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Assessing Multiple Stakeholders' Perceptions of an Effective Principal Evaluation System

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



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Existing principal evaluation research has failed to include the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. The present research study used focus group interviews to gather data about designing a principal evaluation process that includes these perspectives. Focus groups were conducted with principals, parents, certificated staff, and classified employees (N=34) in a public school district. Our findings revealed five common themes for all stakeholders, as well as themes unique to specific participant groups. We then examined the themes to determine how they aligned with the two primary purposes of evaluation: accountability and professional development (Stronge, 1995).

Introduction

The evaluation of school leaders has received much attention in research and policy debates (Council of Chief School Officers, 2008; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2011). Yet, the focus has been primarily on determining the content and purpose of evaluation, rather than on the principal evaluation process itself (Sun, Youngs, Yang, Chu, & Zhao, 2012; Goldring, Cravens, Murray, Porter, Elliott, & Carson, 2009). Dialogue amongst researchers on the topic of evaluation has resulted in recommendations to include multiple stakeholders (VIVA Project Minnesota Teachers Idea Exchange, 2012; King & Ehlert, 2008; Clifford & Ross, 2011). Scant empirical research has focused, however, on the inclusion of perspectives from these stakeholders in the design of the principal evaluation system (Mahar & Strobert, 2010).

Given the limited empirical research on the principal evaluation process, especially regarding incorporation of the multiple perspective framework, this study examined the evaluation process by exploring the perspectives of multiple parties who should be included in the principal evaluation. Focus group interviews guided the design of this research study because this approach enabled the gathering of data directly from the multiple stakeholders, including principals. In this study, we examined the potential benefits of using the multiple stakeholder approach to balance the two primary purposes of principal evaluation: accountability and professional growth. Then we examined the stakeholders' perspectives about the principal evaluation process to identify themes and determine alignment with the evaluation purposes.

Purpose of Evaluation in Education

Increasing focus on educator quality and accountability has placed the spotlight on employee evaluations in education. Stronge (1995) identified the need for developing an educational evaluation system that reflects the two dominant personnel evaluation approaches, which he asserts are accountability and professional growth. An important feature of principal evaluations is the fact that these assessments can serve multiple, often conflicting purposes (Portin, Feldman & Knapp, 2006). These two approaches are closely aligned with what educators describe as summative and formative assessment respectively and have been “described as incompatible, often resulting in a focus on one purpose to the virtual exclusion of the other” (p. 131). Yet the emerging trends in principal performance assessments have moved towards greater emphasis on both of these purposes. Specifically, the federal and state standards reform movement has shifted greater emphasis on evaluating principals based on student outcomes via an accountability perspective, all the while “interest in discovering what assessment can do for leaders is growing” (Portin, et al., p. 28) via a professional growth perspective.

School districts must be clear about the purpose of their principal evaluation before developing the appropriate assessment tools and process, but determining this purpose is not an easy task as evidence suggests that districts must reconcile the conflict between both accountability and professional growth purposes for evaluation. For instance, Zepeda, Lanoue, Price and Jiminez (2014) showed that principal evaluators such as superintendents, often have to struggle with the tension of wanting to focus on principal professional improvement and growth against the context of accountability pressures. In this study, we examine how the use of a multiple stakeholder approach to principal evaluations balances both accountability and professional growth purposes of school leadership assessment.

Principal Evaluation

While the emphasis from policy and research perspectives has been on teacher evaluations, both the Race to the Top criteria (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) and No Child Left Behind waiver requirements (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) also incorporate principal evaluation as a critical component (Pashiardis & Brauckmann, 2009). In fact, past research supporting principals' influences on student outcomes (Waters, Marzano, & McNully, 2003) and teacher retention (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011; Balu, Beteille, & Loeb, 2009) has demonstrated principals' critical impact on the school community. Due to the lack of research on evaluating principal effectiveness, policy has been driving practice as principal evaluation systems are implemented prior to the establishment of an empirical base of knowledge required for such an endeavor (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2013).

Existing research on principal effects has primarily focused on student outcomes, particularly achievement (Bowers, & Bradford, 2014; Coelli & Green, 2012; May, Huff & Goldring, 2012; Waters, Marzano, & McNully, 2003). Despite the political push to use student achievement as measures of principal quality in the field setting, research findings have suggested that student outcomes, such as achievement data, are inappropriate for the use of high stakes personnel decisions in light of the current lack of ability to capture the independent effects of principals apart from their school context (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2013). Furthermore, superintendents' perceptions of the important principal evaluative domains have differed from the actual criteria measured by the principal appraisal instrument used in districts (Fletcher & McInerney, 1995), which may lead to questions about the fairness of the evaluation process.

Evaluatees who perceive fairness in the evaluation process are more likely find their evaluator's feedback useful and consequently may participate in professional development activities to improve their performance (Tuytens & Devos, 2014). Given perceptions of the general lack of quality and integrity in the evaluation process, it is no wonder that principals in Davis and Hensley's (1999) work suggested that their formal evaluations did not help with "shaping or directing their professional development or in promoting school effectiveness" (p. 399). In this study, principals criticized their evaluation processes, citing the lack of input from multiple stakeholders such as teachers and parents, as problems in the present system.

Similarly, principals have also emphasized the importance of their collaborations with a community of stakeholders, including parents and teachers (Medina, Martinez, Murakmai, Rodriguez, & Hernandez, 2014). Consequently, effective principal evaluations should include the perspective of parents and the school community. It is because of this widespread impact and the need for valid principal performance assessments that many are calling for a multiple stakeholder approach to principal evaluations (Brown-Sims, 2010; Lashway, 2004; Rinehart & Russo, 1995; Whaley 2002).

Multiple Stakeholder Perceptions

The 360-degree feedback is an increasingly popular human resource evaluation strategy for gathering feedback from co-workers, including supervisors, peers, subordinates, and others in the organization (Budman & Rice, 1994; Hoffman, 1995; Tyson & Ward, 2004). In the business sector, the 360-degree feedback is widely accepted as a beneficial evaluation instrument for managers and executives because it enables them to examine leadership behaviors and style from multiple stakeholders (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000). One of the benefits of this evaluation process is

the incorporation of the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, whose feedback is used to promote personal growth of the evaluatee as well as lead to positive outcomes for the organization (Brutus, Fleenor, & London, in press). According to Carey (1995), the business industry is split on whether the 360-feedback should be used for developmental purposes or accountability. Arguably, this multi-rater evaluation system has the potential to provide summative assessment data as well as formative developmental feedback if the measures are developed appropriately (Hoffman, 1995). The multiple stakeholder perspective has been identified as a critical component of accurately representing performance (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000) and understanding effectiveness as a leader (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998).

The 360-degree feedback strategy gained popularity in education as a feedback rich evaluation process for teachers (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; King, 2011) and principals (Brown-Sims, 2010; Moore, 2009). Mahar and Strobert (2010) contend that the 360-degree feedback process has been underutilized as well as under researched in the K-12 public education system. Based on teacher survey results, they report that teachers preferred the multi-source feedback process because it enhanced the development of professional growth goals while also focusing on student achievement. Indeed, a multiple stakeholder approach to evaluation feedback has been found to be related to improvement in performance (Edwards & Ewens, 1996). Moore (2009) advocates for adoption of the 360-degree feedback process for principals. He indicates that principals would benefit from knowing the perceptions of not only their supervisors but also of teachers, staff, and parents who are impacted by principals' leadership practices and decisions. Similarly in Minnesota, the collaborative efforts and survey responses of countless instructional personnel across the state have resulted in numerous recommendations for schools to adopt a principal evaluation process that incorporates the perceptions of all critical stakeholders (VIVA Project Minnesota Teachers Idea Exchange, 2012).

As school leaders, principals are critical to building "strong community relationships with stakeholders within and outside the school" (Clifford & Ross, 2011). These key stakeholders include parents, faculty, district staff, and possibly students. Multiple stakeholder input in the evaluation process is viewed as beneficial to understanding the school leader's perceived performance in the organizational context of the school (Portin, Feldman, & Knapp, 2006). Specifically, multiple stakeholders contribute differing viewpoints; helping to assess the multifaceted nature of the role and responsibility of school principals. In a review of the literature of the policies and practices of principal evaluations, Davis, Kearney, Sanders, Thomas and Leon (2011) suggested that the quality of the principal appraisal process is more important than the actual content used for the evaluations themselves. To improve the principal evaluation process, numerous authors have recommended the inclusion of multiple stakeholders during its development and implementation, including peers, teachers and parents (Brown-Sims, 2010; Lashway, 2004; Rinehart & Russo, 1995; Whaley, 2002).

This study includes the perspectives of principals, parents, certificated, and classified staff members on the topic of the development of an effective principal evaluation system. When it comes to research and policy discussions on the issue of principal performance appraisals, classified staff members are often a neglected group whose voices are unheard, despite the fact they have much insight into the effectiveness of principals and principals have much impact on their professional work. In this study, we give special attention to the evaluation process given its important influence on evaluatees' utility of feedback, which may influence principal self-development behavior (Tuytens & Devos, 2014) and the consequent potential improvement of school effectiveness. Drawing upon both professional and empirical principal evaluation

research, we have carefully established the need for continued principal evaluation research that includes the voices of multiple stakeholders.

