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Notes from the Special Issue Volume 2 Editors

Mari Gray and Chuck Flores

Welcome to the special issue of *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development: The Journal of the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration (CAPEA)*. This special issue offers a collection of previously published articles from the annals of the CAPEA journal that still resonate today. Each article contributes to our understanding of social justice and equity, key values central to our organization. In researching possible additions for this special issue focused on diversity and social justice, the CAPEA editorial team conducted a systematic analysis of journal articles published between 2005 and 2021; five articles were selected for inclusion. Each article provides insight into the stance and practices necessary for leaders to succeed in today's politically and socially charged educational environment.

The first article, *Exploring Leadership Practices of Elementary School Principals Through a Distributed Leadership Framework,* explores leadership practices through a case study that describes how a distributed leadership model informs elementary school principals' approaches to teacher collaboration, working relationships between school-site leaders, and instructional leadership. The second article in the journal, *Inclusive Leadership: Preparing Principals for the Role that Awaits Them,* discusses the role of post-secondary educational institutions in the preparation of school site leaders. These institutions are foundational in preparing pre-service leaders for facilitating effective instruction for all learners, improving programming, and developing structures to support inclusive leadership practices. *Tipping the Balance: Social Justice Leaders Allying with Marginalized Youth to Increase Student Voice and Activism* focuses on the role of school site leaders in supporting student activism and developing student voice. Leaders in this study disrupted hierarchical structures and facilitated an ally-centered approach with marginalized students.

The fourth article from the annals is *Model Continuation High Schools: Social-Cognitive Factors That Contribute to Re-Engaging At-Risk Students Emotionally, Behaviorally, and Cognitively Towards Graduation.* The article explores and identifies effective policies, programs, and practices for re-engaging students in continuation high schools who need additional support. *School Factors that Contribute to the Underachievement of Students of Color and What Culturally Competent School Leaders Can Do,* the final article in this special edition of the CAPEA journal, explores the factors that contribute to the underachievement of students of color and the practices that school leaders can implement to positively impact academic achievement.

This special edition would not have been possible without the efforts of the CAPEA editorial team and the CAPEA board who approved this special issue. We thank all of the authors who contributed manuscripts, our copy-editor, Dr. Sarah Haughn, and our publishers, Brad Bizell and ICPEL Publications, for their hard work.

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Exploring the Leadership Practices of Elementary School Principals Through a Distributed Leadership Framework: A Case Study

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to explore the leadership practice of two urban elementary school principals through a distributed leadership framework. Methods: The study employed an ethnographic case study and data were collected through semistructured interviews and observations. A case study for each principal was created, followed by a cross-case analysis. Findings: Exploring leadership practice through a distributed leadership framework provides insights into how leadership practice is enacted by individuals and their situational context. Conclusion: Additional research should focus on the how *of leadership practice to provide school leaders deeper insights into the work of school improvement.*

Keywords: distributed leadership, educational leadership, school leaders, leadership practice, principals

Creating equitable educational systems to close the opportunity gap is the most significant challenge facing 21st-century education in the United States (Bryant, Triplett, Watson, & Lewis, 2017; Huggins, Klar, Hammonds, & Buskey, 2017; Valant & Newmark, 2016). However, obstacles arise when principals engage in efforts to improve instruction and close the opportunity gap for culturally and linguistically diverse student populations in their schools (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Howard, 2010). Quite often, school leaders, specifically principals, are left to figure out how to create conditions to improve instruction and increase academic achievement by enlisting the support of other individuals in their schools (Bredeson, 2013; Dimmock, 2012; Halverson & Clifford, 2013). As a result, principals are examining more responsive leadership approaches and seeking to adopt new leadership skills in order to address the challenges of improving student achievement and close the opportunity gap for the diverse student populations in their schools (Dimmock, 2012; Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Smith, 2017; Vang, 2015).

The traditional leadership perspective in which one person, generally the principal, is responsible for enacting all leadership functions and responsibilities has quickly given way to a more distributed perspective of leadership practice (Huggins et al., 2017; Spillane, 2006, 2007). A distributed perspective moves beyond this narrow view and invites an examination of the leaders in schools that engage in or influence practice that impacts teaching and learning (Spillane, 2006). The practice of distributed leadership extends beyond traditional roles and responsibilities to integrate coordinated actions and interactions across the school community (Dimmock, 2012; Gronn, 2008; Mulford, 2008; Spillane, 2006). In turn, these coordinated interactions among school leaders can harness human capital and resources to improve teacher practice, which can have a sustained impact on efforts to close the opportunity gap for diverse student populations (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Robinson, 2008).

This article examines the leadership practice of two principals working in urban elementary schools that have demonstrated annual gains in student academic achievement as measured by the annual state accountability assessment. The following research question was addressed: What are the leadership practices of principals working in schools that demonstrate annual gains in student academic achievement as measured by the annual state accountability assessment?

In the following sections of this article, there is a brief review of the literature with a focus on the constructs of distributed leadership as a conceptual framework for examining and analyzing leadership practice in schools. The methods employed to conduct this qualitative case study of two elementary school principals are then described. Next, the themes that emerged from the data analysis and the consequent findings are presented. Finally, the article ends with a discussion of the findings, recommendations, and a conclusion.

Literature Review

Distributed leadership is a relatively new concept in the field of leadership and organizational performance (Dimmock, 2012; Halverson & Clifford, 2013; Harris, 2004, 2013; Spillane, 2007). A distributed perspective of leadership provides a conceptual framework by which the *how* of leadership practice can be examined and may serve as a more accurate way of representing patterns of leadership that occur in schools (Bredeson, 2013; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006).

Theoretical Conceptualizations

A growing body of empirical research draws on the distributed perspective in order to understand how leadership practice extends to those with no formal roles in schools (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Dimmock, 2012; Spillane, 2006). Prominent researchers Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004), as well as Gronn (2000, 2002a, 2002b), have developed conceptual frameworks for analyzing leadership practice in schools; however, their conceptual frameworks differ (Dimmock, 2012; Halverson & Clifford, 2013).

Gronn (2000, 2002b, 2009) describes three patterns of collective action observable in the practice of distributed leadership: (a) spontaneous collaboration, where leadership practice is a result of the collective interactions of individuals with different skills and expertise to accomplish a task; (b) shared roles, where leadership emerges between two or more individuals coordinating their efforts to accomplish a task; and (c) institutional structures, where leadership practice is dictated by formal organizational structures or roles.

Moreover, Gronn (2000, 2002a) proposes that distributed leadership emerges as a result of the interactions of people in a group or groups of people acting as one connected network with a specific purpose. In this conceptualization, Gronn (2002b) views leadership as a concerted action to be explored from a broader understanding of leadership practice rather than a collective of each person enacting tasks. This perspective holds that people in a given organization are working in tandem to merge their efforts and expertise so that the collective outcome of the group is greater than the efforts or actions of one person alone.

In contrast, Spillane (2006, 2015) conceptualizes leadership practice from a distributed perspective where leadership practice is the focus of the analysis (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). A practice lens provides insights into how leadership is enacted in schools, including which individuals are networking together, what they do, and why they do it (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Spillane, 2006). A distributed perspective views leadership practice in schools as an outcome of the interactions of formal and informal leaders, their situational context, their use of tools in facilitating these interactions, and the organizational structures that constrain or influence their interactions (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Spillane & Healey, 2010). Therefore, a distributed perspective of leadership practice is always the starting point for understanding the *how* of leadership as it unfolds in the work of schools (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Huggins et al., 2017; Spillane & Healey, 2010).

A distributed leadership framework provides an alternative way of examining the complexities of how multiple individuals and principals engage in the work of improving teacher practice and student learning outcomes (Halverson & Clifford, 2013; Huggins et al., 2017; Spillane, 2005, 2015). This shift in focus further contributes to a more integrated understanding of the leadership practice of school leaders instead of a narrow examination of isolated individuals lacking any situated context (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Dimmock, 2012; Spillane & Healey, 2010).

Methodology

The researcher used a case study design grounded in the ethnographic research tradition (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Schram, 2006) to examine how the complex relationships and interactions of two urban elementary principals in contextual situations intersect as leadership practice and constitute distributed leadership. This article highlights the two case principals and the range of leadership practice that occurred through their interactions with teachers while situated in various

contexts and settings.

Participants

This case study was conducted in a large urban school district in Southern California. The three data sources were (a) elementary principals, (b) leadership team members, and (c) grade-level teachers. Participants varied in gender, age, ethnicity, and length of educational experience. The two case study principals were identified and selected using criterion sampling. Both case principals have spent their entire professional careers in this urban school district. Principal Artavia (pseudonym) worked as a teacher, instructional coach, and assistant principal and has been the principal at the case school, Cedro Elementary School (pseudonym), for six years. Cedro Elementary School has a high-poverty (72%), predominately Latinx (99%) student population with 50% of the students identified as English learners. Principal Amado (pseudonym) worked as a teacher, categorical programs coordinator, and assistant principal and has been the principal at the second case school, Almendro Elementary School (pseudonym), for 12 years. Almendro Elementary School has a high-poverty (87%), predominately Latinx (95%) student population with 82% of the students identified as English learners.

Data Collection

Data collected from observations described the setting and context, interactions, behaviors, and leadership practice of both case principals. Interviews and observations allowed the researcher to examine and explore the *how* and *why* of leadership practice. Field notes taken during observations of the case principals described the setting, school cultures, and interactions with leadership team members and grade-level teachers. The use of multiple data sources (Merriam, 2009) enhanced the data reliability through triangulation in two specific ways: (a) first, by asking each case principal to review the field notes, transcriptions, and coding schemes; and (b) second, by sharing interview transcripts and notes with each case principal to ensure a high degree of accuracy in capturing detailed information about their interviews (Glesne, 2011).

The semistructured interviews with each principal lasted two hours. All interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. After each interview, the researcher wrote analytic memos based on personal reflection and perceptions. Interview questions were aligned with the research questions and focused on examining how case principals enacted leadership practice in a variety of settings and contexts through their use of various tools and organizational routines. Additionally, interview questions provided the researcher with an opportunity to collect a wide spectrum of insights and perspectives about leadership practice, and to understand the social patterns and norms of a culture-sharing group (Glesne, 2011).

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis were ongoing throughout the study. The data were organized and analyzed in the following sequence: (a) organizing and establishing familiarity with the data; (b) generating categories; (c) identifying themes; and (d) coding of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

The researcher examined both case schools, and categorized and noted similarities and

differences in each case. As patterns and trends emerged, the researcher was better able to understand the leadership practice of principals in each case school. The synthesis of the data collected from the case schools yielded a deeper understanding of the leadership practice of both case principals. Comparing and contrasting leadership practice provided further insight into the enactment of leadership practice, the distribution of leadership practice across many individuals, and how the tools, routines, and context of a given situation help to define leadership practice in each case school.

The researcher used a professional transcription service for all principal and focus group interviews, and then read and reread all of the transcripts to recheck them for accuracy prior to the data analysis process. A coding system was developed based on the conceptual framework addressed in the literature review on leadership theories and the research questions to generate themes and descriptions and to create relational categories for the data. Upon completion of the data collection and preliminary analysis process, the researcher began a thematic data analysis and interpretation by sorting all of the responses from interview participants and field notes, including the examination of themes across both case schools.

Data collected from each of the case schools were analyzed through a within-case and cross-case analysis. The cross-case analysis was conducted based on where similarities and differences between both case schools were noted and categorized. Data analysis suggested four broad themes of leadership practice that emerged between principals, leadership team members, and grade-level teachers in both case schools that address the research question for this study.

Findings

The case study data are organized around four themes of leadership practice. The leadership practices are (a) a focus on instructional improvement, (b) monitoring instruction in classrooms, (c) structures to promote collaboration, and (d) supporting leadership development for teachers. Each case highlights the most significant leadership practice of each principal and sheds light on the intricacies of leadership practice as it unfolds in the interactions of others. A cross-case analysis of the leadership practice of the two case principals is presented in the discussion section.

The Case of Principal Artavia

A Focus on Instructional Improvement

Principal Artavia understood the need to build a sense of urgency around improving the quality of instruction to reverse the three-year decline of academic achievement and close the opportunity gap. Principal Artavia commented:

> When I first got to the school, there was no question that the priority had to be one of setting a focus, dedicating resources and support for improving instruction. We have a moral obligation to do what we can to improve student achievement because we are talking about children from this community. I tried to make sure that teachers understood that we could and had to do this.

Realizing the daunting challenge of stemming the decline of student achievement and closing the opportunity gap, Principal Artavia gave serious thought and reflected upon how teachers at the school could be leveraged as leaders in a collective and focused way to address the

opportunity gap. What resulted was the establishment of two routines, purposeful goal setting and a data analysis cycle, that would have a direct impact upon instructional improvement and teacher practice over time.

Goal setting. Principal Artavia implemented SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) instructional goals as a high-leverage strategy to maintain a focus on instruction, hold teachers accountable for student progress, and create a way for the school community to measure and see student achievement progress over time. The goal-setting process pushed teachers to become more focused on instruction in a specific way, and over time teachers began to realize how a routine such as goal setting could be instrumental in focusing individual teachers and their grade-level cohorts on instruction. Principal Artavia underscored the importance of goal setting by commenting:

> You begin your work with goal setting. Your reflective questions begin to be about why students are not progressing, and what goals will you set to help them progress. The gains in achievement are mostly because we kept focusing on a process of improving instruction and teacher practice over the years.

Data dialogues. From the principal's perspective, formative and summative data dialogues provided a process and structure for communicating directly with teachers and their grade-level peers about assessment data. Initially, the data dialogues were a difficult sell for the principal, and teachers balked at having to engage in these dialogues. Gradually, however, the data dialogues had a deep impact upon teachers and eventually laid the groundwork for building a school culture focused on improving instruction and creating internal accountability for student academic progress. Principal Artavia provided this insight:

> The data dialogue was my way of focusing individual and grade-level conversations with teachers about what kind of results they were getting with their teaching. Now we are able to see teachers engaging in data dialogues with each other at their grade-level meetings, which has made everyone more serious about making sure all students achieve and show improvement.

