat Influenced (2)	Strongly Influenced (3)	Extremely Influenced (4)
Classroom teaching experience (personal belief based on your experiences in the classroom)	○	○	○	○
Research on class size (such as: Tennessee STAR, Wisconsin SAGE, Indiana Prime Time)	○	○	○	○
Financial impact on class size and managing the school budget	○	○	○	○
What I believe a teacher can manage in terms of behavior (classroom management)	○	○	○	○
Instructional quality (ability to improve student outcomes)	○	○	○	○

Q9. Please provide any additional information as it relates to how you answered question eight.

Appendix B
Survey Matrix

Question Content	Demographics	Teacher Experience	Class Size Research	Financial Implications	Classroom Management	Instructional Quality
Question Number	1, 2 & 3	8	4, 5, 6, 7, 8	8	8	8
Matrix of Literature and Research Informing Survey Questions						
Achilles, 2005			x			
Alsauidi, 2016	x	x	x		x	x
Alspaugh, 1994			x			
Althauser, 2015		x			x	
Bascia & Faubert, 2012				x		
Biddle & Berliner, 2008	x	x	x	x	x	x
Borland, Howsen & Trawick, 2005			x			
Bosworth, 2014			x			
Brewer, Krop, Gill, & Reichardt, 1999				x		
Caulfield, 2007		x			x	
Chingos, 2013			x	x		
Deci & Ryan, 1985		x				
Fan, 2012		x	x		x	

Finn & Achilles, 1999			x			
Garland, Garland, & Vasquez, 2013	x		x			x
Glass & Smith 1978			x	x		
Hanushek, 2010			x			x
Hattie, 2009	x	x	x	x	x	x
Hattie, 2012	x	x	x	x	x	x
Helding & Fraser 2013					x	x
Hetrick, 1999			x			
Hoy & Spero, 2005	x	x	x		x	x
Hruz, 2000	x		x	x		x
In-Soo & Jae Young, 2009			x			
Johnson, 2011			x			
Klassen, Tze, Betts & Gordon, 2011		x			x	
Klusmann, Richter & Lüdtke, 2016		x				
Krueger, 2003			x	x		
Laine & Ward, 2000	x	x	x	x	x	x

Lapsley, Daytner, Kelly & Maxwell, 2002			x			
Lee, Tice, Collins, Brown, Smith & Fox, 2012	x	x			x	x
Levin, Glass & Meister, 1984			x	x		
McGiverin, Gilman & Tillitski, 1989			x	x		
Molnar, Smith & Zahorik, 1999			x			
Odden & Picus, 2011			x	x		
Pate-Bain, Boyd-Zaharias, Cain, Word & Binkley, 1997			x			
Phillips, 2010		x				x
Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-Davis & Hunt, 2010			x			
Ratcliff, Costner, Carroll, Jones,			x		x	x

Sheehan & Hunt, 2016						
Reichardt, 2001	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sims, 2008						
Smith, Molnar & Zahorik, 2003			x			
Sohn, 2010			x			
Soholt & Sly, 2015	x					
Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001		x	x		x	x
Vroom, 1964		x				
Wagner & French, 2010	x	x			x	x
Weili & Lehrer, 2011			x			
Wiseman & Al-bakr, (2013	x	x				x
Woodmansey, 2017	x					

Appendix C
Optimal Class Size and District Population

Optimal Class Size in Relation to Job Positions and District Population

District Size Population of Students	Superintendents			Principals			K-3 Teachers		
	M	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Kindergarten									
0-199	14.40	3.18	15	15.88	2.64	8	14.98	2.58	43
200-600	17.74	2.63	50	17.44	2.60	36	16.18	2.34	89
≥ 601	18.94	2.70	32	18.31	3.41	29	17.16	1.79	132
First Grade									
0-199	15.00	3.67	15	17.75	1.91	8	16.49	2.93	43
200-600	18.76	2.65	50	18.50	2.66	36	17.22	2.15	89
≥ 601	20.00	2.45	32	19.34	3.12	29	18.57	1.87	132
Second Grade									
0-199	15.60	3.78	15	18.38	2.00	8	17.14	3.44	43
200-600	19.50	3.07	50	19.36	2.80	36	17.72	2.27	89
≥ 601	20.84	2.36	32	20.41	3.39	29	19.83	2.20	132
Third Grade									
0-199	15.93	4.15	15	18.87	1.81	8	18.05	3.56	43
200-600	20.22	3.18	50	20.94	3.11	36	18.49	2.52	89
≥ 601	21.63	2.41	32	21.34	3.47	29	20.84	2.58	132

School Administrator Support of Teachers: A Systematic Review (2000-2019)

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There have been a number of narrative reviews that focus on the relationship of school administrators and the teachers at their school sites. This systematic review evaluates a select group of research articles published between the years 2000 and 2019. The main questions for this review ask: (a) what does recent literature tell us about the support school administrators provide to teachers? and (b) what does recent literature tell us about a school administrator's ability to retain effective teachers? Seven qualitative and 24 quantitative studies were selected for inclusion in this review, all evaluated for quality using research based instruments. Seventy-nine percent of the prescribed evaluative criteria were met. The majority of the included research focused on statistical analyses of city, state and national datasets. Results of this investigation revealed that certain administrative efforts, used independently or in combination, are effective in supporting teachers, including induction, mentoring, staffing support, course assignment changes, resource and professional development enhancement, increased autonomy and agency, meaningful and constructive evaluations, workload abatement, discipline/rule enforcement and support with challenging parents. Implications of this study endorses the use of research-based practices by administrators to support the teachers at their sites, resulting in increased job satisfaction and student learning. This study provides researchers and policymakers with a comprehensive review of recent, peer-reviewed literature regarding administrative support of teachers.

Keywords: *administration, support, early-career, retention, attrition*

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Approximately half of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years of teaching (Foster, 2010). Enrollment in teacher preparation programs is declining, and it is estimated that teacher turnover costs $7.3 billion each year (National Math and Science Initiative, 2013). A plethora of research over the past twenty years supports the claim that school administrators are connected, in a substantive way, to teacher retention. The authors assert that this research will justify increased support of teachers by their administrators, which ultimately improves teacher satisfaction, and leads to improved learning for students.

Teachers who feel that they are supported by their administrators in carrying out professional responsibilities are more likely to be satisfied with their career and remain in teaching longer than those who do not feel this support (Boyd et al., 2011; Curtis, 2012; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Ingersoll, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Podolsky et al., 2016; Redding & Henry, 2018; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Tickle, Chang & Kim, 2011). Although there have been reviews of literature related to teacher retention which included studies published prior to the year 2005 (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibañez & Daley, 2006), a more recent comprehensive summary of literature related specifically to the connections between administrative practices and teacher retention has not been completed.

Appropriate management practices are necessary to support teacher autonomy, their degree of input for decisions, and disciplinary practices (Djonko-Moore, 2012; Painter, 2000). Supportive practices provided by administration such as mentoring programs, staff development, assistance with parents, and support in general with teachers' personal and professional issues ultimately affect teachers' decisions to remain in the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Dee & Wyckoff, 2013; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014; Schaefer, 2013). Teachers' responses to administrative practices can affect teacher trust of administration, the ability of teachers to ask for support and their general ability to do their job effectively (Corbell, Osborne & Reiman, 2010; Hanselman, 2016; Ladd, 2011; Mawhinney, 2008).

A few studies showed that teacher retention is higher in rural schools relative to their non-rural counterparts (Djonko-Moore, 2012; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Guarino et al., 2006; Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves & Delgado, 2005; McClure & Reeves, 2004; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Reasons include lower teacher pay, lower per pupil spending, reduced access to professional development and instructional materials, social isolation, increased teaching load (e.g. multiple subject teaching) and reduced access to a hiring pool of more diverse and well-qualified teacher candidates. Countering these obstacles are stronger ties to the community and, in some circumstances, lower student to teacher ratios (Lieberman, 2000).

Other demands on the teaching profession have come about due to federal mandates provided in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Hammer et al., 2005). The increased requirements for teachers to be certified, and evaluated, as highly qualified teachers (HQT) and on the job accountability pressures related to standardized testing have affected teacher and administrator perceptions of teaching (Boyd et al., 2011; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Dizon-Ross, 2018; Ford, Urick & Wilson, 2018; Grissom, 2009; Grissom, 2011; Hanselman, Grigg, Bruch & Gamoran, 2016; Ladd, 2011; Robinson, 2017). More recently, provisions of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which passed into law in 2015, delegates provisions for assessment, accountability and measuring of teacher/student performance to states and local school districts, which can add additional layers of responsibility for teachers (Jones, Khalil & Dixon, 2017).

It is important to note that research on teacher retention includes investigations regarding the variety of ways that teachers are counted as "leavers", even though they may remain in the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Goldring et al., 2014; Guarino et al., 2006; Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves & Delgado, 2005; McClure & Reeves, 2004; Redding & Henry, 2018). For instance, teachers who are dissatisfied with their administrator may choose to transfer to another school, whether it be inside or outside of their school district. Some teachers leave the profession for reasons that are not associated to administrator support, such as temporarily focusing on family (e.g. extended maternity), enrolling in a full time program of study, or simply exploring other career opportunities, including the means to become school administrators.

That said, there are a number of significant studies that focus on teachers leaving the profession specifically due to the lack of administrative support. In a recent study conducted by the Learning Policy Institute (Podolsky et al., 2016) which included a nationally-representative sample of teachers across the United States, the authors reported that:

> approximately 25% of public school teachers who left the profession in 2012 reported that dissatisfaction with the influence of school assessment and accountability measures on their teaching or curriculum was extremely or very important in their decision to leave. (p. vii)

A number of studies focus on the ability of school administrators to ensure that the school environment is supportive of teaching, with effective professional development, substantive evaluations of teaching and avenues for engagement with other teachers and members of the local community (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Dizon-Ross, 2018; Curtis, 2012; Djonko-Moore, 2012; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Ford, Urick & Wilson, 2018; Grissom & Loeb, 2009; Grissom, 2011; Hanselman et al., 2016; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Ladd, 2011; OECD, 2014; Painter, 2000; Podolsky et al., 2016). School administrators are asked to not only ensure that a teacher's workplace is well-maintained, collegial and offers easy access to materials/resources, administrators should also support their teachers by positively recognizing their efforts in and out of the classroom. In addition, administrators can support teachers with student discipline, managing unreasonable parents, and working to ensure that all teachers have input as they work with others toward shared goals. Administrators providing a degree of professional autonomy in the classroom is especially regarded as a key element in ensuring a productive environment for teaching.

Finally, the quality and design of programs which further ensure that novice teachers are better prepared for teaching are connected to the degree that these teachers require direct assistance from their school administrators (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; OECD, 2014; Podolsky et al., 2016; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). These programs include: (a) teacher preparation programs for both traditionally and alternatively credentialed teachers, (b) induction programs that provide support for teachers in the initial year(s) of their teaching, and (c) mentoring programs at the school and district levels. Thus, the degree that administrators are able to support their teachers by endorsing teacher autonomy and decision-making, providing resources to those serving certain populations, making connections to students from a wide variety (i.e. urban/suburban/rural) settings, ensuring high quality teachers are hired and evaluated effectively, developing a healthy school environment, and endorsing substantive teacher professional development are important connections between practices school administrators employ and the teachers they serve.

This systematic review depicts the effects that satisfactory or unsatisfactory administrative practices has on rates of teacher retention based on the literature from the past 20 years. The goal is to provide researchers and policymakers a comprehensive overview of the peer-reviewed literature between 2000 and 2019 regarding administrative support of teachers. The main questions for this review ask: (a) what does recent literature tell us about the support school administrators provide to teachers? and (b) what does recent literature tell us about a school administrator's ability to retain effective teachers? For the purposes of this review, the term "principal" is inclusive of any administrator, including associate principals, assistant principals, deans, and others serving in an administrative role in schools.

Theoretical Framework

The literature included in this review is focused on to the needs of school administrators and the teachers they serve, and as such aligns with the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) (Ryan and Deci, 2002), a sub-theory of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT provides that personal motivation is enhanced when specific psychological needs (e.g. relatedness, autonomy, competence) are supported. When this occurs, individuals experience "increased psychological health and well-being…but also enhance(d) intrinsic motivation, facilitate(d) internalization of extrinsic motivation, support(ed) the development of autonomous causality orientations, and strengthen(ed) intrinsic relative to extrinsic aspirations" (Ryan & Deci, 2015, p. 490-491). The BPNT is particularly suited as a lens to inspect the included research regarding school administrator support of teachers because of connections to work motivation, job satisfaction and retention (Ford et al., 2018). In addition, using the BPNT as a "lens" allows the researchers to: (a) inspect recent literature about the degree of competence school administrators must have to provide adequate support to teachers (connecting to the first research question), and (b) determine the degree that relatedness and autonomy relate to an administrator's ability to retain effective teachers (connecting to the second research question).

Method

The use of a systematic review of literature for this investigation of school administrator support of teachers ensures that rigorous procedures are used for selection of included research and, in the case of this study, an assessment of the quality of all included articles is performed. Inclusion/exclusion criteria were defined after eligibility definitions were developed, and strict screening procedures were employed to ensure that all literature included in the review contributed to a broad, yet comprehensive understanding of the main topic and answered, to some degree, one or both of the research questions. The procedures used to select the included literature generally follow the guidelines provided in the "Roadmap for Systematic Reviews & Meta-Analyses" (Pai, et al., 2004, p. 88).

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To ensure that the research material included in this study focused on the research questions and were substantive in nature, the researchers used strict inclusion/exclusion criteria. Studies that focused on public, private and charter schools/school districts were included, as well as those focused on kindergarten through 12th grades, including elementary and secondary (middle and

high) schools. Also included were studies which described schools with teachers who served in regular, self-contained classrooms, classrooms serving students from specialized populations (e.g. special education, English language learning) and content specific classrooms (e.g. mathematics, music, social science). Administrators included in this study were principals, deans, assistant principals, and other persons serving in full- and part-time administrative roles who work in urban, suburban and rural geographic areas, serving students from diverse racial, ethnic and socioeconomic neighborhoods. There was no restriction on articles which included teachers and administrators with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation. Included literature were journal articles, reviews of literature and reports of international schools (OECD, 2014), gleaning data from surveys, district/state/national databases, observations and interviews.

The process of sifting through a wide variety of source material was recursive in nature, evolving over time until a final, well-defined group of 31 articles remained. At the onset, the following computerized reference databases were used - Education Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC); Psych INFO; JSTOR; The Scholarly Journal Archive Academic Search; and Education Full Text. The researchers searched these databases for all peer-reviewed publications published between 2000 to 2019 using the following search criteria (asterisks serving as wildcard characters where noted): (a) administrat* support (AND) teacher*, (b) principal support (AND) teacher*, (c) teacher support (exact phrase), (d) teacher retention (exact phrase), (e) early-career teacher* (exact phrase), and (f) novice teacher* (exact phrase). The result of these searches provided 108 unique listings.

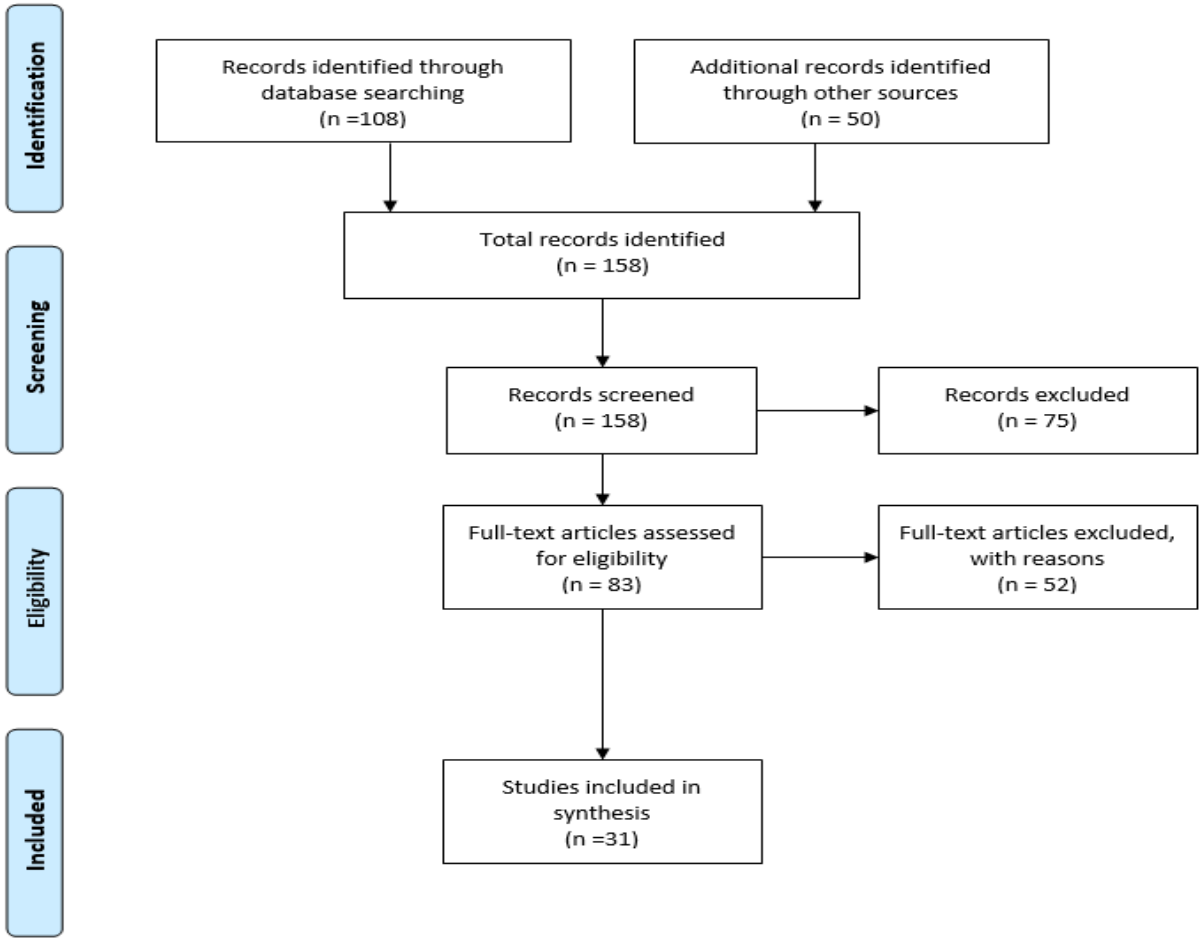
Nineteen articles were added from an inspection of the reference sections of these articles whose titles contained references to either "administration", "principal" and/or "retention". An additional 31 articles, published since the year 2000, were added based on the lead researcher's experience in the field, from well-known reports (e.g. NCES, NBER, NCMST), that met the inclusion criteria, including grey literature such as working papers, monographs and symposium documents. It was important to include this grey literature as there are a number of research consortiums and policy organizations (e.g. Learning Policy Institute) which publish substantive reports that are focused on teacher retention. Also, reports published by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) provided the researchers with statistical reports based on survey results from a nationally representative sample of school teachers and administrators. To ensure international considerations were included, a comprehensive study published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2014), was included. As a result, the number of included articles to be considered grew to 158 articles. At this point, annotated bibliographies were created for each article, which provided the researchers a way of evaluating the relevancy of the articles.

An inspection of these annotated bibliographies resulted in the removal of 75 articles which, under inspection, did not specifically reference support provided to teachers by school principals or other administrators. Finally, 52 more articles were removed as they were reviews of literature, dissertations, editor columns, position papers, case studies, magazine/newspaper articles, and fictitious case studies, resulting in the final group of 31 articles. Removal of these articles was justified based on the understanding that they either: (a) did not represent empirical research (e.g. reviews of literature, fictitious case studies), (b) were not peer-reviewed by persons outside their organizations (e.g. dissertations), or (c) included bias and/or misrepresentation. Inclusion/exclusion of all material for this study was accomplished in a collaborative, in-person format where each researcher critically examined the other's expressed

rationale, and those articles which were not mutually agreed upon were eliminated. A visual representation of the entire search process is included in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Literature Search Flowchart



Note. Flow diagram designed using PRISMA formatting (http://prisma-statement.org/PRISMAStatement/FlowDiagram). Use of PRISMA is not intended as a quality assessment of this systematic review.

Using information gathered from each of the articles in the final list, the researchers created an Author Inclusion Table (AIT), which provides the following information for each article in tabular format: (a) author(s), (b) year of publication, (c) publication type (i.e. journal article, research organization report, book, government report), (d) research design (i.e. survey, interview, observation, database analysis, narrative), (e) research method (i.e. quantitative, qualitative, mixed method), (f) sample size, (g) setting (i.e. elementary, middle school/junior high, high school), (h) school type (i.e. public, private, parochial, charter), and (i) study purpose as defined by the author(s). Author Inclusion Table (AIT) is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Author Inclusion Table (AIT)

Author(s) (year of publication)	T	Subject	M	R	P(D)	ST	Y	Purpose
Boyd et al. (2011)	J	Administration	Qn	S	4,360	E, MS, HS	Pu	Administration and Retention
Carver-Thomas et. al (2017)	RR	Turnover	Qn	A	8,200	E, MS, HS	Pu, Pr	Reducing Turnover
Corbell et al. (2010)	J	Induction	Qn	S	439	E, MS, HS	Pu	Early Career Retention
Curtis (2012)	J	Retention	Qn	S	5,000	MS, HS	NA	Retaining Math Teachers
Dee & Wyckoff (2013)	RR	Evaluations	Qn	A	2.630	E, MS, HS	Pu, Pr	Compensation/Retention
Dizon-Ross (2018)	RR	Accountability	Qn	A	50,616	NA	NA	High-performing Teacher Attrition
Djonko-Moore (2016)	J	Attrition	Qn	A	730	E, MS, HS	Pu	Attrition and Demographics
Djonko-Moore (2012)	J	School environment	Qn	A,S	34,870	E, MS, HS	Pu	Teacher Dissatisfaction
Donaldson (2013)	J	Teacher Effectiveness	Ql	I	30	E, MS, HS	Pu, Ch	Effects of Principals' Decisions
Ford et al. (2018)	J	Job Satisfaction	Qn	A	1,850 Tch./122 Prn.	Lower Secondary	NA	Effects of Evaluations
Gates et al. (2019)	RR	Managerial Actions	X	A,I,S	6 districts	NA	NA	Different Approaches to Management
Griffith (2004)	J	Principal Leadership	Qn	S	3,291	E	NA	Effects of Principal Leadership
Grissom (2011)	J	Retention	Qn	A	30,690	E, MS	Pu	Retention in Disadvantaged Schools
Grissom & Loeb (2009)	RR	Managerial Skills	Qn	S	13,942 Tch./899 Prn.	E, MS, HS	Pu	Principal Effectiveness
Grissom (2019)	J	Retention	Qn	A	287,261	E, MS, HS	Pu	Principals' Retention Strategies
Hanselman et al. (2016)	J	Social Resource	Qn	S	555 Yr.1/517 Yr.2	E	Pu	Measure Leadership/Community
Ingersoll (2003)	RR	Turnover	Qn	S	55,000	E, MS, HS	Pu, Pr	Reasons for Turnover
Jacob (2013)	RR	Urban Admin.	Qn	A	24,010	E, MS, HS	Pu	Dismissal Decisions
Johnson & Birkeland (2003)	J	Retention	Ql	I	47/50	E, MS, HS	Pu, Pr, Ch	Why Teachers Leave
Ladd (2011)	J	Perceptions	Qn	A,S	42,871	E, MS, HS	Pu, Pr, Ch	Perceptions and Attrition
Lochmiller (2016)	J	Feedback	Ql	I	50	HS	Pu	Explore Administrators' Leadership
Mawhinney (2008)	J	Interactions	Ql	O, I	16 (312 hours)	E, MS	NA	Dealing With Stress
OECD* (2014)	G	International Overview	Qn	S	3,150	E, MS, HS	Pu, Pr, Ch	Principal and Teacher Dev.
Painter (2000)	J	Teacher Dismissal	Ql	S	70	E, MS	Pu	Barriers to Evaluation
Podolsky, et. al. (2016)	RR	Teacher Shortage	Qn	A	Various	E, MS, HS	Pu, Ch	Why Teachers Enter, Stay, Leave
Redding & Henry (2018)	J	Monthly Turnover	Qn	A	13,665	E, MS, HS	Pu, Pr	Novice Teacher Retention
Robinson (2017)	J	Music Teacher Eval	X	S/I	7	E, MS, HS	Pu	Policy Review
Ronfeldt & McQueen (2017)	J	Induction	Qn	A	13,000	E, MS, HS	Pu, Pr, Ch	Induction and Retention
Schaefer (2013)	J	Attrition	Ql	N	1	E, MS, HS	NA	Reflexive Analysis
Smith & Ingersoll (2004)	J	Induction Programs	Qn	A	3,225	E, MS, HS	Pu, Pr	Induction Effectiveness
Tickle, et. al. (2011)	J	Principal Support	Qn	A	34,810	E, MS, HS	Pu	Administration Support

Key: T = publication type (J = journal article, RR = research organization report, B = book, G = government report); R = research design (S = survey, I = interview, O = Observation, A = Database Analysis, N=Narrative); M = research method (Qn = quantitative; Ql = qualitative, X = Mixed Method); D = Duration; P = sample size; ST = Setting (E = elementary, MS = middle school or junior high, HS = high school); Y = school type (Pu = Public, Pr = Private, Pa = parochial, Ch = charter, NA = not applicable); *OECD = Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

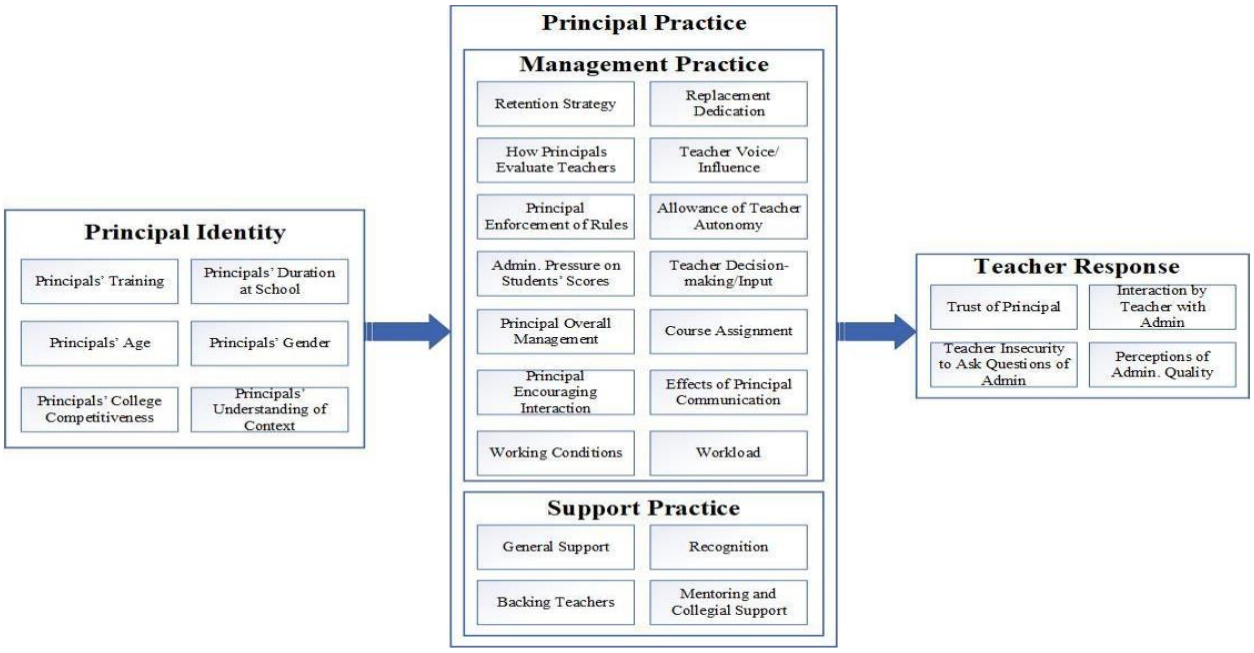
In all, there were 24 quantitative, five qualitative, and two mixed methods studies included in this review. The majority of the included articles included all school levels - elementary, middle and high school (68%), and although private and charter schools were included, most of the included articles were analyses of data gathered in public schools (74%). There were fewer included studies based on interviews (16%) and observations (3%), with the majority as survey analyses, many from large-scale datasets (84%).