Methods

Given the evolving nature of principal evaluation, efforts to investigate this contemporary phenomenon should proceed within the real-life context of a school district environment (Yin, 2009). As Seidman (1998) suggests, in order to understand an educational organization and phenomenon, the researcher should collect perspectives directly from the people who make up that organization. Focus group interviews were chosen in order to draw upon the experiences and direct thoughts of selected participants, who represent multiple stakeholders's views, which are important to understanding a fuller picture of principal evaluation (Patton, 2002).

Through conversational dialogue during the focus group interviews, participants' perspectives are captured with minimal direct influence on the responses or discussion from the researcher (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). As Morgan (2002) describes, focus group interviews promote greater insight into areas of research that are relatively new or evolving in nature. The focus groups were conducted with homogenous groups to account for differences in authority and position within the school community (Morgan, 1997); specifically, all principals participated with each other in a focus group, all parents participated in separate focus groups, and so forth with the other educational professionals. By grouping individuals according to their positions and corresponding level of authority, we minimized potential discomfort and conflict among the focus group participants (Morgan & Krueger, 1993).

Procedures

A member of our research team was approached by an Assistant Superintendent of a large (7,000+ students) suburban school district in California for assistance with updating and improving the district's principal evaluation process. The Assistant Superintendent explained that the district uses a simplistic principal evaluation process consisting primarily of occasional observations and "walking around the site." There were two official principal evaluation forms that can be used for the appraisal process, one that consists of boxes that allow the option for evaluators to mark that performance was either satisfactory or not, and another form with several areas for evaluator comments such as strongest assets, recommendations, improvement needs, and additional evaluator comments.

Participants

Participants (N=34) were selected to reflect numerous groups that would have insight into the performance of their school principal and the development of the evaluation process (Brown-Sims, 2010; Lashway, 2004; Whaley, 2002; Rinehart & Russo, 1995). Specifically, four focus groups were conducted with principals, parents, certificated employees (i.e., teachers and a school counselor) and classified employees (i.e., site secretaries). The parents, teachers, and principals represented every school level (i.e., elementary, middle and high school).

The focus group questions were grounded in both practice and the literature from a wide-array of reference sources, including peer-reviewed academic journals, best practice documents, non-profit research institutions, policy briefs, the Interstate School Leadership Licensure

Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, and market principal evaluation instruments, such as Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (n.d.), Marshall's Principal Evaluation Rubric (2011), and Marzano's School Administration Rubric (Learning Sciences International, 2013).

Data analysis for this study was an ongoing process as categories and themes were discovered along the way and contributed to the effort to explain the principal evaluation process. According to Merriam (2009) "data analysis is a complex process that involved moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation," and "the practical goal of data analysis is to find answers to your questions" (p. 176). The next step, coding data, is important for organizing the text of transcripts in such a way to reveal possible patterns emerging from the data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Through the open coding process, possible themes began to emerge promoting insight into the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2009).

Findings

After coding was completed, we worked together to develop emerging themes from the data segments, labels, and categories. Figure 1 demonstrates the nine dominant themes that emerged from the focus group interviews. In the following discussion we identify and define the themes, relying on the data that emerged across the four stakeholder groups: principals, certificated staff, classified staff, and parents. We also identify the themes that emerged in the principals and certificated staff focus group discussions, but not in the parents and classified staff focus groups.

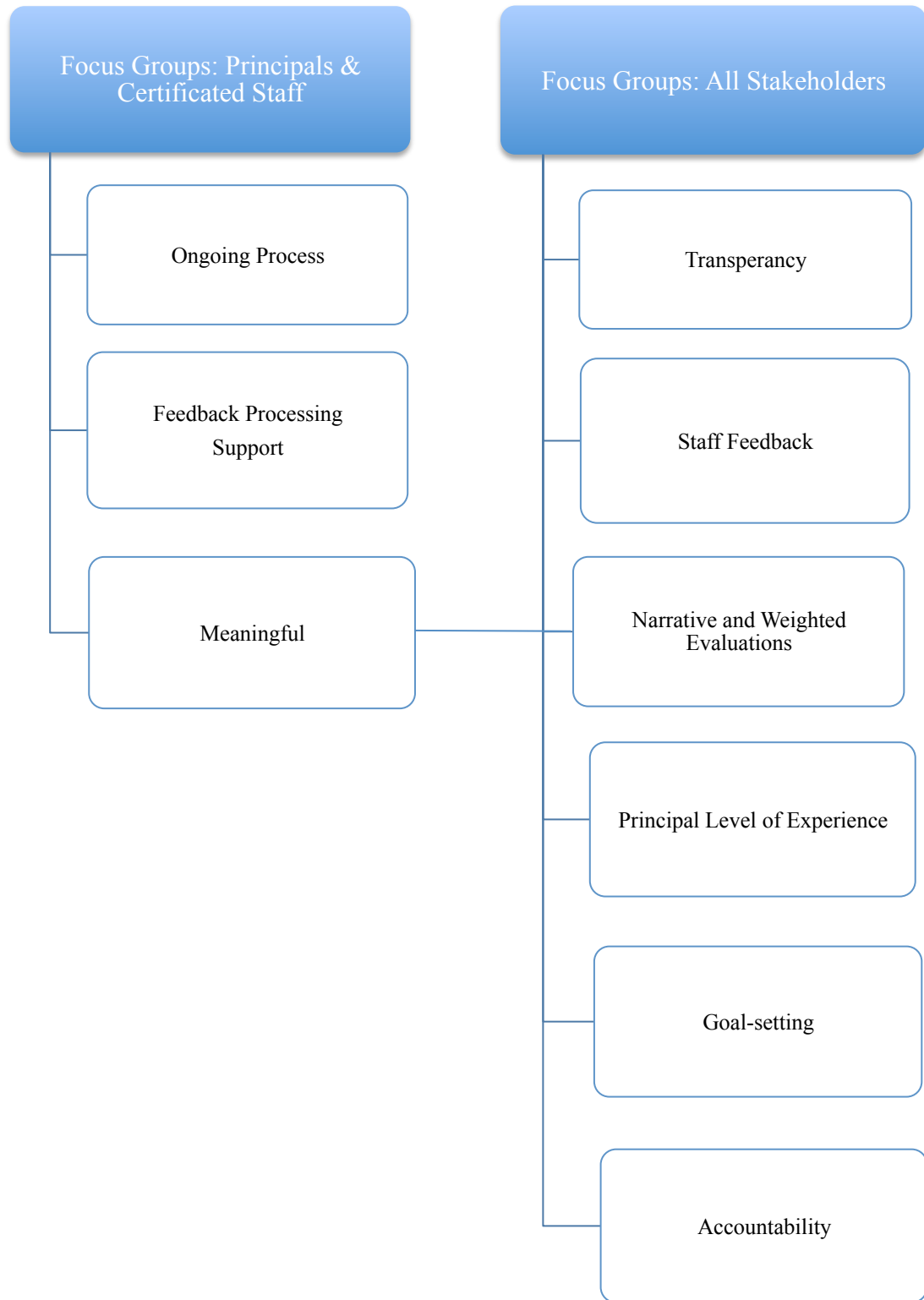


Figure 1. Focus Groups Themes

Transparency

The transparency theme is a genuine concern that quite clearly emerged from all of the stakeholders. Classified and certificated staff members, as well as the parents, expressed that they had very limited knowledge about the district's principal evaluation process. As one of the classified staff members reported "We [the staff] don't even know when it [principal evaluation] is happening." Collectively, the classified staff members expressed their desire for transparency because as one participant stated, "...it is not obvious that it [principal evaluation] is occurring because it appears to be done in a vacuum."

A certificated staff member stated emphatically that the principal evaluation system must "Be more transparent. None of the staff members knew what the purpose of the principal evaluation was for [sic]." Following this comment, another participant noted "I didn't know there was one [principal evaluation]." Parents likewise affirmed that they did not know much about the principal evaluation process or about its intended purpose.

Not only is the lack of transparency an issue, but sometimes the principal evaluation process does not even occur. For instance, one of the principals commented "I haven't been evaluated since [her former evaluator] left, it should be that is has to be done." Although the principals focused indirectly on the transparency issue, they were adamant in their belief that the evaluation should not be a snapshot of one point in time during the year. Instead, their focus group discussion indicated a desire to have an "on-going process" that is comprehensive and demonstrates appreciation for the work that has been done throughout the year. Certificated staff expressed agreement that the evaluation process should occur throughout the year rather than in a single high pressure event.

Feedback

The perceptions regarding feedback varied somewhat across the multiple stakeholder groups. While all groups advocated for the inclusion of feedback during the principal evaluation process, the principals and certificated staff stated that only feedback from teachers should be included. Yet, when parents and classified staff were asked about the evaluation process, they clearly indicated that their feedback should be included also. However, the individuals representing these two stakeholder groups were hesitant to provide feedback unless it was confidential.

According to the classified staff "It is important to solicit staff and parent feedback because they are the clients." Furthermore, the classified staff raised concern because there is "currently no staff/parent input" and therefore, they expressed that they lacked knowledge that the evaluation process was even occurring. Their concerns about the lack of staff/parent input into the principal evaluation process appeared to be connected to the lack of transparency in the principal evaluation process.