Monitoring Instruction in Classrooms

According to Principal Artavia, the school district's Framework for Instructional Improvement became the guiding tool to monitor instruction in classrooms. The Framework has been instrumental in strengthening the principal's understanding of effective pedagogy and instructional practices, effective classroom management, student-centered learning, and supportive classroom environments. Principal Artavia offered this perspective:

> It would be very difficult, next to impossible, for me as to keep a focus on instruction if I did not visit classrooms regularly to see what was actually happening with teaching and learning. I have a commitment to students to improve their quality of learning by improving the teacher's understanding of effective instruction, and the Framework helps me accomplish this.

Conversations about practice. Principal Artavia believes in the importance of engaging teachers in conversations about practice, a necessary part of monitoring instruction in classrooms. Conducting conversations about practice has been a productive way to make meaningful instructional change, monitor the implementation of instructional strategies, and reinforce the message of a focus on instruction. Principal Artavia emphasizes the importance of principal

leadership and a commitment to improving teacher practice and instruction through conversations with teachers as follows:

> You need to have conversations with teachers about what you observe in their classrooms. You give them feedback so they can improve. But you can't have these conversations if you aren't regularly visiting classrooms and monitoring the quality of instruction you see, then meeting with the teacher afterwards. It is about giving specific feedback to the teacher to improve their practice that counts.

Structures to Promote Collaboration

An advocate of removing barriers of isolation between teachers and deprivatizing teacher practice, Principal Artavia took the opportunity to improve upon an existing routine to facilitate teacher collaboration and grade-level articulation: the data analysis cycle.

Data analysis cycle. Principal Artavia established a quarterly data analysis cycle so that teachers would develop a common instructional focus to improve instruction. Additionally, by providing teachers with the opportunity to engage in a process of analyzing data, they were able to teach each other how to use data to identify instructional goals for improvement. Principal Artavia summed up this process as follows:

> This opportunity where teachers begin to share, begin to take responsibility, begin to take leadership in making commitments about instructional strategies, how they are going to improve teaching and learning is key to why we have begun to see student achievement improve over time.

Supporting Leadership Development for Teachers

After months of skepticism, many teachers began embracing Principal Artavia's call to assume leadership roles in the school. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the principal's beliefs about developing teacher leadership practice through job-embedded professional development. Teachers were encouraged and supported in their efforts to take responsibility for creating and leading professional development initiatives at the grade level and during faculty meetings as a way to build their capacity and empower themselves as leaders. Principal Artavia reflected:

> It's about developing teacher leaders, giving all teachers an opportunity to do professional development, to be leaders in their area of expertise. By providing this leadership opportunity it's allowing them to be innovative and creative in how they want to approach meeting their own growth and needs as learners.

The Case of Principal Amado

A Focus on Instructional Improvement

Principal Amado spoke of having inherited a school with a vacuum of leadership. Consequently, the principal was determined to create a sense of urgency surrounding the need for instructional improvement. Principal Amado's leadership practice around this effort is summarized in this manner:

> Remember, it's about having an instructional focus, a pathway for improvement if there is

going to be any impact on teaching and student learning. Teachers need to understand the urgency about improving instruction. If they lose this focus, student achievement suffers and it's more difficult to close that gap.

Conversations about practice. From Principal Amado's perspective, efforts to create a strong focus on improving instruction in classrooms often resulted in conversations with teachers about their practice and delivery of instruction. Such conversations are critical opportunities for the principal to provide teachers with feedback so they can improve their practice. At times, conversations with teachers about their practice can create tension, as described by Principal Amado:

This is about leadership work and setting expectations that everyone must contribute to improving instruction in the school. I set the tone and expectations. Sometimes teachers struggle with the message of what needs to be done to improve. It's hard to have these conversations, but necessary so teachers see where they need to improve in their teaching.

Monitoring Instruction in Classrooms

Principal Amado conducts classroom visitations to monitor the delivery of instruction and the implementation of instructional strategies. Classroom visitations have become a way to monitor the connections between teacher practice and professional development learning over time. Principal Armado highlighted the importance of classroom visitations to monitor instruction as follows:

Consistent classroom visitations help me to communicate my expectations for what instruction needs to look like every day, and to give teachers feedback and suggestions for improvement. This is part of my effort to keep the focus on instructional improvement. It sets a tone that we take this work seriously.

Peer observations. From Principal Amado's perspective, leadership practice is not solely his responsibility as principal, but should involve all teachers as they work to improve their own practice, demonstrate leadership through observation and participation, and support building leadership practice in others. According to Principal Amado, building leadership practice in others acknowledges that teachers serve a critical role in visiting their colleagues' classrooms and engaging in providing feedback to their peers, while at the same time gaining the experience and skills necessary to have conversations about practice with their peers. Principal Amado summed up the importance of peer observations as follows:

Providing all teachers with the opportunity to engage in classroom observations is a direct way to influence teacher commitment to improving instruction. It can deepen the trust and collaboration between the teacher and the principal over time if done thoughtfully. And over time I can see changes in their practice and how this change impacts student learning in a positive way.

Structures to Promote Collaboration

Principal Amado was very committed to improving upon how teachers and administrators used data to improve teaching and learning. This became the impetus to establish a dedicated time every six weeks for teachers and administrators to analyze formative and summative student data. The data analysis process put in place at the school created ongoing opportunities for teachers and

administrators to not only collaborate but to also build their leadership capacity around using data to improve teaching and learning.

Data analysis cycle. Principal Amado believes that a robust, data analysis cycle has been critical to improving student learning and achievement. Additionally, Principal Amado felt it would be extremely difficult for teachers to collaborate and set instructional goals for students without a robust data analysis process. Over time, the majority of teachers were able to see how analyzing formative and summative data assisted them and the principal in determining professional development topics and identifying areas of student need. Principal Amado's gradual delegation of leading the data analysis meetings resulted in an increasing number of teachers realizing that, with the right amount of support and encouragement, taking on this type of leadership role creates a strong culture of internal accountability to student learning and achievement outcomes.

Grade-level meetings. The weekly grade-level meetings were another example of how Principal Amado embraced an existing structure to promote collaboration and reinforce the important message of instructional improvement as a pathway to improving student achievement. Principal Amado relied on an organic process to build teacher leaders by encouraging them to come together weekly to engage in instructional planning based on the needs of their students. Principal Amado provided the following insight into this organic process:

> I have made it a point to encourage teachers individually about the importance of stepping up and taking on leadership roles in the school. I encourage them to try leading discussions, to use grade-level data as a jumping off point for discussions, and I encourage them to look at student needs for their grade-level planning.

Supporting Leadership Development for Teachers

Principal Amado has played a pivotal role in providing leadership opportunities for teachers. The principal understands the challenges of motivating teachers to become empowered leaders of professional development opportunities at the school. It is through professional development opportunities that Principal Amado has created relevance for teachers by having them take charge of their own individual and group learning. Over time, Principal Amado felt a tremendous sense of accomplishment and pride in supporting teachers as leaders of learning in the school. Principal Amado commented:

> Allowing teachers to take a greater role in leading their own professional development has been beneficial for the school. Teachers bring their expertise and knowledge to the table, and that creates opportunities for everyone to learn from each other. That's what leadership looks like in action, and something I am most proud of.

Discussion

This study examined the leadership practices of two urban elementary school principals through a distributed leadership framework to better understand how each principal enacted leadership practice in their schools to improve student achievement and close the opportunity gap. The following section provides a cross-case analysis of the leadership practice of both case principals organized around the four themes of (a) maintaining a focus on instruction, (b) monitoring instruction in classrooms, (c) structures to promote collaboration, and (d) supporting leadership

development for teachers.

A Focus on Instructional Improvement

Principal Artavia and Principal Amado understood the importance of maintaining a focus on instructional improvement in order to increase student academic achievement over time. Both case principals were intentional in their conversations with teachers about improving their practice to impact student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2009). The strategic use of routines such as goal setting, a data analysis cycle, and ongoing data dialogues were a personal way for case principals to connect themselves and their teachers to the goals of maintaining a focus on instruction and impacting student learning (Spillane, 2007). The leadership practice that resulted from the implementation of these routines served to strengthen the commitment of administrators and teachers to improving instruction (Bredeson, 2013; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

Monitoring Instruction in Classrooms

The case principals understood the importance of monitoring instruction in all classrooms to improve student achievement (May & Supovitz, 2011). Principals Artavia and Amado were very clear in communicating their purpose for monitoring instruction in classrooms; however, each case principal's purpose for conducting classroom visitations was different.

Principal Artavia used the Framework for Instructional Improvement as a tool to benchmark teacher pedagogical practices in a more specific way than Principal Amado, who did not use the Framework as a tool to collect and benchmark evidence of teacher practice during classroom visitations (Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003). In Principal Amado's case, the Framework served as a starting point for providing feedback to teachers about their classroom practice.

Structures to Promote Collaboration

In order to create a more active professional learning community in their schools, both case principals created structures to support teachers and provide time for collaboration around instruction (Bredeson, 2013; Elfers & Stritikus, 2014). Principal Artavia believed in the importance of providing structured opportunities for teachers to engage in planning, goal setting, and data analysis as a way of boosting confidence in their leadership abilities (Halverson & Clifford, 2013). Contrasting with this is Principal Amado's belief that grade-level meetings provided both the structure and opportunity for teachers to come together based on individual and grade-level needs to address instructional issues, and to focus on the challenges of making their instructional delivery relevant to students (Dimmock, 2012; Halverson & Clifford, 2013).

Supporting Leadership Development for Teachers

Both case principals understood the need for supporting a distributed approach to leadership practice in their efforts to improve teaching and learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2009). Principal Amado attempted to make teaching practice more transparent by engaging teachers in a cycle of inquiry using data to identify student learning needs, and then developing improvement strategies

to address those needs (Spillane, 2006). By contrast, Principal Artavia attempted to make grade-level meetings more teacher driven and less dependent on principal facilitation as a leadership capacity–building strategy to foster teacher ownership of instructional improvement efforts (Bredeson, 2013; Huggins et al., 2017).

The cross-case analysis suggests that leadership practice was constituted by the ways the principals developed leadership practice in others. The case principals created opportunities for meaningful interactions between themselves and their teachers (Bredeson, 2013). By creating structured opportunities for teachers, leadership team members, and administrators to engage in the work of school improvement, both case principals arrived at similar outcomes of maintaining a focus on instruction while building teacher leadership capacity and practice (Halverson & Clifford, 2013).

Finally, the key to closing the opportunity gap for their students was clear for both case principals: a commitment to strong leadership that provided opportunities for individuals within their schools to have direct responsibility and influence over school improvement efforts. Additionally, both case principals viewed distributed leadership as a framework that could be understood as a combination of both vertical and horizontal leadership (Harris, 2013; Jones & Harris, 2014), which stemmed from the interactions and interrelationships of multiple individuals situated in specific contexts and driven by the aim of improving teacher practice and student achievement.

Recommendations

School leaders must possess leadership skills and knowledge that allow them to address the challenges they face in closing the opportunity gap and creating schools that are responsive to the demographic shifts in student populations. Findings generated from continuing empirical research using the lens of a distributed framework can provide school leaders with perspectives on leadership practice and efforts to close the opportunity gap and improve academic achievement for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Further examination of how the social and situational distribution of leadership practice occurs, coupled with identifying the tasks, interactions, and resources of school leaders, provides powerful examples of how school leaders shape efforts to create equitable and responsive educational systems. By providing researchers and practitioners with an analytic framework for examining leadership practice, school leaders, including principals, are better positioned to create more responsive and equity-driven educational systems designed to close the opportunity gap for all students.

Additionally, given the magnitude of the challenge school leaders face in closing the opportunity gap and creating schools that are responsive to an increasingly diverse student population, school leaders must look for and apply alternative methods of engaging other individuals in this work. Efforts to close the opportunity gap will likely fall flat, or even fail, if the responsibility for this work is concentrated on only one or two individuals solely because they possess formal leadership roles instead of distributing the work broadly across the school. The principal cannot undertake the daunting task of improving schools as a lone practitioner. Consequently, principal leadership must focus on galvanizing and empowering other individuals to organize for effort, action, and improvement.

Conclusion

Given the magnitude of the challenge posed by closing the opportunity gap, current efforts to create educational systems that are responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students call for a deeper examination and analysis of how school leaders enact leadership practice. Additionally, principal leadership demands the skill of knowing how to motivate and empower others to address the social and academic needs of diverse students. Since principals cannot undertake the task of school improvement as lone practitioners, they must seek out and enact alternative ways of engaging others in this work. A distributed leadership perspective offers a way for researchers and practitioners to examine leadership practice through the perspective of multiple individuals at all levels of the school, and to rethink how human capital can support school efforts to close the opportunity gap.

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Inclusive Leadership: Preparing Principals for the Role that Awaits Them[1]

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Abstract

Preparing administrators with the capacity to improve instruction for all learners is critical for recruiting and retaining special education teachers. However, recent research points out the need to improve skills of current and future administrators for this role. To address these concerns the special education and administrator preparation programs at a western university designed and conducted research to determine how well pre-service principals were being prepared to improve instruction for all learners. To determine program improvement and training needs, researchers collected focus group and survey data from current and alumni students from both programs. Findings of this research are organized into recommendations for program improvement.

Keywords: inclusion, special education, administrator preparation, training programs, teacher retention

One of the most important challenges in education is to create and nurture inclusive environments that support learning for all students. The degree to which students can be well educated is directly correlated to a system of personnel preparation that results in a qualified work force so that every student has highly skilled and competent teachers and administrators. In an effort to increase student achievement in classrooms, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002* (NCLB) requires that all students be taught by highly qualified teachers. This act was scheduled for revision in 2007, because the prescriptive requirements were unworkable for schools; in 2015, Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced the prior act (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Every administrator appreciates how teacher quality and quantity directly link to student learning results. However, many students receiving special education services do not have access to highly skilled or competent special education teachers due to the critical shortage of fully licensed special educators (Mandlawitz, 2022). Educating students with special needs is a top priority in school districts, yet critical shortages of special education teachers and specialized instructional support personnel exist in all regions of the country. It is well documented that the persistent shortage of special educators in the K-12 education system has reached crisis levels. Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia recently reported shortages of special educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). More specifically, this includes 98% of the nation's school districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Further, teacher attrition is increasing at a rate that is parallel to that of the national population of students with disabilities, and the percentage of students receiving special education services is also growing (National Education Association, 2021). Due to the dual increase of teacher attrition and students receiving special education services, there is a severe need to address the shortage of special educators (Mandlawitz, 2022; Monnin et al., 2021).