The annotated bibliographies of articles included in this review included, among other items, included a "description of results" and "direct quote(s) regarding effect(s) of administration". Using text from each article associated to these two elements, the researchers collaboratively engaged in an open coding procedure, resulting in codes of no more than six words for each article. These codes, a qualitative representation of each article, were then used as elements in an axial coding process, corroborated by both researchers, resulting in four, organically emergent themes: (a) principal identity, (b) management practice, (c) support practice, and (d) teacher response.

To simplify even further, the researchers combined two of these themes - management practice and support practice - under a general heading defined as "principal practice". Using a constant comparative analysis, the researchers associated each of the included articles to each of the themes, resulting in a conceptual framework for the study. Figure 2 provides the conceptual framework which emerged from this collaborative coding process. This graphic representation shows how principal identity influences principal practice, which in turn has an effect on teachers who serve in their schools.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework



Note. Conceptual framework was created using a constant comparative analysis conducted collaboratively by the authors. Each of the included articles was associated to one of more of the included categories. This graphic representation shows how principal identity influences principal practice, which in turn has an effect on teachers who serve in their schools

Assessment of Quality of Included Literature

In order to assess the quality of the literature included, separate criteria for qualitative and quantitative studies were needed. In searching for a manner to evaluate the qualitative studies used in this review, the researchers came upon a study by Dixon, Fitzpatrick & Roberts (2001), which stated that "it is necessary to (weight) the (qualitative) studies…to contribute to a synthesis of evidence." (p. 130). The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018), developed by the Oxford Centre, establishes specific criteria to assess the quality of qualitative studies. The CASP criteria evaluates specific aspects of qualitative studies, evidenced by: (a) a clear statement of the aims of the research, (b) a justification of the study's recruitment methods, (c) a justification of the manner in which data was collected, (d) an examination of the researcher's role, (e) a consideration of ethical issues inherent in the particular study, (f) the sufficiency of the data analysis, (g) the positionality of the researcher in the study, and (h) an examination of the validity, credibility and generalizability of the study.

An assessment of the CASP criteria was separately performed on each article in this study by the two researchers, indicating either "Yes (Y)," "No (N)," "Can't Tell (CT)," or "Not Applicable (NA)" for each of the criterion. Afterwards, all discrepancies between the two researchers' assessments were investigated, and resolved collaboratively. The Critical Appraisal

Skills Programme (CASP) is provided in Appendix A. Although the selection of the articles included in the study had been concluded prior to this assessment and results of evaluating these articles showed a general adherence to best practices, the analysis also revealed some areas of weakness. For example, an analysis of the "justification of the manner in which data was collected" showed a preponderance of self-reported data.

In order to assess the quality of the quantitative literature, the authors created a rubric of seven criteria based on qualities outlined in "Characteristics of Quantitative Research" in *An Introduction to Educational Research* (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017, p. 118-120). This rubric is provided in Appendix B. Whereas none of the reviewed studies included interventions (which would have allowed for specific measures, such as effect size), evaluating the degree that each of these studies specifically addressed objectivity, generalizability, positionality and error serves to generally describe the quality of each of the included quantitative studies.

In the assessment process, the quantitative and qualitative literature were evaluated independently by the authors. Both quantitative and qualitative sources were evaluated, resulting in 79% adherence to criteria. Following independent evaluations, it became apparent that one question in the quantitative evaluation was inherently "Not Applicable" for 20 of the 31 articles that analyzed data gathered from an outside source (e.g. SASS; TFS; state, city or local educational agency data). This question asked if the researcher(s) imposed conditions to increase the objectivity of their study, including taking measures to ensure the data was collected accurately. Although some studies analyzed datasets which had been collected by an outside source, the researchers were not involved with data collection. Other than this question, all responses were evaluated by both authors and compared, resulting in an 89% agreement. Each conflicting response was subsequently reviewed and resolved collaboratively. Results of this collaborative assessment are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Assessment of Quality of Included Literature

Study/Evaluation Question	Research Method	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Boyd et al. (2011)	Quantitative	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y			
Carver-Thomas, et al. (2017)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	Y			
Corbell et al. (2010)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	Y			
Curtis (2012)	Quantitative	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	NA	N			
Dee & Wyckoff (2013)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	Y	NA			
Dizon-Ross (2018)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y			
Djonko-Moore (2012)	Qualitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Djonko-Moore (2015)	Quantitative	Y	N	Y	Y	NA	NA	Y			
Donaldson (2013)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	Y			
Ford et al. (2018)	Quantitative	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	NA	Y			
Gates (2019)	Quantitative	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			
Griffith (2004)	Quantitative	CT	Y	Y	Y	N	NA	N			
Grissom (2011)	Quantitative	CT	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	Y			
Grissom (2011)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	Y			
Grissom (2019)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA			
Hanselman (2016)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	Y			
Ingersoll (2003)	Quantitative	Y	N	Y	Y	NA	NA	N			
Jacob (2013)	Quantitative	Y	N	Y	Y	NA	NA	Y			

Johnson & Birkeland (2003)	Qualitative	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	CT	Y	Y	Y
Ladd (2011)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	Y			
Lochmiller (2016)	Qualitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	CT	Y	Y	Y
Mawhinney (2008)	Qualitative	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y
OECD (2014)	Quantitative	Y	N	Y	Y	NA	NA	NA			
Painter (2000)	Qualitative	N	Y	N	Y	CT	N	CT	CT	Y	Y
Podolsky et al. (2016)	Quantitative	Y	N	Y	Y	NA	NA	N			
Redding & Henry (2018)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	Y			
Robinson (2017)	Qualitative	Y	CT	CT	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Ronfeldt & McQueen (2017)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	Y			
Schaefer (2013)	Qualitative	Y	Y	Y	NA	Y	NA	N	N	N	N
Smith & Ingersoll (2004)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	NA			
Tickle (2011)	Quantitative	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	NA			

Key: Y=Yes, N=No, CT=Can't Tell, NA=Not Applicable. See Appendices for question descriptions.

Results

Based on an evaluation performed by the researchers using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018) and the Characteristics of Quantitative Research (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017), the studies included in this review adhered to 89% of established standards for acceptable research. As a result of a systematic analysis of the articles included in this study, four distinct but interrelated themes emerged: (a) principal identity, (b) management practice, (c) support practice, and (d) teacher response. Articles related to the principal identity theme (four articles) include those which relate to intrinsic factors of the school administrator (e.g. demographic, years at the school site, type/levels of prior training). Literature contained within the management theme (19 articles) relate to tasks that school administrators traditionally employ at their schools (e.g. evaluation, hiring, course assignment, enforcement of rules). Support practice articles theme (14 articles) include research which focused on specific tasks that school administrators employed to increase the effectiveness of the teachers at their schools (e.g. recognition, mentoring, support with challenging parents). Finally, articles grouped in the teacher response category theme (seven articles) include literature describing the manner in which teachers responded to administrative efforts at their sites (e.g. perceptions of administrator effectiveness, increased communication/collaboration, feelings of trust).

Principal identity

A number of studies included in this review provided evidence that factors related to the identity of school principals affected the degree to which these professionals could support their teachers. Administrator identity, for the purposes of this study, refers to characteristics which purportedly affect principal interactions with their teachers, including those which are: (a) inherent in nature (age and gender), (b) a direct result of academic preparation prior to professional practice (principal's college competitiveness and preparation in specific subject areas), and (c) directly related to the principal's current professional work (number of years served at their sites, previously acquired professional development, inherent structures in the school/district that inhibit effective service).

Understanding contextual factors (e.g. school level, subjects taught) that affect the manner that school administrators support their teachers relates to the identity of principals (i.e. prior teaching experiences at the same school level and prior teaching in the same subject areas). To better understand these connections, Lochmiller (2016) investigated instructional feedback provided to a select group of math and science teachers by their principals. The study was performed in five, comprehensive high schools in the Western United States and included 12 school administrators and 39 classroom teachers. The participants were interviewed "to illuminate the administrator's understanding of the content area they supervised, their understanding of the subculture within which that understanding was situated, and the teachers' perceptions of the feedback they received" (p. 88). The author posited that school administrators are presumed to be experts in the curricular, instructional and assessment aspects for their schools (p. 81).

Results of the study revealed that teachers felt that administrators who had prior experiences teaching in the same subjects at the same level (i.e. math and/or science in high school) "tended to offer slightly different (instructional feedback) from those who were not previously teachers in those subjects (and) administrators with (similar subject) experience(s) often reinforced their own views about instruction" (p. 97). Lochmiller's study connects to the theoretical frame for this study – the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), which asserts that administrators and teachers experience increases in personal motivation when they establish a sense of "relatedness" to each other (e.g. same subject area) (Ryan and Deci, 2002).

More recently, Robinson (2017) investigated music teachers' perspectives of principal support in high-stakes (i.e. value-added measure included) schools. The ability for principals in these schools to not only understand the contextual connections related to a specific subject matter (i.e. music), but also to recognize the impacts of evaluation on teacher morale in high-stakes schools where teacher promotion/pay is more directly connected to evaluation, relates to perceptions of principal support of these teachers.

Management Practices

Studies included in this review of literature provided evidence that factors related to general management practices adopted by school principals affected the degree that these professionals support their teachers. These practices related to the ways that principals: (a) evaluated and focused on retention and/or replacement of teachers, (b) encouraged autonomy, agency, interaction and decision-making by their teachers, (c) focused on student achievement (i.e. standardized test scores) and attended to rules/discipline at their schools, (d) communicated with their teachers and provided an environment of teacher-teacher communication, and (e) considered and adopted policies regarding workload and working conditions of their teachers.

Management practices employed by school principals vary greatly, depending on their personal/professional dispositions, the knowledge and skills they acquired in principal preparation and other training, past experiences, support available to them and the particular circumstances that they are presented with at their sites. To investigate the degree that a "comprehensive principal pipeline would be more effective than business-as-usual approaches to the preparation and management of school leaders" (p. xiv), Gates, Baird, Master & Chavez-Herrerias (2019) evaluated student achievement data to compare large, urban school districts which substantively supported the management practices of school principals versus those which had no specific program in place. Results of the study showed that, relative to districts which did not have a specific program in place, districts which dedicated support to principals (costing less than 0.5

percent of the district budget) showed significant increases in student achievement and retention of principals at these sites. Although this study highlights the connections between administrative practice/retention and student achievement, a key link between the two are the teachers who relationships with both parties. Regardless of the preparation and district funding/support of school leaders, the majority of the literature included in this review reveal the degree that principal management practices affect the degree that school administrators are able to support their teachers.

Evaluation, Retention and Replacement of Teachers. A number of studies in this review explored the connections between how teachers were evaluated and their feelings about retention. Following this research line, a recent study by Ford et al. (2018) performed a secondary analysis of Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) data gathered by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2013. Investigating the relationship between teacher evaluation experiences and overall job satisfaction among teachers internationally, data analysis revealed that teachers who used feedback from their evaluators to make changes in their teaching rated higher in job satisfaction than those who did not make these changes. That said, the results also showed that teacher satisfaction was higher in schools where the primary evaluator was someone other than the school principal.

In a more recent, localized study, Grissom (2019) analyzed longitudinal administrative data gathered by the State of Tennessee between the years 2011 and 2017 (corresponding to the first six years of the implementation of a new teacher evaluation system) to investigate the effect of strategic retention strategies employed by principals. The study found that the turnover rate of teachers who received observation scores characterized as "very low" rated roughly 23 percentage points higher than that of teachers with the top observation scores (p. 532). With regard to how evaluations of administrators are related to their retention practices, Grissom found that administrators who received higher ratings on their own evaluation rubric were more likely to retain teachers with higher observation scores, and less likely to retain teachers with very lower observation scores (p. 535).

Teacher Autonomy, Agency, Interaction and Decision-Making. A substantive portion of research articles included in this study focused on the importance for school principals to support teachers by giving them autonomy, agency, opportunities for peer collaboration and opportunities to express their professional opinions. Boyd et al. (2011) surveyed first-year teachers serving in New York City schools in 2005, and again in 2006. Combining survey results with district administrator file data, the research team found that well over 40% of the study participants stated that dissatisfaction with the administration was the most important factor in deciding to transfer or leave teaching (p. 327). More specifically, the teachers in the study cited that having autonomy in their classrooms as a reason for remaining at their schools.

The needs of teachers to provide input in how their schools should operate was cited numerous times in the included literature. Results in a study by Ingersoll (2003), reveal that "the most common reasons (of those who depart because of job dissatisfaction is) little faculty input into school decision-making" (p. 9). Although they may exist, there were no studies in this review that explored specific interventions by principals that provide increased decision-making opportunities to their teachers.

Finally, in a related study which focuses on teacher identity for music teachers (Robinson, 2017), the author appealed for greater autonomy, relatedness, and competence in the teaching force (p. 8). Substantive research included in this study provides evidence for increased efforts by school administrators to support teacher autonomy, agency, interaction and decision-making.

Robinson's study connects to the theoretical frame for this study – the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), which asserts that teachers experience increases in personal motivation when their administrator endorses teacher autonomy at their sites (Ryan and Deci, 2002).

Student Achievement and School Rule/Discipline Related. A few research articles included in this review of literature focused on the manner in which school principals support their teachers with regard to increasing student achievement and the enforcement of school rules for students. Dizon-Ross (2018) found that principals are motivated, due to accountability pressures, to actively support measures that are attractive to teachers (e.g. teacher development, increased opportunities to collaborate, increased autonomy) (p. 22). In addition, according to the author, the data support the notion that "induced by accountability pressure, principals at lower-graded schools put more effort into making the schools better places for teachers to work, or into attracting and retaining high-quality teachers" (p. 3).

In contrast, Ladd (2011) evaluated teachers' perceptions of working conditions in economically disadvantaged schools, including how the school principal enforced school rules, and related these factors to teacher retention. Working conditions related to establishing and implementing policies associated to student discipline were measured. The researcher used data available from the State of North Carolina, gathered from school administrators and teachers alike. Data from elementary, middle and high school revealed that:

> the elements in the (leadership) factor suggest that North Carolina teachers have a broad view of leadership that starts with the general support of the school leadership for teachers, especially with respect to their effort to maintain discipline in the classroom. (p. 241)

Communications with/between Teachers. The degree that effective communication between school administrators and their teachers is present was studied by researchers in this review. Using NCES data from the 1999-2000 SASS and TFS questionnaires, Smith & Ingersoll (2004) found that the degree that beginning teachers reported having regular, supportive communication with their principal varied little across school types - about 80% in public and charter schools and 85% in private schools. Regardless of setting, substantive communication with school principals, other administrators, or department chairs was linked with reducing the likelihood of both teacher moving to another school and departing from the profession (p. 703).

With regard to mentoring and collegial support, the OECD TALIS study (2014) which included participants from the United States and a host of other countries, the authors state that, "by encouraging teachers to learn from one another, principals help teachers remain current in their practice and may also help to develop more collaborative practices between teachers in their school" (p. 59).

Workload and Working Condition Related. Teachers evaluate the working conditions at their school sites to understand the degree that they are in a conducive environment to work effectively. Articles in our literature review focus on the ways that school principals affect working conditions at their sites, including how they enhance/affect the environment of the school and make resources available to their teachers. In a study described earlier that focused on teacher control in the classroom, Djonko-Moore (2012) also researched the role of school environment, in general, as it relates to teacher satisfaction in U.S. schools. In this article, Djonko-Moore defines a positive school environment as one which includes a supportive administration where the general perception is that the school is well-run (p. 10).

Grissom (2011) hypothesized that teacher satisfaction and turnover are explained by school working conditions and that disadvantaged schools with the greatest staffing challenges are

connected to the ability of principals to retain teachers at those sites (p. 2552). The author stated that "teachers working in schools with larger numbers of nonwhite and low-income students have significantly lower levels of job satisfaction and significantly higher propensities to leave the school" (p. 2576).

Support Practices

A number of studies included in this review of literature supported the assertion that factors related to principal support practices affected the degree to which these professionals could support their teachers. These included recognizing teacher efforts and expertise and supporting teachers with difficult parents.

General Support. A number of studies included in this review of literature focused on the ways that school administrators supported their teachers in general. In their localized study involving teachers in New York City schools between 2005 and 2006, the research team of Boyd et al. (2011) found that over 40% of participants in the study identified dissatisfaction with the administration as the most important factor related to their feelings about leaving the profession (p. 326-327). Djonko-Moore (2016) took a separate look at the data from the same 2007-2008 NCES SASS survey, as well as the 2009 Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS), investigating the mobility and attrition of teachers serving in high-poverty, racially segregated (HPRS) schools across the U.S. The author found that, "teachers' perceptions of their students' behavior and teachers' perceptions of community problems have the greatest influence on teacher mobility while urbanicity and student–teacher ratio were found to have the greatest impact on teacher attrition" (p. 1080). To ameliorate these conditions, Djonko-Moore suggests that if principals and administrators want to reduce teacher mobility in their schools, they should consider teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the student population when making hiring decisions (p. 1080).

Using data gathered in the Teacher Questionnaire from the 2003-2004 NCES SASS survey as a basis for analysis, Tickle et al. (2011) found that "administrative support mediates the effect of teaching experience, student behavior, and teachers' satisfaction with their salary on both teachers' job satisfaction and intent to stay in teaching" (p. 346).

Recognition and Support with Parents. The ability for principals to recognize the efforts of teachers at their site was of interest to a number of researchers whose contributions are included in this review of literature. Painter's (2000) qualitative investigation of elementary and middle school principals in Oregon provides evidence that even with teachers with performance issues, more frequent collaboration with their principals allowed for them to obtain satisfactory improvement. Additionally, the author found that principals perceived outside observers to overestimate the number of low-performing teachers under their supervision during their administrative tenure (p. 258). In a study with multiple perspectives, Johnson & Birkeland (2003) used a qualitative approach to validate that administrative support of teachers, as they interact with parents, is essential. Additionally, aside from the need for administrators to involve parents more at their sites, teachers in the study revealed the importance of school administrators who "backed" their teachers (with difficult parents).

Teacher Response

As principal identities affect their general management and specific support practices at their school sites, teachers respond to their administrators in a variety of ways. Certain studies included

in this review of literature focused on these teacher responses, including the degree that teachers trusted and otherwise interacted with their principals (including their ability to approach them with questions) and perceptions their principals' professional merit based on their own experiences and those related to them by their colleagues.

Trust of and Teacher Interaction with Principal. Using results of the Perceptions of Success Inventory for Beginning Teachers (PSI-BT), Corbell et al. (2010) found that "new teachers who rarely interact with administrators report diminished perceptions of success" (p. 76). Results of this study indicate that adequate supportive practices are necessary for teachers to be confident in their abilities and success in the classroom, and when these effective practices are not implemented, teachers' feelings of inadequacy are exacerbated.

Due to the varying levels of trust by teaches of their principals, relationships among teachers can serve to be the primary connections that provide the teacher with emotional and professional support. In one, site-specific study (Mawhinney, 2008), researchers conducted extensive interviews and observations at a kindergarten-8th grade school in a large, urban school district between 2005 and 2007. Results of the study showed that at this particular site, there were numerous accounts by teachers not supported by administration, and as a result, teachers experienced a lack of trust with district administration (p. 199). As a coping strategy, the teachers in the school communicated informally among themselves, which in the opinions of the authors, provided a forum to express their concerns and anxieties (p. 207). Additionally, it was found that these teachers relied on laughing about themselves, practical jokes, and sharing of amusing stories about students to relieve stress and increase feelings of professional support.

Perceptions by Teachers of Quality of Administrator. Teacher perceptions of the quality of the administrative management practices affects their personal feelings about retention. Boyd et al. (2011) investigated results of a survey of first- and second-year teachers in New York City to conclude that the perceived quality of administration is influenced by the amount of feedback principals are able to provide. The authors revealed that teachers have different preferences for professional autonomy, with different expectations for the optimum number of classroom visits and amount of instructional feedback by administrators (p. 329).

In an experimental evaluation of a systematic intervention for upper elementary science teachers in 80 elementary schools in Los Angeles (Hanselman et al., 2016), researchers investigated the perceptions that teachers had about their site administrators. The study found that teachers' perceptions of the degree that administrators are retained at their schools factors into their assessment of principal quality. The researchers found that "principal turnover causes immediate instability in teachers' perception of principal leadership" (p. 29). Hanselman, et al.'s study connects to the theoretical frame for this study – the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), which asserts that teachers experience increases in personal motivation when they feel that administrators are perceived to be competent - indicated, in this case, by retention at their schools (Ryan and Deci, 2002). Lastly, Tickle et al. (2011) analyzed of the data gathered from the administration of the 2003-2004 SASS survey to conclude that "administrative support mediates the effect of teaching experience, administrative support, and teachers' satisfaction with their salary on teachers' job satisfaction and intent to stay in teaching" (p. 346).

Conclusions

Included in this systematic review of literature are research articles published between 2000 and 2019 that reveal, to some degree, ways that school administrators support their teachers, as well

the degree that teachers perceive these administrative efforts. These articles were evaluated, in a systematic way, to determine the quality of methods and analyses conducted through the use of carefully developed rubrics. The degree that administrators can support the teachers serving in their schools is determined by a myriad of factors. According to individual studies included herein, there are aspects of an administrator's identity (e.g. age, gender, prior college competitiveness) and structural components (e.g. salary schedule, contractual workload) that are not in administrator control which affect an administrator's ability to support their teachers.

The articles in this review detail strategies that are in the control of school administrators that promise to increase their ability to supportive them. Whereas this is not an exhaustive list, these may include: (a) increasing their understanding of subject matter and instructional practices which they are not familiar with, (b) engagement in professional development related to teacher evaluation and general support, (c) advocating/securing additional funds for needed resources, (d) increasing their effectiveness to have students follow school rules, (e) increasing teacher agency and decision-making, and (f) assisting them with difficult parents.

Implications

With substantiated research results in place, it is recommended that current researchers develop and implement interventions to further understand ways that administrators can provide increased autonomy, agency, interaction and decision-making opportunities to the teachers at their sites**.** The theoretical frame of this study (BPNT), asserts that teachers and administrators experience increases in personal motivation when specific psychological needs (e.g. relatedness, autonomy, competence) are supported. (Ryan and Deci, 2002). This systematic review of literature provides ample evidence that administrators who engage in professional practices to support their teachers with instructional needs, training, meaningful evaluation, increased agency, student discipline, and communications with parents further ensures that these psychological needs are met. These practices also serve as measures administrators can use to address the second research question for the study, namely "what does recent literature tell us about a school administrator's ability to retain effective teachers?"

Although many articles included in this systematic review of literature focus on practices that school administrators can employ to increase support for teachers at their sites, there is also evidence that increased job responsibilities related to increased accountability of teachers and students competes for time that these professionals could dedicate to theses support efforts. Principal preparation programs are positioned to adopt curriculum and fieldwork experiences that more specifically address these challenges for aspiring school administrators. For school administrators already serving in schools, it is incumbent on their central offices to increase support and training for these professionals to incorporate additional teacher support measures at their schools. Increased school administrator effectiveness, as evidenced by literature in this review, has a direct impact on teacher effectiveness/retention. Policy makers at the local, state and federal levels are strongly encouraged to increase funding to meet the needs of school administrators to increase support for, and retention of, their teachers.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

There were a number of limitations to this systematic review of literature, including that the study was conducted from the perspective of two university affiliated persons, not practitioners directly

involved in school administration or teaching. Also, databases used to search for relevant articles are limited in scope based on subscriptions and contributing parties. Sample sizes, data collection methods, and other methodological parameters were not specified in advance when choosing the literature used in this study. Delimitations to the research included the omission by the researchers of specific types of literature, including reports, news articles, and magazines. Additionally, the study included articles previously accumulated by the lead researcher, gathered from prior research.

Recommendations for future research involving the support of teachers by their site administrators include the increased use of instructional technology, support during/after school closings due to world events (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic) and the relative effectiveness of multiple administrators at a single site, versus a single administrator. In addition, it would be beneficial for future research to investigate the support of teachers by administrators using other theoretical perspectives (e.g. critical race, self-efficacy).

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Appendix A

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Questions

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?
   - what was the goal of the research
   - why it was thought important
   - its relevance
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?
   - If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants
   - Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal?
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?
   - if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?
   - If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected
   - If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study
   - If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?
   - If the setting for the data collection was justified
   - If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)
   - If the researcher has justified the methods chosen
   - If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)
   - If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why
   - If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)
   - If the researcher has discussed saturation of data
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?
   - If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location
   - How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?
   - If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained
   - If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
   - If approval has been sought from the ethics committee
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?
   - If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process

- If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data
- Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process
- If sufficient data are presented to support the findings
- To what extent contradictory data are taken into account
- Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?
   - If the findings are explicit
   - If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments
   - If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)
   - If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question
10. How valuable is the research?
    - If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature
    - If they identify new areas where research is necessary
    - If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used

Appendix B

Quantitative Research Evaluate Criteria (derived from Lochmiller & Lester, 2017)

1. Is the research based rooted in positivism?
    - Is there an objective reality to be known?
    - Can this reality be known concretely?
    - Is precise measurement and structured analysis of the data appropriate to lead to a full understanding of reality?
2. Is deductive analysis central to the research?
    - Does the study work from a set of premises (hypotheses) to formulate a broader understanding or conclusion?
    - Does the researcher seek to confirm or disconfirm a hypothesis through analysis of numerical data?
    - Does the researcher think critically about the theories that inform their hypothesis (es)?
3. Does the research rely almost exclusively on numerical data?
4. Does the research use statistics as a tool to make sense of the data, not as an end of itself (i.e. are there conclusions based on the numerical analysis)?
5. Does the research provide the degree that the results are generalizable?
    - Did the researcher(s) describe how the results might apply to a larger population?
    - Did the researchers utilize randomization or random assignment in their participant selection (individuals had an equal chance of being included in the study)?
6. Did the researcher(s) impose conditions to increase objectivity in their study?
    - Did the researcher(s) take measures to ensure that their own bias(es) didn't contaminate the study?
    - Did the researcher(s) take measures to ensure that the data collected accurately reflected the reality of those who were studied?
7. Did the researcher(s) take steps to ensure that error was reduced or eliminated?
    - Did the researcher(s) take steps to ensure that measurement error was minimized or eliminated to the degree possible?
    - Did the researcher(s) take steps to ensure that all data was considered-none overlooked, ignored or interpreted incorrectly.