On the other hand, both principals and certificated staff expressed concern about parental/staff feedback that contained personal attacks. For example, one principal commented that feedback is beneficial only "if [staff feedback is] well written and professionally done and tied to skills and things to work on rather than personal attacks." The desire to eliminate personal attacks and to avoid unprofessional feedback emerged as a concern across all of the stakeholder groups. As a certificated staff member indicated "the staff survey should be shared with the principal. The disrespectful comments should be cleaned up so that it is not personal."

Finally, the principals added a slightly different perspective on the feedback received as it was typically directed at them. Specifically, they felt challenged to process and make sense of the feedback on their own. Thus, several principals indicated that they “need support in processing those things [staff feedback]. If a supervisor could work directly with the principal and explain for example, here are areas, some concerns and some outliers ... capturing trends and presenting that to us and have that conversation about that skill.”

Narrative and weighted evaluations

The importance of providing narrative feedback as a part of the evaluation process emerged as a significant theme across all of the stakeholder focus group discussions. Principals, in particular, asserted that narrative feedback is far more valuable than weighted evaluations. For example, one of the principals explained, “I do not believe in weighting system... should do narrative” Another principal agreed, “I don’t think there should be weights. I am not necessarily evaluated on every piece every year. Depends on goals that year ...” In fact, the principals stated that they were far more interested in the comments and would actually skip over the quantitative ratings in order to read the written feedback.

Even the classified staff believed that narrative feedback provided more meaningful information. The staff members asserted that weights failed to provide sufficient information about all aspects of the principal’s job. One of the classified staff members explained this idea further, adding “don’t include weights, as all aspects of the principal’s job are important. An area that would usually be weighted ten percent could turn into a 90% problem if not addressed and nipped in the bud early on.”

Certificated staff members and parents did not show the same opposition to weights as principals and classified staff members. In general, they did not seem as opposed to the idea of using weights in the evaluation process for principals. As one parent explained, “I think we can give them sort of importance of categories of evaluations, but you know, focus groups in [school] sites generally lends itself to weighting questions and percentages.

Principal level of experience

The idea of accounting for the principal’s level of experience or career spectrum in the evaluation process emerged as a common theme for this study across all of the focus groups. For example, one of the female principals reported that it is important to “take [experience] into consideration. This sentiment was affirmed by the other principals in the focus group and clarified further by one of the male principals who noted “...as new principal my needs [are] very different than experienced principal.”

Parents, certificated staff, and classified staff members echoed these sentiments about the need to modify principal evaluations in order to reflect the principal’s level of experience. In a discussion among several parents, they noted that “it [evaluation] depends on where they are in the process and the school.” Another parent clarified, “whether you’re brand new or whether you’ve been around twenty years.” Likewise a teacher, one of the certificated staff member, discussed the importance of taking “into consideration whether the principal is new or not...somebody has to provide some protection for the new principals from the mob mentality that can set in from parents.” In general, all of the focus group discussions reflected the idea that first year principals should be evaluated differently than veteran teachers.

Goal-setting

All of the stakeholders identified goal-setting as an important component of the principal evaluation process. The discussion among principals revealed a preference for including goal-setting as part of a collaborative effort between the supervisor and principal. In particular, the evaluation presents an important opportunity for the principal to reflect on and target areas of growth for the coming year. When asked what has been useful in prior principal evaluations, the male principal responded “collaboratively generated goals set for myself with action plan with some type of frequency or follow-up to assess those goals.”

A similar perspective was shared by many parents in the parent focus group, when they were asked about the evaluation process. Specifically, one of the parents identified goal-setting as a helpful component of the evaluation process for parents. Likewise, the certificated staff considered the goal-setting process as an opportunity to examine the progress that the principal has made towards achieving the goals. The identification of goals according to numerous parents is important to the feedback process because it provides an opportunity for principals to grow and “recognize their successes and failures.”

Meaningful

According to principals, an important aspect of the evaluation process that is missing is meaningfulness, as they felt that current evaluations lacks depth and meaning. Specifically, one principal explained that evaluations should be “collaborative and ongoing and not just done in June. My former evaluator did them on time but only wrote 2-3 sentences. It should be more in-depth and meaningful.” The meaningful theme encompassed all of the other themes to some extent because it encapsulated the notion that principal evaluations should matter and thus needs to incorporate components and efforts reflecting the depth, care, and time that is necessary to give meaning to the evaluation process.

Although the other stakeholder groups also implicated the meaningful theme, their perspectives differed slightly from the remarks made by principals and certificated staff. Principals and certificated staff alluded to the frequency of conducting evaluations as a manner by which the process might become more meaningful. While one of the certificated staff members explained in her focus group discussion, that “there should be evaluations for new principals, but they do not need to all be formal, for example, there can be formative assessments and check-ins to see how things are.” When a classified member was asked about the purpose of the principal evaluation system, she reported that “it should be to provide meaningful feedback...how to improve and grow and to provide support. It should also be an atta [sic] boy recognition of a job well-done.” Unfortunately, the current evaluation process lacks the desired quality and depth. As succinctly remarked by one of the classified staff participants, the evaluation process “has to be done but it is not very meaningful.”

Accountability

Accountability was emphasized in almost all of the themes. For instance, in the transparency theme, stakeholders expressed their desire not only for holding principals accountable for performance but also the district for developing a performance evaluation system that is transparent. Many stakeholders noted that they were not aware of the purpose of principal

evaluations or whether evaluations even occurred, which suggested that the system was not accountable to its constituents. Although the feedback theme focused primarily on providing valuable feedback to principals, a classified member recommended that parent's feedback should be included in the evaluation process to hold principals accountable to the parents, who are the district's clients. In the goal-setting theme, the principal and parents noted that there should be accountability for assessment of whether principals met their goals. Finally, for the meaningful theme, a classified member identified the need for accountability "to determine if someone will continue in their role..." In the next section, we examine the themes to determine how they aligned with the existing evaluation research identifying the two primary purposes: accountability and professional development (Stronge, 1995). Specifically, we determined whether the perceptions of multiple stakeholders revealed alignment or exposed additional aspects of the process that are necessary for the establishment of a comprehensive evaluation system using the multiple stakeholder process.

Alignment with Evaluation Purposes

As the findings above reveal, the themes differed to some extent across the stakeholder groups, revealing that perceptions and expectations about the principal evaluation process were very much tied to an individual's role in the school system. This result is, in fact, consistent with the 360-degree feedback research about multiple stakeholder perceptions. That is, the benefits of 360-degree feedback evaluations include disagreement (Hoffman & Woehr, 2009) and the provision of unique insights (Lance et al., 2008) from individuals in different roles. Figure 2 reflects how themes emerging from the multiple stakeholders' focus group discussion were aligned with the purposes of evaluation revealed in the literature. All stakeholders identified the accountability approach as an inherent component of the principal evaluation process and as a concept that was embedded across the themes. Transparency is related closely to accountability as evidenced by stakeholders' desires to be informed about and included in the evaluation process. The professional growth approach aligns with both the level of experience and goal-setting themes. Given the different needs of veteran versus new principals, the multiple stakeholders expressed their desire for an evaluation system that takes experience into consideration. By holding different expectations for principals based on experience level, there is an implicit evaluative perspective that emphasizes professional growth. The principals, as well as the other stakeholders, advocated for the opportunity to set goals as part of the evaluation process, which was perceived as essential to professional growth and individual improvement.

Despite the perceived tension between accountability and professional growth, a number of themes reflected emphases on both of the evaluation approaches. Specifically, meaningfulness, feedback and narrative/weighted evaluation were all identified by the multiple stakeholders as important components of the principal evaluation process. As explained in Figure 3, these three aspect of the principal evaluation process – meaningfulness, feedback, narrative/weighted evaluation – are important to include because they have the potential to address both accountability and professional growth foci of evaluation. For instance, while principals and classified staff members sought to avoid the use of weights, seeking instead to adopt a professional growth perspective, classified staff and parents did not have such reservations for using weights to hold principals accountable for performance.



Figure 2. Evaluation Purposes and Theme Alignment

Discussion

In an effort to make sense of the findings, we examined the themes for consistency or divergence from the professional and empirical literature (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Through this process, we were able to determine whether the themes reflect the practical aspects of effective principal evaluation processes as recommended by policy analysts as well as the evidence based assertions made by researchers. Our findings are illuminating in several areas. For instance, the perspective of the stakeholders in our study was aligned with much of what professional practice and existing research has suggested. Further, by seeking feedback about the evaluation process from multiple stakeholders, we discovered varying perceptions and expectations across the different stakeholder groups.

The transparency theme has been identified as an especially important component of the evaluation process in previous research studies (Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengston, 2012) and also from all of the stakeholders in the present study. As Fuller and Hollingworth (2013) contend, the principal evaluation process must be perceived as fair, particularly by school principals. In order to determine if a process is fair, there must exist some degree of transparency so that the process is trusted and perceived as valid. The transparency theme was particularly important among classified employees, certificated staff, and parents, who expressed concern because they lacked knowledge about the process. As Clifford, Hansen, and Wraight (2012) concluded, the evaluation process should be transparent for stakeholders through clear communication about the evaluation purpose and process. Although the principal focus group did not specifically discuss transparency, they expressed their desire to be aware of and not surprised by the evaluation process. The transparency theme, similar to the feedback theme, is an especially important issue

for multiple stakeholders who desired not only to understand, but also contribute to the principal evaluation process.