Leading special education scholars (McLeskey et al., 2017) have identified and made monumental strides in addressing the most pressing issues facing educators and special education systems, including ambiguous and competing responsibilities, overwhelming paperwork, inadequate district and administrative support, significant teacher isolation, insufficient focus on improved student outcomes, increased demand for well-qualified special educators, poorly prepared general and special educators, and fragmented licensing systems. York-Barr et al. (2005) accurately described the problem and predicted "that an emerging crisis in special education, if unresolved, will result in diminished quality of services and education outcomes for children" (p. 194).

Further compounding this problem, the lack of special preparation for school principals challenges their ability to meaningfully serve all students (Billingsley et al., 2014; Garrison-Wade, 2005; Goor et al., 1997). Administrators report being ill-prepared for the job and cite difficulties with role clarification and job specialization (Ashby & Maki, l996; Garrison-Wade, 2005). In the role of instructional leaders, principals need requisite knowledge in assessing the impact of disabilities on student performance, monitoring referral-to-placement procedures, providing various service delivery models, and facilitating student support teams (Garrison-Wade, 2005). Aims to create inclusive environments for all learners can be more easily realized through strong, inclusive leadership practices from school administrators.

While every teacher must be prepared for the vast diversity of today's student population, principals face additional challenges leading special education initiatives. Sindelar et al. (2006) maintained that the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education is a complex and demanding reform. Given that complexity, inclusion is often misunderstood and sometimes

resisted by teachers and not fully understood or supported by school administrators. Since 1990, considerable attention has been paid to the identification of the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that enable all teachers to embrace and successfully implement inclusive educational practices (Artiles & Kozleski, 2016; Mancini & Causton, 2021; Ryndak et al., 1999-2000; Sciuchetti, 2017). As schools move away from maintaining separate systems, others, including Fisher et al. (2003), have cautioned that schools are going to need special educators who can interrelate curriculum and communicate with others. All educators need skills and dispositions to provide instruction and assessment to students with and without disabilities and the ability to facilitate collaborative problem-solving when difficulties arise in these areas. Facilitating such collaborative problem-solving situations must be modeled, nurtured, and fostered by principals.

Collaborative problem-solving is essential as schools strive to meet the statutory demands for improved educational outcomes. Improving those outcomes must be accomplished by increasing the delivery of academic and behavior interventions in the general education settings (IDEA, 2004). The emergence of *response to intervention* (RTI) initiatives requires that administrators be knowledgeable about and value multiple processes including philosophical perspectives and policies related to RTI, research-based instruction/interventions, tiered intervention approaches, curriculum-based measurement/evaluation, data-driven decision making, progress monitoring, and the role of RTI in eligibility decisions (Hardcastle & Justice, 2006).

Beliefs and attitudes that principals hold toward special education are key factors in implementing inclusive school programs. Guzman (1997) identified common factors among successful inclusive school leaders. Those principals had the ability to (a) establish a communication system that allows for rich dialog, (b) be actively involved in the IEP process, (c) be personally involved with parents of students with disabilities, (d) collaboratively develop philosophies regarding inclusion, (e) articulate clear policies for addressing discipline issues, (f) implement professional development around inclusive practices, and (g) demonstrate skill in data gathering and problem-solving.

Praisner (2003) found that administrator preparation programs provided principals with a minimum amount of knowledge deemed by special education experts to be relevant in the implementation of inclusion. She also discovered that characteristics of disabilities, special education law, and behavior management may be adequately covered in preparation programs, but specific topics that present authentic strategies and processes to support inclusion appear to be lacking. Additionally, many principals lack knowledge of special education legal issues, specifically in compliance and procedural requirements as legally mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) (Rhys, 1996; Nardone, 1999). Despite the implication for school administrators to be trained in special education laws and policies, many school administrators have received little if any training related to special education in their leadership preparation training (Anderson, 1999; Garrison-Wade, 2005). Instead, many principals find that they must rely on central office staff (i.e., directors of special education and consultants) and special education teachers as primary sources of information and guidance in providing leadership to students, staff, and programs within their schools. Similarly, Patterson et al. (2000) concluded that principals are not adequately trained for leadership in special education. Therefore, not only is the issue the quality and quantity of teachers, but also of adequately skilled administrators.

To address these alarming shortcomings, the special education and administrator preparation faculty at one urban university began to look seriously at what these programs were

doing or could be doing to equip future administrators to lead inclusive schools. The School of Education and Human Development (SEHD) at the University of Colorado Denver's (CU Denver) mission is to improve simultaneously the quality of education for citizens of our democracy and the quality of preparation of educators for our schools. Were we doing a good job of meeting these needs for professionals striving to become the next generation of inclusive school leaders? To answer that question, faculty from the Special Education (SPED) and Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies (ALPS) programs collaborated in a study that looked critically at the ALPS program to see if key content, knowledge, and skills related to disability issues were infused across all core courses in the administrative preparation program.

Methodology

This study included both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative portion of the study focused on data collected from two focus groups. The quantitative portion used data collected through a survey instrument. Two major research questions guided this study.

1. How well do graduates of the ALPS program feel they are prepared to lead inclusive school practices?
2. What are the most crucial skills that administrators need to have for inclusive leadership?

Participants

A total of 124 participants took part in this study. For the quantitative portion of the study participants were identified through the ALPS principal licensure, Masters, and Specialist in Education programs' database of alumni graduates between the years 2000 and 2005, and students completing their final semester in the ALPS program. From this database 240 email invitations were sent out. Of these alumni and students, 99 participants responded (41% response rate). The participants represented alumni/students from twelve administrative preparation cohorts and seven school districts throughout Colorado. The qualitative portion of the study consisted of a convenience sample of students from a group of SPED students completing their final course in their MA program. Twenty-five students (n=25) were invited to participate in focus group discussions, and 100% of the students agreed to participate. Participation in the study was completely voluntary. No remuneration was provided.

Validity

Kidder and Fine (1987) have supported the use of quantitative and qualitative methods in research, because it is a form of triangulation that enhances the validity and reliability of the study. The multi-methods process of data collection is based on the "triangulation" concept that bias in one data source or investigation is neutralized or at least lessened when other data sources, methods, and investigations are used and/or identified (Jick, 1979). The use of multiple methods helps to "facilitate the validation of data through triangulation" (Denscombe, 1998, p. 40). The triangulation of data in this study was accomplished by looking at similar data sources through different methods, both qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative (survey instrument).

We also conducted a face validity of the instrument prior to administering it. Three

researchers not involved with this study were asked several questions to determine its validity: (a) What are your perceptions of what the instrument measures?; (b) Is the instrument a reasonable tool to gain information?; and (c) Is the instrument well designed? The feedback received from the researchers aligned with the desired outcome of the instrument.

Data Collection

Data were collected through two activities. The first was a survey instrument given to students to determine their perceptions of the effectiveness of the program to prepare administrators to lead inclusive schools. The second activity involved focus group methods.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was designed and administered in the first phase of the study. It was distributed through Zoomerang, an online survey tool. The instrument consisted of four background information questions, four open-ended questions, and eleven questions using a Likert scale (Appendix C). The items aligned with the study's objectives and goals, which sought to gather information from participants to assess ALPS' effectiveness in designing courses to support inclusive leadership in the principal licensure program.

Focus Group Discussion

Two focus groups (n=25) were conducted to gather data on the benefits and disadvantages of working within schools that serve students with diverse needs and backgrounds, to offer specific strategies that they perceived were effective in working with students who struggle, and to provide recommendations for principals and prospective principals to improve supportive, inclusive practices. The participants were divided into two groups. The length of the two focus groups ranged from one to one and one-half hours. Data were collected using a tape recorder to record program participants' responses. The data were transcribed using a professional transcriber.

Data Analyses

Survey data were analyzed using a statistical software program, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), to present descriptive statistical data. Descriptive analysis is the process of transforming raw data into tables and charts to make better sense of the data and provide summaries (Denscombe, 1998). Data were coded and tallied as frequencies and percentages and displayed in frequency distribution tables to give a clear picture of distributions for relevance and comparison.

Qualitative data were coded line-by-line using the constant-comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process involved the researchers thoroughly reading data to get a sense of the information. Next, we identified segments of information that were alike across interviews or focus groups. The open-ended questions and focus group questions provided the initial coding organization. Various Microsoft Word tools (highlighting, comment bar, theme format) were used to manage and analyze the data. Open coding of participants' responses was grouped into themes. Further, an inductive approach was used to identify additional codes for remarks made that did not fit into initial categories. Axial coding involves linking various codes by placing them into

conceptual categories. In the final step, selective coding, we explicated themes and compared them between groups (SPED and ALPS).

Quantitative Findings

The background questions from the survey instrument revealed that 37% of the study participants were currently serving as school administrators. Their roles consisted of 16 assistant principals, five principals, six district level positions, and 10 other administrative positions. The remaining 62 participants served in a variety of teaching roles, including regular education teacher, special education teacher, instructional coach, and department chair. Forty-three participants (45%) had 11-15 years of teaching experience, thirty-five (33%) had 6-10 years of experience, and twenty-two (21%) had 1-5 years. The majority of the participants, 54% (n=52), work in elementary schools. Further, the remaining 6% work in pre-school, 38% work in middle school, 24% work in Jr. and Sr. High schools, and 28% work in secondary schools.

Question 14 of the survey instrument asked participants to identify ALPS projects that most helped them learn how to support inclusive practices. The top five projects identified by participants supporting inclusive practices include the following: School Culture (n=38); Legal Audit (n=35); Family/Community Engagement (n=31); School Improvement Data Analysis (n=31); and No Child Left Behind (n=31). Question 15 asked participants to rank their level of competence in 11 different areas. The top areas of competencies self-reported by the participants at a level of proficient to exemplary in inclusive practices included the following: 90% have the ability to make and implement differentiated learning recommendations for learners with diverse needs; 87% have the ability to facilitate effective collaborative relationships between special and general education personnel; 86% have the ability to create a diverse learning environment, offer and implement recommendations for differentiated instruction, and foster collegial relationships between special and general educators.

Three red flags were raised in the competence levels participants ranked below a level of proficiency toward inclusive practices: 40% identified a lack of understanding regarding legal issues related to special education; 28% self-reported a lack of skills in their ability to provide constructive feedback and mentoring of special educators and support staff; and 28% reported a lack in their ability to generate options and solutions in resource management (i.e. planning time, paperwork demands, and alternative scheduling). These areas of skill deficiency mirror those articulated in prior studies presented in the literature review. Appendix A illustrates respondent ratios and total number of respondents by the level of perceived competences.

Qualitative Findings

The findings of the focus groups and open-ended survey questions are organized below into three broad categories: (a) benefits of working with diverse populations; (b) challenges facing teachers and administrators; and (c) suggestions from participants. Comments are actual responses from the focus group questions (Appendix B).

Benefits of Working with Diverse Populations

Participants from both programs saw many benefits to working in a school with learners having

diverse backgrounds and needs. A number of students spoke to the richness of difference and the values of acceptance for all students.

- One teacher noted, "Having diverse backgrounds and needs allows students to gain an appreciation of the uniqueness of all individuals."
- An ALPS student maintained, "The biggest benefit is that schools with diverse populations mirror the 'real' world. It represents society—there are all types of individuals with different abilities that we learn to work with."
- Currently practicing principals saw personal benefits to working in such schools noting, "It broadens my perspective, and increased my empathy;" "It's stimulating, rewarding;" "The instructors learn as much as the students. Everyone has something different to offer;" and it "[t]akes you out of your comfort zone and makes you learn."

Challenges Facing Teachers and Administrators

While the benefits of working with learners displaying diverse needs and backgrounds are vast and varied, so too are the concerns. We received feedback from ALPS students and alumni as well as SPED students and teachers.

ALPS students

Current students of the ALPS program voiced a genuine sense of apprehension about being able to meet the needs of all learners as reported in comments including the following.

- "The main concern I have is being able to meet the diverse needs of all students and having the knowledge and resources to do so."
- "If too many diversities are present, the staff can be spread too thinly to effectively meet the needs of anyone let alone everyone."
- "It is a challenge to have all staff members 'be on board' with encouraging rather than denying diversity."
- "I'm concerned about spending too much time on students who have more needs and forgetting about the 'normal/typically developing' students."

SPED students/teachers

Since the 25 SPED students were concurrently completing their Master's degree while teaching in the field, they drew upon their daily experiences that were often quite challenging. Many of those challenges focused on their administrator's ability to support inclusive practices. Legal and training issues were evident in a number of teacher comments.

- "I'm concerned about my administrators' knowledge of the legal components of special education because I don't see it. I've come to resent that I always have to train the staff."
- "We have students that are never going to be at grade level and meet NCLB. The principal needs to advocate for us."
- "I hear….I want you guys to work together…but my administrator is really not creating an environment where it can happen, or setting the leadership tone for how to do it."

Other teachers voiced feelings of frustration and isolation in their efforts to meet their students' needs.

- "A majority of my teachers don't know how to differentiate in order to understand how they can have an inclusive classroom."
- "The administrator has no idea what is going on in the special ed room."
- "My principal says…we're inclusionary, we're inclusionary, but there's no co-teaching, kids are pulled and gone from the general ed classroom."

ALPS Alumni

Alumni of the ALPS program currently serving in leadership roles see first-hand the realities of meeting students' diverse needs. They articulated an array of specific challenges.