Appendix C

Definition of Terms

1. teacher turnover - an umbrella term which describes the departure of teachers from the teaching profession, including retirement and pre-retirement
2. teaching attrition - the general phenomenon of teachers leaving the profession
3. teaching retention – a general term that relates to efforts to increase the amount of time teachers remain in the profession
4. support – a general term that describes assistance by administrators for teachers

A Proposed Model for Transformational Education

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The proposed Transformational Education (TE) model clarifies a dynamic process where teachers and other school staff embrace their contribution to educational leadership. Reworking Transformational Leadership (TL) constructs for a stronger fit within the classroom, this concept paper reviews the literature to construct a model illustrating the relationship among teacher behaviors, school climate, student wellness, and performance outcomes. The proposed conceptual framework describes teacher TL behaviors that directly and indirectly influence student performance outcomes. Student wellness outcomes mediate this relationship, and a positive school climate creates a context where teacher leadership benefits are maximized. Most work on effective school leadership posits administrators as leaders, with teacher factors only as mediators of student outcomes. The TE model described here is distinctive in its approach to apply TL to teachers, describing the means by which teachers benefit students in a supportive classroom and school context.

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Leadership within organizations has received a great deal of scholarly attention for the last century. While all this work proceeds from the basic premise that leadership involves influence, understandings of the nature of this influence have varied greatly (Vroom & Jago, 2007). Initially, heroic conceptions of leadership focused on traits yielded to behavior-based formulations, and these have been expanded into education through instructional leadership (Coladarci, 1992) and transformational school leadership (Leithwood, 1992), among others.

Transformational school leadership emerges from transformational leadership (TL), arguably the most widely researched leadership theory among organizational researchers in the last three decades (Anderson, 2017; Bass, 1985; Berkovich, 2016). Core characteristics include increasing others' commitment to a compelling vision, motivating followers to accomplish shared values and goals, providing empathy and individual support, and developing others' intellectual capacities for higher performance (Bass, 1985, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Transformational leaders are often described as charismatic and trusting (Bass, 1990). Notably, authority does not stem from formal positions but instead from the ability to foster a collective environment of inspiration and mastery, and a collective capacity to achieve goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Many researchers have highlighted the use of TL by school principals (e.g., Allen et al., 2015; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999, 2006). Principal TL behaviors have been correlated with student academic improvement, both directly and through numerous mediators (Basham, 2012; Day et al., 2016; York et al., 2015). Other studies have found benefits for teachers' job satisfaction (Podsakoff et al.,1996), organizational commitment (Yammarino et al., 1998), and individual and collective self-efficacy (Ninković & Knežević Florić, 2018).

This model of leadership, like others, suffers shortcomings. One is a lack of attention to the situation and complexity of leadership (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013; Vroom & Jago, 2007). More recent theories posit that leadership is distributed, embedded in the network of roles and interactions creating an organization (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Spillane, 2005). For schools, these oversights have led to research focused only on principals as leaders, with teachers as followers. Only few studies have examined the leadership behaviors of teachers; those that have done so have revealed the positive impact of teacher leadership on student and school outcomes, including school climate (Battistich et al., 1997; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2010; Bolkan et al., 2011).

These studies, taken together, suggest teacher leadership is part of a network of factors related to student outcomes. However, no attempt has been made to map this network and describe the interactions involved in a teacher's influence on student outcomes. In this article, we attempt to articulate such a map through a model for Transformational Education.

Development of the Transformational Education Model

To develop the Transformational Education (TE) model, we began from the premise that leadership is distributed and that teachers play a key leadership role both for the school and in their classrooms. In modeling teachers' influence on students, we start with the TL framework, formally applied to education by Leithwood (1992), whose six constructs mirrored the four developed by Bass (1985): (a) idealized influence—providing a compelling vision, setting high standards for emulation, serving as a role model for followers, demonstrating high moral standards, and putting followers' needs first; (b) inspirational motivation—engaging followers in shared goals, providing meaning and challenge to followers' work, and inspiring enthusiasm and optimism; (c) intellectual stimulation—stimulating innovation and creativity, and developing followers' intellectual

capacities for higher performance; and (d) individualized consideration—providing empathy and support to followers, addressing followers' needs and interests, and coaching and mentoring to help followers develop new skills.

Using TL as a starting point for the construction of a model, we then turned to examination of the power of its influence on various organizational outcomes. A robust body of literature attests to the influence of TL behaviors on followers in organizations. In schools, these include teachers and students (Sergiovanni, 1999). Research has found even direct effects on student engagement and achievement from principal TL behaviors (Leithwood & Jantzi 1997, 1999, 2005; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Much of the influence of TL on students, however, is exerted via direct effects on teacher- and school-level outcomes (Boberg & Bougeois, 2016; Ngang, 2011). These and other studies have found specific links between TL and student performance are mediated by as many as 41 such factors (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Among the proximal and distal teacher outcomes associated with principal TL behaviors are motivation (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006), job satisfaction (Aydin et al., 2013; Cansoy, 2019), individual and collective efficacy (Ibrahim et al., 2014; Ling, Pihie, Asimirin, & Fooi, 2015; Ross & Gray, 2006), and several facets of commitment, including organizational commitment and commitment to students (Dumay & Galand, 2012; Jackson et al., 2013; Sun, 2015).

Again, these outcomes have been associated with *school leadership*—leadership as a set of behaviors exhibited by principals, without respect to the distributed nature of leadership and the understanding that teachers are themselves leaders, working directly with students and contributing to student outcomes. Indeed, leadership involves a process of influence, and educators exert that influence most directly through teaching.

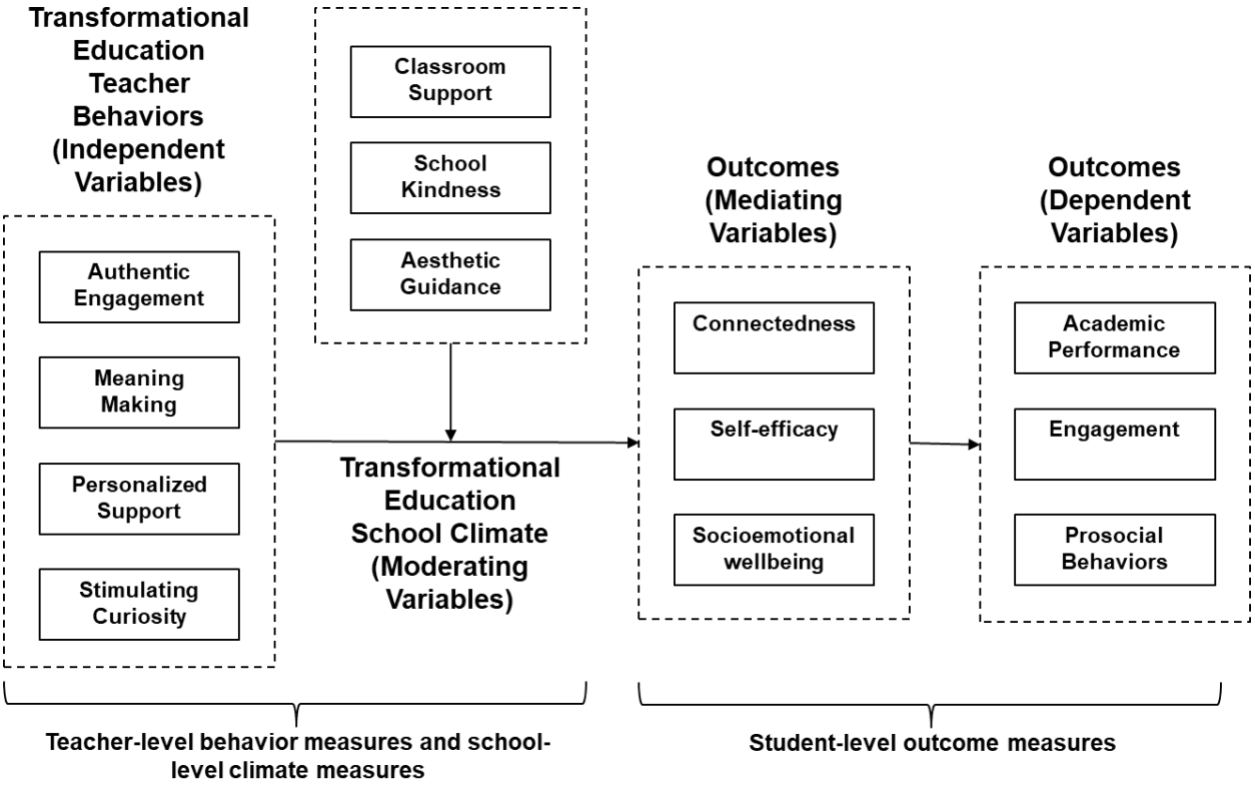
Existing research on teacher leadership acknowledges teachers' influence, though scholarly focus has been on teachers as organizational actors, not as educators. An early writer in the field, Wasley (1991) conceived of teacher leadership as "the ability to encourage colleagues to change" (p. 32). Other researchers, including Gehrke (1991) and Muijs and Harris (2003), acknowledge a role for teacher leaders in the improvement of their own instruction, but they emphasize influencing colleagues through in-school decision-making, in-service trainings, performance evaluations, and supportive relationships—not teaching.

The little work on teachers' classroom leadership indicates that behaviors roughly aligned with TL predict a number of student- and school-level outcomes. Pounder (2010, 2014) conducted studies on teacher TL behaviors in universities, finding extra student effort and a positive classroom experience for students with transformational teachers. Battistich et al. (1997) measured elementary school teacher behaviors, including (a) warmth and supportiveness, (b) emphasis on prosocial values, (c) encouragement of cooperation, (d) elicitation of student thinking and idea expression, and (e) and promotion of student influence in the classroom. These behaviors were associated with students supporting and working collaboratively with one another, and with active student engagement in classroom activities and decision-making.

While more research is needed, we argue that these results, taken with robust support for the effectiveness of transformational school leadership, enable the creation of a model to provide a network of school- and student-level outcomes associated with *teacher leadership*.

Figure 1

The Transformational Education (TE) Model



The TE model involves four components: (a) teacher behaviors, (b) school climate, (c) student wellness, and (d) student performance. Teacher behaviors are aligned with the tenets of TL and predict student performance outcomes, consisting of engagement, prosocial behaviors, and academic performance. Student wellness—connectedness, self-efficacy, and socioemotional wellbeing—mediates this relationship; its factors are directly influenced by teacher leadership and contribute to student performance (Shamir et al., 1993). School climate contributes to student wellness, providing an additive effect (Gray et al., 2017), and its components of aesthetic guidance, school kindness, and classroom support allow for a more explanatory model. A description of each component of the model and subcomponents, as well as the rationale for model inclusion, is provided below.

Model Description and Supporting Literature

Teacher Behaviors

Teacher leadership behaviors predict school and student outcomes, including connectedness, collective sense of community, and wellbeing (Battistich et al., 1997) as well as student learning (Seashore Louis et al., 2010). Teacher behaviors are a critical component of TE because students' positive outcomes constitute the ultimate goal of education. These behaviors are composed of (a) *authentic engagement*, (b) *meaning making*, (c) *personalized support*, and (d) *stimulating curiosity*. They align broadly with dimensions of TL and with teacher behaviors (e.g., supporting

different learning styles and having a growth mindset) found in project-based learning literature (Boss & Larner, 2018), as well as with teacher leadership practices found by Battistich et al. (1997) to shape school climate and student behaviors (see Table 1). In this way, TE formalizes these teacher behaviors through the creation of a holistic model connecting these behaviors with student outcomes.

Table 1

Teacher Behaviors

Transformational Education	Teacher Leadership Practices (Battistich et al., 1997)	Transformational Leadership
Authentic engagement	Low use of extrinsic control	Idealized influence
Meaning making	Emphasis on prosocial values; encouragement of cooperation	Inspirational motivation
Stimulating curiosity	Elicitation of student thinking and idea expression	Intellectual stimulation
Personalized support	Warmth and supportiveness; promotion of student influence in the classroom	Individual consideration

Authentic Engagement. Authentic engagement, aligned with TL's idealized influence, involves influencing students through what Battistich et al. (1997) described as low use of extrinsic control. Teachers using authentic engagement eschew external motivators and means of control, instead engaging meaningfully with learning. They believe genuinely in education and their teaching, and they ask students, both directly and through modeling, to feel and act the same way.

Authentic engagement provides a powerful model for students (Cetin, 2018). Evidence suggests that teachers' reactions to student responses and lesson elements may matter more than the content of those responses: Conveying genuine surprise, interest, and engagement creates a more interactive environment and supports learning (Smith & Higgins, 2006). A comprehensive study by Sebastian et al. (2016) found that authentically engaged instruction increased student engagement and achievement. We propose that this behavior also directly influences students' connectedness to teacher and school, and other facets of their wellness, mediating relationships between authentic engagement and student performance as distal outcomes.

Meaning making. Meaning making is distilled from inspirational motivation, focusing on the teacher behaviors that create that motivation. Meaning making occurs when teachers unite students to achieve important, shared goals; they help students to see the importance of their choices and the meaning and values they convey. Meaning making aligns with Battistich et al.'s (1997) emphasis on prosocial values and encouragement of cooperation, as both involve teachers guiding students to explore and articulate values through action, including through collaborative and helping behaviors.

Researchers have identified meaning making as a critical aspect of leadership. Varney (2009) proposed that a key goal of leadership is to continuously create meaning in life, a behavior important for change even at the organizational level. It creates purpose by aligning individuals' goals, resulting in intrinsic motivation and commitment. While studies on teachers are few, principal meaning making is associated with increased teacher commitment (Ibrahim et al., 2014). In Battistich et al.'s (1997) own research, teacher meaning making improved students' sense of

community. Students perceived they all enacted care and support for one another and were important to decision-making in the classroom.

Stimulating Curiosity. Stimulating curiosity shifts TL's intellectual stimulation to focus on what Battistich et al. (1997) described as eliciting student thinking and idea expression. Teachers who stimulate curiosity encourage students to think about *how* and *why*, building curiosity to clarify and solve problems. Stimulating curiosity has been highlighted in education research (e.g., Crough, 2019; Lee et al., 2017; Lindholm, 2018). For instance, Lindholm (2018) proposed that curiosity is a driving force of innovation and learning, emphasizing exploration rather than the accumulation of facts.

In the classroom, stimulating curiosity generates concrete student outcomes. Such stimulation as a school leadership behavior results in increased teacher commitment (Ibrahim et al., 2014). Examining teacher leadership, Bolkan and Goodboy (2010) and Bolkan et al. (2011) found intellectual stimulation resulted in student empowerment and deep and strategic approaches to learning, leading to increased affective and cognitive growth.

Personalized Support. Individualized consideration in TL becomes personalized support in TE, aligned with what Battistich et al. (1997) described as warmth, supportiveness, and the promotion of student influence in the classroom. Teachers enacting this behavior are supportive to each student's needs and tailor instruction to their interests, fostering student growth and decision-making.

In Sebastian et al.'s (2016) study of teacher leadership, personalized support was an outcome of authentically engaged classroom instruction; student engagement and achievement also resulted, though the authors did not assess links among these outcomes. A more recent study by Benner et al. (2017), however, did assess these links, and they found that personalized teacher support promoted engagement. Other research has linked this support with reduced internalizing and school problems, as well as increased personal adjustment (Tennant et al., 2015). We postulate that a similar, model-aligned examination would find an association, consistent with many studies of school leadership and teacher outcomes.

Student Performance

In the TE model, transformational teacher behaviors improve student performance outcomes: academic performance, student engagement, and prosocial behaviors. Research has conceptualized student performance mostly in academic terms, measured through course grades, test results, and standardized test scores (e.g., Allen et al., 2015; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Writing about upside-down educational organizations, Ross et al. (2005) argued for a more expansive view of performance: education should build transformation and growth in students, with approaches that focus on building character and community-mindedness, expressed through empathy, kindness, cooperation, and understanding (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2012).

The inclusion of these additional, non-academic outcomes in the TE model is in part an expression of values and an argument about what education *should* do. But it also emerges from the belief that such skills—to engage, and to empathize and be kind—are critical for students to live healthy and productive lives.

Academic Performance and Engagement. Engagement, in practical terms, refers to the degree to which a student is engaged in the work of meaningful learning, enacting behaviors (e.g., homework completion, observed attention, self-monitoring comprehension) demonstrating compliance with instructions and an intent to learn (DuPaul et al., 1991). This engagement is a

positive outcome on its own and is predictive of increased student performance (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Sabin, 2015). Additional research has linked student engagement with transformational school leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997, 1999). In TE, academic performance refers to demonstrated skill proficiency in written work, overall work quality, and durability of learning (i.e., retaining knowledge and skills learned).

A host of studies find links between school leadership and increased student academic achievement (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Sebastian et al., 2016; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Direct associations are rarely found, however, and the findings of Sebastian et al. (2016) typify this literature, indicating that teacher characteristics and learning climate, among others, mediate the effects of school leadership on student achievement. This study is significant, however, in conceptualizing classroom leadership similarly to Battistich et al. (1997) and to TL—effective instruction is characterized by a teacher's authentic engagement and support for students.

Prosocial Behaviors. As described, student performance goes beyond the academic, and students' ability to empathize and enact kindness are important outcomes from a holistic education. They also reflect the increasing recognition that social and emotional learning matters; however, they are often absent from conceptual models of teaching and learning (Binfet et al., 2016). We conceptualize prosocial behaviors as consisting of empathy and kindness, borrowing Spreng et al.'s (2009) definition of empathy as involving understanding and adaptive responses to others' feelings and effective emotional communication. Kindness refers to "doing good for others" (Layous et al., 2012, para. 2) and includes behaviors such as showing respect to teachers, sharing with someone in need, keeping a promise, and consoling someone anxious or upset (Battistich et al., 1997; Lamborn et al., 1994; Layous et al., 2012).

A significant body of literature supports the notion that teachers can help students develop empathy and kindness (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2006). Using behaviors aligned with those in the TE model, Battistich et al. (1997) found empathetic and kind responses (e.g., concern for others, altruism, acceptance of outgroups, intrinsic motivation to act positively) as a result of the strong community emerging from teacher behaviors.

Student Wellness

Though transformational leadership behaviors can impact student performance directly, these influences are also mediated by other student-level outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Additionally, students play a role in their own personal academic performance, developing characteristics that enable success. Student wellness, in particular, influences both overall health and academic achievement (Thompson & Porto, 2014).

In the TE model, we include student connectedness, self-efficacy, and socioemotional wellbeing as wellness outcomes proximal to teacher leadership and mediating effects on the distal performance outcomes described above.

Connectedness. Connectedness is the extent to which students feel part of the community within their school and among their family and friends (Battistich et al., 1997; Freeman, 2016; Shamir et al., 1993). It is composed of students' internal experiences, perceptions, and feelings about school—encompassing a sense of belonging, relationships with staff and other students, and the feeling that learning is a priority (Osher et al., 2009). School leadership literature finds links between TL behaviors and similar follower outcomes, and these findings support Shamir et al.'s (1993) general identification of organizational conditions.

Connectedness to school, in the form of a sense of community, was found by Battistich et al. (1997) to mediate relationships between teacher leadership behaviors and a host of other student outcomes, including prosocial behaviors, intrinsic motivation to learn, and reading achievement. Other empirical research has linked forms of connectedness and engagement, classroom participation (including homework completion), and student achievement (Osher et al., 2009; Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). Foundational research on connectedness by King et al. (2002) found links between adult mentoring (including personalized academic and socioemotional support) and significantly increased connectedness to school, peers, and family, as well as decreased levels of depression. During the transition between primary and secondary school, connectedness to school is predctive of socioemotional wellbeing (Lester & Cross, 2015). In the TE model, we formalize these interactions, placing connectedness as a mediator between transformational teacher behaviors and student performance outcomes.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy for students refers to the degree to which they sense the power to make choices that impact themselves and their larger contexts (Binfet et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2005; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Many studies on student self-efficacy have found that it influences cognitive engagement and academic performance (Cassidy, 2015; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Indeed, per Cassidy (2015), self-efficacy may be more predictive of achievement than even a student's previous achievement. A recent meta-analysis of 57 studies by Honicke and Broadbent (2016) also revealed a significant correlation with academic performance.

Many studies have found transformational school leadership predictive of self-efficacy in teachers as followers (Ibrahim et al., 2014; Ling et al., 2015; Ross & Gray, 2006). There is also indication that student self-efficacy can be influenced by teacher behaviors, particularly those in the TE model (Battistich et al., 1997). In math, for instance, emotionally supportive teacher behaviors predict increases in subject-specific self-efficacy (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). Given the network of interactions involving self-efficacy, we posit that transformational teacher behaviors will directly influence self-efficacy, which will itself influence student performance.

Socioemotional Wellbeing. Socioemotional wellbeing is a broad dimension in the TE model, representing a student's belief in self, belief in others, emotional competence, and engaged living (Furlong et al., 2013). These constructs predict a sense of connection and safety for students (Wang et al., 2010). A meta-analysis of 213 school-based studies by Durlak et al. (2011) found that interventions aiming to build socioemotional skills and create wellbeing were associated with improved attitudes and behavior, as well as academic achievement. Additional research by Hawkins et al. (2008) found significantly improved mental health for students, even long after socioemotional learning interventions ended. Finally, elements of socioemotional wellbeing were found by Furlong et al. (2013) to predict self-efficacy, persistence, peer support, empathy, and other outcomes.

The interventions described above make clear that socioemotional wellbeing can be learned. They do not conceptualize socioemotional learning interventions or the behaviors that make them up in overtly transformational terms, but Durlak et al. (2013) suggest that the benefits they found result in part from teacher support for student achievement, caring teacher-student relationships that build connectedness, cooperative learning, and positive classroom environments. TE formalizes these links as part of a comprehensive model.

School Climate

The interactions described above—among teacher behaviors, student wellness, and student performance—take place within a school context, which itself has characteristics bound up with the behaviors of individuals. The climate of a school is made up of "factors that contribute to the tone in schools, and the attitudes of staff and students toward their schools" (Osher et al., 2009, p. 1). In Transformational Education, school climate factors moderate the relationships among teacher behaviors, student wellness, and student performance.

Researchers studying school climate have found that it interacts with many of these constructs—it has been linked to both academic learning (Cohen et al. 2009) and the social and emotional wellbeing of students (O'Brennan & Bradshaw, 2013), as well as school connectedness (Osher et al., 2009; Thapa et al., 2013). School climate also predicts students' engagement, as well as their kindness and empathy, self-efficacy, and academic success (Bernard & Slade, 2009; Binfet et al., 2016; Cohen, 2006; Sherman et al., 1998).

School climate has also been an outcome. Research indicates that school climate is influenced by principal TL behaviors (Allen et al., 2015; McCarley et al., 2016). Improved school climate has also been the result of School-wide Positive Behavioral Supports implementation focused on teaching of social skills and responsiveness to middle school students' socioemotional needs (Caldarella et al., 2011).

In most of these studies, climate has been a mediator of outcomes such as decreased referrals (Caldarella et al., 2011) and student achievement (Osher et al., 2009). In the TE model, we postulate that school climate factors act as moderators; this has been found in some research (e.g., Birkett et al., 2009; Loukas & Robinson, 2004; Wang & Dishion, 2012). Again, we apply these to relationships involving teacher leadership.

In TE, the first two variables contributing to school climate measure socioemotional or relationally perceived elements of the climate: classroom support and school kindness. A third variable, aesthetic guidance, measures how physical school and classroom spaces shape the teaching and learning process, as well as the student's sense of safety, the institutional environment, and capacity to improve. Together, these mirror the five emergent themes in Thapa et al.'s (2013) review on school climate: (a) safety, (b) relationships, (c) teaching and learning, (d) institutional environment, and (e) school improvement.

Classroom Support. Classroom support refers to the empathetic and caring behaviors exhibited by the school—for students by teachers, staff, and other students. Durlak et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis revealed that classroom support in caring school communities predicts improved student academic performance and socioemotional health.

Other research concurs, finding supportive classroom behaviors part of a larger network of factors that contribute to student success, including self-efficacy (Battistich et al., 1997; Ross et al., 2005). In Battistich et al.'s (1997) own research, the specific teacher behavior of meaning making improved students' sense of community, including their perception that students cared for and support one another and that they were important to decision-making in the classroom. A more recent study by Lester and Cross (2015) found that the peer support dimension of classroom support was linked to student wellness—both connectedness to school and socioemotional wellbeing.

There is significant interest in strategizing to create conditions for social and emotional learning (Schonert-Reichl & Weissberg, 2014; Wang et al., 1997), and our TE model formalizes this construct and posits a moderating role for it and the other school climate factors.

School Kindness. School kindness has been defined as "voluntary, intentional behaviors that benefit another and are not motivated by external factors such as rewards or punishments" (Eisenberg, 1986, p. 63). School kindness is linked to socioemotional wellbeing, broadly, and more specifically to classroom support (another climate factor in the TE model), life satisfaction, and academic self-efficacy (Binfet et al., 2016). Kindness also helps students enact prosocial behaviors, leading to healthy interpersonal relationships (Binfet et al., 2016). Datu and Park (2019) found associations between school kindness and students' cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement.

The Binfet et al. (2016) study examined associations, rather than predictions, and further research is needed to determine whether kindness is a predictor, outcome, or both in its interactions with other positive results for students. Additional study is needed to confirm the results of Binfet and Passmore's (2017) qualitative study in which teachers perceived their kind behaviors encouraged kindness on the part of students. Given the results of research on classroom support and other caring behaviors, we posit a moderating role for school kindness in the Transformational Education model.

Aesthetic Guidance. Aesthetics refer to "felt meaning generated from sensory perceptions, [involving] subjective, tacit knowledge rooted in feeling and emotion" (Hansen et al., 2007, p. 544). Since climate is the collective perception of the school community, the physical presentation of that space also merits consideration as an influence on students.

According to Chang (2017), a student's aesthetic experience of the classroom and other educational spaces occurs both consciously and unconsciously and can improve a student's capacity to think critically and creatively to solve problems (Chang, 2017; Lin, 2009; Richards, 2007). Favorable aesthetic experiences predict student learning and achievement (Lin et al., 2009; Suleman & Hussain, 2014), and specific physical elements, such as lighting and seating arrangements, can impact learning behavior and achievement (Brooks, 2012; Samani, 2012).

The TE model uses four dimensions of Fenner's (2003) theory of aesthetic experience: (a) object directness, where the object (e.g., classroom or school space) directs the individual's attention in ways that help the individual sense that things will resolve positively; (b) felt freedom, in which the object or space enables the individual to sense the ability to freely make choices; (c) detached affect, whereby the object or space enables the individual to gain emotional distance from things that frighten or oppress him or her; and (d) active discovery, where the object or space challenges the individual to creatively discover new connections and solve problems. Measurement aligned with this theory allows for a more directed exploration of students' aesthetic experiences as they contribute to positive wellness and performance outcomes.