The critical importance of providing feedback to evaluatees has been noted by researchers (Sun et al., 2012), as well as by participants in our study. In fact, the participants in our study emphasized the importance of including feedback from multiple stakeholders. However, the certificated employees and principals expressed concern about parental/staff feedback potentially becoming an avenue for personal attacks rather than an avenue for professional and objective evaluative feedback. Consequently, effective principal evaluation must develop mechanisms to mitigate some of the problems associated with the usage of feedback. In the present study, the participants preferred narrative feedback as long as it included professional comments and not merely personal attacks. Previous researchers likewise reported that principals valued narrative feedback, whether oral or written, from their supervisors, regardless of whether it was positive or negative (Parylo et al., 2012). This difference in outcomes between the present study and previous research could be due to the inclusion of multiple stakeholder perceptions from parents and other staff members. Not all stakeholders are likely to have personal relationships with the principal; thus these individuals may think it is their right to include personal attacks if they are dissatisfied or dislike the principal for any reason. Although negative feedback from supervisors who are respected is viewed as constructive (Parylo et al., p. 227), negative feedback from parents, teachers and staff, is likely to be viewed as destructive when it is disrespectful and personally motivated.

Accounting for the principal's level of experience during the evaluation is premised on past research that supports a distinction between what is "expected performance for novice principals and more experienced principals" (Clifford et al., 2012, p. 42). The level of experience, which is also referred to as the career spectrum was likewise reflected in focus group discussions among the multiple stakeholders in our study. According to the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, principal evaluation systems should reflect the principal's career spectrum in order to promote effectiveness (Clifford et al.).

The identification of explicit goals to strive towards was mentioned both in the literature (Clifford, et al., 2012; Huff & Goldring, 2012) and by participants in our study. Specifically, policy analysts (Clifford et al.) stressed the value of identifying clear, explicit goals as part of an effective principal evaluation system. Similarly, researchers report that planning and implementing agreed upon goals are part of the core school leadership tasks (Davis, Kerney, Sanders, Thomas, & Leon, 2011; Huff & Goldring, 2012).

Despite the existence of much overlap between the professional literature and the perspective of participants regarding best practices for principal evaluations, the recommendations did not always align. For instance, while weights on various evaluative factors have been suggested by the literature (Davis et al., 2011), principals and classified staff were against the idea of implementing weights as they felt it would not lend itself to the multidimensional aspects of the principal's job. Principals were especially focused on the value of narrative feedback with focused support for information processing. Thus, it could be that weights have merit, but overall the potential benefits of the evaluation process are diminished without the desired narrative feedback and processing opportunity. Misalignments like these must be addressed during the design of the principal evaluation system because failing to do so may negatively impact buy-in from relevant stakeholders, particularly the principals themselves.

Whereas many of the themes aligned primarily with either the accountability or professional growth approaches, several themes: accountability, transparency, level of

experience, and goal-setting aligned with both the accountability and professional growth approaches. Given these alignments, we assert that our proposed multiple stakeholder approach to principal evaluations can serve as a mechanism to balance the accountability and professional growth purposes of school leadership assessment. Like all research, this study had limitations, which are presented in the following section.

Limitations

While the qualitative focus group research method was appropriate for the present study, it is not generalizable or representative (Morgan, 1988) of the greater population. Despite this, our study's participants provided perspectives that add significant detail about the principal evaluation process. Specifically, past researchers (Portin et al., 2006) have identified the positives and negatives of including multiple stakeholder perspectives in their recommendations to move principal evaluation in this direction. Yet, multiple stakeholders' perspectives regarding the evaluation process are glaringly absent. Their perspectives are important and could inform the development of evaluation models that are not only helpful to achieve school systems' accountability goals and principals' professional growth goals, but also promote positive school community relations and a collaborative school community (Clifford & Ross, 2011).

Another limitation of the study was that the focus groups were unbalanced relative to size. For instance, there were many more parents than principals in the district, and as a result, there were many more parents in the parent focus groups than principals in the principal focus group. Moreover, our study could have further benefited from the inclusion of more certificated staff members as their participation was not proportionate to the amount of certificated staff employees in the school district overall. However, we were able to obtain the perspectives of both classified and certificated employees, including principals and teachers from across school levels. All participants were provided the opportunity to speak openly about the subject matter, allowing for a rich and in-depth exploration into the area of principal evaluations.

Finally, although one of the district's principal evaluators, the Assistant Superintendent of HR, worked alongside one of the authors of this paper throughout the data collection process, it would have been further enlightening to have the opportunity to conduct a focus group with all the principal evaluators in the district to gain further insight into their perspective about principal evaluations. That being said, the Assistant Superintendent of HR interacted regularly with one of the authors and expressed his desire to update the principal evaluation process and include the perspective of multiple stakeholders in its design.

Implications and Conclusion

In recent times, an increasing emphasis on accountability has permeated the education environment. It has been argued within the accountability context that performance measurement models must address stakeholder needs (Harrison et al., 2012). One way of doing this is to include their input into the evaluation process, as we have done. Discussions with the multiple stakeholders in this study reflect a keen interest among these participants to better understand as well as to contribute to making the principal evaluation process a meaningful experience for principals and for the greater school community.

The present work included the voices of many who are affected by principal performance, including classified staff members. The perspective of the latter group has often

been ignored in the literature. By obtaining the input of several parties who are affected by the performance of principals, we are better able to holistically address how to evaluate the far-reaching impacts of principals. This philosophy is aligned with education evaluation research, especially the principle regarding the necessity for stakeholders to be involved in the evaluation process (King & Ehlert, 2008).

Although this study produced rich conversations with multiple stakeholders regarding their perceptions of the principal evaluation process, not all members of the school community were represented in the focus groups. Consequently, future research might include additional perspectives, such as those from students, supervisors, and other staff members (e.g., custodians, nutritionists, other support staff).

The need to better understand how to improve the principal evaluation process cannot be understated. Evaluation processes are currently not based on evidence that ensures the promotion of effective leadership (Goldring et al., 2009) and because there is no one size fits all approach due to variation in districts' needs and capacity, school community members must have serious conversations regarding what performance expectations should principals be held accountable to and how to best proceed to evaluate that performance. This study complements the "growing trend of involving parents, teachers and principals themselves" (Sun et al., 2012) in the development and refinement of the principal evaluation process.

No matter how good an evaluation system is, if the employees are not on board with it, the system is doomed to fail. Districts must be cognizant of discrepancies between what they seek to accomplish and how their employees may feel about those endeavors. If designed correctly, the evaluation process offers employees the opportunity to gain substantive feedback on their performance, develop themselves and grow professionally (Tuytens & Devos, 2014). If employees are not enthusiastic about the process, discussions should be held between relevant stakeholders and the district to determine how to best address any conflicts and misunderstandings. Through the 360-degree feedback that includes multiple stakeholder perspectives as well as principals' self-reflection, a model may be developed to serve as a mechanism to achieve the dual evaluation purposes of accountability and professional growth for principal evaluations.

Only by open conversation can the school community be actively engaged in the process that emphasizes the importance of each perspective and unique insight into how to further improve principal evaluations. It almost goes without saying that meaningful principal evaluations are critical for helping principals improve their effectiveness, and principals themselves are critical to the school community and all its stakeholders (Medina et al., 2014). Given the general consensus that principal performance does impact student learning (Waters et al., 2003), one way that we can improve the education of our students is to improve the evaluation process for our principals.

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Portrait of a Turnaround Leader in a High Needs District

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



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Using portraiture methodology involving interview, observation, and artifact data, this study portrays a turnaround leader, Dr. Susan Gray, in a high needs, rural district in the Southeast. In three years, Gray led Lincoln Elementary from nearly being reconstituted to being an award-winning school. Gray has subsequently been assigned other leadership roles that required a change agent. The study narrates Gray's professional arc, highlighting her drive, ability to build relational trust, unapologetic disruption of deficit thinking, mission-orientation, and high expectations to guide the turnaround process. The paper concludes with implications for practice and research related to leadership preparation and school turnaround.

KEYWORDS: school turnaround; school leadership; school reform; portraiture; turnaround principal

Purpose

Since the passage of *No Child Left Behind* in 2002, “turnaround” has become a significant focus of school reform efforts in the United States. As opposed to incremental and continuous improvement, school turnaround refers to the rapid and significant improvement in the achievement of persistently low achieving schools. School turnaround has been a cornerstone of the Obama administration’s approach to education reform, spurred by a large Title 1 School Improvement Grant program. States have further stimulated efforts at rapid school improvement through state-specific turnaround-focused funding and initiatives.

Concurrent with governmental efforts to stimulate school turnaround, the concept has also received significant attention in recent years in the work of policy centers (e.g., Mass Insight, 2010; Public Impact, 2007), education foundations (e.g., Portin et al., 2009), and research consortia (e.g., de la Torre et al., 2012; Herman et al., 2008). Well-known educational researchers have also provided insight into turnaround as a school reform strategy (e.g., Fullan, 2006; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008).