- "We don't have enough accommodations to meet everyone's needs."
- "I am concerned about knowing everything in their IEP's."
- "Politics. I do not like the way that children are labeled. I do not like that students are given a 'life sentence' in special education."

Other principals spoke to the inter-related dynamics of implementing best practices.

- "Differentiating is always a challenge. It requires time, resources and expertise that are often hard to come by."
- "I have concerns about effectively meeting both the requirements of the law and the needs of the students and their parents."
- "Am I able to meet the needs of my special students while challenging my gifted ones and providing for the needs of those in the middle?"

Another principal left us with a series of important questions.

- "How do we respond and support all of our students from a place of cultural competency as a school and individual? Are we willing to first examine how our cultural assumptions impact the learning experience of our students?"

Suggestions from Participants

While all participants clearly face challenges in working with students from diverse backgrounds and needs, they were quick to identify strategies and/or processes that could foster the environment of inclusive schools. A common theme heard amongst the focus group participants focused on communication and collaboration.

When asked what things administrators need to know to meet diverse needs and backgrounds, SPED students spoke passionately about an array of issues that clustered around the following themes: (a) knowledge of special education law and disabilities; (b) skills to create inclusive environments, including the ability to lead teachers in best practices such as differentiation, collaboration, and positive behavior supports; and (c) the willingness to display a

genuine appreciation and support of what SPED teachers do.

Practicing and future administrators clearly elaborated their needs for effectively leading efforts to improve instruction for all learners. They called for more training in a variety of special topics: (a) special education law; (b) strategies for organizing a school to best utilize the special and general education teachers; (c) concrete strategies and resources about the variety of diverse needs; and (d) managing discipline issues with students displaying special education needs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The suggestions given by students, teachers, and administrators mirrored those offered to educators by Friend and Pope (2005) to create inclusive schools where everyone can succeed. To be supportive, principals should (a) be knowledgeable about differentiation of instruction, (b) help teachers attend professional development opportunities, (c) provide coaching, (d) arrange for teachers to visit each other, and (e) field questions that parents and family have about special education teaching practices. To meet that charge of creating schools where every student can succeed, higher education preparation programs must look critically at their basic values as well as their existing organizational structures, be responsive to their students, and hold the highest expectations to ensure they are doing all they can to prepare administrators and teachers for the challenges present in today's inclusive schools.

We know we have our curricular work cut out for us, but the direction is clear, and actions are underway to ensure that our preparation programs strategically plan for ways that administrators and special educators can work together to improve instruction for all students. For instance, faculty have begun to review all assignments in program courses to see where leadership skills for inclusive practices can be added. We have also developed and implemented a seminar for future principals in special education. Strategic focus has already been given to enhance readings, discussions, and assignments that will better prepared ALPS students to (a) understand legal issues related to special education, (b) provide constructive feedback and mentoring of special educators and support staff, and (c) generate options and solutions in resource management (i.e., planning time, paperwork demands, and alternative scheduling).

Principals have reported tht their greatest barrier to finding qualified special education personnel is the limited applicant pool (Carlson et al., 2002). Given the daunting profile of the current applicant pool combined with the demands of the job, it goes without saying that once they are hired, principals must embrace an active role in retaining special educators. While there isn't a *script* for what inclusive programming should look like in every school, supporting and nurturing special educators is critical in realizing the goal of providing a quality education for every student (Sobel et al., 2006). The key is to identify and provide supports that are uniquely geared to the realities of the special education teacher.

As students with challenging academic and behavioral needs participate in a wider array of settings, programs, and opportunities, the need for school leaders who understand the complexities of varied systems and alternative teaching strategies becomes essential to meet to ensure student success. As inclusive education becomes increasing the norm in every school and as special and general educators assume shared responsibility for all students, many questions about shifts in roles, rules and responsibilities of everyone who works with and for students with disabilities are guaranteed to spring forth, many of which have not even been considered to date (Fisher et al., 2003). The recent world-wide pandemic exposed educational inequities and areas of

urgent need—and now, schools have a unique opportunity to press pause and reimagine their practices. Mancini & Causton (2021) have maintained that now is the time for school leaders to take the lessons of the COVID-19 era and turn them into action by closely examining what worked during distance learning, letting go of practices that some students struggle with, and plan for new routines and environments that meet the needs of every learner.

We fully support the call for vision and action that Skrla et al. (2004) have passionately advocated: "Achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, home language or culture, SES, or other variables are not just an educational problem; they are a problem for our entire society" (p. 156). We hope that our response—auditing our program's effectiveness in preparing principals to lead inclusive school practices—will be helpful to other educational leadership programs that also choose to respond with action to the call.

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Appendix A

Total Respondent Ratio and Total Number of Respondents by Level of Perceived Competence

Research Questions	1 Emergent	2	3 Proficient	4	5 Exemplary
1. I have the ability to develop school-wide positive behavior support programs.	6% 6	3% 3	38% 38	37% 37	15% 15
2. I have the ability to facilitate effective collaboration between general and special education teachers.	3% 3	9% 9	34% 34	38% 38	15% 15
3. I have the ability to make and implement differentiated learning recommendations for learners with diverse needs.	2% 2	11% 11	32% 32	32% 32	22% 22
4. I have the ability to lead an initiative that creates a learning environment that allows for alternative styles of learning.	1% 1	12% 12	28% 28	47% 47	11% 11
5. I have the ability to develop activities and make recommendations for professional development training regarding inclusive practices.	4% 4	11% 11	29% 29	41% 41	14% 14
6. I have the ability to generate options and possible solutions in resource management (i.e. planning time, paperwork demands, and alternative scheduling).	4% 4	14% 14	35% 34	23% 23	13% 13
7. I have the ability to coach and provide constructive feedback and mentoring to special education and support service personnel.	10% 10	18% 18	35% 34	23% 23	13% 13
8. I have the ability to foster collegial relationships between special and general education personnel.	4% 4	8% 8	32% 31	39% 38	17% 17
9. I have the ability to understand and make recommendations regarding the challenges parents and children with disabilities frequently encounter.	10% 10	15% 15	31% 31	34% 33	9% 9
10. I have the ability to understand and make recommendations regarding legal issues related to special education.	12% 12	27% 26	29% 28	26% 25	7% 7
11. I have the ability to develop and implement inclusionary practices in schools.	6% 6	12% 12	40% 39	33% 32	9% 9

Appendix B

Focus Group Research Questions

1. What benefits do you perceive for yourself and your students when working in a school with learners having diverse backgrounds and needs?

2. What concerns do you have for yourself and your students when working in a school with learners having diverse backgrounds and needs?

3. Describe the working relationship with your administrator(s).

4. Describe a specific initiative/action/project that your administrator has undertaken to support inclusive services in your school building.

5. Have you experienced any challenges in working with an administrator on issues related to inclusive practices? If so, please identify.

6. What questions do you have regarding addressing the needs of learners with diverse needs and backgrounds that you feel should be addressed in an administrator preparation program?

7. Please identify specific strategies and/or processes that you believe future administrators need to learn to support inclusive practices.

8. Please identify any projects that you believe could help future administrators become skilled supporting inclusive practices.

Appendix C

Inclusive Practices Survey

We realize that some of these questions deal with sensitive issues. Please note that all of your responses are CONFIDENTIAL.

1. Last four digits of your home telephone number: ___ ___ ___ ___

2. Choose your cohort descriptor:

APSLA-1
ACLA-1
JCLA-1   JCLA-2
DPSLA-1   DPSLA-2
DCLA-2   DCLA-3
BVSLA-2   BVSLA-3
DL#3   DL#4   DL#5

3. K-12 Teaching/Administration experience (check all that apply).

Type of School	Teacher Role	Administrator Role
□ public school	□ teacher – reg. ed.	□ assistant principal
□ private school	□ teacher – sp. ed.	□ principal
□ alt. school	□ instructional coach	□ central office position
□ _____	□ dean or department char	□ assistant superintendent
	□ _____	□ superintendent
		□ _____

Years Teaching	School Level	Curricular Focus
□ 1-5 yr teacher	□ Pre-School	□ (eg. Art/Music/Science)
□ 6-10 yr teacher	□ Elementary	□ _____
□ 11-15 yr teacher	□ Middle	□ _____
□ Jr-Sr. High	□ _____	
□ Secondary		

Type of Endorsement/Licensure

□ General Education (Elementary)   Content Area: _____
□ General Education (Secondary)   Content Area: _____
□ Special Education (Elementary)   Content Area: _____
□ Special Education (Secondary)   Content Area: _____
□ Other _____   Content Area: _____

Open Ended Questions

4. What benefits do you perceive for yourself and your students when working in a school with learners having diverse backgrounds and needs?

5. What concerns do you have for yourself and your students when working in a school with learners having diverse backgrounds and needs?

6. What questions do you have regarding addressing the needs of learners with diverse needs and backgrounds that feel should have been addressed in this preparation program?

7. Please identify specific strategies and/or processes that you have learned to support inclusive practices.

8. Please check any project in your ALPS program that helped you learn how to support inclusive practices.

   □ Core Values   □ NCLB   □ SI: Quality
   □ Vision-Mission   □ Legal Audit   □ SI: Data Analysis
   □ Culture Study   □ SI: Curriculum
   □ Family/Community Engagement   □ SI: Writing the Plan
   □ Evaluation Cycles   □ Instructional Leadership Work Samples

Please check one number to indicate your *current* level of competence—0 indicates no competence and 5 indicates exemplary competence.

9. I have the ability to develop school-wide positive behavior support programs.

Emergent		Proficient		Exemplary	
0	1	2	3	4	5

10. I have the ability to facilitate effective collaboration between general and special education teachers.

Emergent		Proficient		Exemplary	
0	1	2	3	4	5

11. I have the ability make and implement differentiated learning recommendations for learners with diverse needs.

Emergent		Proficient		Exemplary	
0	1	2	3	4	5

12. I have the ability to lead an initiative that creates a learning environment that allows for alternative styles of learning.

Emergent		Proficient		Exemplary	
0	1	2	3	4	5

13. I have the ability to develop activities and make recommendations for professional development training regarding inclusive practices.

Emergent		Proficient		Exemplary	
0	1	2	3	4	5

14. I have the ability to generate options and possible solutions in resource management (i.e. planning time, paperwork demands, and alternative scheduling).

    Emergent   Proficient   Exemplary
    0   1   2   3   4   5

15. I have the ability to coach and provide constructive feedback and mentoring to special education and support service personnel.

    Emergent   Proficient   Exemplary
    0   1   2   3   4   5

16. I have the ability to foster collegial relationships between special and general education personnel.

    Emergent   Proficient   Exemplary
    0   1   2   3   4   5

17. I have the ability to understand and make recommendations regarding the challenges parents of children with disabilities frequently encounter.

    Emergent   Proficient   Exemplary
    0   1   2   3   4   5

18. I have the ability to understand and make recommendations regarding legal issues related to special education.

    Emergent   Proficient   Exemplary
    0   1   2   3   4   5

19. I have the ability to develop and implement inclusionary practices in schools.

    Emergent   Proficient   Exemplary
    0   1   2   3   4   5

Tipping the Balance: Social Justice Leaders Allying with Marginalized Youth to Increase Student Voice and Activism

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Abstract

Social justice school leaders can amplify the voices and activism of marginalized students by shifting from hierarchical relationships to working as allies. An ally is commonly defined as a person who is associated with another or others for some common cause or purpose. By transferring Kendall's (2013) concept of "allyship" from racial privilege to leadership, this paper applies this theory through three dimensions: developing a radar, breaking ranks and creating space for student voice, and making intentional strategic moves. Ultimately, the school leaders highlighted in this study are tipping the balance to disrupt hierarchical relationships between leaders and students, in service of marginalized students.

Keywords: social justice leadership, student activism, student voice, marginalized students, transformational leadership

In typical schools, students have hierarchical relationships with the formal leaders. This dynamic suppresses student voice in decision-making and other aspects of schooling (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Howard, 2001; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992; Weinstein, 2002). Schools are organized in ways that privilege adult and leader voices over student voices in matters that have real consequences for students (Valenzuela, 1999). Students rarely get a say in disciplinary policy decisions, for instance, or in determining how they are allowed to speak up in support of causes that serve their interests. When student voice is allowed, leaders often focus on elected student leaders or an elite group of high-performing students, rather than marginalized youth. In contrast, this paper focuses on leaders who support the voice and activism of those students who are most disempowered, and how they can authentically support students when they have hierarchical authority over them. In other words, we examine how leaders, in the interest of social justice, can become allies to their most marginalized students.

An ally is commonly defined as a person who is associated with another or others for some common cause or purpose. In her book *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race,* Kendall (2013) differentiates between allies, advocates, coalitions, and connections within cross-privilege relationships. She writes that creating authentic relationships across privilege requires a willingness to keep channels of communication open about power and privilege differences and involves "the risk of losing social and cultural capital" (Kendall, 2013, p. 176). With a focus on racial privilege, Kendall (2013) identifies key behaviors that create the potential to develop authentic relationships across privilege, including:

- "Allies work continuously to develop an understanding of the personal and institutional experiences of the people with whom they are allying themselves" (p. 180).
- "Allies choose to ally themselves publicly and privately with members of target groups and respond to their needs. This may mean breaking assumed allegiances with those who have the same privileges" (p. 180).
- "Allies know that in the most empowered and genuine ally relationships, the persons with privilege initiate the change toward personal, institutional and societal justice… sharing the power, doing the dance…" (p. 183).

In this paper, we argue that Kendall's (2013) concept of allyship across privilege can be transferred beyond racial privilege to other privileges—such as hierarchical authority. This paper applies the above key behaviors of Kendall's (2013) theories of allyship across privilege to the relationship between alumni of the University of California, Berkeley, Principal Leadership Institute (PLI), who are working as equity-centered leaders, and their most marginalized students.