In all, the TE model creates a coherent picture of transformational teacher leadership and the paths through which it results in measurable benefits for students. The model leverages a robust body of studies on leadership theory, compares and synthesizes these theories, and directs future research to fill a gap on studies that features teachers as leaders.

Measurement and Validation Methods

To begin validation of the proposed TE model, a two-phase study including a minimum of 200 middle and high school students from schools of various sizes around the United States is recommended. This research should sample from schools with a wide variety of characteristics (e.g., open-model, traditional, public, private, charter), from teachers of middle and high school classes with at least 20 students. Initial baseline data collection and analysis should comprise the

first phase, undertaken at or near the start of an academic term (e.g., at or near the start of the fall semester). Analysis should establish (a) construct validity (exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses), and internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the dimensions in the chosen instruments; (b) bivariate correlations between the model's individual variable pairs; and (c) full-model results using regression analysis and ANOVA modeling.

The second phase, with validated instrumentation, should be conducted near the end of the term or school year and using the same procedures as in the first phase. Analysis should consist of the same validity and reliability testing, bivariate correlations, and full-model testing, with additional examination of the extent to which teachers' leadership behaviors account for the student performance outcomes at the end of the term or year as compared to the beginning. The extent to which the moderating and mediating variables impacted these relationships should also be assessed.

Implications for Practice

A validated TE model can have significant implications for teacher practice and evaluation, as well as for the student outcomes described above. In formalizing a vision for effective teaching, the model clarifies the leadership role that teachers play in their classrooms and for their students. This clarification can result in a streamlining of teacher evaluation that encourages teacher growth. Currently used evaluation tools may not nurture continued development (Lillejord & Børte, 2020; Warren & Ward, 2019), and a refined approach to evaluation may result in clearer guidance for teachers.

For students, teaching practice that embodies the TE teacher behaviors can promote improved wellness and performance, as well as contribute to a school climate that intensifies these impacts. Foundational research by Battistich et al. (1997) found teacher behaviors like those in TE associated with a host of benefits for students—empathy and kindness, connectedness, motivation, self-efficacy, and achievement, among others. More recent studies suggest that specific behaviors, such as authenticity and personalized support, increase student engagement, improve student behavior, and improve academic performance (Benner et al., 2017; Sebastian et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Student performance can be impacted by a variety of factors, and examining student outcomes from a single angle is insufficient. This paper proposes a new, multidimensional model—called Transformational Education—based on transformational leadership and research linking these behaviors with student- and school-level outcomes. The model illustrates the holistic, reciprocal relationship between teacher behaviors and student outcomes, as moderated by school climate variables and mediated by student wellness. This model can be incorporated into the school as a whole to assess teacher behaviors but also in the classroom to assess student performance and wellness and perceptions of school climate.

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Student Perceptions of Superintendent Internship Topics/Activities Associated with National Educational Leadership (NELP) Standards

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Educator preparation programs for school district leaders are encouraged to review internship topics and activities for relevance in today's changing educational climate and programing. The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards are research-based standards that have been approved to assist advanced programs at the master, specialist, and doctoral levels in the preparation of district leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2018). In this study, students nearing completion and recent completers in two leadership preparation programs, one in Texas and one in Arizona, were asked to complete a survey seeking their perceptions of topics and/or experiences included in their internship program. Survey items included two questions associated with each of the first seven NELP standards for district leadership. The results of the survey provided meaningful feedback for educator preparation program improvement and insight to the challenges facing current district leaders. Findings and conclusions identified in this study may be helpful to district level educator preparation programs seeking field experience information associated with Leadership Training K-12.

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Clear and consistent leadership standards assist all educational stakeholders in understanding the expectations for campus and district leadership in providing for the academic success and personal well-being of every student (Canole & Young, 2013). The first set of national standards for educational leaders was adopted by the National Policy Board of Educational Administration (NPBEA) in 1996 and revised in 2008 and 2015. These standards were created to guide states in developing policies for expectations and evaluation of school and district administrators. The 2015 revision was named the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). Three years after each revision, key professional educational leadership organizations collaboratively develop and adopt standards for university and other preparation programs. This set of standards was renamed the National Education Leadership Preparation (NELP) Standards in 2018 to guide program design, accreditation review, and state program approval (NPBEA, 2018). The PSEL standards provide broadly stated performance expectations for beginning level building and district leaders whereas the NELP standards were developed specifically with the principalship and superintendent position in mind (NELP Companion Guide, 2018).

NELP standard 8 stipulates that preparation programs require students to serve in an internship and incorporate the content of the first seven standards with the supervision of knowledgeable, expert practitioners, by engaging candidates in multiple and diverse school settings, and providing candidates with coherent, authentic, and sustained opportunities to synthesize and apply knowledge and skills identified in NELP standards 1-7 (NPBEA, 2018).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of superintendent certification program candidates in two university preparation programs concerning internship activities associated with the NELP Standards in order to improve their programs. Program improvement based on candidate feedback is an important element for professors of educational leadership programs in designing content that promotes continuous improvement and complies with requirements found in NELP Standard 8. Forty superintendent certification completers, or candidates nearing completion of the program, responded to a survey designed to measure perceptions of which internship activities associated with the NELP standards were most relevant/meaningful and which topics and activities would they liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of superintendent certification program candidates as to which internship topics and activities associated with NELP Standards are most relevant and meaningful?
2. What is the perception of superintendent certification program candidates as to which internship topics and activities associated with NELP Standards would the candidate liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?

Methods and Procedures

The population reviewed in this study consisted of forty superintendent certification program completers or candidates nearing completion of their preparation program. Those surveyed were from two separate superintendent preparation programs housed at two different regional universities, one in Texas, the other in Arizona. The superintendent certification program in Texas has a nine-month internship and the Arizona superintendent certification program has a six-month program. Internship activities and requirements include culminating experiences at both university programs. Most, if not all, of those surveyed were practicing school administrators who also hold certification or licenses as campus principals. The anonymous survey used in this study was designed to measure perceptions of students regarding internship activities aligned to NELP Standards. The first three questions of the survey used multiple choice responses to garner contextual demographic information for analytical purposes. The survey concluded with fourteen questions related to activities aligned to seven identified NELP Standards. Two questions related to each NELP Standard were presented and each question provided a textbox for open-ended individual narrative responses. This survey was deemed valid as it solicited open-ended perceptions of internship activities related to published NELP Standards. All reviewers had direct experience with assisting students during internship activities, and one reviewer was certified as a field supervisor. Five professional educators reviewed the content of the survey and four of the reviewers have extensive experience as a school superintendent. All survey reviewers were graduate faculty members in educational leadership programs and have direct knowledge and experience with using NELP Standards.

The survey received university approval and made use of Qualtrics software. Data from the survey were analyzed using a qualitative method design and identified themes from student responses regarding individual perceptions of topics and/or experiences in the internship activities with their superintendent preparation program.

Review of Literature

NELP Standard 1 – Mission, Vision, and Improvement

This standard focuses on three important topics necessary to school district continuous improvement; research related support emphasizes the importance of district leadership having the knowledge and skills to promote the success of every student through collaborative leading, designing, and implementing a district mission, vision, and process to achieve improvement, district leadership awareness of the importance of collaboratively developed mission and vision statements, and the importance of a social climate that promotes organizational learning and improvement (Finnigan & Daly, 2012). The ability for a district leader to demonstrate a collaborative process and to provide evidence is a skill that is needed by the district superintendent and other central office staff. A review of the literature and study of evidence identified the use of evidence supporting district decision-making is complex, spans multiple sub-activities, and requires local knowledge (Honig & Coburn, 2018). Associated with district improvement is the ability and willingness for district leadership to promote reform. Successful reform is contingent upon building trusting relationships between district leadership and school site personnel. Understanding the importance of social construct and networking in the reform process is also important, particularly in cases of underperforming schools (Daly & Finnigan,

2011). Continuous improvement is an appropriate goal for all school systems and the knowledge and skills of the district superintendent are important to leading the improvement process. Understanding the improvement element in NELP standard one is important to district leadership.

NELP Standard 2 – Ethics and Professional Norms

Sustaining a positive professional culture is important to achieving school effectiveness and the development of networks among schools contributes toward student learning and instructional improvement (Lee, Louis, & Anderson, 2012). While cooperation among schools is important, individual professional conduct and behavior by district leaders is also a key element in providing effective leadership. Superintendents are expected to keep themselves familiar with changes in the law related to conflict of interest and to also be sure that each board member is updated regularly with changes and issues related to superintendent responsibility (WSSDA, 2016). The greatest challenge to maintaining composure and ethical behavior is during times of stress. In a study of school superintendents, more than half of school superintendents experience high levels of stress on a frequent basis (Hawk & Martin, 2011). In addition to individual behavior, it has been found that the superintendent's ability to encourage organizational properties that lead to cognitive and social-emotional development of faculty and students will ultimately lead to effective schools. Three characteristics, or properties, were found in a study to impact differences in student achievement: collective efficacy, collective trust in parents and students, and a schoolwide emphasis on academic achievement (Hoy, 2012).

NELP Standard 3 – Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness

The issues of equity, inclusiveness, and cultural responsiveness are complex, particularly the aspect of understanding each in relation to improving student learning. Extending our understanding of educational reform by providing instructional leadership, reorienting the organization to emphasize equity and cultural understanding, establishing policy that supports these objectives, and maintaining a focus on equity serve as a foundation for improving achievement and advancing equity (Rorrer & Skra, 2008). Superintendents should be a catalyst for campus leadership improvement by being supportive of improved working conditions and encouraging change for the purpose of improving achievement. Empowering principals while establishing a clear focus and strategic plan for improvement are important leadership traits (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). Inclusiveness is perhaps the opposite of segregation and although we have laws requiring desegregation, studies indicate de-facto segregation in our school systems. Findings of a qualitative study in which Black superintendents were interviewed indicated the perception that many school systems have never truly integrated and continue school program inequality (Horsford, 2011).

NELP Standard 4 – Learning and Instruction

Researchers advocate the need for major school reform if schools are to advance the teaching/learning process and if students are to acquire 21st century thinking skills (Resnick, 2010). Grissom & Harrington (2010) emphasize the importance of relevant professional development for principals in a study including a national sample of schools. Professional

development is often the basis for reform as administrators seek improvement in the areas of teaching and learning. Policy is another concept used to advance educational reform. Policy makers increasingly include provisions aimed at fostering professional community learning initiatives as part of school reform. The mediation of policy and the influence of social networking were found to affect school instructional innovators, an important element for change acceptance (Coburn & Russell, 2008). District leadership has greater opportunities to influence policy decisions than leaders at the site-level and acceptance of district decisions at the site-level often are influenced by teacher acceptance in which social networking has played a role. A study by Neumerski (2013) identified three distinct literatures: (a) the traditional instructional leadership model primarily centered on the principal, (b) the teacher instructional leadership model, and (c) the coach instructional leadership model. The effectiveness of each model (literature) varies based on knowledge and skills of the individuals and the study concluded that it is necessary to assess what scholars do and do not know about instructional leadership in order to identify which literature will be best at a particular school.

NELP Standard 5 – Community and External Leadership

It is important for superintendent candidates to understand the importance of communication and being an advocate for the district by using multiple formats and district environments in order to communicate with stakeholders in the larger organizational, community, and political contexts of the school setting (Trust, Carpenter, & Krutka, 2018). Research suggests that schools' capacity to successfully implement and sustain reform programs may rest, in part, with district- level facilitation. The importance of district-level leadership has been established for a variety of educational reforms, including school, family, and community partnerships (Sanders, 2009). Constituent diversity may increase the need for superintendent focus on networking and partnership efforts. A study of Texas school districts identified the amount of time devoted by superintendents to networking activities. The study found a positive correlation in district diversity to increased amount of time dedicated to working with constituents (Owens & Kukla-Acevedo, 2012). Studies have also shown that district leaders significantly impact success of school reform initiatives and leadership understanding of socio-cultural and organizational theory is important to district improvement (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). Organizational theory includes extending ownership of key initiative that require broad support. A study in Ohio, utilizing a snowball sampling technique and coding of individual responses, found that districts that heavily engaged community members and created a sense of urgency, yielded greater success at the polls than "central office campaigns" (Ingle, Johnson, & Petroff, 2012).

NELP Standard 6 – Operations and Management

The superintendent's ability to transform the work and basic services of central office personnel to an environment that supports the goals of each school is an important function of managing and aligning district resources (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010). In a study of 407 schools in 24 districts, strong empirical support was found for the importance of sociocultural and organizational theories in studying school improvement and that direct district leader facilitation contributes to the quality of school programs (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). District decision-making affects numerous constituents and organizations and creates a political atmosphere for the superintendent. While some decisions must be made expeditiously, others will

require thoughtful reflection and input from others. Almost every challenge will require some degree of political thinking and behavior. In terms of the superintendent/principal relationship, the superintendent should create working conditions that support and encourage change for improving school achievement (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). Improving school achievement has several different elements and variables between districts depending on circumstances.

NELP Standard 7 – Policy, Governance, and Advocacy

Improving school performance is aided when central office personnel support principals with working conditions consistent with improving teacher effectiveness and student performance. As a result of multiple studies, a report by the Southern Regional Education Board identifies seven key strategies for improving high schools: (1) Establish a clear focus on core beliefs, effective practices and goals for improving student achievement; (2) Organize and engage the school board and central office in support of schools; (3) Provide instructional support; (4) Invest heavily in instruction-related professional development; (5) Provide data that links student achievement to classroom practices; (6) Optimize resources to improve student learning; and (7) Invoke key school and community leaders in shaping a vision for improving schools (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). District governance is enhanced when the superintendent works to develop collaborative relationships with local business communities (Bennett & Thompson, 2011). Generating support for improvement strategies is a critical element and the use of data-driven decision-making validates governance and other decisions.

Findings of the Study

An analysis of the survey responses to the two research question prompts for each of the seven NELP Standards indicated key findings concerning the perspectives of university interns in regard to the relevance of chosen district-level internship activities and the desire for additional activities or greater depth of chosen activities to better prepare for an entry-level position of superintendent. Due to the high degree of similarity and no ascertained differences between responses from the sample of interns from Texas and Arizona, the findings are presented as one larger group. Duplicate responses and responses not directly related to the research question prompts are not reported.

Further analysis of the responses yielded emergent themes or more general topics that surfaced from the list of responses under each NELP standard. The researchers therefore have grouped responses under the subheadings of theme or general topic for greater clarity and organization. Responses that were not directly related to a theme or general topic but relevant to the overall standard are presented under the subheading of 'Other'.

NELP Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Improvement

What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?

Vision and Mission

1. Analyzing data relevant to the district mission and vision including the relationship to district goals and budget

2. Developing a plan to communicate the mission and vision to multiple constituencies
3. Observing, interviewing, and understanding the importance of the superintendent promoting and projecting the mission and vision of the district to multiple stakeholders
4. Reviewing and comparing mission statements of various school districts

Culture and Climate

5. Data analysis based on culture and climate surveys

Improvement Plan

6. Reviewing the District Improvement Plan and process
7. Aligning the campus and district improvement plans to the mission and vision statements of the district
8. Understanding the role of the superintendent in school improvement

Collaboration

9. Collaboration in designing a shared mission and vision statement for the district
10. Collaborating with other administrators in the district to evaluate the district mission and vision statements and goals related to data use, technology, values, diversity, digital citizenship and community
11. Understanding the importance of collaboration between the superintendent and board for communicating the district's mission and vision

Other

12. Attending administrative meetings every two weeks to discuss district initiatives and goals
13. I was allowed to create a Strategic Plan for our CIP during the internship
14. Reading and learning the guidelines for the superintendent and school board was beneficial
15. Details about reporting gifts and conflict of interest disclosures

What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?

1. Developing skills to create committees for new mission statement
2. More about the vision of the school board
3. More time in school improvement and the systems in place at the state level
4. More time studying district data on improving the district
5. More hands-on activities in working with the District Improvement Plan
6. Working with strategic planning committees
7. More time is needed to evaluate existing improvement processes
8. Researching district-wide improvement efforts
9. Shadow the superintendent more
10. More practice working to build consensus among stakeholders
11. More time discussing how to engage diverse stakeholders

NELP Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms

What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?

Professional Norms and Culture

1. Being assigned grade level leader to work on professional norms
2. The work to cultivate professional norms and build organizational culture.
3. The importance of the district staff understanding expectations for district culture
4. Administrative meetings in which district culture and ethical decision-making was discussed

Reflection

5. Self-reflection and life-long learning
6. Ethics and self-reflection are two areas that I learned a deeper appreciation for
7. Self-assessments, reflections, and interviews were all viable components of learning this standard
8. Seeing my mentor conduct reflective conversation with groups was very powerful

Ethics

9. Reviewing the Educator Code of Ethics
10. Sharing information about ethical decisions with fellow cohort members
11. Understanding the importance of leading with integrity, transparency, and trust and how to keep politics out
12. Discussing the importance of student well-being and advocating for ethical decisions
13. The emphasis that was placed on the welfare of every student
14. Interview questions for district leaders that pertained to ethics
15. The importance of leaders sharing their views about expectations for ethical behavior
16. Understanding the importance of modeling correct behavior and to cultivate ethical behavior in others
17. Understanding that superintendents' main focus is to always do what is best for students

Superintendent/Board Relations

18. Superintendent/Board relations
19. Studying the roles, responsibilities, and working relationship of the superintendent and board has been the best activity to learn this standard

Other

20. The interview with the Executive Director of Finance offered me a great opportunity to evaluate complex issues
21. Working in HR assisted me in understanding the importance of this standard
22. Dealing with upset parents
23. Conducting professional learning committees

What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?

1. More on cultural responsiveness, social justice, and restorative justice
2. More experience with dealing with upset parents and staff
3. Evaluating ethical behaviors in other districts
4. More time on approaches to organizational culture
5. How the superintendent works to improve the moral direction for each school and promote ethical behavior
6. Analyze case studies and identify best practice in approaching different ethical dilemmas
7. More time is needed in cultivating professional norms in others
8. How to systematically cultivate new professional norms
9. Advocating for legal and ethical decisions
10. More time studying the politics of the district and decision-making
11. I would have liked to dive into the logistics of the laws
12. Discuss some court cases focusing on ethics and professional norms
13. There is a need for more transparency and digital citizenship on all campuses
14. The opportunity to communicate with more stakeholders
15. To know how the staff feel after training on personal conduct and ethical behavior

NELP standard 3: Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness

What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?

Equity

1. The equity audit
2. Two important aspects – 1) your own bias and 2) the difficulty in maintaining equity
3. The importance of recognizing diversity and equity
4. Discussing the importance of equitable access to educational resources
5. Attending board meetings and watching the process of equity and inclusiveness

Cultural Responsiveness

6. Demonstrating the capacity to evaluate and cultivate district inclusiveness and culture
7. Processes for evaluating district culture and processes for fostering cultural change
8. Building unity, diversity, and culture in the school district
9. The huge role that superintendents have with cultural responsiveness
10. Using research and data to improve district culture
11. Superintendents must have a support network to promote a positive culture
12. Understanding your own cultural bias

Other

13. I attended one meeting that dealt with SPED and gifted
14. Participated in numerous educational annual goal committees – IEP, 504, accommodations
15. Working with the early college program for all students

What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?

1. Working with parents on cultural responsiveness for emotional/wellness curriculum
2. More restorative justice and cultural-responsive leadership
3. More time working with departments
4. More historical court decisions
5. Cultural-responsive instruction and behavioral support practice
6. More discussions about Mexican and Central American families seeking asylum in our border towns and how to handle the difficult decisions about fairness and equity
7. Explore more ways to cultivate cultural competence
8. Additional opportunities to explore equity and cultural responsiveness
9. Working with district-level public relations
10. More emphasis on working with diverse cultural contexts of a global society
11. Closing the achievement gap in our schools
12. Evaluate sources of inequality and bias in terms of allocation of resources
13. More time should be spent on the policies concerning misconduct
14. Studying a district that has different demographics than mine
15. More research on district cultures
16. Advocating for equitable access
17. More activities related to special education
18. Advocating for behavior support practices among teachers and staff
19. More time with finance and equity issues
20. More time looking at sources of bias and educational opportunities

NELP Standard 4: Learning and Instruction

What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?

Data Analysis / Assessment / Curriculum Development

1. Using research and data to evaluate coherence and relevance of district support systems, coaching and professional development
2. Experiencing a PLC meeting and working with assessment data
3. Data driven analysis and professional learning plan
4. Attending the meetings of the curriculum department and campus principals
5. Evaluating, developing, and implementing quality curricula
6. Accountability related to student performance
7. Analysis that supports instructional improvement
8. Evaluating curriculum, the use of technology, and coordination among systems and supports
9. "I wrote and equity audit and gave assessment training."

Technology for Instruction

10. Integrating technology across the district
11. Digital learning and selecting a school-wide dashboard to be used for homework and system accountability
12. Discussions about technology and online delivery of instruction

Professional Development

13. Research-based planning for professional development
14. Understanding the importance of professional development
15. Professional development targeted district goals
16. The assignment to evaluate professional development

Superintendent Role / Policy

17. Learning board policies associated with teaching and learning and the impact of school culture
18. Working with the administrative team in our district to evaluate our performance in the district to keep our "A" rating
19. Activities that promoted administrators as true instructional leaders
20. The politics of education and to work with the school board in a positive way
21. Reviewing policies related to curriculum development
22. Understand what the superintendent should know about curriculum, teaching, and learning

Other

23. Attending grade level meetings
24. Being able to participate in textbook adoption for the district
24. To know research-based strategies for supporting district and school collaboration
25. Implementation of programs for early college high school

What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?

1. State testing data interpretations and relation to professional development
2. Learning about the rules for purchasing curriculum, state testing, budgets, etc.
3. Current trends in education
4. Instructional technology and its use
5. Differentiated and personalized instruction
6. School culture and physical buildings impact on learning
7. Curriculum audits
8. More time in our district's planning meetings
9. More time analyzing data trends
10. Learning how to evaluate district programs
11. Developing culturally responsive and accessible assessments
12. The pandemic - more knowledge about technology assisted instruction
13. Reading and math programs at the elementary level

NELP Standard 5: Community and External Leadership

What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?

School/Community Relations/Partnerships

1. Work in school-community relations
2. Discussion board posts from other cohort members was a great way to share information about engaging community with the district
3. Evaluate our buildings for safety and a healthy school environment – then share information with the community
4. Activity that required me to come up with ideas to engage diverse families
5. Developing strong partnerships with our community
6. The importance of cultivating relationships with families and constituents
7. Learning the importance of advocating for district needs to the community
8. Engaging community members and developing a committee to support bond issues
9. Discussing community leadership with my superintendent
10. Working with parents about special education issues
11. The latitude to work on cultivating collaboration to benefit students and families
12. Develop a joint school/business event with the local Chamber of Commerce
13. Having the ability to increase parent involvement and impact student growth

Role of the Superintendent

14. Learning about the role of the superintendent as being a community leader
15. Interviews with the superintendent made me keenly aware of how important it is to communicate with outside stakeholder and community
16. Interviews with the superintendent and learning about the role as instructional leader
17. Board related activities and the importance of involving all stakeholders
18. Speaking to district administrators about the last bond election
19. Community safety and health protocols during the pandemic

Other

20. Leadership networking with high school and neighboring private school
21. Engaging the support of diverse families is important to the district to benefit students
22. Working with Head Start and community services
23. Being a part of SEL curriculum for district use

What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?

1. Allow more time to analyze governance with community partnership (MOU)
2. How do you work with community members when they disagree with you?
3. More time working with strategies to involve the community with the district
4. Working with the board and community involvement
5. How to plan meetings for the purpose of involving the community
6. How to involve parents at the high school level
7. Engaging diverse families
8. Involving parents with students who have disabilities
9. Additional opportunities to work with community groups
10. More visibility in the community
11. Have an activity with the superintendent and a business leader

12. More time with public relations
13. Learning cultures and languages in the community
14. More activities that involve teacher learning and understanding of diverse families
15. Having access to district communication templates would be helpful

NELP Standard 6: Operations and Management

What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?

Budgeting

1. Budgeting work and interview with CFO
2. Topics of purchasing
3. School-based budgeting
4. Research and best practices involving budgeting and operations

Facilities

5. Learning about facilities
6. The interview of the Director of Facilities
7. Facilities management and budgeting
8. Process to improve facilities
9. I led the district safety committee

Operations

10. Data informed operations systems
11. The process of evaluating operations and management systems of the district
12. Interviews with Deputy Superintendent
13. Reviewing transportation policies
14. Evaluating and implementing laws and policies for this topic area

Technology

15. Use of technology for administrative purposes – interviews
16. Learning about technology applications for district

Personnel

17. Budget, facilities, and personnel
18. Detailed procedures for staff
19. Master scheduling and conflict management among students and staff
20. Policy and procedures on student/parent and staff handbook
21. Recruiting, hiring, supporting of personnel
22. Creating a professional development plan

What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?

1. Federal and state policies

2. A deeper understanding of school finance and budgets
3. More training about cyber-bullying
4. More experience with laws and regulations
5. Building maintenance processes
6. Community partnerships
7. Go in person to our operations departments
8. Work on a TRE (Tax Ratification Election)
9. Shadow and interview the Director of Operations
10. More time learning about recruiting
11. More time developing a staff development plan
12. Professional health and well-being of faculty and staff
13. Managing fiscal and physical facilities
14. More time shadowing the CFO
15. Learning about district and school level resources

NELP Standard 7: Policy, Governance, and Advocacy

What topics and/or experiences associated with this NELP standard did you find to be relevant and meaningful in your internship experience?

Board Relations / Meetings

1. Attending school board meetings
2. Understanding the importance of the relationship between the superintendent and school board
3. Building relationships among the board members

Role of Superintendent

4. The superintendent as district advocate
5. The superintendent and board roles in policy and governance
6. Communication strategies – negotiation strategies
7. Developing priorities for discussion and collaboration with elected officials
8. Superintendent role in preparing for board meetings
9. Selecting and hiring staff, professional learning
10. Staff evaluation processes

Board Policies

11. Reading the district policies
12. Policies regarding contracts, renewals, terminations
13. Policy study and understanding governance issues
14. The importance of workplace conditions and staff productivity

Other

15. Meeting with the ATPE district representative
16. Our internship work in HR
17. Plan to develop School/Community Relations

What knowledge or skill associated with this NELP standard would you have liked to have spent more time for the purpose of gaining greater understanding?

1. The opportunity to study process of state governance decision-making
2. HR guidelines, HR hearings, HR investigations
3. Superintendent's role in driving policy
4. Recruiting personnel
5. Trips to the state capital during a legislative session
6. Research and data related to personnel recruitment
7. Researching the emerging trends in education
8. More time working with board members
9. Advocating in the larger context
10. To have learned more about conflict resolution
11. Professional learning and development of staff
12. Develop a plan to implement laws and policies
13. More discussion about the implications of policy

The wide array of responses listed under each NELP standard suggest that interns begin the internship with varying degrees of experience and level of competence in each NELP standard and are afforded or limited by varying degrees of opportunity to conduct intern activities in their particular district setting. Further disparities may arise due to differences in mentoring and oversight of the district intern supervisor.