Although a few case studies have been published that describe successful school turnaround efforts (e.g., Johnson, 2012), overall empirical literature has been able to document only limited and short-term success for school turnarounds (Aladjem et al., 2010; Birman, Aladjem, & Orland, 2010; de la Torre, Allensworth, Jagesic, Sebastian, & Salmonowicz, 2012; Stuit, 2010). For example, Birman and colleagues (2010) found that out of over 1000 turnaround-designated schools, less than 25% were able to significantly improve their achievement in one year and only 1% of the original 1000 were able to sustain significant improvement over 2 years. Given the seeming intractability of low-achievement, quality school leadership would appear to be a significant factor in turning around persistently low-achieving schools. Indeed, federal education policy privileges the importance of *principal* leadership, with all of the approved turnaround models, in one fashion or another, requiring replacement of the principal to qualify for turnaround funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). While some literature exists that argues for various principal leadership practices in turnaround schools (e.g., Duke, 2004; McLester, 2011; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2012; Steiner & Barrett, 2012), these reports are primarily non-empirical. Given the limited empirical research on turnaround principals and the substantial significance attached in turnaround policy to their work, our study uses a qualitative portraiture approach to provide insight into the work of one successful turnaround leader, Dr. Susan Gray.¹

Federal and State Policy Context

In August 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan made turnaround a cornerstone of the Obama administration’s approach to education reform when he announced a \$3.5 billion federal Title I School Improvement Grant (SIG) program to “turn around” the persistently lowest-performing schools (US DOE, 2009). In order to apply for the grant funding, a school district was required to commit to one of four strategies for turning around district schools which qualified as persistently low achieving. The options included:

- Turnaround Model: replacing the principal, at least 50% of the staff, and implementing a new instructional program;

¹ All proper nouns in this manuscript are pseudonyms.

- Restart Model: closing the school and restarting it as a charter school;
- School Closure: closing the school and redistributing its students to other schools;
- Transformational Model: transforming the school by replacing the principal and implementing comprehensive reforms.

Simultaneous with the federal emphasis on school turnaround there were also formal efforts directed toward rapid school improvement at the state level. In North Carolina, for example, the state's Department of Public Instruction, used funds from a Race to the Top grant awarded to the state to support the turnaround work of the bottom 5% of elementary, middle and high schools.

The School Turnaround Literature and Conceptual Framework

Although there has recently been significant attention in the education literature to school turnaround, much of this literature is in the form of reports, articles, and books drawn from secondary sources, rather than directly from empirical studies. For example, Fullan's (2006) book on turnaround leadership is essentially a general treatise on change (albeit, rapid change) and is based on extant literature. Murphy and Meyers (2008) rely heavily on business and private sector research in their book on effective turnaround practices. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has also shown interest in school turnaround and commissioned education think tank Mass Insight to develop a framework for turning around schools. The resulting report, *The Turnaround Challenge* (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007) is considered by many (including U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan) to be a seminal source on turnaround practice, even though it is based entirely on secondary sources. Anrig (2015) synthesizes emerging evidence from the SIG initiative and identifies five practices that successful SIG turnaround schools have in common: data-based, collaborative focus on classroom instruction; systematic emphasis on safe and orderly schools; expanded instructional and tutoring time; strengthening school connections to service providers, community groups, and parents; and limiting reliance on external consultants to initiating change. The scant empirical research available on turnaround was emphasized by Herman, et al. (2008). Herman and colleagues did an analysis of existing empirical research on turnaround schools and bluntly begin their report by describing the empirical research as "sparse" (p. 4).

Turnaround literature largely privileges the role of the principal as key and focuses on practices that will help turnaround principals be effective in their work. For example, the Mass Insight report (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007) cites the importance of principals making "mission-driven decisions," exercising "resource ingenuity," and being "flexible and inventive in responding to constant unrest" (p. 9). As is true for the empirical research on turnaround schools, there is limited empirical research that documents the practices, attributes, and dispositions of successful turnaround principals. In a rare empirical study, Finnegan and Stewart (2009), studied 10 low-performing Chicago elementary schools and found that principals who were able to turn these schools around kept the focus on the school's vision, developed a commitment to collective goals, targeted resources to support teacher development, established collaborative structures and norms, expressed confidence in teachers' ability to succeed in turning the school around, buffered teachers from the harmful aspects of turnaround policy (e.g., fear of losing their jobs), and centralized decision making (with some distribution of leadership to other administrators in the school). Duke and Salmonowicz (2010) provided an in-depth description and analysis of the key decisions made by a first year turnaround principal. Baeza (2010), studied the first 90 days of a middle school turnaround principal's tenure and found that

the principal's most significant accomplishments included gaining credibility and trust; securing early wins; maintaining high visibility; creating a culture of change; building relationships and coalitions; assuming the role of instructional leader; making strategic decisions; establishing a vision for the school; and implementing a collaborative problem-solving approach.

Successful principal leadership in a turnaround school may not be as simple, however, as implementing prescriptive sets of practices such as those cited above. Cai (2011), for example, suggests that a principal's emotional intelligence may also be key, and Leithwood (2005) cites the importance of a leader's values and emotions. Perhaps most significantly, the widely-accepted ISLLC national school leadership standards speak to the importance of principals' "dispositions" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014).

Based on our review of the literature, we conceptualize successful turnaround leadership as requiring a nexus of leadership practices (e.g., Caulkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007; Stewart, 2009; Baeza, 2010), emotional intelligence (Cai, 2011), and dispositions (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014), as illustrated in Figure 1. This conceptual framework is reflected in our interview protocol and initial analysis (i.e., a priori codes).

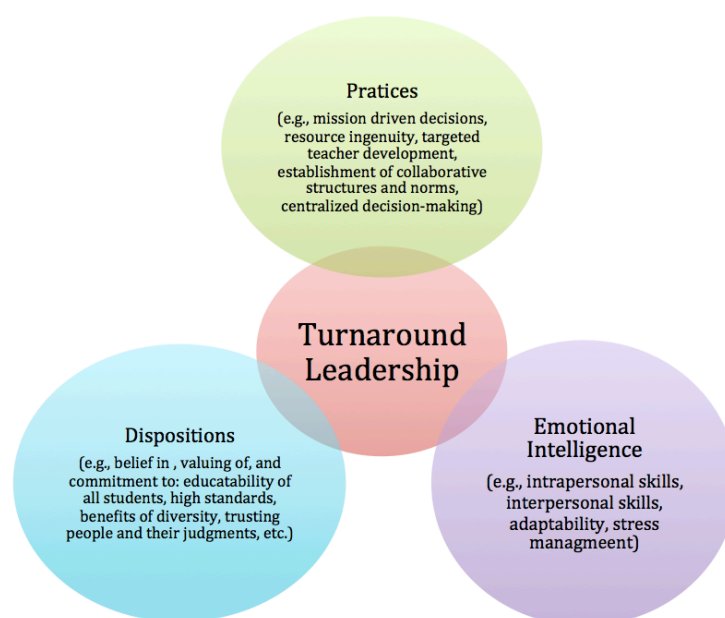


Figure 1. Successful turnaround leadership as a nexus of practices, emotional intelligence, and dispositions.

Methods

Portraiture served as the methodological approach for this study. Originally developed by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot, portraiture crosses methodological boundaries by combining rigorous empiricism with artistic expression to capture complexity, nuance, fluidity, hues, and context (Hill, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Lawrence Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Newton, 2005). Portraitists, in contrast to researchers who listen *to* a story, listen *for* a story:

The aesthetic whole of the portrait is framed by the portraitist's "overarching vision." . . . In order to achieve this rendering of an intelligent whole, the portraitist must thoughtfully delineate and organize the separate parts, and then weave them together in a pattern so carefully unified that the conjoining seams are invisible. (Davis, 1997, p. 261-262)

In other words, portraitists weave together data to illustrate the coherent whole, while also honoring nuance and complexity. Criteria for rigorous portraiture include evocative resonance and authenticity (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Lawrence Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In illuminating the unique, the portrait reveals embedded transferable themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005).

Context

This portraiture study is focused on turnaround leader Dr. Susan Gray. Gray's entire administrative career has taken place in Rothborne County Schools in North Carolina. Rothborne, comprised of more than 25 schools and serving approximately 15,000 students, is categorized as a rural fringe district (NCES, 2015). Approximately 63% of Rothborne students are white; 20% are African American; 11% are Latino; and 6% fall into another racial category. Additionally, about 59% of Rothborne students qualify for free/reduced lunch. Rothborne is designated as a Tier 1 (lowest of 3) county by the North Carolina Department of Commerce, categorizing it as a *highly economically distressed* county.

Gray moved to Rothborne from out of state and served as a third grade teacher and administrative intern at Deerfield Elementary for one year before becoming the assistant principal at the school. After two years in that role, she became principal of Hill Elementary. She served there for three years before being tapped by the superintendent to head the turnaround effort at Lincoln Elementary. By the end of her second year at Lincoln Elementary, the school had made Adequate Yearly Progress in both reading and math, and by the end of her third year, the school had exited school improvement status. For the purposes of this study, these accomplishments designate her as a successful turnaround leader. Gray then became principal of Rothborne Middle, a high-achieving school, but one that was mired in complacency. After only one year at Rothborne Middle, Gray moved to central office as the Elementary and Title I Director. Her charge in this position was to conjoin two previously separate departments and serve as director of the unified entity. After two years in that role, she ascended to the role of Director of the Department for Students with Exceptionalities. In this role, the superintendent tasked her with bringing order to the department, achieving compliance with state exceptional children's guidelines, and increasing the graduation rate of students with disabilities. Recently she was again promoted and now serves as an Assistant Superintendent of Student Services in the district.