Alumni contributions in this paper were taken from their participation in an Alumni Teach-In held by the PLI at UC Berkeley in January 2018. Teach-ins started in 1965 at the University of Michigan, when faculty chose to join students in their protest against the Vietnam War by holding a 12-hour public debate and dialogue about the issues.[2] In this spirit, the PLI uses Alumni Teach-In events as a form of critical resistance, knowledge sharing, and modeling that gives space for public discussion about social justice school leadership in relation to local or national issues. This Alumni Teach-In was held in solidarity with the second annual Women's March.[3]

So as to provide context, the following is a short description of each alumnus who

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[2] For more information about the first teach-in at the University of Michigan, see
http://michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/antivietnamwar/exhibits/show/exhibit/the_teach_ins/first_teach_in.
[3] You can read more about the Women's March and its mission at https://www.womensmarch.com/mission/.

participated in the January 2018 Teach-In.[4] Jill is a white female principal of a large urban high school. Fernando is a Latino male principal of a medium-sized urban middle school. Helen is a white female elementary teacher leader in an urban district. John is a white male assistant principal at a high school in a suburb where the growing diversity of the student population is alarming to many longstanding community members. Finally, Marcus is a mixed-race African American male assistant principal at a high school located in a suburb approximately 25 miles from UC Berkeley where there is no activist culture. This intentional composition of school leaders, representing a variety of educational contexts and backgrounds, was assembled in order to provide multiple perspectives about how social justice leaders can choose to ally with students to make space for student voice and activism.

Developing a Radar

Kendall (2013) writes that,
> Allies work continuously to develop an understanding of the personal and institutional experiences of the people with whom they are allying themselves. If the ally is a member of a privileged group, it is essential that she or he also strives for clarity about the impact of privileges on her or his life. (p. 180)

At the PLI Alumni Teach-In, participants described the development of a personal radar that connects national and local issues to their students, as well as their knowledge of historical and current systemic oppression. For example, Fernando described the need to prepare support for his students prior to the final verdict for Darren Wilson, the police officer who killed Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, because he recognized the parallels between that situation and the experiences of many students at his school, stating,
> My admin and counseling team started to brainstorm, how do we create a space for kids to process? … [Our students are] 70% Black and [Latino], which is in [strong] juxtaposition with the city demographics. So, it was really important for us to think about creating a space that's safe for them and talk about ways that they can be safe in the community when trying to just express their feelings of frustration and anger. (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

Fernando's ability to recognize the impact that repeated instances of police violence have on his most marginalized students allowed him to respond proactively to his students' needs.

Helen gave a contrasting example during the pre-presidential election period of 2016, when the Southern Poverty Law Center published a report called *The Trump Effect*[5] that talked about how the language of the campaign was having an impact on school campuses. Specifically, she recounted how she read the report and "like a good white liberal, I thought, 'I'm so glad that I'm not teaching in a place where this is happening'" (personal communication, January 20, 2018). Her blinders were on until she discussed the article with her colleagues. The principal made her aware of some examples of the Trump Effect at her elementary school, which compelled Helen to reach out to parents of color at her school. Through this process, Helen learned that "students were threatening each other with statements such as, 'you're going to get deported' or 'I'm going to have you deported' or 'you were born in a Taco Bell'" (personal communication, January 20,

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[4] All names and locations have been anonymized in this paper.

[5] You can read the full report at https://www.splcenter.org/20161128/trump-effect-impact-2016-presidential-election-our-nations-schools.

2018). Connecting with her colleagues and listening opened Helen's eyes and compelled her to action.

Another critical component to developing a radar is identifying, acknowledging, and building a relationship with student leaders who might be compelled to action in each situation, especially at the high school level. Jill described how she and her team supported student activism in response to Trump's announcement to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program by being "in very close communication with our student leaders, because that is the way to know what's really happening in the student body" (personal communication, January 20, 2018). She then acknowledged her own social position and how it affects her work as a leader, stating,

> As a white educator and leader, one of the things that I'm always thinking about is how to amplify the voice of our students of color, and I can't amplify their voice if I don't know what are the concerns that are close to their hearts. We knew that the Chicano Latino United Voices club was planning an action… and so we started to meet with the leaders of that club and talk about what that could look like. (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

Fernando, Helen, and Jill provide examples of how leaders can approach allyship with students, especially students from marginalized groups. By recognizing their privileges, in Kendall's (2013) words, they can work "continuously to develop an understanding of the personal and institutional experiences of the people with whom they are allying themselves" (p. 180). Social justice leaders have a unique opportunity to disrupt the systems of hierarchy that were designed to not empower student voice by creating alliances between administrators and students. Developing a radar around social issues that really matter to marginalized students and choosing to take action in support of those students is a critical step in strengthening the ally relationship between students and leaders.

Breaking Ranks and Creating Space for Student Voice

A second key behavior that Kendall (2013) identifies involves breaking from traditional roles that are often defined by the power structure. Specifically,

> Allies choose to ally themselves publicly and privately with members of target groups and respond to their needs. This may mean breaking assumed allegiances with those who have the same privileges... It is important not to underestimate the consequences of breaking these agreements and to break them in ways that will be most useful to the person or group with whom you are aligning yourself. (Kendall, 2013 p. 180)

One response typical school leaders have to student activism is the compulsion to "remain neutral" (Hess & McEvoy, 2015). This neutral stance is particularly prevalent in conservative contexts where student activism is less common. John's school is an example of such a context. John's principal took this path during the 2016 presidential election, and it impacted him as an assistant principal who is committed to social justice because he recognized that it was suppressing the voices of marginalized students. With growing tensions between Trump supporters and dissenters in the student body and on staff, John spent more and more time "fielding phone calls from conservative parents asking, 'what are you doing to protect my kid?'" (personal communication, January 20, 2018). The morning after the presidential election, a massive "Make America Great Again" sign was hung in the quad overnight. That's when John decided that he had to break ranks from his principal and could not be neutral anymore—he took the sign down before

many students arrived at school. The next day, when a student walkout led by a small contingent of students of color was imminent (an unprecedented act in this school context), the principal told the administrative team that someone needed to escort the students. John saw this as an opportunity and gladly volunteered. John describes a profound personal lesson he took away from this experience:

> Go to the kids. Don't focus on control and safety. Don't try to dictate to kids what they can do. Talk to the kids. Pull in the kids. Hear what they want to do, hear their plans, and listen as opposed to just saying, "No, you can't do that." (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

As social justice leaders, creating an authentic response to student activism goes beyond standing with our students during a protest to ensure their safety. Alumni expressed that in order to respond in a truly socially just way, they needed to use their leadership positions to make school-wide structural changes that would create more spaces for student voice to be heard and for future action to be taken. For example, John's utilization of the detention space as an opportunity for a facilitated student discussion is just one example of how leaders can be transformative in their practice in order to model for students the power and potential of speaking out for what they believe in. As John describes, "we had a mass voluntary detention where we went to the kids and said, look, this is the price of civil disobedience. We opened the gym, and they all came" (personal communication, January 20, 2018). The students who voluntarily showed up for their detention had the opportunity to participate in the walkout and also engage in a powerful dialogue with their teachers, administrators, and peers. Instead of blindly adhering to the district policy, which states, "if you walk out of school, you get a detention," John chose to use that policy to create a space to amplify student voice and encourage dialogue among student protesters and those who may have shared an alternate viewpoint (personal communication, January 20, 2018).

Responding in this way comes with risks and challenges. Various stakeholders pressure administrators to react in ways that align with district policies and minimize disruption of school activities (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012; Olsen & Sexton, 2009). Despite this pressure, these social justice leaders were willing to take risks, often breaking ranks with their district office or site administrators in order to respond authentically to student activism. One way that leaders provided an authentic response to student activism was by creating safe spaces for students to talk about difficult issues. At Marcus's school, also located in a conservative community, the administrators organized a peace assembly, where they invited the media, school district officials, and community members to be present and to hear marginalized students express how they felt about a recent incident of discriminatory graffiti in a school bathroom. Instead of inviting a guest speaker or having another adult dominate the space, student voice was at the center. As Marcus describes, the administrators giving

> ...the microphone to the kids to speak about their racial frustrations, the prejudice they experience, ultimately how they see school and more importantly how the administration fails sometimes to recognize the supports that we need to have in place. (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

This courageous act of listening and truly hearing student voice in a public setting is one example of an authentic response to student activism.

When administrators like Marcus choose to ally with their students in this way, an additional consideration is how to ensure that the teachers, who are on the frontlines in their classrooms with students all day, are fully prepared to continue these difficult conversations with

students. Social justice leaders cannot assume that teachers have the experience, training, and skills necessary to participate in conversations about politics, race, and equity. Marcus realized that some of his teachers were uncomfortable leading students in discussions about race-related issues. Rather than letting teachers off the hook, or offering to have the conversations for them, he decided to increase his presence in their classrooms through informal walkthroughs, and to work side by side with his teachers to help them become more comfortable with these critical discussions. In this way, Marcus modeled for teachers and students that these issues are important and that it was okay to let students take the lead. He describes,

> It is about what you do on the interior, in your classrooms, and if you show up and are present. And again, you don't have to take the mic and be the leader. You don't have to be on the stage. Be the guy on the side and just be present. (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

> These alumni provide clear illustrations of how social justice leaders can use their positions of authority to break ranks and make space for student voice through the implementation of policies and school activities, and by supporting teachers to engage with students on difficult topics. As Fernando said, "...whether it's in the flatlands, in the hills, in the cities, or the burbs, we need to create spaces for kids to maintain hope" (personal communication, January 20, 2018). In each case, it is clear that the leaders intentionally planned for the potential "consequences of breaking agreements," and did so in ways that would be most supportive to the marginalized students.

Making Intentional Strategic Moves

A third key behavior for allies involves the strategy the person with more power and privilege uses to support those with less. Kendall (2013) writes:

> Allies know that in the most empowered and genuine ally relationships, the persons with privilege initiate the change toward personal, institutional and societal justice and equality… Sharing the power of decision making about what will happen is essential. Assess who will be at least risk when stepping into a situation to initiate and move forward… Together with the people who aren't privileged, we choreograph who makes which moves and when they will be made. (p. 183)

> Catalyzing a coalition of adults to support student activism, and ensure its success, was a theme echoed by many of the alumni. As discussed by Kendall (2013), it is essential that educational leaders, as persons of privilege, share the power of decision-making. Helen, an elementary teacher leader, tapped into the network of educators with whom she had built relationships during her tenure as an officer with the teachers' union in an effort to coordinate a response to the recent anti-immigrant sentiment that was becoming a prevalent local and national narrative. Her approach assumed that district leadership would be skeptical about their capacity to implement a district-wide action on top of their already overwhelming responsibilities. With this in mind, Helen began to mobilize the various groups she had previously worked with and solicited their assistance and resources. Helen's "choreography" included aligning with the Teachers of Color network, a collective of teachers focused on creating social justice curricula, and creating posters with the theme "We All Belong." The posters, which included a butterfly motif by a local artist of color, Faviana Rodriguez, were printed in Arabic, English, and Spanish. Together, Helen and her team created accompanying lesson plans, based on the Southern Poverty Law Center's

Teaching Tolerance curriculum. When approached, the district was resistant and skeptical about how to distribute the materials. However, because of the preparations made by Helen and her coalition of adults, all concerns were addressed, and the posters and curriculum were distributed to every teacher.

The Southern Poverty Law Center learned of their work and dispatched a reporter and photographer to document the efforts. They also invited Helen to speak at their fall fundraising event to share her experiences with their funders. Rather than attend the event, Helen suggested that her co-facilitator, a teacher of color, present to the group. Ultimately, the teacher, along with one of her students, shared with the gathering the challenges they faced in their community because of their racial identity. While Helen was the initiator of the action, she chose to move out of the center and give the spotlight to a teacher of color and student of color. This deliberate act of allyship by Helen provides an example of how leaders can use their privilege to ally with marginalized adults and students.

In an effort to "[share] the power of decision making about what will happen… and... choreograph who makes which moves and when they will be made" as described by Kendall (2013, p. 183), social justice leaders can align themselves with their students in ways that minimize risk to the students while still amplifying their voices and supporting their cause. When the students at Jill's school, which has a strong history of social activism, were planning a school-wide walkout, she and her leadership team met with the student leaders to help them conceptualize their protest plan in a way that would have maximum impact while also keeping students safe. According to Jill,

> ...we talked over a week about what the action could look like, and their idea morphed away from a walkout to figuring out to get the students and teachers to hold hands around the school. We were really happy about that… not because it made things simpler for us, but because it was a new approach that provided symbolism that was so much more powerful and representative of their message. (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

Being an ally also means supporting teachers who are struggling with students that make triggering remarks toward marginalized groups. A teacher told Jill that she was in the process of changing the curriculum of her course "because this kid just can't stop saying really offensive things" (personal communication, January 20, 2018). Jill then described how the administrators have to be the ones to model dialogue across difference by confronting white students on behalf of teachers. In her words:

> Yesterday, we had another conversation with this student who keeps saying deeply offensive stuff. We've had to give him some really clear boundaries about what you can and can't say—not to abridge his First Amendment rights, but to reset the expectation around what civil discourse in the classroom looks like. Because if you continue to say very offensive things about immigrant students, you're not making a safe environment for yourself or for them. (personal communication, January 20, 2018)

In this instance, remaining silent or neutral was not an option for Jill. It was important for her teachers and students to witness her use her position as a school leader to reset expectations around student safety in support of marginalized populations.

These examples demonstrate how leaders can use their professional knowledge, network, and positionality to amplify the voices of marginalized students and adults. The "choreography of moves" and "assessment of risk" described by Kendall (2013, p. 183) required the leaders to establish and maintain trusting relationships during periods of unrest; it also required both strategy

and preparation for the emotional labor involved.