Limitations of the Study

The study collected perceptions of relevant activities for preparation for the position of superintendent and recommendations of additional activities from students that recently completed a superintendent internship. The responses and recommendations, however, can only be perceived from a student perspective since none of the responders had actually served in the position. The study used a small sample from students in two southwestern, non-union states. Additionally, the survey limited responses for internship improvement to meeting NELP standards. It is unclear whether a part of the internship experience that occurred during the COVID-19 Virus outbreak had any effect.

Implications for Future Research

Future research on superintendent internship activities should utilize a larger sample of survey responders and from states in various areas of the nation. Studies should also include respondents from union and non-union states. For a wider array of responses, the survey should solicit responses for NELP standards and other items not covered by NELP, including leadership style, emotional intelligence, etc. Future research studies should also include individual student interviews or focus groups for greater depth of understanding and candidate responses from programs that have varying internship length and number of internship hours required.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Superintendent preparation programs that seek national accreditation, or simply adopt NELP standards, must demonstrate adequate coverage and assessment of the required skills in each of the standards in field-based settings. Preparation programs, however, have little or no control over the setting, i.e., rural/urban/suburban, district demographics such as district wealth, size, and location. This fact, along with the varying levels of expertise of the intern and district internship supervisor and varying levels of opportunity, suggest that a one-size-fits-all internship design may not meet the needs of all program candidates.

The findings show that superintendent interns are not satisfied with a cursory exposure to the superintendent's role in meeting standards. Their responses indicate the need for a hands-on, in depth experience of meeting the standard and the broader scope of how the standard fits with the overall goals and responsibilities of the superintendent. Responses indicate that some students need additional time, mentoring, and remediation in meeting different standards. Although individualization and flexibility in the design of the internship are needed, the findings do show a consensus of general recommendations for activities for each standard.

NELP Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Improvement

Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)

- Vision and Mission – data analysis and comparative analysis of collaboration, development, implementation, and evaluation
- Climate and Culture – analysis of survey data and recommendations
- Improvement Planning – collaborative process and alignment with vision and mission
- District Professional Development – development and implementation

Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- More time is needed to evaluate existing improvement processes
- More practice working to build consensus among stakeholders
- Spend more time learning how to engage diverse stakeholders

NELP Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms

Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)

- Professional Norms and Culture
- Reflective Practice
- Code of Ethics
- Student Centeredness
- Superintendent/Board Relations

Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- More experience with dealing with upset parents and staff
- More time is needed in cultivating professional norms in others
- More time studying the politics of the district and decision-making

NELP standard 3: Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness

Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)

- Equity Audits
- District Culture
- Role of the Superintendent

Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- Explore more ways to cultivate cultural competence
- Closing the achievement gap in our schools
- Study a district that has different demographics than mine
- More activities related to special education

NELP Standard 4: Learning and Instruction

Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)
Data Analysis / Assessment / Curriculum Development
Technology for Instruction
Professional Development
Superintendent Role / Policy
Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

1. Technology and its use
2. Curriculum audits
3. Differentiated and personalized instruction

NELP Standard 5: Community and External Leadership

Relevant Intern Activities

- School/Community Relations
- Community/Business Partnerships
- Role of the Superintendent

Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- More time working with strategies to involve the community with the district
- Engaging diverse families
- More time with public relations

NELP Standard 6: Operations and Management

Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)

- Budgeting
- Facilities
- Operations
- Technology
- Personnel

Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- A deeper understanding of school finance and budgets
- Building maintenance processes

- More time learning about recruiting
- More time shadowing the CFO

NELP Standard 7: Policy, Governance, and Advocacy

Relevant Intern Activities (Themes)

- Board Relations / Meetings
- Role of Superintendent
- Board Policies

Additional Desired Experience (Examples)

- HR guidelines, HR hearings, HR investigations
- More about conflict resolution
- Superintendent's role in driving policy

The above list of recommended internship activities from this study is certainly not exhaustive but does show the perspectives of students completing an internship suggesting greater depth and breadth of experience are desired in various activities for differing interns. The survey results and analysis suggest the importance of including required activities in each identified theme. Additionally, preparation programs should allow extensive individualization of activities to meet the needs of each candidate. Finally, it is recommended that preparation programs solicit periodic student evaluations of the internship experience for program improvement.

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Public School District Needs at the Crossroads of Professional Development and Public University Partnerships: Superintendents Perceptions and the Potential Alliance Between PK-12 and Institutions of Higher Education

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The incorporation of professional development (PD) activities for PK-12 teachers has long served to advance competency in the profession. With changes in requirements for continued teacher certification, student performance, and state-level testing, superintendents are faced with maximizing PD opportunities of their faculty. This primary investigation considers these changes, and the perceptions of Michigan PK-12 superintendents in the identified areas of need for faculty development. This study also explores the multiple facets of PD and partnerships/collaboration with Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) in the state. The survey instrument, developed for this study, assesses the views of superintendents across Michigan on the greatest areas of PD need for faculty by subject area and teacher performance. Findings consider the perceived roles and utility of IHEs in providing PD, degree programs, and credentialing of faculty to meet these needs. Communication and finances relating to the support of PD, in addition to district-level data, determine if other factors have an impact on identified needs. More specifically, this study examines multiple factors to establish the level of PD need, and the relationship of predictive factors, through the analysis of latent variables based on survey and demographic data.

Keywords*: superintendents, professional development, higher education, teacher training, PK-20 partnerships*

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Professional development (PD) activities have long been part of the process for PK-12 educators to advance disciplinary knowledge, skills, and competencies (Avalos, 2011). Written into bargained contracts, the pursuit, and completion, of advanced degrees would, in part, assist teachers in career advancement and may reward teachers with increased compensation (Bredeson, 2011). Beyond advanced degrees, institutions of higher education (IHEs), in partnership with PK-12 public school districts, have provided PD focusing on research supported best practices through district designed learning experiences (LePage et al., 2001). Further on, as regulations for continuing education credits relaxed at the state level, districts turned inward toward 'in-house' experts, or contracted with private organizations, to meet PD needs (Brown & Militello, 2016). In addition to the examination of discipline-specific needs, this study seeks to better understand other germane PD factors such as addressing the diverse needs of learners, mental health, and relationships with IHEs.

Purpose and Research Questions

With the role of PD and student success as the backdrop, the aim of this study is to explore superintendent perceptions of the need for teacher advancement in disciplinary and instructional practices and the potential role of IHEs in facilitating learning experiences. The significance of this study highlights these long-believed opportunities and notions of collaboration that have existed mostly around specific partnerships, with a specific purpose, or largely around placing teachers and working on grant-specific initiatives; however, the potential for collaboration in a more cohesive manner, based on empirical findings, provides a new backdrop for moving forward with these relationships. Advancing under the notion of this postulate sheds light on the importance of these partnerships to form symbiotic relationships that promote student success and strengthen the foundational services for PK-12 and IHEs related to PD. The primary questions guiding this research are as follows:

1. What do superintendents identify as the PD needs of teachers in public PK-12 school districts?
2. What relationships exist between the PD needs of PK-12 public school districts and other factors related to collaboration with IHEs?
3. What factors are predictive of the PD needs of districts as reported by superintendents?

Review of the Literature

Professional Development

Administrators at the district level must have, and communicate, their ideas to administrators and teachers at the building level (Chen & Reigeluth, 2010). An inherent part of this communication is the idea that superintendents must have high expectations (Armour & Makopoulou, 2012). It is from these expectations for the growth in practice that PD flourishes (Williams et al., 2009).

There are a great, and varied, number of factors at play in the PD of faculty (Kubitsky et al., 2012). Superintendents must address the idea that PD is one of the key factors in the fidelity of the curriculum (Lachausse, et al., 2014). Superintendents must also be mindful of the potential issues and concerns in scaling up and implementing PD initiatives (Breault, 2013), the implications of PD on assessment (Hinchcliff, 2015), and the potential impact of various PD initiatives on both grade level and content-based instruction (Wager & Foote, 2013).

Armistead et al. (2013) indicates that the more experience a participant has as an educator, the more likely they are to only participate in PD activities that fit their current interests and focus. In addition, as PD is approached from a Community of Practice perspective, effective engagement in PD was most highly attributed to situations where there was a clear purpose, effective coaching questioning, and a solid connection between theory and practice (Kintz, et al., 2015).

While communication and engagement by administration within a given district seems to be an essential component of the development of effective PD practices, things such as available funding and standards within the PK-12 school must be considered and addressed (Neapolitan & Leving, 2011). Attebury (2018) indicated that the key in being effective lies in collaboration on, not mandating all, aspects of PD in continuing education for school librarians.

District Factors

Federal Title funds have long been a determinant in providing training and PD to school district personnel as they strive to meet accountability requirements and improve student success. Title II, Part A, of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) P.L. 114-95, outlines the federal role in supporting effective instruction through funding for state and local education agencies. This funding is specific to PD for educators primarily through subgrants to local educational agencies (Sec. 2102). Although PD funding is applicable in other parts of the law, sections 2101, 2102, and 2103 include language specific to supporting effective instruction and PD. The implementation of PD has shown positive results for improving instruction, promoting high expectations for students, and for student-centered practices (Landry, et al., 2010; Blanchard LePrevost, et al., 2016; Kennedy, & Schiel, 2010).

Communication is a critical component of leadership and PD (Honig, & Rainey, 2014). The importance of intentional communication cannot be understated, and cultures of effective communication are critical in all schools (Hilliard & Newsome, 2013). Intentionality in communication focusing on PD affords leaders with the moments to plan, implement, and evaluate PD for staff at all levels (Doolittle et al., 2009).

PK-12 Collaboration with IHEs

The overall body of literature examining partnerships between PK-12 schools and IHE faculty is limited (Smith et al., 2016). The limited existing literature does identify a positive benefit to both IHE faculty (or graduate students) and PK-12 classroom teachers when there is a presence of deep and meaningful collaborative efforts between IHEs and PK-12 school districts (Basile & Gutierrez, 2011; Bullough & Baugh, 2018; Burrows, 2015; Cress, Desmet, & Younker, 2020; Hudson et al., 2012; Knowlton et al., 2015; Nurenberger-Haag & Huziak-Clark, 2008; Phelps, 2018; Sandholtz, 2002; Shroyer et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2016; Tomanek, 2005; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). Benefits to both IHE faculty and PK-12 classroom teachers exists across academic disciplines, school location, and grade level. From physical education (Phelps, 2018; Sandholtz 2002) to STEM related fields (Burrows, 2015; Hudson et al., 2012; Nurenberger-Haag & Huziak-Clark, 2008; Tomanek 2005), elementary schools (Cress, et al., 2020), middle and high schools (Knowlton et al., 2015), urban schools (Cress, et al., 2020) and rural schools (Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012) all experienced positive outcomes from the creation of intentional partnerships.

Through an examination of a Professional Development School Partnership Project between 21 standalone K-12 Professional Development Schools and Kansas State University,

Shroyer et al. (2010) found that all 21 schools experienced gains in reading and 13 of the schools outperformed the state average for growth. Undergraduate students placed in the Professional Development Schools experienced demonstrated improvement in science and mathematics content knowledge, science teaching efficacy, attitudes toward science, and teaching acumen (Shroyer et al., 2010). Through the Adopt A Classroom (AAC) program, between the University of Arkansas and the Arkansas Department of Education, university faculty gained a renewed perspective on student development and K-12 faculty found benefit through innovation, collaboration, real-world connections, and rethinking teaching (Smith et al., 2016). The teaching-higher education faculty partnership, pairing 28 higher education faculty with 22 high school and middle school teachers in the state of Rhode Island over three years, found that university faculty were able to: (a) use their passion and expertise to impact content in the classroom, (b) learn about the issues PK-12 faculty face, and (c) create or revise college-level teaching materials (Knowlton et al., 2015). Knowlton et al. (2015) also found that PK-12 teachers improved their subject matter knowledge and found the partnerships to be invaluable and extremely gratifying.

Conceptual Framework

Transactional Relational Exchange Theory

Sheth and Shah (2003) defined transactional exchange as a short-term interaction influenced through a "one-time exchange with no commitment by customers per se beyond the limited interaction" (p. 628), while "relational exchange, on the other hand, transpires over a period of time, and exchange participants are expected to derive complex, personal, noneconomic gains and to communicate through social exchange" (p. 628). Lefaix-Durand and Kozak (2009) explained that exchanges between two parties are "contextually embedded" and that the "exchange process [is] central to understanding the nature of the exchange" (p. 1005). Thus, the governance of exchange works on a power and influence dynamic within the contract between customer and service provider when the environment is mutually beneficial.

Within the context of education, transactional exchange can be reflected as a one-off professional development (PD) activity delivered by an IHE to a group of school district teachers or as part of a for-credit graduate course delivered asynchronously online to a range of teachers representing different districts, grade levels, and disciplines. In relation to the dynamic between PK-12 teachers and IHEs, the customer (teacher or district) views the relationship between professional and IHE as transactional in nature, void of long-standing, complex, personal benefit (Mencarelli & Riviere, 2019). One-off PD activities delivered onsite, or enrollment in isolated graduate degree courses online, may address the transactional immediacy of a particular skill; however, these types of interactions are void of deriving complex, personal, noneconomic gains to improve PK-12 student achievement through social exchange (Sheth & Shah, 2003).

Transactional Relational Exchange Theory relies on relationships in which there is an exchange between two parties where both *transactional* and *relational* exemplify differences based on the meaning and depth of the relationship (Lefaix-Durand & Kozak, 2009). In educational leadership, and teacher training programs, IHEs have relied heavily on transactional relationships through the provision of degrees, certifications, and coursework in exchange for tuition and a commitment on the part of the student to complete certain requirements to improve their practice. While this system has served many, IHEs are undergoing an awakening (Newfield, 2016) that is

nudging them to examine the services they provide and become more in tune with the needs of school districts.

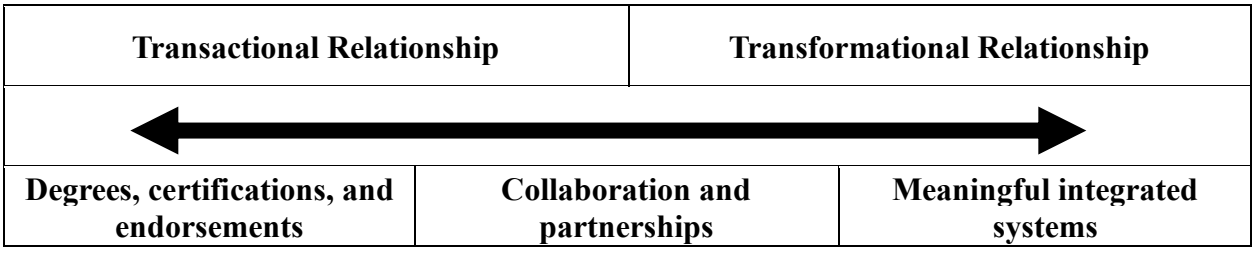
Relationship Exchange Model for Academic Partners (REMAP)

Patrick and Dionne (in press) discussed the ways that PK12 districts and IHEs create, maintain, and revise their relationships. Their work supports and expands Harmeling et al. (2015) as they identified specific events that transform relationships, referred to as exchange events, and illustrated how these events can reformulate relationships within an educational context. When PK-12 district leaders and IHEs form a new relationship to address a specific issue, such as PD, the result is a reformulation of the existing relationship. Over time, the relationship between the district and the IHE will evolve from transactional in nature to one that is ultimately transformational for both parties. Ideally, through the establishment of these mutually beneficial relationships, transformation theory can build into a shared sense of purpose and commitment to common goals (Merriam, 2004). Evidence of similar outcomes are found when Shroyer et al. (2010) identified the concepts of collaborative reconstruction and simultaneous renewal amongst university and participating public schools resulting in the enhancement of a teacher education program.

The REMAP conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1, provides an example specific to the relationship between IHEs and PK-12. The traditional offering of degrees, certifications, endorsements, and coursework to PK-12 teachers and leaders by IHEs represents a transactional engagement in which there is an exchange between the student and the IHE based on monetary agreements and completion requirements for credits or credentials. Sustained interactions evolving beyond this transaction form the relational aspect between the same entities. As complex and personal gains through social exchange deepen and evolve, transformational relationships begin to form. Purposeful and shared commitments to goals signify a transformational relationship in which meaningful integrated systems exist.

Figure 1

PK-12 and Higher Education Example for Relationship Exchange Model for Academic Partners (REMAP)



Methodology

Sample

The instrument was distributed to 497 superintendent email addresses retrieved from a publicly available state-level database (CEPI, 2018). The return rate and individual response rate for each question is approximately 25%. The respondents included 123 superintendents from across the state of Michigan of which 22.8% (N=28) were female and 77.2% (N=95) were male who report having a doctorate degree at a rate of almost 19% (N=23). The majority of districts, 54.1% (N=66) are considered *rural* while 25 are considered *suburban* (20.5%), 22 (18%) are considered *town*, and nine (7.4%) are considered *city* according to state data locale categories.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The superintendent survey, designed specifically for the purposes of this study, included a face validation process with five superintendents from across the state, in varying district types, to ensure validity of questions prior to distribution, via email, to superintendents. Data were collected using Qualtrics®XM. The cross-sectional survey (Appendix) contained questions about the perceptions of superintendents with respect to needs in the areas of curriculum design and implementation, management of the learning environment, cultural diversity, data literacy, communication, PD, and connections with higher education for multiple levels of staff. Question responses include a combination of Likert scale (i.e. *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree*) and rank-order responses.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were organized to perform an initial analysis of results. Three levels of analyses were then conducted to provide statistical explanations of the relationships between variables. These analyses include: (a) an exploratory factor analysis to determine latent variables (factors) based on manifest variables from the Superintendent Survey, (b) a correlation analysis to determine relationships among factors, and (c) multiple regression analysis, including only significant correlations as variables, to determine if factors are significant predictors of outcome variables.

Results

Research Question 1

The first research question sought to determine what superintendents identify as PD needs of teachers in public PK-12 school districts. An analysis of descriptive variables that includes the needs of teachers, the needs of the district related to PD, and discipline-specific needs of elementary teachers was completed.

Professional Development Needs of Teachers. Superintendents most highly agreed that the majority of teachers need to increase their overall knowledge around understanding of learner diversity and data literacy while research methodologies and effective use of classroom management skills was agreed with least. Participants also ranked their perceived areas of greatest

need. Instruction, classroom management, learner diversity, and data literacy needs are the four most critical areas identified. Table 1 is organized by ranking of each component based on *area of greatest need* and needs related to *increasing overall knowledge* for teachers.

Table 1

Comparison of Needs Related to Increasing Knowledge and Ranked Needs for Teachers

Areas of Greatest Need	Rank	Rank Based on Mean	Increasing Overall Knowledge	Mean
Instruction	1	1	Understanding of learner diversity	3.95
Classroom Management	2	2	Understanding of data literacy	3.91
Learner Diversity	3	3	Effective use of technology in the classroom	3.76
Data Literacy	4	4	Ability to effectively instruct	3.66
Curriculum Design	5	5	Understanding of curriculum design	3.58
Cultural Diversity	6	6	Understanding of cultural diversity	3.56
Technology	7	7	Understanding of pedagogy	3.54
Leadership	8	8	Effective classroom management skills	3.46
Research Methodologies	9	9	Understanding of research methodologies	3.13

District improvement needs. Participants were asked to indicate their level of district need for improvement in several areas. Mental health, parent training, and managing inclusive classrooms are reported as the three highest areas of need. Superintendents express the highest need for improvement in mental health above all other areas (N=78) with over three fourths (76.5%) reporting that it was a *very high* or *high* need. Almost 60% (N=66) report managing inclusive classrooms as a *very high* to *high* need in their district and 55% (N=61) report parent training as a *very high* or *high* need. School community relations and test scores are the lowest reported needs with technology integration also reported as less of a need. Table 2 shows these needs in order of highest mean.

Table 2

Need for Improvement as Reported by Superintendents

District Needs	N	Mean	SD
Mental health	111	4.19	.792
Parent training	110	3.72	.890
Managing inclusive classrooms	111	3.62	.905
Technology integration	111	3.48	.952
Test scores	110	3.39	1.024

School community relations	109	3.17	.961

Discipline-Specific needs for elementary teachers. Almost 94% (N=104) of superintendents report that there is *some need, high need,* or *very high need* for mathematics training of elementary school faculty, over 95% (N=104) report the same level of need for training in reading while almost 92% reported the same level of need for language arts (N=100). Similarly, respondents reported that there is *some need, high need,* or *very high need* for training in science at a rate of almost 95% (N=104). Similar data for social studies (77.4%, N=86) and history (65.7%, N=73) indicate a need for training in all areas for elementary faculty. Table 3 includes descriptive statistics for these disciplines.

Table 3

Discipline-Specific Needs for Elementary Faculty

Discipline	N	Mean	SD
Mathematics	111	4.05	.961
Reading	111	3.98	.904
Language Arts	109	3.71	.936
Science	110	3.67	.920
Social Studies	111	3.10	1.018
History	111	2.83	1.026

Research Question Two

Research question two sought to determine which relationships exist between the PD needs of PK-12 public school districts and all other factors in the study. To answer this question, an exploratory factor analysis was performed and these factors were then analyzed to determine statistical correlations.

Factor analysis. Factor analysis included a three-part process to create factors for district needs, communication, and all other variables based on manifest variables from the instrument, with a minimum factor loading coefficient of .500. A principal component extraction method utilizing Varimax rotation yielded several factors included in Table 4. Bartlett's test of sphericity (>0.001) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (.684) were performed and all nonredundant residuals with absolute values greater than .05 is below 50% for all factors. Questions were transformed into means excluding questions that did not meet the threshold for minimum factor loading. Cronbach's Alpha (α <.70) was used to verify reliability for all factors. State data in Table 4, includes district fund balance as a percentage of expenditures (CEPI, 2019a) and is used to represent district funding. Teacher-to-student ratio represents Full Time Equivalency (FTE) district student count data which is divided by district FTE teacher data (CEPI, 2019b; CEPI, 2019c), and Socioeconomic Status (SES) data (CEPI, 2019c) which includes percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch district data.

Table 4

All Factors and Reliability Results Based on Superintendent Survey

District and teacher need factors	α	IHE collaboration and internal factors	α	State data
Curriculum and instruction	.818	Certifications and endorsements	.913	Fund balance as a percentage of expenditures
ELA and mathematics for elementary teachers	.890	Degree programs	.927	
Science and social needs for elementary teachers	.834	Partnership benefit with IHEs	.765	Teacher-to-student ratio
		Dependence on Title funds	.886	SES
		District ability to fund PD	.901	
		IHEs learning from PK-12 personnel	.832	
		Communicating of needs	.876	
		Communication frequency	.726	

Correlations. To examine the second research question, a bivariate correlation utilizing Kendall's Tau Coefficient test was conducted to provide valuable information about the relationships between all factors included in Table 4.

All factors correlate with at least one other factor in a significant way (Table 5). District fund balance as a percentage of expenditures, correlates with dependence on Title funds to provide PD and teacher ratio but, none of the district need factors. Dependence on Title funds correlates with ability to support PD and curriculum and instruction.

Partnership benefit with IHEs is correlated with all need factors along with certifications and endorsements and degree programs. Degree programs, and certifications and endorsements are correlated with all content area needs as well as each other.

Curriculum and instruction need also correlates with dependence on Title funds, and the communication of PD needs to principals.

Table 5

Bivariate Correlation Coefficient Results for all Factors

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Curriculum and instruction													
ELA and mathematics	.255**												
Science, social studies	.131	.314**											
Partnership benefit with IHEs	.200**	.308**	.221**										
Certifications and endorsements	.085	.162*	.158*	.183*									
Degree programs	.131	.135	.239**	.177*	.346**								
IHEs learning from PK-12	.083	.050	.031	.053	.111	.030							
Ability to support PD	.024	.044	-.038	-.054	.046	-.082	.028						
Dependence on Title funds	.235**	.118	.110	.054	-.068	.089	.136	-.183*					
Communication of needs	.132*	.098	.069	.129	.104	.079	.119	.010	.132				
Communication frequency	-.041	-.081	.014	-.067	-.001	-.024	.037	.057	.079	.100			
Teacher to student ratio	.076	.043	.076	.082	-.080	.004	-.042	-.080	.067	.028	-.263**		
Fund balance as a percentage of expenditures	-.065	-.031	-.036	-.008	.068	.041	.061	.088	-.143*	-.049	.047	-.199**	
SES	.048	-.004	-.117	-.036	-.073	-.018	.058	-.043	.260**	.078	.261**	-.085	-.025

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Research Question Three – Teacher and District Needs

To examine the predictive factors of PD needs, multiple linear regression analyses utilizing only factors that exhibited a significant correlation according to Kendall's Tau Coefficient test results was performed with confirmation of observed linearity, homoscedasticity, collinearity statistics, and multicollinearity (All variance inflation factors are 1.2 or less).

Partnership benefit with IHEs, dependence on Title funds, and communication of needs are all significant predictors of curriculum and instruction needs. Multiple regression analysis results (Table 6) reveal that 16.1% (Adjusted R^2) of the variance can be explained by the predictor variables and that all three factors were statistically significant, $F(3,108) = 8.109$, $p = .000$.

Table 6

Multiple Regression Results for Curriculum and Instruction Needs

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Predictors	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.148	.325		6.614	.000
Partnership benefit with IHEs	.218	.077	.250	2.845	.005
Dependence on Title funds	.156	.063	.221	2.492	.014
Percentage of time communicating needs	.166	.079	.188	2.095	.039

Note: $p<.05$

These results indicate that as the need for curriculum and instruction support and PD increases, the perceived benefit of partnering with IHEs also increases. Dependence on federal

Title funds is also a predictor of this need, meaning that there are potential opportunities for collaboration, specifically for districts that are dependent on Title funds for PD. The percentage of time superintendents spend communicating with principals about educational issues predicts the increase in perceived need for curriculum and instruction indicating that communication is critical to PD efforts.

With mathematics and ELA as the outcome variable, 15.5% (Adjusted R^2) of the variance can be explained by the predictor values, F (2,108) = 11.116, p = .000. With regards to science and social studies, 11.9% (Adjusted R^2) of the variance can be explained by the predictor, F (3,107) = 5.950, p = .001. Table 7 provides combined regression analysis results.

Table 7

Content Area Needs for Districts Combined Regression Results

Content Area Needs	Predictors	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Mathematics and ELA	(Constant)	2.073	.423		4.901	.000
	Partnership benefit with IHEs	.413	.1	.372	4.121	.000
	Certifications and Endorsements	.114	.091	.113	1.251	.214
Science and social studies	(Constant)	1.305	.465		2.808	.006
	Partnership benefit with IHEs	.305	.107	.266	2.849	.005
	Certifications and endorsements	.092	.102	.088	.897	.372
	degree programs	.169	.108	.154	1.569	.120

Note: p>.05

Partnership benefit with IHEs is a predictor for all content areas. This signifies that as the level of need for content area supports increase, so does the perceived benefit of partnering with IHEs for PD and supports.

Limitations

These data were collected and analyzed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the results provide insight regarding PD needs and relationships between PK-12 and IHEs, these needs may change as a result of the pandemic; however, the need for ongoing PD and the opportunities to collaborate might well be exacerbated as school districts and IHEs navigate the complex nature of education in the future.