Data Sources

Our research team conducted interviews of 21 colleagues who currently work—or have worked in the past—with Gray, including teachers and assistant principals who served with her; school leaders who succeeded her; external consultants who worked in her building; district leaders who work with her; and the district superintendent who serves as her supervisor. Interviews were generally 45-75 minutes in duration. Additionally, we conducted several interviews of Gray, each of which were two or more hours in duration; we observed her in practice on several occasions; and, in order to establish internal and historical context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), we examined artifacts related to her leadership (e.g., agendas of meetings she facilitated; student achievement and growth data; etc.).

This report is based on microanalytic, line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2004;Stringer, 2009) and interpretation of twelve interviews and our observation field notes. The twelve focus interviews were selected using two criteria: 1) As a collection (see Table 1), they triangulate data from informants based on (a) the role of the interview participants relative to Gray (e.g., people she has supervised; her supervisor; and people external to the district) and (b) the context from which they know her (i.e., which of the roles she served when each worked with her); and 2) As researchers, we selected interviews that yielded particularly rich data, because of the candor, level of detailed description, and richness of examples provided by the interviewee.

Table 1
Participant Matrix

	Association with Gray					Relationship to Gray			
	Deerfield	Hill	Lincoln	Rothborne Middle	Central Office	Teacher/ AP under Gray	Supervised by Gray in Central Office	Supervisor of Gray	External to District
Whitfield	✓				✓	✓	✓		
Anderson	✓		✓			✓			
Simmons		✓				✓			
White	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
TCC (Surry & Wise)			✓	✓					✓
Hocking				✓		✓			
Horn					✓		✓		
Walker			✓			✓			
Teppe			✓			✓			
Atwell					✓		✓		
Gray									

Analysis

As a research team, we each conducted about half of the interviews. Prior to microanalytic coding, we identified a priori codes based on our conceptual framework (e.g., collaboration, emotional intelligence, and high expectations). We also identified additional codes prior to our microanalysis, based on reflective memos (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2009).

We analyzed the first interview collaboratively, using a priori codes and identifying emergent codes (e.g., task v. people orientation, competence, intimidating), a process that took eight hours over four sessions. After this, we independently coded interviews conducted by the other so that we both had intimate familiarity with all of the data. After sharing our microanalyses, we met to review our analyses and interpret the data, attending closely to analytic memos and analytic networks (conceptual maps) that we developed during the microanalysis phase (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Results/Findings

Stature

Susan Gray is a tiny, white woman in her fifties with a compelling voice touched by a slight Southern accent. Gray's voice compels attention not by its tenor or volume but by the passion

she injects in it. She leans slightly forward when she speaks and the strength of her eye contact and brisk matter-of-factness oblige attention. She smiles easily and often. She is forever well coiffed and professionally attired in a suit. Her jewelry is tasteful and understated. Her nails sport a French manicure. Gray is “always professional. Always dresses the part. Has that outward appearance because you never see her sloppy.” When not in sight, she is recognizable by the staccato “*click clack*” of her heels and the *jingle* of her keys as she bustles down the hall—always on a mission.” When she speaks, she gesticulates with her hands in front of her torso. Her energy is palpable.

While Gray is physically diminutive, her presence is enormous:

When we were at Hill Elementary, and we had a crazy parent . . . and she came in the school and--storming through, wanting to attack a teacher [laughter]. Susan and the [assistant principal] somehow got this woman in the office and this woman was trying to come across the desk at Susan . . . She is like -- I don't know -- the little Chihuahua and this lady was huge and very, very mad, and Dr. Gray stands up to her and was not intimidated by her in the least . . . you have just this little woman with so much power.

Intimidating

Indeed, Gray is often described as somewhat intimidating. Gray has high and clear expectations, and this is part of what makes her intimidating:

When she walked in the room, you knew what was expected and you were working with children. You never sat down. I probably did not sit down for the first 5 or 6 years – I would not even. I was afraid to be even standing close to my desk and if I wanted to go over and look at some of my plans, I would go over and look quick and get back – get away. So you just knew what was expected all of the time... I mean it was intense. It was very intense and I have people that walk in the building and talk about how intense the instruction is still at this time.

The perception people have of Gray as intimidating appears to come from the intersection of her strong competence, her high expectations for herself and faculty/staff, and her intense commitment to the mission. Each of these is detailed in the following sections.

Competence

Gray's competence manifests itself through various threads that are interwoven: She is knowledgeable and growth-minded; mission-focused; strategic and tactical; and clutch.

Knowledge and growth mindset. Gray is the type of person who you can drop into “any kind of situation and just toss her in and she would be successful no matter what.” Gray has the confidence and aplomb to handle any situation. She is a scholar of her work, and once she is in a situation, she will further develop her expertise:

Because no matter where you put her, even if she didn't know about where you put her, she would know it by the time she got the position. If we had a group on zebras, Susan would come the next day and by the next day she would know everything there was to know about a zebra. Because that's just how she is.

Gray expects this growth mindset of others as well:

She never stops. She will send us emails at 2:00 in the morning of an article that she has read that we will discuss. Like she is always educating herself. She will text us from her kid's soccer game with things she has found.

To Gray, everyone is in a constant state of development, and as a leader she nurtures that growth. Additionally, Gray feels that a leader herself should constantly be growing. She explains one of her career transitions as follows,

After I realized we made AYP...I was at that place where I don't know if I want to stay here any longer....I need a different venue now, I don't know what that is yet, but I need a new challenge...I need something new to do and to be.

Gray leverages her knowledge and expertise to plan, enact, and monitor strategies to fulfill her mission to effect positive change in whatever position she is in.

Mission Focused, Strategic, Tactical: The "Little General". Superintendent White referred to Gray as the "Little General", a moniker also given to her by some of her peers. Throughout interviews, participants regularly used military language to describe Gray. She is seen as someone who has a strong and unwavering sense of mission, who can set strategy to accomplish that mission, and who can make tactical arrangements to enact the strategy. Much like a general standing atop a vantage point surveying the battlefield below,

She looked at her school, and she put her plan in place, and she told us where we are and what we are going to do, and this is what we are going to do to get here. She made that happen.

An assistant principal who worked with Gray explained, "Once she makes a decision and she knows what she wants to do, she has a lot of follow-through, and she is a delegator. She delegates, and she brings the troops in with her." This tunnel vision, while not unproblematic, is part of what makes Gray *clutch*.

Clutch. Gray is at her best when the circumstances are most intense and challenging. Like pottery fired in a kiln, Gray is made stronger by the heat. Gray's *clutchness* is a function not only of her toughness in the face of adversity but also of her preparedness and organization. In difficult moments that require Gray to be clutch, she maintains her unwavering and—perhaps myopic—focus on the mission. While at Lincoln—a school deep in school improvement status and on the verge of being reconstituted—a crisis occurred on a morning during state testing. As is the case on any state testing day, it was "crazy town" with counselors counting and distributing testing materials and teachers preparing for test administration. One of the teachers was absent and unaccounted for, which was highly uncharacteristic for this teacher. A teacher's assistant (TA) placed a call to the teacher's home. Her husband picked up the phone and stammered:

"Umm, Kara is not going to be coming to school today." The TA says, "Oh my goodness is she sick, no problem, we will put her in a make-up session." He said, "No, I woke up and Kara was dead this morning." So immediately the TA starts to cry, and we had this huge issue that's beginning to now become an issue in another class—it's beginning to spread. Gray was somewhere and heard a commotion and was on it in a New York minute because we don't want any "Woop." And she went and contained it. And it was awesome to see her contain that. She went to the teacher, she went to the TA, she said, "You will pull it together. This is awful. This is horrible. You will pull it together because we have a test today and these children and these teachers need us—so you'll say nothing else." So it had gone on to yet another classroom, so she went next door and said the same thing. "We'll do our grieving later on but right now we have to be professional,

and we need to get through this and get done.” And I was—because we were all a mess—because [Kara] was a dear, precious person to us—and Susan was able as a leader to keep herself together so that we could follow suit. She kept us all strong.

Commitment to Mission

As researchers and former principals, we talked about how we might have handled the passing of Kara and wondered about Gray’s decision to attend immediately to the task of testing (and the larger mission of serving students) and only subsequently attending to people’s need to digest and mourn the loss of their colleague. Throughout the interviews, participants framed Gray as being first and foremost task-oriented and secondarily people-oriented. In juxtaposing Gray to her predecessor at Hill, Whitfield explained:

The person that had been there previously is warm and fuzzy. She knows everybody, knows everybody’s families and would see you in the hall and ask you what you did last weekend. Dr. Gray was more business, and she is kind of straight to the point. She is not goofing around and talking in the hallway. And going from this touchy feely person to this more straight line business person was hard for most of the staff because most of the staff had been there 20 some years. And they are like a family, and it was hard for a lot of people because of that personality difference.

Perceptively, Superintendent White predicted: “If you ask her [Gray], she would say that she is charismatic and she is a people person, but I would say that is not her inherent trait. She works really, really hard at being a people person.” When asked whether she sees herself as task-oriented or people-oriented, without hesitation Gray replied:

I think I’m still people-oriented more than task-. Yeah . . . I had to be fair. I had to be compassionate enough to be willing to hear what [teachers] had to say. Now I didn’t always – and I’ll be honest with you – I’m not always being like, “Oh well, it’s all right.” I’m still like, “Okay, I understand that you’re not feeling well, and you’ll go home, but tomorrow you’ll come back.”