Conclusion

In each of these three dimensions of allyship—developing a radar, breaking ranks, and making intentional strategic moves—the school leaders tipped the balance to disrupt the hierarchical relationships between themselves and their students, in service of marginalized students. The work of developing a radar, breaking ranks, creating space for student voice, and making intentional strategic moves is complex. It requires leaders to repeatedly ask questions such as: *How does my race affect the situation? How can I remove barriers? How do I move out of the center? Where are the opportunities for change? What makes the biggest impact? What are the consequences for each group? Who is taking the risk?*

By choosing to be an ally to marginalized students, social justice school leaders can transform their schools to be more democratic institutions of hope. Leaders can leverage their power and authority to create more equitable conditions for their most voiceless students. This, in turn, will serve to empower students of color and will allow them to become active participants in the democratic process. As Kendall (2013) states, "allies promote a sense of inclusiveness and justice... helping to create an environment that is hospitable for all" (p. 183). Similarly, the alumni leaders of UC Berkeley's Principal Leadership Institute provide models illustrating how social justice-oriented school leaders can create more inclusive schools that empower the voices of marginalized youth.

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Model Continuation High Schools: Social-Cognitive Factors That Contribute to Re-Engaging At-Risk Students Emotionally, Behaviorally, and Cognitively Towards Graduation

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Abstract

This three-phase, two-method qualitative study explored and identified policies, programs, and practices that school-site administrators perceived as most effective in reengaging at-risk students emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively at 10 California Model Continuation High Schools (MCHS). Eccles' expectancy-value theoretical framework was used to gain insight on effective school context that supported at-risk students' developmentally appropriate expectancy for success and task-value beliefs towards graduation. Results indicated that MCHS had significant policies, programs, and practices that transformed disengaged at-risk students into graduates by breaking down the barriers of students' prior negative experiences and formed new expectancy and task-value beliefs through positive learning opportunities.

Keywords: At-risk students, student engagement, expectancy-value, task-value beliefs

Researchers across the United States have cited the leading cause of dropping out as a decline in student motivation resulting from disengagement in the educational system (Finn, 1989). California's Model Continuation High Schools (MCHS) are recognized as making a difference for the most disengaged students, and yet little is known about why their specific policies, programs, and practices are successful in re-engaging at-risk students. Considering that continuation high schools are California's premier dropout intervention program (CDE, 2015), it is imperative to examine what critical re-engaging components in MCHS are significant for other schools to consider. This research examined the phenomenon of re-engagement in an effective school context and its developmental influences on at-risk students' beliefs of expectancy for success and task-value towards graduation.

The study was important because there is a current need to close the dropout gap for low economic status and minority students and to increase engagement for all high school students nationwide. The literature revealed a need for greater understanding of successful policies, programs, and practices at continuation high schools and of schoolwide support structures that address not only the cognitive and behavioral challenges of at-risk students but also their psychological, social, and emotional needs. Currently, the literature focuses on the cognitive and behavioral causes of individual academic failure (Marks, 2000; McDermott, Mordell, & Stolzfus, 2001), overlooking the connection between these failures and the power of a developmentally appropriate school context to re-engage at-risk students in the educational process (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Graham & Weiner, 2012).

Purpose of Study

Given the multifaceted interactions of the school context and the complex developmental needs of at-risk students, this three-phase, two-method qualitative study had a dual purpose. The first purpose was to explore and identify policies, programs, and practices perceived as being most effective in re-engaging at-risk students emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively at 10 MCHS in California. The second purpose was to build upon Eccles' expectancy-value theoretical framework (EEVT; Eccles et al., 1983) by gaining insight on effective school context that supported at-risk students' developmentally appropriate expectancy for success and task-value beliefs towards graduation.

Research Questions

The following central question guided the study at 10 purposely selected California MCHS:
1) How are 10 MCHS re-engaging at-risk students behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively?
2) What principles of Eccles' expectancy-value model are evident, if at all, in the identified policies, programs, and practices of the 10 MCHS?

Theoretical Framework

The data were collected, organized, and interpreted through the EEVT framework, which proposes that both social-cognitive variables (expectancy and task-value) are swayed by students' perception of external structures (psychological factors related to school, family, peers, and

community) that influence the development of their personal beliefs and affect the outcome of achievement-related choices and performances (Eccles et al., 1983). The social-cognitive principles of EEVT are associated with five theoretical frames of research—self-efficacy theory, control theory, self-determination theory (intrinsic motivation only), interest theory, and goal theory—which in turn are connected to social-cognitive theory (Rotter, 1982), achievement theory (Atkinson, 1957), and attribution theory (Weiner, 1985). This makes EEVT framework applicable to a qualitative examination of the multifaceted and multidimensional variables for re-engaging at-risk students through the school context (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002; Wigfield et al., 1997).

The multidimensional aspects of EEVT's psychological factors make it difficult to examine re-engagement in a non-longitudinal study. Consequently, the researcher reduced the basic tenets to include only aspects of EEVT that relate to measuring the school context (policies, programs, and practices). Focusing specifically on school context will assist in examining what principles of Eccles' Expectancy-Value Model are evident, if at all, in the identified policies, programs, and practices of the 10 MCHS that contribute to re-engaging at-risk students in the educational process (Figure 1).

Literature Review

When looking at student re-engagement, the literature operationalized three distinct dimensions of engagement: (a) emotional engagement, (b) behavioral engagement, and (c) cognitive engagement (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992). Emotional engagement encompasses students' affective relationships with educators and the school as well as the mindset about the policies, programs, and practices developed through positive or negative experiences (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Behavioral engagement reflects students' participation or lack thereof in schools (Finn, 1993; Fredricks et al., 2004). Cognitive engagement is the intellectual effort or psychological investment of the student in educational activities (Newmann et al., 1992). All three were seen as important re-engagement mechanisms for at-risk students.
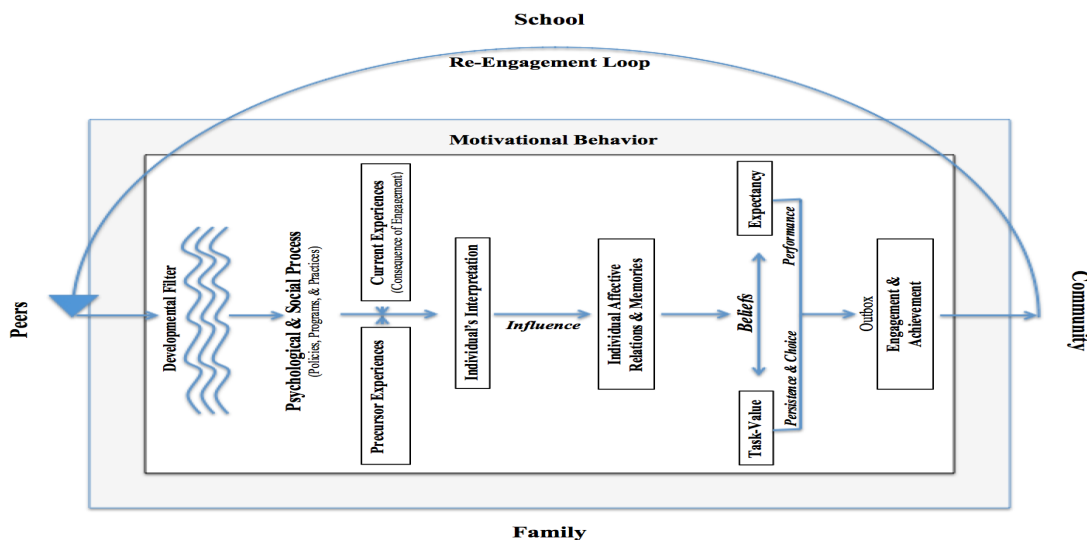

Figure 1. Re-engagement Expectancy-Value Model of Achievement Behavior in Schools

When looking at re-engaging at-risk students in any of the three dimensions of engagement or through policies, programs, and practices, the literature additionally highlighted three basic motivational components that need to be met: (a) competence, or the desire to experience mastery; (b) relatedness, or the desire to interact, be connected, and experience caring from and for others; and (c) autonomy, or the desire to make decisions in one's life (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Eccles & Roeser, 2010; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009). Deci and Ryan (2000) further maintain that these innate needs assist or decrease the students' interpretation and internalization of external experiences into beliefs. Such needs are seen as engagement initiators that foster the internal psychological changes required for engagement to occur, as reflected in Figure 2 (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Eccles & Roeser, 2010; Eccles et al., 1983; Skinner et al., 2009).
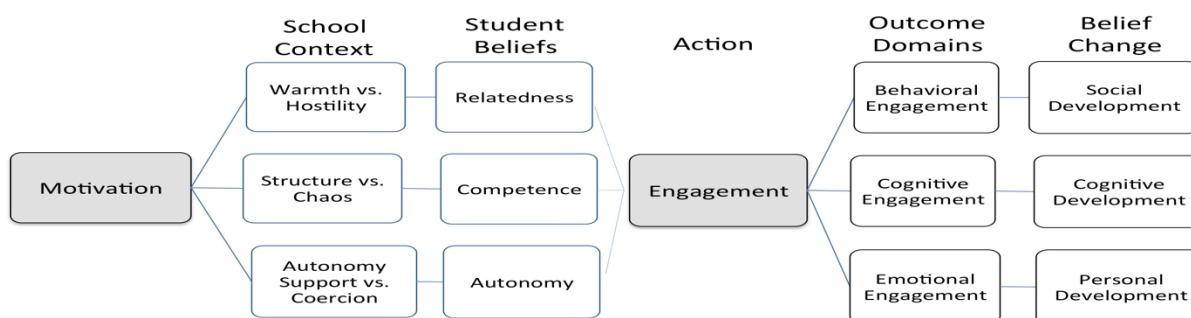

Figure 2. Sources of Engagement

The transformation of the school context in support of relatedness, competence, and autonomy not only addresses the students' basic psychological needs but also identifies a motivational process that produces a sense of self, supporting the EEVT model of student engagement (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Eccles et al., 1983; Graham & Weiner, 2012). The literature review conducted for this study emphasized how school context can facilitate competency by helping students establish realistic expectations, by being consistent in their policies and practices, and by providing relevant and timely feedback (Hattie, 2009; Skinner, 1995). The literature review additionally summarized how relatedness was developed by involving students in school, engaging them in interesting and fun activities, and linking education to their future aspirations (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). By recognizing students' perspectives and providing opportunity for student initiative and choice, educators can increase the students' feeling of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). If these basic needs are thwarted through an inappropriate school context, disengagement begins and eventually the student drops out (Higgins, 2007).

There was a clear agreement across the different domains of research that motivation initiates the process to engage and that engagement is needed to succeed in school. However, the limited perspective on the cognitive and behavioral processes in the existing research dictates a problem-focused approach centered on the individual (Marks, 2000) rather than a more constructive psychological and developmental agenda (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). To support the educators' need to understand how to re-engage at-risk students, this study sought to focus on the three dimensions of engagement, examining how schools develop students' values towards graduation, expectancy for success, and the significance of the school context in re-engaging at-risk students.

Methods

The study was conducted in three phases, utilizing two methods. Phase I and Phase III used content analysis, whereas Phase II utilized a phenomenological method. Each phase was designed to delve deeper into the phenomena of re-engagement through diverse perspectives and multiple methods and strategies (Creswell, 2014; Richards & Morse, 2013). The data were collected from twice-awarded MCHS applications from a pool of 81 schools between the years 2009 and 2015 (the awards were given by the California Continuation Education Association in partnership with the California Department of Education). External evaluators were used in all phases to audit the process, intent, clarity, and to construct a reliable representation of the findings (Maxwell, 2005).

Phases I and II collected data on the MCHS to address the first research question and purpose of this study. In Phase I, the initial conventional or inductive content analysis of each site's MCHS application, including statement letters (from a student, parent, teacher, and community member) was used to triangulate policy, program, and practice data and increase the credibility of the subjective analysis of qualitative data in Phase II. The examination of documents allowed the researcher to (a) gather background information on school context, (b) determine implementation levels, (c) gather authentic language from multiple sources, and (d) expand the data to be collected in Phase II (Creswell, 2014; Richards & Morse, 2013).

Phase I utilized a 10-step data analysis process. The researcher first read each application as a whole, then read it again making notes about first impressions. Then the applications were read a third time, and the researcher began coding by initially highlighting key words or phrases indicating re-engagement of at-risk students behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively. The researcher then made notes about actions, activities, concepts, differences, opinions, processes, or any other information that was seen as relevant to the re-engagement of at-risk students. Next, the application was read a fourth time circling any connection to the development of expectancy or task-value beliefs. The application data coding was bracketed in an attempt to understand the re-engaging policies, programs, and practices from different points of view along the three dimensions of engagement (Creswell, 2014). The researcher then horizonalized the data to discover the range of experiences about re-engagement of at-risk students (Mosustakas, 1994). Quotes from the applications were also gathered to support themes emerging from the coding to allow readers to gain their own conclusions (Richards & Morse, 2013). Finally, the researcher generated an application summary sheet of Phase I data for each site based on the 10-step data analysis.

Phase II used 60-minute semi-structured, open-ended interviews to collect data from 10 site administrators who had at least four years of leadership at the MCHS. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to experience the phenomena more closely and to verify the data gathered in Phase I. The interview scripts included an interview guide and nine prompts addressing the three engagement domains. The purpose of the interviews was to describe the essence of the shared experiences at MCHS in re-engaging at-risk students behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively (Creswell, 2014). The 10-step data analysis process utilized in Phase I was also used on the transcribed interviews, and data from Phases I and II were combined and reported according to the three dimensions of engagement as supported by the identified re-engagement policies, programs, and practices.

Phase III included a deductive content analysis based on eight theoretical components (four

related to expectancy and four to task-value) of the combined data collected in Phases I and II; this phase aimed at addressing the second research question and purpose of this study. The eight theoretical components were: (a) self-concept of ability to graduate, (b) perception that the task of graduating is doable, (c) healthy attribution for failure and success, (d) healthy locus of control, (e) perceptions of personal importance of doing well on a given task, (f) perceptions of the intentions of the task to accomplish a future goal, (g) immediate enjoyment when performing a task that is intrinsically valued, and (h) ability to overcome negative obstacles, undesirable aspects in a task, or the need to making difficult decisions. Three raters collected data for Phase III and the researcher organized the data into four content analysis summary sheets. These sheets recorded each rater's individual scores for the eight theoretical components—raw data counts entered using a five-point ordinal implementation scale. The five-point implementation scale was developed as an adaptation of the cypress approach for evaluating specific occurrences (McCready, 2013). Fleiss Kappa was then used to evaluate the raw scores (occurrences) on each of the eight theoretical components noted in the MCHS applications and the MCHS administrator interview transcripts. Such evaluation resulted in two different Proportion of Agreement for each school, Proportion of Agreement for each scale category, Inter-Reliability Ratings (IRR), Observed Agreement (P-Bar), Chance Agreement (Pe), and Cohen's Kappa scores for each of the eight theoretical based components. To account for the raters' scoring subjectivity and measure the inter-rater agreement, the researcher calculated Cohen's Kappa scores for each of the eight theoretical components of the transcribed interviews and applications.