Discussion

This study provides valuable statistical information for both PK-12 educators and IHEs. Critical insight into the needs of PK-12 school districts, as reported by superintendents, is gained and exposes real potential for transformational relationships between PK-12 and IHE educators. As both populations continue the quest to facilitate student success, the timing for forging these transformational relationships is paramount.

The results of these unique partnerships support Lowery et al. (2018) who stated "Benefits reached to the students in the classroom, the classroom teachers, the university faculty, the teacher candidates as developing educators, and the community at large" (p. 107). They go on to discuss mutual trust and commitment in addition to transformational concepts. Illustrating benefits that transcend transactions, they reported that "These partnerships represent unique spaces in which the best opportunity for educational innovation as well as personal satisfaction and professional growth can occur" (p. 108).

As these partners move beyond transactions, improve trust, and develop integrated systems built around common goals, the findings from this study can provide valuable information about meeting the needs of PK-12 school districts and opportunities for IHEs to be responsive to those needs in a meaningful way.

PK-12 and IHE educators have collaborated for many years to some degree but, these relationships have been largely transactional in nature. For instance, educators would take coursework, complete degree programs, or pursue certifications through IHEs to advance their careers and, ideally, gain valuable skills and knowledge to improve practice based on the needs of the individual educator. IHEs have historically provided these services, yet, superintendents and district leaders, writ large, have been void from influencing the development of these credit bearing offerings.

As PK-12 education and IHEs change the nature in which they provide services, and public resources become scarcer, it is critical to examine potential relationships. To provide PK-12 educators more targeted PD, IHEs need to redefine the services they offer and be responsive to the needs of districts. In an era of highly available PD options through professional organizations, transactional experiences will persist. However, through application of the REMAP model through the communications between PK-12 districts and IHE's, the development, and delivery, of more meaningful PD, based on district needs, provides greater opportunity for increased student performance.

Past examples of meaningful partnerships between PK-12 educators and IHE faculty have yielded positive results for both parties involved (Basile & Gutierrez, 2011; Bullough & Baugh, 2018; Burrows, 2015; Cress, Desmet, & Younker, 2020; Hudson et al., 2012; Knowlton et al., 2015; Nurenberger-Haag & Huziak-Clark, 2008; Phelps, 2018; Sandholtz, 2002; Shroyer et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2016; Tomanek, 2005; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). Using school improvement plans, student achievement data, and in-class observations, collaborative efforts between superintendents and IHE faculty can identify, and develop, meaningful PD experiences for PK-12 teachers. However, in many cases, the concept and purpose of these partnerships are university led.

Implications for District Leaders and Future Research

District leaders need to initiate conversations with IHE's and insert themselves into the dialog to explore collaborative opportunities that ensure the learning activities are relevant and focused for both districted designed PD and credit-based educational experiences. These finding indicate that superintendents are interested in meaningful relationships between their districts and IHEs in their state, as reflected in the REMAP (Authors, 2021), and also have expressed a clear understanding of the type of PD they need from IHEs. Outcomes from such collaborative efforts may improve student success through the advancement of intentional practices for PK-12 teachers and deepen IHE faculty understanding of today's students that can be translated to teacher preparation programs at their institutions.

While this study includes superintendent perceptions of PD need and PK-12 district relationships with IHEs, additional research with other key populations will prove helpful in a more thorough understanding of the concepts in this research. For example, replicating this study with other populations such as: (a) principals, (b) charter schools, (c) private schools, (d) public and private university faculty and administrators, (e) PK-12 faculty, and (f) state departments of education may reveal valuable insights with respect to these relationships and the needs of specific populations. Additionally, performing this study across multiple states may yield valuable information about generalized findings to a broader population and examining non-academic needs such as mental health and addressing student diversity can contribute to the literature on improving outcomes for students beyond academics exclusively.

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Appendix

CMU Superintendent Survey

Start of Block: Teaching and Learning

Q30
Faculty in the College of Education and Human Services at Central Michigan University are eager to better understand the specific skill sets and knowledge base that your faculty and staff need in order to advance your district's success. The entire survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time to complete. All data collected will be kept strictly confidential and only reported in the aggregate. By choosing to participate in this survey, you are providing consent to be a part of this study. At any point in time, you can withdraw your responses from this study by contacting the Master of Arts in Education at CMU, MAEd@cmich.edu or by calling (989) 774-3144. Research findings will be shared with you if you choose to participate.

Q1 The following nine (9) questions will ask about areas where the majority of teachers in your district need to increase their overall knowledge.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

The majority of teachers in my district need to increase their:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Understanding of curriculum design (1)	•	•	•	•	•
Ability to effectively instruct (2)	•	•	•	•	•
Understanding of pedagogy (3)	•	•	•	•	•
Effective classroom management skills (4)	•	•	•	•	•
Effective use of technology in the classroom (5)	•	•	•	•	•
Understanding of learner diversity (6)	•	•	•	•	•

Understanding of cultural diversity (7)	•	•	•	•	•
Understanding of data literacy (8)	•	•	•	•	•
Understanding of research methodologies (9)	•	•	•	•	•

Q2 **Please rank order from 1 to 9 (with 1 being the most important) the areas of greatest need for teachers in your district:**
_____ Classroom Management (1)
_____ Cultural Diversity (2)
_____ Curriculum Design (3)
_____ Data Literacy (4)
_____ Leadership (5)
_____ Learner Diversity (6)
_____ Instruction (7)
_____ Research Methodologies (8)
_____ Technology (9)

Q4

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

IHEs in the State of Michigan should do more to assist my district in effectively implementing school improvement plans by offering professional development activities.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q5 **IHEs in the State of Michigan should do more to assist my district in effectively implementing school improvement plans through content delivered in master's degree programs.**

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)

- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q6 **My district has an impactful relationship with local IHEs in the State of Michigan.**
- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q7 **My district is able to meet the increased professional development demands for new teachers.**
- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q8 **Traditional credit-bearing graduate course work can meet the professional development needs of my district.**
- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q9 **Traditional professional development offerings (e.g.: in-services, conferences, etc.) can meet the professional development needs of my district.**
- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q10 Please indicate your frequency of communication in the following questions:

On average, how frequently do you communicate with your building level principals by email?

- Multiple times a day (1)
- Once a day (2)
- Every couple of days (3)
- At least once a week (4)
- Less than once a week (5)

Q12

On average, how frequently do you communicate with your building level principals face-to-face?

- Multiple times a day (1)
- Once a day (2)
- Every couple of days (3)
- At least once a week (4)
- Less than once a week (5)

Q11 **When communicating with your principals (by email or face-to-face), what percentage of time do you spend on the topics listed below?**

	0%-20% (1)	21%-40% (2)	41%-60% (3)	61%-80% (4)	81%-100% (5)
Professional Development for Teachers, Administrators, and Staff (1)	•	•	•	•	•
Classroom Management (2)	•	•	•	•	•
Cultural Diversity (3)	•	•	•	•	•
Curriculum Design (4)	•	•	•	•	•
Data Literacy (5)	•	•	•	•	•
Leadership (6)	•	•	•	•	•
Learner Diversity (7)	•	•	•	•	•

Instruction (8)	•	•	•	•	•
Research Methodologies (9)	•	•	•	•	•
Technology (10)	•	•	•	•	•

Q13

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

IHEs in the State of Michigan should do more to help assess the effectiveness of teaching and learning in my district.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q14 **IHEs in the State of Michigan should do more to assist with school community relationships.**

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q15 The following four (4) questions will ask about the benefit of your district collaborating with IHEs in the State of Michigan.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree.

My district can benefit by partnering with IHEs in the State of Michigan to increase:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)

The effectiveness of my faculty. (1)	•	•	•	•	•
Student success, as defined by my district. (2)	•	•	•	•	•
The number of students enrolled in my district. (3)	•	•	•	•	•
The number of pathways for students from my district to complete a postsecondary degree program. (4)	•	•	•	•	•

Q16 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree.

My district believes certifications and endorsements (not required for practice) are an important part of the professional development process for:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Faculty (8)	•	•	•	•	•
Staff (9)	•	•	•	•	•
Administrators (10)	•	•	•	•	•

Q18 **My district believes Master's degree programs are an important part of the professional development process for:**

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Faculty (8)	•	•	•	•	•
Staff (9)	•	•	•	•	•
Administrators (10)	•	•	•	•	•

Q19 **My district believes Education Specialist (Ed.S.) degree programs are an important part of the professional development process for:**

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Faculty (8)	•	•	•	•	•
Staff (9)	•	•	•	•	•
Administrators (10)	•	•	•	•	•

Q20 **My district believes doctoral degree programs are an important part of the professional development process for:**

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Faculty (8)	•	•	•	•	•
Staff (9)	•	•	•	•	•
Administrators (10)	•	•	•	•	•

Q21 **University and college professors in teacher education programs can learn from the employees (faculty, staff, administrators) in my district.**

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Faculty (8)	•	•	•	•	•
Staff (9)	•	•	•	•	•

Administrators (10)	•	•	•	•	•

Q22
Please indicate your level of dependence with the following statement: Not at all dependent, Somewhat dependent, Very Dependent, Extremely dependent.

How dependent is your district on title funds to provide professional development for:

	Not at all dependent (1)	Somewhat dependent (2)	Very dependent (3)	Extremely dependent (4)
Faculty? (8)	•	•	•	•
Staff? (9)	•	•	•	•
Administrators? (10)	•	•	•	•

Q23
Please indicate your level of extent in the following questions.

To what extent is your district able to financially support the professional development needs of:

	Very little (1)	Little (2)	Somewhat (3)	Great (4)	Extreme (5)
Faculty? (8)	•	•	•	•	•
Staff? (9)	•	•	•	•	•
Administrators? (10)	•	•	•	•	•

Q24 **To what extent does your district's ability to offer quality professional development impact your ability to attract and retain talent?**

- Very little (1)
- Little (2)

- Somewhat (3)
- Great (4)
- Extreme (5)

Q25 Please indicate your level of interest for the following question.

My district is interested in pursuing external, non-governmental, grant funding for the purposes of professional development.

- No interest (1)
- Little interest (2)
- Some interest (3)
- A lot of interest (4)
- Extremely interested (5)

Q26 **Please indicate your district's level of need for discipline specific training for your elementary faculty:**

	Very high need (1)	High need (2)	Some need (3)	Little need (4)	No need (5)
History (1)	•	•	•	•	•
Language Arts (2)	•	•	•	•	•
Math (3)	•	•	•	•	•
Reading (4)	•	•	•	•	•
Science (5)	•	•	•	•	•
Social Studies (6)	•	•	•	•	•

Q27 **Please indicate your district's need for improvement in the following areas:**

	Very high need (1)	High need (2)	Some need (3)	Little need (4)	No need (5)

Managing inclusive classrooms (1)	•	•	•	•	•
Mental health (2)	•	•	•	•	•
Parent training (3)	•	•	•	•	•
School community relations (4)	•	•	•	•	•
Technology integration (5)	•	•	•	•	•
Test scores (6)	•	•	•	•	•

Q29 **How do you think IHEs in the State of Michigan can best collaborate with your district?**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Open answer:

Adult Bias and Bullying in Education: Coping with Both an Epidemic and a Pandemic

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This paper explains the role of female bias in the rise of adult bullying in workplaces, including those in education. The 2014 and 2017 Workplace Bullying Institute surveys show growth nationally in this phenomena with respondents becoming more aware of its occurrence (Namie, 2014; Namie, 2017). The paper specifically reviews and examines the findings in literature pertaining to females and their roles in perpetrating and perpetuating adult bullying while also including the unpublished statistical results of a 2016 non-experimental quantitative study done in all 850 Illinois public school districts (excluding charter and private schools) for which the results are still relevant today. Via an online survey Illinois superintendents and board members were asked to provide their perceptions of any adult bullying that might be occurring in their districts, who they perceived to be the perpetrators and targets, their perceptions as to the most used tactics and the resulting effects on victims. Data was disaggregated by age groupings, role, and gender; however, the study results discussed in this paper are those relating to females. These results make a noteworthy contribution to the literature on female adult bullies in K-12 educational institutions because: 1) They provide an understanding of the potential and reality of female adult bullying in public school districts; 2) the study results pertaining to females concur with the results from other surveys and research; and 3) Sorrell (2017) found that there was a significant relationship between adult workplace bullying in schools and student bullying in schools. Sorrell's findings (2017) and this study's findings underline the need for further studies on this topic to ascertain what bullying behaviors are being role modeled for students from a gender perspective and the impact of those behaviors on school effectiveness.

Keywords*: adult bullying in K-12 education, female bullying, bias, bullying effects*

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In medicine and popular culture, the word "*epidemic"* is used to describe the rapid spread or increase in the occurrence of something (e.g. disease), while the term *"pandemic"* is usually reserved for medicine and describes an epidemic disease that has spread over a large geographic area such as an entire country (Kelly, n.d.). An epidemic that is growing in the American workplace is that of adult bullying (Kelly, 2006) and it is becoming more and more apparent in educational settings (Mayhew and McCarthy, 2005), even in these pandemic times.

This paper specifically reviews the findings in literature pertaining to bias and its relationship to adult bullying with a focused examination of females and their roles in perpetrating and perpetuating it. It includes the unpublished statistical results of a non-experimental quantitative study done in all 850 Illinois school districts in 2016 that asked superintendents and board members for their perceptions as to their awareness of any adult bullying that was taking place in their district. Study findings will focus on the female roles and actions in any perceptions of adult bullying and the results shared will note any alignment between those findings and other research findings.

The outcomes of this study are important to share because there is limited research about perceived adult bullying in the specific workplace setting of K-12 school districts, and particularly about that which is focused on females and their involvement in those settings. This is essential information to determine because according to the U. S. Department of Education, there is growing evidence that all bullying has a persistent and pervasive effect on the learning environment of a school and its climate (Isaac, 2015), and that climate impacts that school's effectiveness (Tubbs & Garner, 2008). This paper concludes by providing some suggested actions that can occur both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Review of the Related Literature

The Origins of Bias and How They Lead to Bullying

A bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect people's understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner that causes them to have feelings, beliefs, and prejudice towards or against someone or something due to their particular attributes, characteristics, and behaviors that might include skin color, gender, ethnicity, and age (Staats, Capatosto, Kenney, & Mamo, 2017). These stereotypical associations develop over the course of an individual's lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages, from direct personal experience, from other people, via the media (Understanding Unconscious Bias, 2015), or for children from biased nonverbal signals demonstrated by adults (Skinner, Meltzoff, & Olson, 2017).

There are many stereotypes that already exist in the society into which people are born. For example, American children, by way of the literature to which they are exposed during their K-12 education, receive mixed messages that contribute towards the strengthening of stereotypes about females. In some pieces of literature, the female's role in society has been stereotyped as a nurturer such as the "Mother Hubbard" character who is concerned about keeping her children fed even though her cupboards were bare. In other literature pieces, it literally portrays the female as a witch seeking power such as the "Wicked Witch of the West" who wanted the power of the ruby slippers (Baum, 1900).

Even today, American society continues to perpetuate the stereotypes and inequalities linked to gender, race, class, religion, ethnicity, and other "differences" (Kerbo, 2000). One

inequality and stereotype is easily seen through the continuation of a patriarchal culture in which men have held and continue to hold powerful roles in political, economic, and social institutions as a result of using "control and domination" as a way of ensuring one's own safety (Kerbo, 2000). This societal bias towards a patriarchal society certainly may be a factor in the way in which females observe the world, as well as in their quest for power. The obtainment of power over others is one reason that females seek to bully other females (Wiedmer, 2011). The power sought may be social, intellectual, financial, or physical (Brunner & Lewis, 2015).

While mild forms of bias, stereotyping, and prejudice can create uncomfortable and uncivil interactions, even avoidance, the more extreme forms of it lead to conflict, harassment, or aggression (Understanding Unconscious Bias, 2015). Bullying is an aggressive act that can occur almost anywhere with some of the most commonly reported locations being in schools, at the workplace, and at home (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010). It is when adults bully others because of their gender, race, ethnicity, or other factors, that a problem arises.

The Differences: Harassment, Bullying, and Mobbing

There is a distinct difference among harassment, bullying, and mobbing. The distinction between harassment and bullying is that when an aggressive bullying-type of behavior is directed at a target and the target is also a member of a protected class (race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, national origin, sexual orientation, citizenship status or any other federally protected class) that behavior is then defined as harassment.

Researchers began to discuss and explore the concept of bullying among adults in work settings in the early 1990's (Leymann, 1990). Bullying is an individual's repeated offensive escalating behavior towards another through vindictive, cruel or malicious attempts to humiliate, marginalize, or undermine an individual. It includes, but is not limited to psychological pressure, intimidation, threats, conspiracies, manipulation, extortion, coercion and hostile behavior which could impact the worth, dignity, and well-being of the individual (Steinman, 2003). Again, to constitute bullying, these actions must be escalating and occur repeatedly and regularly and over a period of time (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003).

Bullying and harassment are often confused as they are similar. Both are about an imbalance of power, control and power, actions that hurt or harm another person emotionally, mentally, or physically, and the target has difficulty stopping the actions directed towards them. Bullying can happen to anyone, but when it happens to a member of a protected class, it is harassment.

Mobbing then is group bullying through rumor, innuendo, discrediting, isolating, and intimidation (Elliott, 2003). It, too, is a repeated offensive escalating behavior over a period of time that is enacted by a group of individuals with the intent to hurt or harm someone emotionally, mentally, or physically.

Bullying and mobbing are forms of aggression against anyone, rather than specific discrimination or harassment against someone who is in a protected class. They are malicious attempts in-person or on-line to force someone out of the workplace. There is a deliberate intent and a power disparity that robs individuals of their reputation, professional integrity, and competence (Davenport et al., 2005). A victim of bullies is called "a target" and the bully or bullies are called "the perpetrator(s)".

Research has indicated that there are at least 45 different bullying and mobbing behaviors that can be grouped into five different categories that include: 1) attacks on one's self-expression and the way communication happens; 2) attacks on one's social relations; 3) attacks on one's

reputation; 4) attacks on the quality of one's professional and life situation; and 5) direct attacks on a person's health (Davenport et al., 2005).

Why Bullies Bully and Why Females Bully

Bullies bully because of bias, differences in values, and a lack of respect for diversity. They seek attention and power, often "pulling a power play". Bullies want to control others and often envy the superior competence or overachievement of an individual. A bully may: 1) appear to be outgoing, funny, and charming to gain private and personal information that they then can use to manipulate and threaten their targets; 2) be sarcastic, putting others down with negative humor, then say they were only kidding; 3) brag and convince others that they are smarter, know the right people, and have more knowledge and experience; 4) sabotage the work performance of others by giving incomplete or no information about a work assignment; 5) use divide and conquer techniques; and 6) give supervisors false information about their targets (Middelton-Moz & Zawadski, 2014).

There are many opinions specifically as to why women bully. These include low self-esteem and feelings of competition, jealousy, envy, and the quest for power (Barash, 2006; Holiday & Rosenberg, 2009). Dellasega (2005) offers that females bully because some never outgrow the relational aggression behaviors (i.e. negative gossip, using relationships to hurt another) they may have learned when they were in their early teens. She also offers that low esteem may propel a woman into an aggressive or a passive stance (Dellasega, 2005).

Who Bullies Who?

Research has demonstrated that there are certain reasons that people become workplace targets of adult bullies. Individuals who lack self-confidence or sufficient conflict management skills are most likely to be targets of workplace bullies. People who are characterized as overachievers also have more potential to fall prey to a workplace bully because the bully feels threatened by the target's competence. Bullying may occur due to the bully's need to boost his or her own worth and to undermine another as the result of feeling envious of the target's talents or work ethic (Georgakopoulos, Wilkin, & Kent, 2011).

The most recent Workplace Bullying Institute national survey was done in 2017 and its results showed that respondents perceived males as bullying females at 65%, which was an increase of 8% from the 2014 Workplace Bullying Institute national survey, and males bullying males at 35%, which was a decrease of 8% from the 2014 survey (Namie, 2014; Namie, 2017). That same 2017 survey showed that respondents perceived females as bullying females at 67%, which was down 1% from the 2014 survey and bullying males at 33% which was an increase of 1% from the 2014 survey (Namie, 2014; Namie, 2017). Interestingly, 51.5% of the respondents to the survey were female with 48.5% being male.

The Bully Toolkit and Female Tactics for Bullying

Cassito et al. (2003) have identified some of the tactics that bullies use and they include: exclusion, slander, gossiping, rumors, humiliation, turning co-workers against the target, intrusions into private life, isolation, provocation, ridicule (especially in the presence of others), taking away key areas of the target's responsibilities, threats of violence, verbal abuse, repeated criticism and

blame, physical abuse, assignment of meaningless tasks, assignment of new duties without training, excessive monitoring of the person, forced inactivity, unjustified evaluation ratings, unjustified transfers or disciplinary actions, intentionally underrating or ignoring proposals, and mandating a work overload with impossible deadlines.

Barnes (2012) identified additional behaviors in the "bully's toolkit" and they consist of: Glaring, staring, showing hostility, flaunting status, ignoring the target or his/her contributions, failing to respond to calls or memos, the silent treatment, shouting, throwing tantrums, starting or spreading gossip, consistently stealing credit for the target's work, blaming the target for mistakes made by others, excluding the target from important activities and/or meetings, swearing, making obscene or offensive gestures, playing mean pranks, and moving the target's desk or office to a remote area to humiliate the target.

Research has found that female bullying tactics tend to focus on: 1) verbal threats or aggressiveness which include behaviors intended to dominate, manipulate, intimidate, or coerce; 2) words/gossip meant to undermine a target's self-esteem or sense of self or make him or her feel invisible; 3) words/gossip intended to question the target's credibility, authority, image, or reputation; 4) limited access to particular roles, assignments, meetings, positions, important information, supervisors; 5) being lied to, ostracized, demeaned, or socially excluded; and 6) blaming the target for errors, being disrespectful, and taking credit for others' work (Dellasega, 2005; Holiday & Rosenberg, 2009).

The Toll of Adult Bullying and Specifically on Females

Targets (victims) of adult bullying suffer emotionally, mentally, and physically. They experience varying symptoms that include: 1) increasing distress; 2) physical and or mental illness; 3) problems sleeping and fatigue; 4) lack of concentration; 5) weight gain or loss; 6) drug/alcohol abuse; 7) isolation/social misery; 8) avoidance of the workplace; 9) uncharacteristic fearfulness; 10) crying for no apparent reason; 11) depression; 12) panic attacks; 13) forgetfulness; 14) being extremely accident prone; 15) violence directed at self or others; and 16) attempted/successful suicide. Many victims suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder which is an injury that results from an overwhelming assault on the mind and emotions and with some, death may occur (Davenport et al., 2005).

In 2018, Misawa, Andrews, and Jenkins performed a content analysis specifically examining women's experiences with adult workplace bullying and they began with research that started in 2000. They found that bullying in the workplace affects women's mental and physical health, as well as their work environment and their social and work relationships (Misawa, Andrews, and Jenkins, 2018).

The K-12 Adult Bullying Study

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine K-12 superintendent and board members' perceptions as to if and how adult bullying was taking place in their school district. It also explored their perspectives as to who bullied who, how often, and the perceived effect that the bullying had on victims.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework that was used for this study was conflict theory because it encompasses the concepts of inequality, imbalance of power, and instances of oppression, all of which relate to bullying. It can be used on a large or small scale to study the imbalance of power as well as how that affects human behavior (Hutchinson, 2011). Conflict theory raises issues of status when considering human diversity and that, in turn, not only relates back to bullying, but it also relates back to the mission of social justice (Isaac, 2015).

Study Questions

This study had five questions that it sought to answer. These questions were:

1. In Illinois public school districts, based on gender, who perceived the occurrence of adult bullying more often?
2. In Illinois public school districts, were males or females perceived to be the bully more often?
3. In Illinois public school districts, were males or females perceived to be the target of adult bullying more often?
4. In Illinois public school districts, what bullying tactics did each gender use most often?
5. In Illinois public school districts, what effects of bullying were most experienced by each gender?

Method

Sample

This study used total population purposive sampling with all superintendents and board members in the 850 Illinois public school districts (excluding charter and private schools) being invited to participate. Purposive sampling is often referred to as judgmental or expert sampling and this sampling method was appropriate as superintendents and board members share the common characteristic of working with educators in the same school district. The researcher wanted to generate the participants' perceptions and experiences as to if any adult bullying was taking place in their school district.

Survey Instrument

Via an online Google survey respondents were asked to respond to demographic questions, categorical response questions, and one open-ended question. Some of the survey questions were similar, but not exact, to those asked in the 2014 national Workplace Bullying Institute survey (Namie, 2014). Within the pool of survey questions, respondents were asked to provide their perceptions of any adult bullying that might be occurring in their districts, who they perceived to be the perpetrators and targets, their perceptions as to the bullying tactics most used, and the resulting effects on targets.

Design

This study used a non-experimental quantitative design. Descriptive data was reviewed and it was disaggregated by age groupings, role, and gender. For the purpose of this paper, it is predominantly the gender results that will be shared.

Results

Response Rates

The completed sample size for the online survey used was 240 respondents and these respondents represented 20% of all Illinois public school districts. They also represented a variety of school configurations (elementary, high school, and unit K-12 districts) because Illinois is one of the few states in the United States that has what is known as a "duo district" configuration for their school districts. This means that communities throughout time have been allowed to choose how their school district will be arranged. For example, one community may have chosen to have a separate K-8 school district and an additional separate 9-12 school district. Yet another community may have chosen to organize its school district, into what is known as a unit school district, which is one that contains all grades K-12.

The majority of survey respondents (92.1%) were between the ages of 30 and 64 years old. Females comprised 44.58% of the respondent group and males comprised 55.42%. Within the total respondent group there were 33.8% superintendents; 66.2% board members; 25.35% male superintendents; 28.11% male board members; 9.68% female superintendents; and 36.86 female board members. One reason that the percentages may be lower in terms of overall female respondents and female superintendents is due to the lower number of females in leadership roles. While females remain in the majority of classrooms, there is still a gender gap in terms of who sits in the chair in the superintendent's office, and one reason for this may be because school board members are still predominantly 56% male (Kilpatrick, 2019).

Findings for Question One

The first question in this study asked for superintendent and board member perceptions as to the occurrence of adult bullying in their districts. The results of the study indicated that males (60.90%) more often perceived the occurrence of adult bullying/mobbing taking place in the educational workplace than females did. Within the total respondent group, a total of 64.2% shared that they had seen bullying or mobbing happen to others and 26.3% said that they had heard it happened to others. The total group also said that they that they had personally experienced bullying or mobbing in their educational workplace (67.1%) and a small percentage (15.4%) even shared that they "may have" bullied another while at their educational workplace.

Findings for Question Two

The second question in this study asked who was perceived to be the bully more often—males or females. The study found that females were perceived to be the most frequent perpetrators of adult bullying/mobbing (52.5%). With regards to this finding Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen (2010) share that the findings from one study done in one setting may not necessarily be generalized to

other geographical and cultural settings because the cultural values present may affect the overall prevalence of workplace bullying. That said, this study's finding is consistent with the findings from other studies that have found a significantly higher perpetrator rate for women (Giorgi, Ando, Arenas, Shoss and Leon-Perez, 2013; Namie, 2014).