Our assessment is that Gray’s task-orientation is driven by her commitment to her mission and could more accurately be called a “mission-orientation” (see Discussion section for elaboration). She, however, recognizes the importance of being people-oriented and so intentionally goes to lengths to be so. She shared with her department at central office that her New Year’s resolution is to put down her technology when someone comes to speak with her and to focus 100% on that person. During a break in a meeting Gray facilitated of about 15 secondary student support personnel, Gray interacted with a fellow central office administrator, Lila. She smiled and grasped Lila’s arm with both hands and leaned in. Then she milled about the room, talking to various attendees. People smiled back at her and seemed eager to interact with her. She touched one assistant principal on the arm as she spoke. They laughed and seemed to joke. Then she moved around the room, engaging in dialogue with another attendee who had been working on her computer. Again the individual seemed interested in talking to Gray. With each interaction, Gray was 100% focused on the person or people with whom she was speaking, always making strong eye contact. People with whom she speaks seem to soak in everything that she has to say. Their total focus on her and engagement with her communicate their obvious respect for her.

High Expectations

Gray has clear and high expectations for herself and for those with whom she works, in terms of pedagogy, rigor, differentiation, data use, and professionalism:

It was exhausting. She was just exhausting because the expectations were so high, but then again and I have heard so many people say it since she was gone: You just knew what was expected and you just – there was no question about it. You knew what was expected, and you just did your job . . . you just knew that she did not expect more from you than she was going to do herself.

Gray's high and clear expectations are paired with a willingness to do what it takes for people to meet them:

Everybody in the building knows exactly what was expected from them . . . And I have just heard so many other teachers say that she has been their favorite principal, but, and she was very strict . . . And she was not one who came and nit-picked at all. She might come in while you were teaching, leave you a note, check your work, and walk out. She was very hands-on. . . We have these Thursday folders that go home with the children's work in it from the prior week, and I know that she walked in one day, and I was stuffing my own folders and organizing the papers and I knew that, you know that kind of clerical work was not supposed to be done during the day while you had children in the room. But it happened when there were no assistants and there was just no other time to get it done, and she said, "You go on and keep teaching," and she went and stuffed my folders for me.

Gray is willing to provide the support and resources needed for people to meet her expectations, and she is willing to do what it takes to support people. For Gray, it is all about the students. Students are her mission, and she privileges what is best for students over adults. However, this does not mean that she neglects building strong relationships with adults, as is illustrated in the following section.

Relational Trust

Regardless of whether Gray is more task- or people-oriented, or more student- than adult-focused, she does build strong, trusting relationships with adults in her work settings. One study participant who served as an Assistant Principal under Gray reflected:

And there were times when she would say to me, she'd say, "How did that go?" and I would honestly tell her, "Well this is what I think..." and she trusted me enough to look at me and listen to me--believe what I was telling her because, like I said, I depended on her, and she depended on me. I had faith in her, and she had faith in me. And we built a good relationship, we really did . . . She had respect for me, and I felt that respect. And like I said, I felt like we had a friendship as well. We had a good working relationship and that carried over.

Gray, the intimidating, task-oriented, mission-driven "little general" is not only respected, but people have genuine affection for her. She is complex--intimidating and personable, tough and caring, driven and direct but trustworthy and wise. She is respected as a leader and valued as an advisor and confidant:

She was tough, but if you had a problem you could walk into her office and say, "Do you have a minute," and she would close the door and you could sit down and cry, scream --

whatever you needed to do. She would sit there and listen, give you advice on how to handle it. Give you resources, whatever you needed to fix whatever the problem was. I don't know of anybody that went to her that ever left from her and felt that she had never helped them. Even though she was very strict and structured you knew you could talk to her, and you knew it would never go beyond her office.

Gray serves in the capacity her people need her to, whether as confidant or mentor. She is seen as trustworthy and valued, even as she is seen as the Little General:

She is not ooey-goey-- But she is the one that will give the directive with that little love and caring. So that they know, this is expected, but I love you, and I care for you, and I want you to do well.

Several of our study participants used the term “emotional intelligence” to describe how Susan built relational trust. One teacher observed, “She has strong emotional intelligence. Soft skills. She's so *confident in who she is*, we believed in her, whatever she had to say, because she had this *calmness*. She's grounded. She was *firm*, but *fair*.” Gray's ability to develop strong relational trust and to combine a sense of caring with high and clear expectations is one of the keys to her success in disrupting deficit thinking.

Disrupting Deficit Thinking and Centering Students

The first thing that Gray did as Lincoln principal was to interview all faculty and staff:

When I went into the school that summer, I interviewed every single individual – every bus driver, every cafeteria worker, every individual—and said, “What is wrong with Lincoln? Tell me what is going on here,” and I would say 65 – 70% told me it was because we had poor kids and they just couldn't do it. And so that was my mantra, “Yes they will do it, yes you will do it, and we will do it together.”

Gray worked to disrupt the culture of deficit thinking by faculty and staff and to replace it with a culture of high expectations—for adults and students. This disruption of deficit thinking, in conjunction with high expectations and centering student learning as the mission, are cornerstones of Gray as a turnaround leader and change agent.

Summary

In summary, Gray is a force of nature not in terms of bluster or grandiosity but in her consistency, tenacity, and focus. Rather than a lightning bolt or tornado, she is a steady wind in a desert that in surprisingly little time substantially rewrites the landscape, shifting dunes, building hills, filling dips such that the topography is virtually unrecognizable from what it was. She re-contours the landscape wherever she is assigned, and the changes she leaves in place endure long past her tenure in any role.

Discussion

Throughout the data, participants focused much more on *who* Gray is as a leader and less on what she does (i.e., her leadership practices). As such, the findings focused more on the *who* of Gray's leadership than the *what*. This portrait of Susan Gray builds upon existing literature on turnaround principals and reinforces the notion (see Figure 1) that successful turnaround leadership requires a nexus of leadership practices, dispositions, and emotional intelligence and

emphasizes the importance of the latter two. The portrait expands and refines the conceptual framework in several ways. First, the original framework included the importance of the turnaround principal cultivating high expectations. Concomitant with this is the importance of explicitly calling out and disrupting deficit thinking (Delpit, 2012). Second, Gray illustrates the power of being mission-driven *and developing strategies* to support the mission *and tactics* to enact the strategies. Third, this portrait illustrates the importance of turnaround principals exhibiting uncompromising respect and developing strong relational trust (Cranston, 2011; Kochanek, 2005), which Gray did by getting “in the trenches” with teachers to effect change. Perhaps most significantly, we found that to understand leadership practice in successful turnaround schools, it is not only important to understand *what the principal does*, but also *who the principal is* as a person and how this impacts others in the school community and influences the effectiveness of the leader’s practices.

Principals have been positioned in turnaround policy as linchpins who initiate change and keep the wheels of turnaround moving forward. Clearly, this emphasis reinforces the long-standing tradition of the “superprincipal” who is equal parts savior and superhero (see e.g., Copland, 2001; Edmonds, 1979; Peck, West, & Reitzug, 2013). A study such as this one that focuses on a single principal—particularly one that focuses on who the principal is as a person—would appear, at first blush, to reinforce such notions. The shortcoming of such notions is, of course, that very few individuals in any line of work are endowed with superhero-like abilities. Peck and colleagues (2013) note, “As Superman, Spiderman and Wonder Woman would tell you, only a select few can be imbued with extraordinary powers. Expecting every school leader to possess such super abilities is simply a debilitating fantasy” (p. 64). While Susan Gray appears to harbor some extraordinary leadership skills and abilities, our intent in this report is not to canonize her as a superhero, but rather, to demystify what to some might appear to be her “superpowers”.

Susan Gray is not a flashy, highly charismatic leader. Other than her petite size, she would be indistinguishable, at first glance, from thousands of other principals and school administrators. She is, in a sense, an ordinary leader with deeply-held values and a strong work ethic. She is respectful, straightforward, intense, tough, caring, competent, and always prepared. She expects much from those with whom she works. She thinks linearly and aligns mission, strategies, and tactics. These are ordinary qualities, not “superpowers”. What is extraordinary, however, is the intensity with which she exercises these “powers” and the responsiveness she engenders in people.

The intensity and responsiveness evident in Gray’s practice can be explained by examining the relationship between task-orientation and people-orientation in her work. As previously mentioned, we believe she is not so much task-oriented as she is *mission-oriented*. Almost all of our participants spoke about how “driven” she is in her work. We believe what drives her is her mission – a three-dimensional mission that encompasses utilitarian, pragmatic, and self-actualizing components. Her mission is, first of all, utilitarian, concerned with satisfying external expectations others have of her (e.g., reaching school test score goals). Secondly, there is a pragmatic component to her mission, which encompasses being viewed as successful in order to have opportunities that will allow her to advance her career. The third, self-actualizing component of her mission is focused on helping students, staff, and self, grow toward their potential. We believe Gray’s multi-dimensional mission fuels her work with an intensity that a simpler mission would not be able to provide.