Results and Findings

In Phase I, the researcher conducted an inductive document review of the 10 MCHS applications that were awarded, including four statement letters; the results identified 11 policies, 10 programs, and 11 practices that were effective in re-engaging at-risk students emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively. Even though the policy, program, and practice themes identified diverse exemplary school context components of effective re-engagement, as expressed both through self-reporting and in writing, those components were not in themselves re-engagement initiators and required a deeper look into the school context from the perception of MCHS site administrators, which was done in Phase II.

In Phase II, the 10-step phenomenological analysis of semi-structured administrator interviews revealed eight re-engaging implementation strategies perceived to be effective with at-risk students, based on four emotional, two behavioral, and two cognitive components. First, the MCHS re-engaged at-risk students emotionally by maintaining a welcoming, safe, and clean campus, establishing meaningful and supportive adult-student relationships, providing on- and off-campus counseling support, and frequently celebrating small wins. Second, the MCHS re-engaged at-risk students behaviorally by establishing clear and high expectations for all students and seeking active student participation in educational activities, events, and learning opportunities. Finally, the MCHS re-engaged at-risk students cognitively by providing a structured and adaptable learning environment to meet at-risk students' unique needs and by making sure the students' educational experiences were relevant to their future.

Even though the initial findings of Phases I and II developed a picture of what MCHS were doing within their school contexts, they did not explain whether, or how, the students' beliefs were transformed to promote re-engagement. Thus, the content analysis in Phase III offered a deeper

deductive approach to provide insight into the transformation of the students' expectancy for success and task-value belief towards graduation.

The Phase III findings revealed that two principles of the EEVT (expectancy and task-value beliefs) were evident in all 10 MCHS, at an average exemplary implementation rate of 27% (11 or more occurrences at each site), a progressive implementation rate of 43% (7–10 occurrences), a transitional implementation rate of 24% (4–6 occurrences), and a beginning implementation rate of 6% (1–3 occurrences). The MCHS accomplished this by modifying the school context to break down the barriers of students' prior negative experiences and form new expectancy and task-value beliefs through positive learning opportunities.

Expectancy captures the students' beliefs about their success on a given task, and it was explored through four theoretical achievement ability beliefs (Eccles et al., 1983; Skinner, 1995; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). The Phase III findings indicated that the strongest expectancy belief component was the development of a healthy locus of control, followed by the perception that the task of graduation was doable (Table 1). Next was the development of self-concept of ability to graduate, and last, but still significant, was the development of a healthy attribution for failure and success. These findings showed how the MCHS are building students' positive self-efficacy and locus of control through their policies, programs, and practices by transforming students' inappropriate beliefs about their achievement levels and abilities into more constructive and appropriate expectancy beliefs.

Table 1

Phase III Expectancy and Task-Value Belief Findings

Social-Cognitive Components	Implementation Rate			
	Exemplary (11+ Times)	Progressive (7–10)	Transitional (4–6)	Beginning (1–3)
Expectancy:				
1. Healthy locus of control	55%	40%	5%	0%
2. Perception that graduating is doable	30%	40%	30%	0%
3. Self-concept of ability to graduate	25%	40%	35%	0%
4. Healthy attribution for failure & success	10%	15%	40%	35%
Task-value:				
1. Ability to overcome obstacles or make difficult decisions	50%	45%	5%	0%
2. Perception of intentions of the task to accomplish future goal	30%	55%	15%	0%
3. Immediate enjoyment when performing intrinsically valued tasks	25%	45%	30%	0%

| 4. Personal importance of doing well on a given task | 15% | 55% | 30% | 0% |

Note: Cohen's Kappa and inter-rater agreement were calculated for each component.

School programs and practices that build appropriate expectancies are important because self-efficacy and perceived control over competence are major predictors of engagement and achievement (Bandura, 1997; Pintrich, 2003; Schunk & Mullen, 2012). In fact, motivation and achievement researchers suggest that the school context should support the building of a mastery-based mindset by progressively developing the level of the challenges the students face, by assisting students in envisioning multifaceted concepts, and by providing them with constructive and timely feedback to overcome inappropriate expectancies (Dweck & Elliott, 1983; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). This was most evident in the mentoring and support programs, adaptable learning environments, and systematic monitoring of student progress observed in the MCHS discussed here.

EEVT's second component, task-value, refers to the qualities of a specific task and how such qualities influence the student's engagement to do the task (Eccles et al., 1983). The Phase III findings indicated that the two strongest components of task-value beliefs were the perceived ability to overcome negative obstacles or make difficult decisions and the perceived intentions of the task to accomplish a future goal (Table 1). Next was the immediate enjoyment when performing an intrinsically valued task, followed by the perception of personal importance of doing well on a given task. These findings show how the policies, programs, and practices at the MCHS are building students' intrinsic motivation, interest, and goal setting to transform their inappropriate beliefs about educational tasks into more constructive, and appropriate task-value beliefs.

Task-value beliefs influence the students' intent and persistence in the given task (Wigfield et al., 1997). The students determine the value of a school-related task in two ways, based on performance in school and on experiences in different school contexts (Higgins, 2007). If the task is useful, thought-provoking, and meaningful to the student, engagement will occur, which in turn will develop positive intentions and values and therefore affect the student's beliefs (Pintrich, 2003; Wigfield et al., 1997). All MCHS developed the students' interest and intrinsic motivation through student activities and events and by providing exploratory career, college, and community service opportunities.

Conclusions

Three conclusions resulted from the analysis of the study's findings. First, at-risk students' re-engagement is most effective when the school context (policies, and practices) provide learning opportunities that scaffold the development of students' emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement in a successive loop, beginning with emotional engagement. Positive experiences initiate belief alteration and create an amenable mindset for the change, allowing for an open pathway for experiencing success (Finn, 1993; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Once this pathway is opened, the desire to interact can be nurtured to enhance behavioral engagement, which encompasses students' effort, persistence, and active participation within the classroom and school context (Bandura, 1997; Newmann et al., 1992; Weiner, 1985). After students become active participants they are ready to begin experiencing effectiveness in their own social and physical

environment, leading to cognitive engagement (Bandura, 1997; Weiner, 2007).

MCHS started emotional reengagement during the voluntary intake process, by treating new students with respect and welcoming them into a safe and caring environment. They continued to reengage students by providing individualized support opportunities to immediately address each student's needs, frequently acknowledging the students' progress, and encouraging active participation to holistically develop behavioral engagement in and out of the classroom. Next, MCHS provided a structured and adaptable learning environment for relevant educational experiences to develop students' cognitive abilities. They created the feeling of effectiveness by monitoring student progress and nurturing "whatever it takes" attitudes to ensure student success and not allow failure.

Second, student engagement is most effective when the school context provides developmental opportunities that build students' self-efficacy and locus of control, altering students' inappropriate emotional, behavioral, and cognitive expectancy for success beliefs about their perceived ability to graduate. Students construct, interpret, and understand knowledge through positive developmental opportunities. When numerous failed attempts form inappropriate beliefs, it causes at-risk students to stop trying, to experience helplessness and low self-efficacy, or to believe that they have a fixed ability. Students with low self-efficacy tend to regard their performance as a measurement of inherent aptitude, and failure as an indicator of intellectual deficits or something out of their control (Bandura, 1997). When students develop this mindset, it modifies their perspective, decreasing engagement (Bandura, Barbararanelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Schunk & Mullen, 2012), and ultimately deteriorating their performance (Dweck & Elliott, 1983). Understanding the actions required provides the crucial foundation for expectancy to succeed and is the regulatory component for students towards their success or failure (Rotter, 1982).

MCHS built students' self-efficacy and locus of control through individualized instruction and support to raise the students' confidence in their abilities. They promoted high expectations and appropriate acknowledgment of success and failure based on the students' efforts, and they had a strong commitment to student success. MCHS also provided clear paths so students would understand how to earn required credits, offered numerous opportunities for active participation, provided individualized support and progress monitoring, and established personal goal setting through advisory and mentoring programs. By supporting the students' personal development of responsibility for their educational outcomes, it allowed students to overcome their learned helplessness and supported their path towards success and attribution retraining.

Third, student re-engagement is most effective when the school context provides choices that build the students' intrinsic motivation and interests, altering their inappropriate emotional, behavioral, and cognitive beliefs about perceived task-values towards graduating. EEVT explains values based on the qualities of a specific task and how such qualities influence the student's engagement to do the task (Eccles et al., 1983). The values of a specific task and their influence on the students' engagement to do the task are key in altering the students' inappropriate choices and lack of persistence (Eccles et al., 1983). The task's value can be developed by providing various opportunities to nurture the students' interest and increase their personal identity by performing the task (Carver & Scheier, 2005; Eccles et al., 1983). The findings supported how MCHS are building students' intrinsic motivation, interest, and future goal setting to turn their inappropriate beliefs about educational tasks into more constructive and appropriate task-value beliefs. All MCHS developed task-values by modifying the school context to support attainment,

interest, utility, and cost-value development to improve the students' outcome choices and performance. Wigfield and colleagues (1997) found that value beliefs influence students' intent and persistence in a given task. By supporting the students' interest for future personal goals, MCHS allowed students to build intrinsic motivation and altered their beliefs towards graduation and beyond.

Implications

Practical and theoretical implications resulted from this study. First, the findings can be used to inform school intervention programs and practices that reduce disengagement and dropout as well as policy recommendations that re-engage at-risk students back into the educational process. Second, to better understand the multidimensional aspects of re-engagement, this study conceptualized social-cognitive components of expectancy and task-value to validate and extend EEVT, and it provided an adapted educational model for practical implementation.

Summary

The results of this research suggest that a school context intentionally designed to address the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of engagement through the development of students' expectancy to succeed beliefs, together with the development of students' task-value beliefs towards graduation and beyond, can lead to re-engagement for at-risk students (Dweck & Elliott, 1983). The genuine importance of this study can be supported by the result of the MCHS's ability to transform disengaged at-risk students emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively into graduates who seek career and college options. MCHS were able to overcome student obstacles and barriers by creating a school context that supported the right policies, programs, and practices to address their students' diverse needs in the three dimensions of engagement.

MCHS are exemplary sites that have much to share with other continuation high schools looking for successful re-engaging approaches for at-risk students. This research suggests that MCHS had significant policies, programs, and practices that transformed disengaged at-risk students into graduates by developing the students' expectancy for success beliefs and task-value beliefs towards graduation and beyond. The vision of the researcher is for future studies to build upon the presented concepts and share findings with educators who can address the dropout problem and truly guide all students to new heights.

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School Factors That Contribute to the Underachievement of Students of Color and What Culturally Competent School Leaders Can Do[6]

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Abstract

Both socioeconomic and school factors contribute to the underachievement of poor children and children of color. This article explores factors that contribute to the underachievement of students of color and offers practices that culturally proficient school leaders can use to build a school culture that may positively impact the academic achievement of students of color.

Keywords: Underachievement, students of color, cultural proficiency, school leadership

Prefatory Note

Camille A. Smith's article, *School Factors that Contribute to the Underachievement of Students of Color and What Culturally Competent Leaders Can Do*, is as relevant today as when it was first published in 2005. Smith's indictment, "Schools have not succeeded in educating students of color or poor students," remains true. Students who identify as African American, Pacific Islander, Latinx, Native American, low-income, and who qualify for special education services in California have some of the lowest levels of achievement. The recent COVID pandemic has exacerbated these outcomes. Educational leaders looking to address the adult practices and beliefs that contribute to these inequities will appreciate learning how culturally competent leaders transform their school cultures into places "where beliefs, practices, and policies nurture and develop all students intellectually and socially."

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One of the most urgent issues that the educational community is facing is how to meet the academic needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. Currently, there are many students, primarily African American, Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students, who are not being well educated in this country. The inequities that prevent the educational achievement of these children may very well affect the social stability of the United States (Bowman, 1994, p. 1). This low level of education threatens these students' economic and social integration into mainstream America. A poor education creates a permanent underclass and severely compromises this country's ability to develop and sustain a well-balanced, pluralistic society that enjoys a high standard of living.

Many factors contribute to the underachievement of poor children and children of color (EdSource, 2003; Kober, 2001). While there is a strong correlation between low socioeconomic status, usually defined by the educational level and family income of parents, and poor academic performance, there are also links between various school factors and underachievement (Howard, 2002). Misguided perceptions of students of color are often demonstrated through a lack of respect and acceptance for cultural diversity (Howard, 2002; Revilla & Sweeney, 1997); low expectations for underachieving students (Steele, 1992); poor teacher/student relationships (Sadowski, 1992); and a sense of privilege that prevents needed changes from occurring in schools (Beswick, 1990; Gordon, Piana & Keleher, 2000; Weissglass, 2001). This paper will explore how a lack of respect and acceptance for cultural diversity impacts the achievement of African American students and suggests ways that school leaders can be more successful in addressing the academic needs of students of color in their schools.

Defining the Gap

The "achievement gap" refers to differences in performance (e.g., test scores and graduation rates) between children of color and middle class, White children. While poverty is strongly associated with low academic achievement, the gap breaks down along both racial and ethnic lines (Howard, 2002; McRobbie, 1998). The results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal that the percentage of African American and Hispanic students who score "below basic" across all subjects and grade levels is two to three times lower than that of White and Asian/Pacific Island students. The percentage of African American and Hispanic students who score at or above the "proficient" level tends to be about one fifth of what White and Asian/Pacific Island students score (EdSource, 2003, p. 3). The College Board (1999) reported that regardless of socioeconomic status and parent education, African American, Hispanic, and Native American students perform at lower academic levels than White and Asian students.