Findings for Question Three

The third question in this study asked respondents who they perceived to be bullied most often. They said that both males (53.5%) and females (82.5%) were perceived to bully females more frequently rather than males. This may be because when growing up, boys and girls are punished and rewarded for different behaviors; thus, as men and woman they continue to exhibit those behaviors that they believe to be appropriate to their gender. For example, expressing anger may heighten a man's status in some professional settings while women who do this in that same setting are seen as being emotional, less competent and perhaps even aggressive (Brescoll and Uhlmann, 2008).

Findings for Question Four

Question four in this study asked respondents about their perception as to the types of bullying tactics each gender used most often. The study found that the tactic most used by females was slander (25.8%), followed closely by verbal abuse and attacks (25%). With regards to female tactics, these results compliment the findings of Björkqvist, Österman and Lagerspetz (1994) who determined that women tended to rely more on social manipulation tactics such as rumors, backbiting, insulting comments about someone's private life, and social exclusion.

Findings for Question Five

The final question in this study asked respondents about their perceptions as to what were the most experienced effects for any targets who had been bullied. Their perception was that the main effect for adult bullied females was chronic stress, which is a stress that won't "go away". As noted earlier in this paper, workplace bullying has been shown to have severe consequences for employee health and well-being with some researchers reporting that women experience stronger symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Einarsen and Hetland, 2016). Rodríguez-Muñoz, Moreno-Jiménez, Sanz Vergel and Garrosa Hernández (2010) found that there was a strong association between bullying and symptoms of post-traumatic stress among women.

Discussion

The Importance of the Study

The results from this study make a noteworthy contribution to the literature on adult bullying in K-12 educational settings. They provide an understanding of the potential and reality of adult bullying taking place in school districts and illustrate a stark contrast from the female as a nurturer to the female as an aggressor. Many of the outcomes from this study concur with other conclusions in the research literature about females as perpetrators and perpetuators of adult bullying, while offering some explanation about why that may be and how bias and conflict theory contribute to

it. The study findings also strengthen the need for further research in terms of the what, why, and how of gender-based bullying behaviors in educational settings. It is essential to determine what behaviors are being role modeled for students because they do mimic what they see and educators at all levels should serve as positive role models for them.

This study is also important in another way. It could be considered a pilot study, a first of its kind, if you will. When originally searching the literature for a study like this to replicate, none could be found. With this study having had a respondent return rate that represented 20% of all Illinois public school districts, using it as a pilot study provides an opportunity to alleviate any potential or found problems (e.g. question wording, strategies for obtaining a higher return rate, etc.) before replicating it in a larger regional study (Andrews, Nonnecke, & Preece, 2003).

Implications for Practice

If educational leaders truly want to improve school culture and effectiveness, they must work to eliminate bias and adult bullying. As a result of the literature review in this paper and the findings resulting from the K-12 adult bullying study, there are many suggestions as to the implications for practice that include: 1) having a good relationship with your unions/associations; 2) providing professional development to everyone on bias and adult bullying; 3) creating, communicating, and upholding an adult bullying in the workplace policy or negotiating language that addresses it in any collective bargaining agreement; 4) creating an accountability system for investigating any reported complaints immediately and acting accordingly; 5) taking the necessary steps to create a safe and bully-free workplace; 6) evaluating climate and conducting periodic surveys of working conditions; 7) establishing an employee hotline; and 8) lobbying and supporting state and federal legislation pertaining to a "bully-free" workplace law.

There is one more implication for practice that can have a tremendous impact on improving school culture and its effectiveness, while working to eliminate bias and adult bullying. That implication consists of creating and implementing an adult social and emotional learning program.

Montgomery and Rupp (2005) have reported that the social emotional competence level and well-being of educators, all educators, is key to influencing student outcomes. Some of the most important social emotional learning that students receive begins with the interactions that they have with the adults at school given the amount of time that students interact with them.

At least four states (Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington, and Wisconsin) have worked with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning to create a competency-based adult social and emotional learning framework that outlines what adult social and emotional learning looks like in five core social and emotional areas that include: 1) self-awareness (understanding one's emotions and thoughts and how they influence behavior); 2) self-management (being able to regulate one's emotions and behaviors in different situations and to set and work toward goals); 3) responsible decision-making (being able to make positive choices and take responsibility for positive and negative outcomes); 4) social awareness (being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others); and 5) relationship skills (being able to establish and maintain healthy and meaningful relationships with others) (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, Core SEL Competencies Section, n.d.).

Conclusion

Workplace bullying is not discriminatory as to where it occurs. Wherever it takes place and for whatever reason, one thing is certain, it contributes to the creation or continuance of a toxic workplace culture, impeding that organization's effectiveness and making any improvement within that organization next to nearly impossible. Workplace bullying legal expert David Yamada (2010) maintains that workplace bullying is the most neglected form of serious worker mistreatment in American employment law.

This paper explored the nature and involvement of adult female bullying in the educational workplace. The findings from the Illinois study that are shared in this paper are still important today due to the current social unrest as well as the anxiety resulting from the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Falcone (2020) believes that with the heightened anxiety caused by the coronavirus crisis and increasing co-worker disagreements on such things as wearing face masks and social distancing, bullying is poised to rise in the face-to-face workplace. It is also important to note that due to the pandemic, many workplaces have transitioned to full or part-time online work and the potential still exists for adult bullying through messaging apps and social media. Meidav (2020) suggests that as a result of this technologically-based super-connectedness, personal time has been blurred and people continue to interact with their colleagues off hours and sometimes this interaction takes a negative turn.

When educational institutions begin to return to whatever their "new normal" workplace becomes, heightened anxiety, the use of social media, and female bias and bullying will still be there. Adult bullying in the workplace was a national epidemic in the United States well before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic began, it continues on during the pandemic, and it will certainly endure post-pandemic if something is not definitively done by the educational leaders in school districts, state governments, and the federal government.

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An Evaluation of Virginia's Standards of Accreditation: Factors that Foster and Impede Local-Level Discretion in Implementation

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We apply a utilization-focused evaluation approach to an evaluation of Virginia's latest comprehensive accountability policy—the Standards of Accreditation (SOA). Our study focuses on the implementation experiences of district and high school level administrators in four urban districts. This study is significant in two important ways. First it provides an example of UFE approaches to policy analysis and evaluation. The literature on UFE supports the approach's application to policy analysis, but its use in this arena has been limited. Second, our study provides important insights for evaluation stakeholders formulating and implementing complex accountability policy, particularly in early phases of implementation. Our findings explore how and why local level administrators understand each of the new standards, what factors shape those understandings, and then how the case districts and schools respond to each of the SOA. Our findings illustrate how, along one dimension, stakeholders' understandings of the standards are related to factors that influence their sense of implementation efficacy. Along a second compliance-continuous improvement dimension, administrators' leadership experience and change-oriented mindsets appeared to determine how they responded to the new policy regime. We present conclusions and recommendations for key stakeholders and other students of policy analysis and evaluation.

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This paper reports on the early implementation experiences of new state education accountability standards in Virginia. Framed as a utilization-focused evaluation, we sought to capture four districts' experiences early in the adoption of the Virginia Standards of Accountability (SOA). Specifically, and according to the needs of key evaluation users, the study reports on how administrators in four districts made sense of the new SOA, a set of policy indicators designed to allow for broad implementation discretion at the local level. How local level district and school leaders responded to the discretion allowed under these new standards was a key area of focus in this evaluation study (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). The new SOA were developed to complement the long-standing Virginia Standards of Learning (VA Department of Education, 2018). Where the Standards of Learning focused on specific academic content and achievement, the SOA were designed to encourage district and school focus on continuous improvement, student academic growth, and student engagement with school and learning (VDOE, 2018).

The SOA focus on five areas divided into categories for academic performance and student engagement. For example, under the performance category schools are evaluated on student progress in English, mathematics, and science. Districts and schools are measured on their progress in closing achievement gaps in English, mathematics, and science, and on ELL student progress toward English proficiency. Under the student engagement category districts and schools are evaluated on 1) progress toward lowering chronic absenteeism and dropout rates and 2) participation and achievement in college, career, and civic preparedness (VDOE, 2018).

Purpose and Research Questions

Guided by conversations with the intended users of the evaluation – state department of education officials – the purpose of this evaluation study was to understand how the new policies were being interpreted and responded to at the local level. In so doing, we sought to understand the responses of local educational leaders to the new policy, how they responded to the implementation discretion provided in the policy, and the reasoning behind their decisions and/or actions. The evaluation questions, co-developed with key stakeholders included:

1. How are local educational leaders in the case districts interpreting the new SOA and what factors shape those understandings?
2. Given those understandings, how are these districts responding to the new SOA policy?
3. What, if any, unforeseen challenges have emerged as a result of the new SOA and their focus on allowing for local discretion?

Policy Implementation: A Brief Overview

This section provides an overview of how scholars have conceptualized policy implementation and various strategies for implementation in education. Our overview leads to a focus on "new public management" and how that approach has influenced policy implementation in public education. Later, we explain utilization-focused evaluation and its relevance to this study.

Policy Implementation: Evolving Perspectives

The challenge of policy implementation has continued unabated for decades as practitioners have struggled to interpret policy and transform those interpretations into action (Honig, 2006a; Walker,

2004; Werts & Brewer, 2015). Scholars have recounted the evolving approaches and choices that policy makers have used over the past decades in attempts to shed light on factors associated with implementation success, failure, and policy drift (Elmore, 1980; Honig, 2006a; Placier, et al., 2000; Tummers & Bekker, 2014; Walker, 2004). To better understand this evolution, a brief overview of the journey and shifting perspectives is helpful to understand the SOA policy approach.

As Elmore (1980) argued decades ago the focus on policy implementation began in the 1960s with the "war on poverty's" massive infusion of federal dollars aimed at solving the nation's most persistent social problems, including education. Policy designers of the era assumed that implementation fidelity would be ensured across multiple levels without regard for political pressures, resource challenges, and/or requisite knowledge and skill (e.g., Evans, 2010; Lipsky, 2010). This rational model fell short as unaccounted for factors (e.g., context, environment, individual characteristics) stymied policy intentions.

Since the 1970s and 80s, policy scholars have increasingly focused on the dynamic and unpredictable challenges of policy implementation (Honig, 2006b; Malen, 2006). Elmore's (1980) argument for a backward-mapping orientation proved prescient as policy makers attempted to incentivize local actors to work in ways that maximized implementation fidelity to the intended purposes of public policies. A focus on actors responsible for realizing public policy began to surface factors that influenced policy implementation. These factors included, among other things, discretion afforded public servants as they decided how and when to implement policy. In turn, discretionary decisions were influenced by factors such as expertise, relative stakeholder power, available resources, and policy complexity (Evans, 2010; Heinen & Scribner, 2007).

As policy implementation theory and practice shifted to include dynamic challenges at the local level, the new public management approach to policy implementation made its way into the education sector in the 1990s (e.g., De Vries, 2010; Goma, et al., 2009; Møller, & Skedsmo, 2013; Tolofari, 2005). Borrowing from the Total Quality Management (TQM) movement of the early 1990s, performance management by "steering at a distance" (Kickert, 1995) surfaced as both a neo-managerialist conceptual lens and orienting philosophy approach for policy makers (De Vries, 2010). This shift intended to make a break from prescriptive policy implementation strategies toward approaches that sought to deregulate by devolving decision-making authority to street-level bureaucrats (De Vries, 2010; Tolofari, 2005). In so doing, these bureaucrats were held accountable through performance measurement of outcomes as they used local knowledge to overcome local implementation challenges (e.g., Schmoker & Wilson, 1993).

Policy implementation has posed a challenge across each of the aforementioned eras (Fowler, 2012). In large part, these challenges stem from the ways in which implementors make sense of policy (Weick, 1995). In particular, educational scholars have demonstrated that sense-making is influenced by individual cognition shaped by prior knowledge and experience, but also by the social, political, and economic contexts within which those actors operate (Coburn, 2005; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019; Werts & Brewer, 2015). Studies show that these factors, for instance, have shaped how school leaders use their knowledge and status to shape how others understand policy, but school leaders' understandings are also shaped by context (Coburn, 2005; Honig, 2006b). Put simply, actors can manipulate or be manipulated as a result of their participation in the policy implementation process.

The emergence of performance management manifested in federal and state education policy has affected policy evaluation and evaluators as well (Rogers, 2008; Goma, et al. 2009). Complex policy implemented in diverse ways across myriad contexts creates new challenges

that require flexible evaluation approaches. The complexity of these education policies manifests itself in terms of district size, wealth, urbanicity, leadership expertise, teacher quality, etc., creating myriad micro-policy contexts across regions and states. Most policy implementation and sensemaking studies explore relatively singular policy foci. However, questions remain regarding the impact of complex and wide-reaching accountability policy on large numbers of school districts with educational leaders representing an infinite array of individual capacities and implementation contexts. As a result, policy researchers and practitioners have called for evaluation studies that address the processes as well as outputs and outcomes related to large-scale policy interventions (e.g., Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001; Scribner, et al. 2019).

Our utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) approach engaged stakeholders early on to determine what, specifically, stakeholders needed to know and understand in order to make future changes in support of school districts (Patton, 2008). These discussions identified the need to explore how the logic of the SOA policy played out in local district contexts. We worked with stakeholders to develop a plan that would explore how local leaders interpreted and responded to the policy. Also important to the key stakeholders were possible unintended consequences or factors that influenced implementation success (Patton, 2017).

Design and Methods

The UFE approach offered a framework for, among other factors, helping come to understand and articulate their actual wants and needs regarding the evaluation (Patton, 2017). Further, the approach engaged the evaluation team in ways that increased the likelihood that the evaluation outcomes would be useful to the current and future needs of those responsible for the policy issues being evaluated. Specifically, we held multiple discussions with state department of education officials to ensure a mutual understanding of the goals for the evaluation. Finally, we note that extending UFE beyond program evaluation and into the realm of policy evaluation has long been acknowledged, but seldom used (Lester & Wilds, 1990; Patton, 2008).

As a result of these conversations, and guided by department officials' needs, we focused on a cluster of urban school districts in one region of the state. We designed an embedded, multi-case study (Herriott & Firestone, 1983; Merriam, 1998; Scholz & Tietje, 2002). The primary units of analysis were districts embedded in one state context. Key stakeholders also wanted preliminary insights into secondary school experiences with policy implementation. Therefore, we included one high school from each of the four districts, so we could explore school-level SOA policy implementation and any unintended consequences or issues that might arise. We chose this vertical design based on key stakeholder needs in order to provide a focused examination of the implementation experiences across multiple districts and secondary level experiences.

Data Collection

Interviews served as the primary data source. Each superintendent provided access to other staff with leadership and management responsibilities in areas related to the five SOA areas. In each district, we interviewed central office personnel charged with overseeing implementation of elements of the SOA; we also interviewed at least one high school principal in each district. Overall, we interviewed 19 district and school level administrators across districts with

responsibility for overseeing the SOA implementation process. We also interviewed the state superintendent of education and the state education department's director of research – the two state administrators most responsible for the development and implementation of the policy. In all, 21 interviews were conducted with state, district, and high school administrators.

Interview questions focused on participants' understanding of the SOAs, how they approached implementation, and how and why they responded to the various policy elements. We also explored questions regarding their objectives, activities and strategies, assumptions and expectations for their decisions. Documents served as the secondary data source. Specific documents included state department of education regulations and information and school level strategic plans and school improvement documents.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed conventional qualitative procedures (e.g., Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Bogdan and Biklen, 2013). Analysis involved, first, carefully reading and reviewing interview transcripts and documents. These reviews led to coding sessions in which codes and categories related to our areas of interest were developed. Researchers took care to cross-examine each other's coding and resolve interpretive differences where they occurred. We also engaged key stakeholders at each site toward the end of our data analysis to ensure that our findings reflected stakeholders' experiences. We also were sensitive to coding for substantive content around the specific SOA areas, as well as environmental influences (e.g., politics, resources), assumptions and dilemmas or challenges. Coding led to later rounds of categorizing and theorizing to develop broader categories around which we organized our findings.

Findings

We present our findings according to the major standards of interest to our key evaluation users: chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, academic performance, and college, career, and civic readiness. We considered how our interviewees made sense of the new standards, how district and school administrators responded to the standards, and why.

Chronic Absenteeism and the Issue of Locus of Control

Administrator Beliefs about Absenteeism and District/School Influence

We found that across each of the four case districts interviewees recognized chronic absenteeism as a critical issue related to student and school success. However, equally important, these administrators also believed that the sources and reasons for students' chronic absenteeism were the least "leverageable" standards of the new SOA. In other words, these administrators argued that the reasons behind and solutions for chronic absenteeism rested outside of districts' and schools' spheres of influence. For example, administrators often described chronic absenteeism as an area that primarily belonged to parents, giving the schools and districts little control of students' attendance to school. As one administrator said:

> I think attendance is often related to families and family priorities and while we have a responsibility, public education, to evolve families from that, I think we have limited resources when it comes to helping hold families accountable.

Further, interviewees expressed that chronic absenteeism reflects the ongoing challenge that parents do not recognize the relationship between the consistent attendance and student learning.

Responses to chronic absenteeism indicator

In spite of the uniform belief among these administrators that the chronic absenteeism indicator was the least "leverageable" standard for districts, they also agreed that both schools and parents should be held accountable for student attendance. Still, our data showed little in the way of innovative responses to the absenteeism indicator. In three of the four case districts during this first year of SOA implementation, little or no action to implement programs or other actions addressing chronic student absenteeism had been taken. What actions were described fell into traditional compliance approaches to policy implementation and relied on limited resources such as school attendance officers.

More often, we found district and school level personnel struggling to understand their role vis a vis the absenteeism challenge. In these districts, our participants believed that proven interventions either did not exist or that barriers to information sharing between districts limited their learning regarding what strategies worked for similar districts. Chief among these deterrents to action were what one district administrator described as "a vast discrepancy in the collection and monitoring of absenteeism data between and among schools within the same district" and "the challenge of how families are engaged across schools that district leadership may not be fully aware of." The lack of awareness of systemic solutions caused these administrators to focus their attention on other elements of the SOA while putting absenteeism interventions low on their priority list.

However, administrators in one case district were more proactively grappling with ways to address the new absenteeism standard. These leaders understood the interconnectedness between chronic absenteeism and the degree to which students 1) found value in their learning and 2) experienced meaningful relationships with teachers and administrators. Participants from this district described early efforts to draw on parents, teachers, and school communities as resources to develop more engaging school and classroom communities in ways that would increase student attendance. Interviewees stated, unequivocally, that if school staff expected students to come to school regularly, it must be a place where they want to be. To this end, administrators discussed how school level personnel must combat chronic absenteeism by fostering high quality instruction and creating school cultures in which students are supported and have the resources needed to stay engaged throughout their tenure in school.

Data also suggested that these administrators had begun to shift resources in order to adequately address the absenteeism indicator. One school level administrator from the aforementioned district described the traditional approach to absenteeism, something this principal argued had to change: "in high schools the school attendance secretary is often the primary point person focusing on the absenteeism problem, and only in the most cursory ways." This administrator argued that to address absenteeism directly was a "fool's errand." But rather, the root causes of chronic absenteeism needed to be addressed by involving a host of professionals in developing interventions—professionals such as social workers, parents, teachers, and even the courts. In spite of these more strategic approaches to addressing chronic absenteeism, the consensus among these administrators was that the current district- and school-level systems could identify the problem but lacked the capacity to delineate who within the system was responsible for curbing chronic absenteeism.

Another administrator from this more proactive district noted, the chronic absenteeism indicator prompted leadership to more explicitly address attendance in its 5-year strategic plan with more relevant and actionable goals and objectives to be presented during the opening weeks of the 2018 school year. As one administrator from this district described, "we have more actively and openly used baseline attendance data to set new targets and analyze the attendance data to formulate better and more strategic ways to address absenteeism in our schools." This district, as the administrator continued, "used baseline data to determine which students were chronic absentees." With these data, the district was able to inform parents or guardians, continuously monitor students, and also create school-level teams to follow up with specific students and families. These responses not only focused on instructional aspects of the student experience, but also on ways to mitigate challenges posed by poverty, homelessness, etc., that traditional engagement efforts alone would not overcome.

Finally, this district's high school principal described how the district had instituted a comprehensive public relations and communications plan. He stated, "we put in place a standard approach to communication to make sure that all communications to families from schools regarding attendance were consistent across the district with a common language and message." Further, he described, "our communications with students were revised to be more constructive, like focusing on the importance of being in school and communicating what they missed when absent, rather than being punitive all the time."

Graduation Rates: Tension between Outputs versus Outcomes

Factors Driving District Perspectives: Communication and Tradition

Unlike the absenteeism standard, participants tended to perceive a greater degree of control over the new graduation standards. However, participant concerns regarding the graduation standard centered on weak vertical communication from the state department level to districts and schools. These perceived weak communication linkages limited the impact administrators believed they could potentially have, at least in the short term. Most importantly, several interviewees across the four districts stated that while the information provided by the VDOE about graduation indicators was appreciated, it was provided in piecemeal fashion causing administrators to struggle to stay abreast of, and make sense of, the new changes. Lack of coherent communication created implementation questions in the minds of local administrators limiting their vision for innovative approaches to graduation rates. Further, the lack of clear central communication had a negative impact on teachers' understanding of the new changes. According to administrators, not all teachers (or staff) were aware of critical changes to the graduation requirements, and the need for districts to fill in communication gaps exacerbated the potential for mixed and erroneous communications. As such, while administrators tended to understand the new indicators, they struggled to ensure that teachers adequately understood the new requirements. In short, clear, accurate, and comprehensive communication from the state level was critical in light of new changes regarding, for example, new requirements for graduation.

Finally, while administrators recognized that high completion rates were critical measures of school performance, they were skeptical that the new graduate rate standard would foster student engagement. They expressed concern that the intent of the SOA to focus on graduation as an outcome (i.e., graduates with skills to succeed after high school) would not be realized, and rather districts across the state would be inclined to respond to graduation rates as an output (i.e.,

percentage of students graduating). As such, district administrators across our case districts voiced concern that the new SOA standards might create pressure for district rule-bending related to graduation rates. As one high school principal worried, "the graduation rate data is susceptible to manipulation and gamesmanship, and that could deter other districts from authentically complying to the graduation rate indicator." Another district administrator put it this way, "We're really honest when it comes to [graduation rates]. For instance,…a neighboring district…has an on-time graduation rate above ours at about a percentage point or a percentage and a half, yet 60% of those schools aren't accredited."

Responses to the Graduation Indicators

In spite of the challenges, district personnel described initiating practices in support of promoting successful and timely graduation as per the new indicators. Responses fell into two themes: 1) being more intentional about including graduate support activities and practices into master plans and 2) assigning additional resources to graduation support activities. An example of a typical response to the new graduation rate requirements comes from one district that had created a master implementation plan with goals, strategies and criteria to track and measure progress related to student progress toward graduation. In a second example, a district had instituted options to make up lost credit. In this case, the district had instituted Saturday school and evening classes as a result of the new graduation standard.

In three of the four districts, respondents mentioned reallocating resources to provide the human resources to support new and renewed efforts to improve graduation rates. Aligned with the intent of the SOA, administrators generally argued that improved graduation rates must be marked by high quality education. For example, one district created on-time graduation committees to track at-risk students to ensure they were provided credit recovery options, graduation coaches, and graduate lab teachers at schools with lower graduation rates. Another district created two positions at the high school level to advance graduation efforts: Student Advancement Coaches (SAC) and School Improvement Specialists (SIS). Staff in these roles worked closely with school leadership and intervention teams at the middle and high schools. These staff members led school-based teams to identify individual student trajectories and discuss the areas of concern, diagnose and remedy student's needs, and develop intervention plans.

College, Career, and Civic Readiness: Complexity and Scope

Factors Driving District Perspectives

Factors that shaped how districts experienced and perceived the new college, career and civic readiness indicator fell primarily into two themes. First, the shear breadth of post-secondary experiences subsumed under the CCCR indicator posed considerable planning challenges to participants. District participants discussed the plethora of possibilities that the indicator encompassed, and the overwhelming implementation challenge they posed. As a coping mechanism, administrators described focusing on the college-readiness aspects of the CCCR indicator, primarily because administrators believed that they "knew how to 'do college prep'." Regarding career-readiness, administrators discussed numerous programmatic approaches for connecting students to career exploration experiences including, e.g., job shadowing, teaching

workplace skills, and internships. However, they also argued that creating, implementing, and bringing to scale comprehensive career preparation opportunities was a daunting proposition.

The breadth, complexity, and multi-dimensionality of the CCCR standard also created an "ownership conundrum" as one district administrator mentioned. Administrators described how the enormity of the indicator raised questions about who would take administrative and instructional ownership for the CCCR indicator. Some administrators argued for a comprehensive state strategy to address CCCR, rather than leaving it to schools to figure out; an idea that, ironically, runs counter to the underlying philosophy of discretion under the SOA policy. Other administrators argued that district and school leaders should look outward to external partners to create a multi-faceted CCCR strategy.

District Responses to the Complex Challenge of CCCR

During this first year of the SOA policy, district responses to the CCCR indicators were limited, in part, due to the state's choice to not begin measuring CCCR outcomes until year-two of the SOA roll-out. But, in practical terms, administrators we interviewed already demonstrated concern about how to comply with such a complex and multi-faceted standard. Concern across each district focused on how to develop career and civic readiness opportunities that were meaningful, measurable, integrated with the broader curriculum, and scalable to meet all students' needs.

Further, each of these challenges was complicated by the cultural and political pitfalls that come with questions about the purpose of schooling. Across school districts, our participants understood the inherent cultural conflicts embedded in "the three C's." District administrators described how, for some of their education stakeholders, these three foci were considered to be mutually reinforcing goals. But for other stakeholders, defining the purpose of schools as college or vocational preparation, and citizenry development was at best a zero-sum game. Specifically, district administrators expressed their sensitivity to, for instance, parents for whom school was not vocational, but strictly preparatory for professional careers. Administrators also worried that some parents might interpret "civic readiness" as a political stance or attempt to indoctrinate in one form or another. Taken together, these two broad themes posed significant implementation challenges for districts who saw potential responses as highly varied and resource dependent.

Another challenge raised was the potential for parents to perceive the focus on career and civics as a threat to college preparation. Administrators suggested that many parents assume, for instance, that college and career goals are at relative odds. In other instances, principals argued that some core subject teachers see career and civic education as a distraction from college and threat to accountability testing readiness. However, these interviewees also suggested that these challenges provided more reason to ensure that clear communication from the state was required to ensure a common understanding of the CCCR standard among all stakeholders.

Finally, the scarcity of resources surfaced again as an area of concern. The variety of potential approaches to achieve CCCR, coupled with limited resources to do so, presented a conundrum for administrators. We found a relative dearth of concrete responses to the indicator. The most significant response was the result of one district's long-term, on-going efforts in career education. This district had created a strong career preparation culture and infrastructure that had taken root over the years. The district's career centers were dedicated to specific professions that included partnerships with local industries. Students could attend the career center of choice regardless of attendance area.

Smaller scale responses were noted in some other districts in this evaluation. Typifying these responses were such actions as the reassignment of personnel to oversee implementation of the CCCR standard. For example, one district hired a career coach whose responsibility was to support CCCR across three high schools. A district administrator stated that while the goal was to have a career coach at each high school, the current career coach was simply attempting to facilitate student opportunities for career exploration for students across three high schools.