In California, the academic landscape for children of color reflects this national dilemma. Schools have not succeeded in educating students of color or poor students. All of California's students are required to take the California Standards Test (CST) in English /Language Arts and Mathematics. Recent CST English/Language Arts scores (Table 1) and math scores (Table 2) demonstrate the achievement gap in the performance of students for various ethnic groups and economically disadvantaged students (Ed Data Online, 2005). In California, Asian and White students performed about twice as well as students who are African American, Hispanic or economically disadvantaged.

In English/Language Arts, Asian students out performed all groups and scored slightly better than White students. African American, Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students

performed poorly in reading with over 75% of students from each of these groups scoring below proficiency. African Americans did slightly better than Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students in English/Language Arts.

Table 1

California Standards Test (CST) 2004 English/ Language Arts (ELA) Score Results

Student groups grades 2-11	Number of students tested	Number of students below Proficient Level	Percentage of students below Proficient Level
African American	389,000	298,000	76%
Asian	395,000	172,000	43%
Hispanic	2,200,000	1,700,000	79%
White	1,600,000	714,000	46%
Economically disadvantaged	2,300,000	1,900,000	79%

Table 2

California Standards Test (CST) 2004 Mathematics Score Results

Student groups grades 2-9	Number of students tested	Number of students below Proficient Level	Percentage of students below Proficient Level
African American	274,000	216,000	78%
Asian	253,000	82,000	32%
Hispanic	1,619,000	1,176,000	72%
White	1,038,000	484,000	46%
Economically disadvantaged	1,800,000	1,321,000	72%

In math, African American, Hispanic and economically disadvantage students again performed poorly with over 70% of students from each of these groups scoring below proficiency. African Americans performed slightly worse than Hispanics and economically disadvantaged students in math. Asian students were the highest scoring group in math, as they were in English/Language Arts. White students performed at the same level in math and English/Language Arts.

In California schools, African American and Hispanic students also have lower graduation rates than White students. High school completion rates for Hispanic students are 64.1%, compared

with 94.6% for Asians, 91.8% for Whites, and 83.7% for African Americans (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). The question for educators is not how large the achievement gap is for students of color, but rather how to close that gap.

Perceptions about Students of Color

Julian Weissglass (2001), Director of the National Coalition for Equity in Education, contends that many educators, through their race and class biases, have developed low expectations, misconceptions, and false assumptions about students of color and poor students. Such assumptions often result in low expectations that hinder the learning of these students. These lower expectations are a threat to the academic performance of students (Campbell-Jones & Campbell-Jones 2002; Ferguson, 1998; Ogbu, 1994; Roscigno, 1998; Steele, 1992; Warren, 2002). Students begin to accept the lower standards, develop a low self-concept of themselves, and become less confident in their ability to be successful (Ogbu, 1994; Viadero, 2000).

For example, African American children experience school differently from White children. (Sadowski, 2001). African American students battle negative perceptions and social expectations that often hinder their achievement (Sadowski, 2001; Steele, 1992). Ogbu (1994) posited that African American children may not be given access to advanced classes because teachers and administrators may perceive of them as inferior to their White counterparts. This differentiated treatment is revealed through several practices including tracking students into lowlevel classes, inappropriate assessments, and insensitive or unrepresentative portrayals in textbooks. Ferguson (1998), an economist and researcher at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, found that teachers behave differently toward African American students than they do toward White students. Teachers tend to be less supportive of African American students which may help perpetuate the continuance of low academic performance. He concluded, "stereotypes of black intellectual inferiority are reinforced by past and present disparities in performance, and this probably causes teachers to underestimate the potential of black children more than that of whites" (p. 312).

When African American students internalize negative concepts, they suffer what has been characterized by psychologist Steele (1999) as *stereotype threat.* Stereotype threat is the hazard of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype (Ferguson, 1998; Sadowski, 2001). Accepting racial stereotypes can affect grades, test scores, and academic identity. Dr. Steele believes that when capable African American college students fail to perform as well as their White counterparts, the explanation often has less to do with preparation or ability than with the threat of stereotypes about African American's capacity to succeed. These negative connotations about the intellectual capabilities of African American students impede their performance on standardized tests. In both subtle and overt ways, African Americans remain devalued in public schools. National surveys reveal that, from elementary through high school, African Americans are twice as likely as White students to receive corporal punishment (Steele, 1992,) and be disproportionably suspended or expelled from school and labeled mentally retarded (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002). This devaluation has far-reaching effects. After a while, African American students realize two things: (1) society is preconditioned to see the worst in them, and (2) if they achieve in one classroom, or one level of schooling, that approval has to be won again in the next classroom or at the next level. Skills, appearance, and success can decrease this racial devaluation, but many African American students

are left hopeless and deeply exposed to this type of treatment (Steele 1992).

Often students of color have a negative attitude toward school because they feel discriminated against (Ogbu, 1994; Roscigno, 1998; Sadowski, 2001; Viadero, 2000). Professor Asa Hilliard (1992), noted educator and researcher, argued that teacher expectations play an important role in student success or failure by stating:

> The literature on teacher expectations is clear; the images that teachers and others hold about children and their potential have a major influence on the use by teachers of their full range of processing skills. …It is not the learning style of the child that prevents the child from learning; it is the perception by the teacher of the child's style as a sign of incapacity that causes the teacher to reduce the quality of instruction offered. (p. 373)

Many educators, whether consciously or unconsciously, believe that children of color and poor children cannot achieve at the same academic levels of White children (Cooney, Moore, & Bottoms, 2002; Denbo, 2002; Ferguson, 1998; Ogbu, 1994). And while low expectations may influence how African American students view their own chances of success in school, Sadowski (2001) found that the effort and academic motivation put forth by African American students was as high or higher than that of White students.

A Need to Address Privilege and Entitlement

Gary R. Howard (2002), Founder and President of the REACH(Respecting Ethnic and Cultural Heritage) Center for Multicultural Education in Seattle, as well as others, contend that a lack of awareness, respect, and acceptance of cultural differences on the part of many educators contributes to the current level of student achievement in schools (Revilla & Sweeney, 1997). Howard posited three interrelated and reinforcing dynamics of dominance that support educational inequities, including: (1) *the assumption of rightness*, where educators assume that the academic failure of students lies with the students and their families, and not with the structure of the school; (2) *the luxury of ignorance*, where many White educators remain unaware that the home environment of poor students and racially diverse students are dynamically different from the school environment and therefore these students may not experience as smooth of a transition between home and school as White middle class students do, and; (3) *the legacy of privilege,* where advantages flow to some and not to others based merely on their membership in the dominant culture of this country (Howard, 2002, p. 2-3).

To examine possible contributing factors to the underachievement of students of color schools need to examine the concepts of *White privilege* and *entitlement*. There is a belief among people of the dominant White culture that what they have acquired in life is based on merit and character. This privilege or entitlement creates a lack of awareness that not all Americans have an equal opportunity to exercise their inalienable rights. Many people of "privilege" feel that everyone has the opportunity to be successful. Our curriculum does not teach about the duality that exists among the privileged and people of color (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999). People of the dominant culture may not feel a need to reevaluate the way other people are treated, especially if it interferes with their entitlement or privileges (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999).
Peggy McIntosh, associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women (1990), refers to this entitlement as *White privilege*. In discussing White privilege she states:

> In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught

to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance of my group from birth. To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge the colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subjects taboo. (parg. 16-18)

Unchecked White privilege is one precursor to racism that Weissglass (2001) defines as, "the mistreatment of groups of people based on the color of their skin or other physical characteristics. Racism can be conscious or unconscious. This mistreatment can be carried out by individuals (personal racism) or through society's institutions (institutional racism)" (p. 1). An example of unconscious personal racism is when teachers expect less from African-American students or when they interact less often with African-American than they do with White middle-class students (Weissglass, 2001). Institutional racism is evident in schools when school procedures and practices disadvantage students of color and poor students; when White middle-class values go unquestioned; and when there is a lack of concern to reexamine policies and behaviors that are detrimental to the learning and well-being of culturally and ethnically diverse students (Beswick, 1990; Denbo, 2002; Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Ogbu, 1994; Weissglass, 2001).

Addressing White privilege and institutional racism are among the most difficult challenges that schools face. Educational leaders need the knowledge, skills, desire, and capacity to address such issues as well as the challenges that arise in a culturally diverse environment. Many schools have found that bringing in an outside expert to approach these issues with members of the organization has laid the foundation for honest dialogue and problem solving.

Glenn Singleton, founder of the Pacific Education Group—an organization that advises school districts on how to address issues of educational inequities—believes that districts and schools must examine privilege and entitlement of White America (Sparks, 2002). This work entails the introspection of Whites to examine their own assumptions, beliefs, culture, power, and position in America and the role these factors continue to play in the perpetuation of racism in this country (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999; Sparks, 2002; Weissglass, 2001). In order to address institutional racism, Singleton (2002) suggests that schools need to develop educational equity plans that require everyone in a school community to participate in this equity-centered approach of exploring White privilege in order to create a culturally competent learning environment (Sparks, 2002).

Culturally Proficient Leadership

Today's schools need leaders who are *culturally proficient* and who can create *culturally proficient schools*. Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell (1999) define cultural proficiency as:

The policies and practices of an organization or the values and behaviors of an individual that enable that agency or person to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment. Cultural proficiency is reflected in the way an organization treats its employees, its clients, and its community. (p. 21)

Culturally competent leaders are individuals who develop and enact a vision of schooling that truly addresses the needs of all students. They work to eradicate distorted notions and stereotypes about students of color, and create specific conditions and practices to address the

needs of diverse students. They adapt to diversity by examining, policies, procedures and programs for subtle practices of discrimination. If necessary, they change the way things are done (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999, p. 25). They model the behaviors that they would like their staff to emulate. In doing so they value diversity by creating an inclusive environment and encouraging a variety of perspectives in the decision-making processes at the school. Such leaders learn and teach strategies for effectively managing differences that might arise when interacting in a cross-cultural environment. They address issues of White privilege and entitlement.

Culturally competent leaders institutionalize cultural knowledge by providing training about diversity and incorporating that cultural knowledge into the school organization. They make sure that the school's professional development program includes cultural diversity training that will help staff examine their own assumptions and assist them in understanding how institutionalized knowledge within schools has perpetuated stereotypes about racial and ethnic groups. Such professional training should also provide teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to interact effectively in cross-cultural situations (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, et.al., 2001; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999) and to deliver instruction that ensures all students have equal opportunities to experience both academic and social success (Banks, et al., 2001). This type of professional training reduces discipline problems and lowers student dropout rates (Banks, et al., 2001; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999; Steele, 1992). Positive relationships between and among students, teachers, and the community lead to mutual trust and respect.

To address any lack of awareness, respect or acceptance of students of color, effective school leaders promote relationships and build linkages between school, parents and the community (Bottoms, 2000). School leaders proactively reach out to parents and the community and create meaningful relationships. Parents are made to believe that they are important partners in the learning process of their children and that neither poverty nor cultural differences are used as excuses for students not being academically successful (Bottoms, 2000; Carter, 2000; Haycock 1999; Johnson, Lein, & Ragland, 1997; Schwartz, 2001). Culturally competent leaders incorporate the viewpoints of parents in the decisions that are made regarding the school and their children. Such leaders engage community leaders who reflect the cultural makeup of the student population to become partners with the school in improving achievement of all students.

Culturally competent leaders focus on academic success and demand high expectations for all students (Leithwood & Riehl, 2002). They assist teachers in identifying and implementing pedagogical strategies that are appropriate and effective for diverse learners. They are visible in classrooms, provide assistance for increased teacher efficacy, give feedback, and uphold norms of continuous improvement. Their role revolves around individual teacher development and the creation and sustainability of conversations around issues of teaching and learning (Lambert, 1998; Riehl, 2000). They work with teachers to scrutinize failed practices and to examine current content to engage and enable diverse student populations to be successful. Such leaders help teachers choose appropriate assessment methods to monitor student performance. They help staff examine school practices, processes, and procedures to ensure that every student receives an equitable education (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999, p. 25). Finally, culturally proficient principals mold school cultures that address and support diversity.

In 2001, the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, built on the work of Beswick (1990) to identify several strategies that culturally competent leaders can use to address White privilege and improve cross-cultural relationships, including:

1) identify the contextual barriers and supports that have an impact oncross cultural relationships at the school;
2) assess the nature of both overt and subtle racial conflicts, tensionsand their root causes. Identify key issues that trigger these conflicts;
3) make a safe and secure environment a priority for the current year;
4) plan how the school will address racial or ethnic conflict and proactivelybuild a positive cross-cultural environment;
5) articulate a clear statement in regards to racism and develop a vision
6) for diversity, not just a statement, but a set of practices that take place daily in the school;
7) involve diverse stakeholders in the development of the vision. Seekout diverse perspectives on issues that affect the whole school. Seek advice and support from parents and student advisory boards;
8) establish and enforce expectations of a culturally responsive environment;
9) create a system that will allow the school's progress in humanrelations to be measured. Communicate the successes to the school community;
10) have key leaders in the community, who reflect the cultural makeupof the students, conduct teacher workshops, assemblies and arbitration of racial incidents;
11) respond to racial incidents quickly and fairly. Create an environment where people can openly and safely discuss topics and issues related to race and ethnicity;
12) hire and assign a culturally and ethnically diverse faculty and staff.

California cannot afford to allow another generation of students of color to leave our schools undereducated and unprepared to be successful citizens. In order to change the continuing tide of underachievement, schools need leaders who will take up the challenge of fundamentally changing the institutions into places that support and demand success for all students, especially students of color (Warren, 2002). Such leaders will create schools where White privilege and entitlement are challenged and where whole communities are engaged in helping students succeed to high levels. The challenge for culturally competent leaders is to transform school into cultures where beliefs, practices, and policies nurture and develop all students intellectually and socially.

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