Performance Levels and Growth: A Sense of Familiarity

Factors Shaping Perspectives on Performance Indicator Implementation

District and school level administrators expressed high degrees of familiarity with performance indicators for mathematics, English and science, including the focus on achievement gaps for specific groups of students. Not that administrators believed the performance indicators were any less important, but the evaluation surfaced a sense that administrators were comforted by their prior experience with content-oriented performance measures and thus believed they had appropriate structures and processes in place.

However, in spite of years of experience focusing on academic performance and high stakes outcomes in core subject areas, administrators raised concerns about the new performance indicators. Some concerns stemmed from a lack of full understanding regarding how districts would be judged on these indicators. For example, one district expressed concern that some districts might be unfairly penalized under a proposed *post hoc* process that took a three-year average for subgroups of less than 30 students. These administrators believed that it would be fairer to set up a three-year average going forward under the new indicators. In short, there seemed to be concern in one district that it was initially advised by VDOE they would have three years to increase subgroup achievement, but in actuality they will have one year.

Another concern peculiar to one district was the potential for lost instructional time due to their structure of career academies. Specially, the concern was that some students (disproportionately representing underserved populations) would lose valuable instructional time in math, English and/or science due to zoning and transportation issues as those students traveled to academies outside their zone. As one of this district's administrators stated, "It's ironic how by addressing one standard [CCCR], we could be potentially suffering under another [academic performance]."

Lack of resources again cropped up as a factor that shaped administrators' implementation considerations. For example, in one district, administrators worried that their desire to focus more on academic performance, especially with regard to subgroups, was hampered by the school board's unwillingness to provide resources to strengthen the instructional corps in those academic areas.

Finally, administrators also identified a misalignment between the federal Every Student Succeeds Act and VDOE requirements for mathematics that could create negative outcomes on schools and students. Most notably, under Virginia's standards students only need one verified mathematics credit to graduate. However, the verified credit can often be earned in algebra I that some students earn in middle school; yet, new graduation requirements require students to earn their verified mathematics credit in high school. This situation decreases the number of opportunities that students have to meet the proficiency standard, especially if they are on the

accelerated track and earn both the Algebra I and Geometry credits while in middle school, thus introducing a new limiting factor for students and schools.

Responses to the Performance Standards

Each of our districts described implementation responses to the new performance standards that should stoke optimism among policy makers. For example, numerous administrators described how student performance and success in the classroom was, in large part, an issue of engaged classroom learning. Administrators acknowledged that fully engaging students in the learning process should be a primary goal in all subjects – particularly, those measured under the new standards. These administrators argued that by achieving authentic and engaged learning, improvements in attendance, progress toward graduation, and the perceived future relevance of students' current education would result. One district official went so far as to say that the proficiency standards drive success with the other standards and associated indicators.

Beyond engagement strategies, administrators also described strategic changes to school structures and processes to optimize students' experiences already underway. For example, in one district, administrators have focused on intentionally scheduling students and teachers to find the best fit for students and more purposefully organizing master schedules to allow certain teachers to co-plan and co-teach students requiring additional support. In other instances, administrators described increased frequency of data reviews to focus on all sub-groups and the assignment of additional counselors to help identify and monitor students in need of support.

Discussion

In considering our evaluation findings, their interpretation, and application, we remained committed to our UFE approach. We offer our reflections of some of the issues that our key stakeholders and street-level implementors might find useful as they continue to refine policy directives and support and/or grapple with the day-to-day of policy implementation.

In placing key stakeholder needs first, we centered our focus on understanding how local district and school leaders were experiencing implementation of the new SOA accountability policy. As the reader may recall, the policy was designed to allow for maximum decision-making discretion regarding implementation. And thus, we focused our evaluation questions on local experiences with implementation and how local stakeholders took, or did not take, advantage of an accountability policy that focused on outcomes, but allowed wide latitude for program level decisions.

Our findings and analysis support the consideration of two dimensions that, we argue, should be used to guide future decisions related to implementation support at the local level. The first dimension focuses on the relationship between a given standard and local level stakeholders' sense of implementation efficacy vis a vis that standard and associated indicators. The policy factors and characteristics that we found influenced implementation efficacy included 1) the perceived locus of control, 2) the breadth and complexity, and 3) the familiarity and past experience with procedures and practices related to the standard.

Our findings showed that administrators in our districts were sensitive to the perceived locus of control of each individual indicator within the standard. Further, how stakeholders perceived their level of control over the standard or its indicators shaped how stakeholders understood and responded to each standard. Extant theory on policy implementation sheds some

light on how and why locus of control was an issue. We believe that administrator experience and prior knowledge influenced their sense of implementation efficacy with regard to some aspects of the SOA, such as graduation rates and student academic performance (Coburn, 2005; Spillane, et al, 2002).

We argue that the perceived breadth and complexity of a standard in the minds of stakeholders can influence their implementation efficacy. For example, local stakeholders across case districts believed the enormity and complexity of the CCCR standard threatened their ability to implement it in its multi-faceted form. However, our study points to the importance of individual administrators' dispositions toward change (Spillane, et al., 2002). As our findings illustrated, some administrators in our study did not allow lack of experience to deter their attempts to implement new policies related to, for example, chronic absenteeism or college, career, and civic readiness. The perceived familiarity with the standard by stakeholders also shaped a sense of implementation efficacy for that standard. For example, across the board, district stakeholders expressed the most confidence with implementation of the performance standards, primarily because they perceived that this standard was essentially the same as past performance standards, albeit with some important differences.

However, we also offer that perceptions of implementation efficacy paint only part of the picture. We noted evidence of a dimension ranging from simply compliance- to more complex continuous improvement strategies related to implementation. These responses may be influenced by factors such as leadership experience with accountability policy and/or change-oriented leadership (Gagnon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019). In most cases, three of the districts' stakeholders responded to policy implementation in less-than strategic ways. The responses tended to overlook the interconnectedness of the myriad policies, thus missing opportunities in which one policy (e.g., performance) might leverage other policies (e.g., chronic absenteeism and graduation rates). These situations appeared to be determined by factors, such as a lack of strategic vision, limited fiscal resources, limited leadership capacity, or local politics. On the other hand, in one district in which stakeholders demonstrated clear strategic-minded leadership these leverage opportunities were put to use. In this case, implementation responses were multi-faceted, focusing on "driver" policies that helped leverage action and improvement on other policies. For example, we noted that the more strategically-oriented district sought to focus on core issues that influenced performance—issues such as teacher quality, engaging learning activities, better communication with parents, and so on. In these ways, a focus on learning would also improve communication with parents, which in turn would improve attendance rates, subgroup academic performance and other key factors within the SOA. Also, of relevance here was the change-oriented leadership approaches of this district's stakeholders. This points to the important role of experience with organizational change and improvement as part of a leader's toolkit when leaders are expected to implement complex and far-reaching accountability policies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This evaluation of early stage, state-level policy implementation in four districts provided useful insights using a UFE framework for the principle users of the evaluation, state level administrators. While much can be learned from the findings above, we distill those lessons into a few conclusive statements, and then provide our thoughts on recommendations.

First, we conclude that approaches to policy implementation that allow for wide discretion with regard to means must not take for granted myriad internal and external factors

that influence an already complex implementation process. Simply allowing implementors the latitude to make their own context-appropriate decisions does not account for internal and external factors that also influence choices and the discretion to make those choices. Second, each implementation locale is defined, uniquely, by its stakeholders' characteristics, experiences, and capacities. Factors such as perceptions of locus of control, complexity, and familiarity or experience with a specific standard will intersect and play out differently in each district setting. And finally, how policies are implemented (e.g., piecemeal and compliance-oriented, or strategically) is more dependent on local capacity and leadership than, for example, insightfulness or flexibility at the policy making level (in this case the state level).

Our recommendations to key stakeholders center on improved communication and capacity building. First, vertical communication down through the system must be more purposeful, supportive, and aware of the role unique contexts play. For example, state communication should acknowledge that different standards within a policy bundle will have varying impacts and require different resource sets across districts. Therefore, we recommend that the state take a more proactive role in learning opportunities within and between districts encouraging and allowing implementors to share ideas and experiences. In this manner, gaps in leadership capacity and experience that impact implementation can be minimized. Finally, at the district and school level, administrators must acknowledge the importance of having leaders experienced with organizational improvement who are able to recognize the interconnectedness of large-scale accountability policy in ways that leverage district strengths as we saw in one case district. This type of strategic leadership can be nurtured and, thus, its development should be prioritized.

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Living Legend Speech

Betty Alford

CalPoly Pomona

Editor's Note: Since 1999, the Living Legend Award has been presented at the ICPEL Annual Conference to recognize outstanding contributions in the field of educational administration. This year's recipient, Dr. Betty Alford, has created a culture of respect in her teaching, service, and in her scholarly work. Her kindness, humility and grace under pressure in personal and professional situations contribute to being an outstanding role model for quality, compassionate leadership.

Dr. Betty Alford's life and work exemplify the core tenets of the NCPEA/ICPEL Living Legend:

- *Inspires others*
- *Has exemplary service*
- *Is a model of genuine care, ethics, and professionalism*
- *Is dedicated to research, teaching and service to the profession*
- *Has made and continues to make significant contributions to the field of educational administration.*

Dr. Alford's Living Legend speech:

Thank you for this tremendous honor. To consider the past recipients of this honor is immensely humbling. My special thanks to Sandra Harris and Carol Mullen in nominating me for this recognition. I was completely surprised and honored to receive the news of this nomination and, then again, completely honored and surprised to be named this year's Living Legend. To be in the company of giants in our field who received this award since 1999 is humbling and gratifying. Thank you.

The International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) is an organization with special meaning for me. In 1996, when I first attended the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA, the previous name for ICPEL) summer conference, I encountered a family environment of outstanding scholars who were intent on improving the preparation of educational leaders. The conference became a venue that I looked forward to each year, and the conference became a family affair. Generally, my parents and son would accompany me to one conference a year, and, usually, it was the NCPEA conference in August. At my sister's home at Thanksgiving, we would begin talking about the location of the next NCPEA conference. Juneau, Jackson Hole, Vail, San Diego, San Antonio, Chicago, Puerto Rico, and Portland were some of the locations of the conference. The variety of locations only added to the pleasure of the experiences. I never missed a conference session, but the evenings and the weekend following the conference afforded the wonderful experience as my dad would say, "to see the sights."

What joy to see friends and colleagues each year to engage in learning together. I remember special moments such as when we paused for a moment of silence in solidarity of tribute for Chuck Achilles and John Hoyle, former Living Legends, who contributed greatly to the organization and to our profession. This organization has a very rich legacy of educational leaders who are

immensely well-known in our field and who have contributed significantly to the preparation of school leaders.

Part of what has made the organization great are the numerous opportunities for involvement that are afforded to members. As a young, untenured faculty member, I served as site selection chair for three years and later, as a national NCPEA Board member for three years and as an assistant editor, associate editor, and as editor of the NCPEA Yearbook. The opportunities for service are endless in ICPEL, and all are encouraged to select an area of service. There are no restrictions that limit involvement. Whether you are an individual member or a university member of the organization, all can participate equally in the opportunities for networking and growth that the organization offers. Mentoring Mosaic is one of the more recent opportunities of service in which ICPEL members serve as mentors for new faculty members. *Education Leaders Without Borders*, co-founded by Rosemary Papa and Fenwick English, provides further opportunities for collaboration, service, and networking through institute sessions that are provided in conjunction with the ICPEL summer conference. Publications of the organization have also increased and include peer-reviewed journals of *The International Educational Leadership Review, The Educational Review of Doctoral Research, Mentoring and Tutoring*, and *Educational Policy Briefs* in addition to principal series books and state-centered books on educational finance. Each of these publications provide opportunities for submission of scholarly work and provide opportunities for service through volunteering as a peer reviewer of submissions.

Comments Based on Frameworks

When I thought about my comments tonight, I thought about Mike Martin's approach in his 2007 Living Legend presentation. In that speech, he discussed educational leadership scholars who had influenced his professional practice in a profound way (Martin, 2007). Tonight, I would like to borrow Martin's approach and share three theoretical frameworks that hold special meaning for me followed by reflections of four lessons learned.

Ethical Leadership Framework

One of my favorite theoretical frameworks for educational leadership is Starratt's (1991, 1994, 2004, 2013, 2014) framework for ethical leadership. In the 90s in the US, ethics because widely accepted as part of the knowledge base for our field (Beck, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992. 2007; Starratt, 1991, 1994, 2004). Starratt provided an ethical framework for school leadership guided by ethics of critique, social justice, and care and exemplified through virtues of authenticity, responsibility, and presence.

Ethics of Critique, Social Justice, and Caring

Starratt posited that ethical leaders should engage in actions of critique, social justice and caring. In critique, educational leaders would question what needs to be changed. A question to consider could include, "Whose interests are being served?" In considering the ethic of social justice, educational leaders may ask current questions such as, "What assets can we build on? How do we provide safe spaces for all members of the community? How do we fight micro-aggressive behavior? How do we make a difference for social justice?" For the ethic of care, educational leaders might ask, "How do we demonstrate care in a way that students thrive?" Although in

Starratt's (2014) chapter in *The Handbook of Ethical Educational Leadership*, he combined critique and social justice in response to criticisms that these ethics were similar, I think it remains useful to consider each of these ethics separately.

In considering the third ethic that Starratt (2004) presents of the ethic of care, further explication of this concept is provided by additional authors for the field of educational leadership. Beck's (1994) book titled *Reclaiming Educational Administration as a Caring Profession*, Noddings' (1992) book titled *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, Pellicer's (2003) book titled *Courage to Care* and, recently, Smylie, Murphy, and Seashore-Louis's (2020) book titled *Caring School Leadership* join in promoting caring as a central tenet of educational leadership. Caring is pivotal in all aspects of life, but it is critical in the work of educational leaders (Beck, 1994; Pellicer, 2003; Smylie, Murphy, & Seashore Louis, 2020).

In considering a personal anecdote regarding caring, I think of my mother and sister and their prize-winning pies. I thought they created these by magic. Then, I listened to them one day when they were discussing their techniques such as making a cooked syrup to go into the meringue to keep the meringue from weeping. I thought to myself as I was sitting in the other room listening to this conversation, "Oh, it's about caring enough to attend to details." Fullan (2020) points out in the title of his recent book, *The Devil is in the Details: System Solutions for Equity, Excellence, and Student Well-Being* and in his critique of his earlier book titled *Coherence*, "You have to work with the ideas in practice, learning the details of success as they apply within the culture of your organization" (p. 21). Illustrating the importance of caring enough to attend to details, Deal and Peterson (1999) quoted Howard Schultz, then CEO of Starbucks as saying, "The key is heart. I pour my heart into every cup of coffee, and so do my partners at Starbucks" (p. 4). Deal and Peterson (1999) reminded us that if Starbuck's can care that much about a cup of coffee, surely, we can care much more about children. School culture is impacted by leader's actions and the development of shared values and beliefs (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Virtues of Authenticity, Responsibility, and Presence

Starratt (2004, 2013) does not end with the discussion of the ethic of critique, social justice, and care. He goes on to discuss the virtues of authenticity, responsibility, and presence. I think these virtues are very powerful. I do not always live up to them, but I think they are beacons to consider and ask, "Am I being authentic? Am I being true to my values? Am I being responsible?" I love the way that Starratt describes the virtue of responsibility in terms of the prepositions *to* and *for* others. The third virtue Starratt discusses is presence, and I ask, "Am I being fully present?"

As an aside, I will share that I love going to the movies and I particularly like Tom Hanks and his portrayal of characters. As he portrayed Mr. Rogers in "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood," there are wonderful scenes when Mr. Rogers models presence by totally being with the child in the moment, modeling being fully attentive and responsive. I think that this is what we all should strive to do. When we are in a meeting, we should totally *be there*. When we are working on an endeavor, we should totally *be there*. Presence matters.

I like Starratt's framework because it encompasses the qualities of leadership that matter as well as the actions. I see it as a litmus test for my own leadership. Am I being authentic? Am I demonstrating responsibility? Am I being fully present in any continual improvement process? My understanding of Starratt's framework is enhanced by his powerful prose that is almost poetic as he clearly describes each aspect of the framework. The credibility of the framework is also

enhanced in that he demonstrated these virtues so completely in his own professional career. The components of Starratt's ethical framework resonate with me and serve as guides to what matters in successful school leadership.

Reframing

Through the years, I have also found Bolman and Deal's (2017) discussion of a four-frame model useful in considering approaches to take in meeting challenges of educational leadership. They suggest, "Reframing requires an ability to think about situations from more than one angle, which lets you develop alternative diagnoses and strategies" (p. 6). Bolman and Deal (2017) point out:

> The structural approach focuses on the architecture of organization-the design of units and subunits, rules and roles, goals and policies. The human resource lens emphasizes understanding people-their strengths and foibles, reason and emotion, desires and fears. The political view sees organizations as competitive arenas of scarce resources, competing interests, and struggles for power and advantage. Finally, the symbolic frame focuses on issues of meaning and faith. It puts ritual, ceremony, story, play, and culture at the heart of organizational life. (p. 23)

The four frames of structural, political, human resource, and symbolic stimulate questions such as, "Is the issue a structural problem that needs to be addressed? Is it political? For example, is the issue based on a private agenda? Is it a human resource issue or is it a symbolic challenge? For example, are banners of college on every wall needed to show symbolically that we value college as a goal for students? Strengthening a positive school culture is a component of the symbolic frame. Cuban (1995) described culture as "the unexamined, deeply embedded norms and expectations that district staffs have about performing their central tasks of schooling children" (p. 6). He further stated, "These shared beliefs run like a bright red ribbon throughout a school tying together adults and children" (p. 9). Culture includes the values that the school stands for and that leaders reinforce and is very powerful. As Cuban (1995) further shared, "Culture-those deeply ingrained, patterned responses to familiar and new situations mirroring common basic values held by group members – matters" (p. 9). The journey toward success is often messy and complex work requiring the involvement of multiple stakeholders, the concerted work of educational leaders who are engaged in intentional, purposeful, culturally responsive actions based on shared core values that guide the reform effort and strong relationships with students, faculty, parents, and the community that are based on trust and respect (Berry, Moss, & Gore, 2019; Murakami, Notman, & Gurr, 2019). As Cuban (2020) asserted in his book titled *Chasing Success and Confronting Failure in American Public Schools,* after forty years of studying school reform, in achieving success in promoting increased student learning, more is needed than a technical, rational lens.

Looking at issues through these different lenses can be helpful in determining what we need to do next. The process of school improvement and bringing about needed changes is not linear and may be intersecting with issues related to multiple frames (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Sometimes, the frames need to be addressed simultaneously or two or three addressed at a time. For example, maybe, we need to change our ongoing practices as well as provide more professional learning opportunities as well as build a shared understanding of what we are trying to achieve.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

The third framework that I find particularly useful is culturally responsive leadership. Through the Black Lives Matter movement and the growing illumination of injustices caused by systemic racism and racist actions and beliefs, many educational leaders have felt the urgency of providing an equity-minded and antiracist school culture where all student experience respect and are provided support and meaningful instruction to foster the attainment of their full potential. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2018), in their meta-analysis of the literature on culturally responsive leadership, describe four primary strands of leadership behaviors that represent tasks of culturally responsive school leaders. Although the first primary task that is listed is critical self-reflection, Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2019) stressed the powerful importance of reflection throughout all elements of the four tasks. Questions, such as, "Are we doing the right thing? Is this where we need to be moving?" may be considered. The authors identified three additional primary strands of leadership behavior from their review of literature regarding culturally responsive leadership. They emphasized that "culturally responsive leaders should consistently contribute to culturally responsive teaching and curricula. . . and must also promote culturally responsive school environments" (p. 1296). The fourth task of culturally responsive school leadership is to "engage the community in culturally responsive ways" (p. 1297). In his book titled *Culturally Responsive School Leadership*, Khalifa (2018) further provided examples and illumination of these four tasks of culturally responsive leaders.

Being culturally responsive also entails being" contextually sensitive, but not context-constrained" (p. 25). Increasingly, research studies have supported that while context may influence specific leadership actions, context does not dictate results (Day & Gurr, 2014; Gurr et al., 2019; Hallinger, 2018).

Intersection of the Frameworks

The ethical leadership, reframing, and culturally responsive frameworks intersect and are not in opposition to one another. For example, trust is strengthened as we build relationships, as we work together, as we critique, as we reflect, as we grow (Schultz, 2019; Tschannen-Moran, 2018). As educational leaders are authentic and truly trying to help all students to succeed, as they are constantly engaging in critique, considering next steps, responsible to and for fellow colleagues and working for organizational improvement in demonstrating care, trust is developed (Tschannen-Moran, 2018). As educational leaders, we are called to address each of these concepts in our work with others, and ongoing reflection is pivotal to the process (Fahey, et al., 2019; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Praxis, the combination of reflection and action, matters as Freire (1970) reminds us.

Impetus for Reflections

COVID 19 provided for many of us a time for reflection as we "sheltered in place." For many of us, it meant we were working from home, suddenly faced with learning new skills as courses very quickly pivoted to online platforms. For me, my first week of sheltering in place was the week of spring break, and we were advised by the governor's orders to "stay at home unless we were an essential worker." A colleague called and said, "Are you writing your book?" I said, "No, actually, I'm cleaning my garage and opening moving boxes," which had remained unopened in the garage

for over a year while other work dominated my time. As I listened to news reports in the first days of the "shelter in place" order, the isolation of the "shelter in place" orders also provided further time for reflection and learning. Many times, at home, my doorbell would ring, and it was always UPS delivering another book that I had ordered in seeking to consider ways that we could better enhance learning for all and play a role in overcoming systemic racism (DeMatthews, 2018; Doud & Bensimon, 2015; Fahey, et al., 2019; Howard, T., 2019; Kay, 2018; Kendi, 2019; Khalifa, 2018; Lopez, 2018; Love, 2019; Malone, Rincon-Gallardo, & Kew, 2018; Polluck, 2008; Singleton, 2015; Smith & Brazer, 2016; Yosso, 2006). With the news dominated by the Black Lives Matter protests, for me, the shelter in place order provided a time of reflection and introspection as well as a time of action. This work must continue.

Lessons Learned

As I thought about my conclusion for this Living Legend speech, it seemed that reflection on some lessons learned would be appropriate. I will close with four personal reflections.

Lesson One

Lesson one is, "Treasure your friendships and your memories." I have reflected on my wonderful memory of working late in the night at my university office with Sandy Harris near the end of the hall also working late. It was past midnight, but we both were very intent on finishing some project or paper and our resources were at the office, and so we had stayed. I walked into the workroom to get a paper clip, and as I screamed to the top of my lungs, Sandy came running to give assistance. I had opened a desk drawer and encountered a very small gray mouse. We laughed as the poor little mouse ran away. Then, at Christmas, outside my door was a gift sack with an enormous mousetrap, a lovely note, and a bottle of wine in case I found myself working late at night and had a gigantic surprise. Such fun. Such good memories.

I remember an evening trip at a NCPEA conference in Kentucky when six of us got into a tiny car for the twenty-minute drive to a restaurant. Carol Mullen was new to the profession, and we were giving her advice and saying that she would go far. Little did we know how far she would go in her professional contributions to the field. I look back at that animated conversation and think, "What fun, and how great that she surpassed us all through her professional work."

I think of being with Beverly Irby and floating down the river in Portland at a NCPEA sponsored trip in the evening of a conference and conversations about life and education. What fun. These are memories to treasure, and there are so many more.

Lesson Two

Secondly, my lesson learned is, "Seize every opportunity." I am old enough that I was influenced by Madeline Hunter. I remember listening to her presentation for six hours one day, and I remember a story she shared of her work with schools. As she told the ladies in her bridge club about her work, one friend said, "I am so impressed by what you do. I would like to part of this work." Hunter said that she responded quickly, "I'm going to be at school at 7:00 am in the morning for a meeting. Come and join me." Well, that timeframe did not fit her retired friend's 10:00 am time of being ready to great the world, and her friend declined the opportunity to participate.

I remembered that story later in 1998 when I went to a technical assistance meeting concerning a new U.S. Department of Education partnership grant that was being launched titled Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). The moderator announced that before an individual asked a question, the person's name and affiliation should be shared. After the session, an individual from the back of the room came forward and said, "I'm from Angelina Community College, and we're looking for a university partner, and I said, "I'm looking for a community college partner." She said, "I'm meeting with a school tomorrow at 7:00 am." I said, "I have a meeting with another school in three days." We both agreed, we would be there. From that conversation, our first partnership began that continued for 20 years as we wrote and implemented three successful GEAR UP grants to serve the East Texas region. Seize every opportunity. Doing so will enrich your life.

Lesson Three

Thirdly, I recommend, "Continue to critique and to fight for needed changes in educational practices and processes." I remember when my son was in second grade, and we had moved from a rural school in Texas to a suburban school near Austin. The school was large with over a thousand students in a beautiful facility. About four weeks into the term, I was reflecting upon how easy his math homework seemed to be when my son who was working on the homework, looked up and said, "Mom, there are kids in my class who have never made a 100." I decided that I should meet with his teacher and discuss his homework in math. In the conference, I learned that the first day of school, when undoubtably he was nervous in a new school, he had been given a math placement test and placed in next to the lowest level of eight levels of math where the children had been divided. Although he was making 100's each day, no one had questioned his placement. I showed his ITBS achievement scores from the previous year, and the next day, he was placed in the upper level section. I learned a strong lesson that educational practices can be wrong and unjust. This led to my extensive study of the limitations caused by student tracking and subsequently, my dissertation titled "Creating a Culture of Detracking in a Learner-Centered School." When my son was in seventh grade, he commented regarding the dissertation, "Mom, you wouldn't have had a dissertation if it wasn't for me." Yes, the experience he had faced had fueled my passion to study the issues of tracking, but they also had intensified my concern for all the other students who were being negatively impacted by this practice.

Lesson Four

Finally, as my last lesson learned, I propose, "We must always listen and always continue to learn." In my mother's house, there were candy dishes in every room because she loved chocolate. At age 93, when she passed away, my son was asked to share some comments about her which he eloquently provided, and he included the statement, "In Grandma's house, if you didn't find chocolate, you weren't looking." I thought his statement was very true. As I watched the Black Lives Matter movement through news stories and commentaries, another young man looked straight at the camera and said, "If you don't hear, you're not listening." That same poignancy struck me of the power of the young man's statement. As the Black Lives Matter movement intensified throughout the world, as educational leaders, we have asked, "What are we doing as educational leaders to engage fully in antiracist actions and to promote social justice?" We must

hear. We must respond. We must seek to understand. We must always listen and always continue to learn.

Conclusion

In closing, I will share a phrase that the Methodist pastor for a church I attended in Claremont would always use to end his comments, a phrase that I later learned is a Buddhist affirmation, "May it be so." I end this speech tonight of sharing some of my personal perspectives and my immense thanks for this organization and this wonderful honor with simply saying again, "Let us engage in critique. Let us engage in constantly trying to move this profession forward. Let us engage in seeking to make a difference in the lives of others. "May it be so.'"

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