In querying our interview participants about whether they perceived Gray to be more task- or people-oriented, most responded that she was both--but somewhat more task-oriented. When we asked Gray this same question, she responded that she is more people-oriented. We believe both she and our other participants are right. Gray values people above all else and this is evidenced in the complete respect she shows for others. Additionally, she has an astute (and perhaps, intrinsic,) understanding of people, what motivates them, and their need for commitment to a cause beyond themselves. Thus, people are what drive her mission. For these reasons, she may view herself as being more people- than task-oriented. However, her people orientation may not extend to the type of socializing behaviors that are often associated with such an orientation (and perhaps a gendered notion of leadership). Valuing and respecting people and being concerned with their growth does not require being “ooey gooey” or “warm and fuzzy”. Indeed, time spent conversing about non-professional matters may detract from time spent facilitating growth and dilute focus on the mission. Thus, Gray does not spend excessive amounts of time discussing non-professional matters. Those who work with her, however, may interpret this as her being more concerned with tasks than with them. For Gray, it is not tasks toward which she is oriented; it is mission, with that mission driven by an orientation toward, and a valuing of, people and their growth. Nonetheless, although those who work with her may not believe that she is primarily people-oriented, they feel strongly connected to Gray and speak glowingly of their relationship with her. This is understandable when one considers that Gray, in addition to treating them with complete respect, has helped them internalize that they are key players in working for a cause beyond themselves. Ultimately, it seems, being valued and having meaning in one’s work are more important than social friendships.

Implications

In summary, we believe there are several key takeaways for leaders striving to turn around schools or other educational units.

1. You do not have to be a superhero to be a successful turnaround leader; you do, however, need to be intensively mission-driven.
2. The mission that drives you needs to serve you practically *and* be self-actualizing. Simply raising test scores or working to further your career can be soul-deadening; conversely, working for growth and maximizing potential may be fulfilling but insufficient in meeting turnaround expectations.
3. In your interactions with others, it is important to stay focused on the mission. When the mission is difficult, extraneous social interactions may be counterproductive.
4. It is imperative to respect and embrace everyone’s intrinsic worth--always.
5. Hold high expectations—they are an outward manifestation of your respect and valuing of others. Concomitant with high expectations is a commitment to providing the support needed to help people meet those expectations.
6. Be driven--have your personal work be an outward manifestation of your high expectations for yourself.
7. Disrupt complacency--challenge deficit thinking, expect high performance from low performers, and higher performance from already high performers.

Future research on turnaround leadership should attend not only to school turnaround but turnaround at the central office level as well. Also, researchers should attend to turnaround leaders’ dispositions and emotional intelligence in concert with their practices, especially as the

former two may mediate stakeholders' responses to the latter. In other words, we need to view practices not in isolation but rather as part of a larger, integrated view of turnaround leadership.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the term "successful turnaround leader" is usually applied to a principal of a chronically failing school that is experiencing transformation. Susan Gray certainly meets this definition for her work at Lincoln Elementary. However, more broadly, she is a successful turnaround leader who is able to bring about substantive and speedy change in various educational settings, including in her most recent role as the head of a central office department. In this sense, we expand and trouble the more narrow use of the term "turnaround" leader and argue that the analysis offered here has implications for turnaround leaders in various settings.

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Leading into the Future: Perceptions of School Board Presidents on the Essential Knowledge and Skills for Superintendent Preparation Programs

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



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Reports in the media on American public schools are pretty dismal. Accountability measures enacted with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Law of 2002 include federal and state sanctions for school districts not making adequate yearly progress on state assessments. Typically these results are published locally, which only increases the perception that many American schools are failing to prepare students for the future. Often educators and in particular school leaders are scapegoated in the absence of any other solutions to educate American youth.

Marzano and Waters (2009) provide more promising evidence related to American schools. Their meta-analysis, which sought to uncover deeper understandings of the underlying relationships between district leadership and student achievement revealed, “when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected” (p. 5).

“The accountability movement has put school boards in a new, unfamiliar environment” (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 77). Historically, school boards have not focused to any great extent upon student achievement. This study sought the perceptions of sitting school board presidents of expectations for their superintendent. Findings of the study reveal these school board presidents fully support ISLLC and ELCC standards, which provide the foundation for superintendent preparation programs. Female board presidents’ perceptions of the importance of several factors were stronger than their male counterparts.

Introduction

Reports in the media on American public schools are pretty dismal. Accountability measures enacted with the passing of the *No Child Left Behind Law of 2002* include federal and state sanctions for school districts not making adequate yearly progress on state assessments. Typically these results are published locally, which only increases the perception that many American schools are failing to prepare students for the future. International comparisons as reported by the Program for International Student Assessments (PISA) from 2012, the most recent reported data, indicate that the United States lags behind other countries, many of which spend far less on educating their student populations. Often educators and in particular school leaders are scapegoated in the absence of any other solutions to educating American youth.

Marzano and Waters (2009) provide more promising evidence related to American schools. Their meta-analysis, which sought to uncover deeper understandings of the underlying relationships between district leadership and student achievement revealed, “when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected” (p. 5). Delving deeper into effective leadership, Marzano and Waters identified five district (superintendent) level responsibilities with a statistically ($p < .05$) correlation with average student academic achievement. The five responsibilities are “(1) ensuring collaborative goal setting, (2) establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction, (3) creating board alignment with and support of district goals, (4) monitoring achievement and instruction goals, and (5) allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction” (p. 6).

“The accountability movement has put school boards in a new, unfamiliar environment” (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 77). Historically, school boards have not focused to any great extent upon student achievement. The passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) increased pressure on school boards and superintendent of schools to be more accountable for student achievement (Sell, 2005, Center for Public Education, 2011). Public displays of test scores, mandated by the law, have engaged communities to some extent in the process of evaluating performance of both school boards and superintendents. In *The State of the American School Superintendency-A Mid-Decade Study*, Glass and Franceschini (2007) reported local district public opinion surveys verified communities’ desire for better performance from their school districts. They claimed communities were not demanding reform but expected school district officials and boards to focus on doing a better job of educating their students. This highlights the fact “superintendents daily face local political realities set down by communities and boards” (p. xiv). This also emphasizes the importance of hiring the right superintendent for the community and monitoring the superintendent’s performance on a regular basis.

School reform agendas implemented every decade with initiatives and programs intended to raise student achievement have had limited results (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Reeves, 2011). Federal and state legislators along with community activists and school board members respond to increasing accountability by holding the superintendent of schools responsible for raising student achievement. This has led to greater scrutiny by school board members to hire the most qualified school superintendent. To date, little research has focused on the perception school board members have of the necessary

knowledge, skills, and abilities a superintendent needs to successfully lead a school district.

The purpose of the study reported here was to determine the perceptions Illinois school board presidents have of the competencies district chief executive officers need to successfully lead local districts in changing environments. The descriptive-survey asked school board presidents for their opinions on the relative importance of superintendent technical knowledge about schools as well as the critical personal and social competencies that ensure exemplary leadership. The study is based in part upon results from an earlier study conducted by Hunt, Watkins, Kersten, and Tripses (2011) that focused on perceptions of practicing school superintendents on the knowledge and skills effective superintendents needed in a changing world. In that study, practicing superintendents reported they needed rigorous preparation that linked theory to real world situations. The previous study was initiated in anticipation for a call for the redesign of superintendent preparation programs in Illinois. The researchers believed that the redesign team would benefit from hearing the voices of the superintendents in the field. The purpose of the current study was to gather information regarding the perceptions of another critical group of stakeholders, school board presidents. Specifically, the study sought the perceptions of school board presidents from three performance levels: competencies for a district chief executive officer (CEO); necessary skills in a changing world; and critical personal and social competencies of superintendents.

Literature Review/Context

School boards in the United States of America, as governing boards for local public school districts, are either elected or appointed by their local communities. Historically, these boards have been in existence since the early 1700's, emerging in the New England colonies first, and then expanding throughout the remaining colonies. Initially their main role and function was to hire the head schoolmaster and oversee the maintenance of the school building. As people moved west and states were established, school districts continued to be formed and school boards played a vital role in the selection of superintendents and in the governance of school districts across the country (Sell, 2005).

Nearly 14,000 local school boards, with more than 90,000 members, govern school districts over the 50 states. "School boards derive their power and authority from the state. In compliance with state and federal laws, school boards establish policies and regulations in which their local schools are governed" (NSBA, 2013). The National School Boards Association asserts that school board members are champions for public schools, and one of their primary responsibilities is community engagement to improve student learning and student achievement. One of their chief functions is to hire, monitor, and evaluate the superintendent of schools, the chief executive officer, and to set policy for hiring other personnel in the school district. Boards are also responsible for additional governing responsibilities that include (a) overseeing the development and adoption of policies; (b) establishing and adopting budget priorities; (c) setting the direction for and adoption of the curriculum; and (d) providing direction and adoption of collective bargaining agreements as school boards work in tandem with the superintendent of schools and the district office staff to design policies (NSBA; Sell, 2005; Dervarics & O'Brien, 2015). A positive, productive relationship between the

superintendent and school board members is vital to implement a governance model, which impacts student learning and student achievement in the local school district (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Eight Characteristics, Sell, 2005; Dervarics & O'Brien, 2015)

Effective School Board-Superintendent Teams

“A high performance team is a group of people in a school or district that work interdependently to meet or exceed established goals. Team members hold each other accountable for results and are able to act independently, but they are aligned with the leader” (Kirtman, 2014, p. 2). Waters’ and Marzano’s (2009) meta-analysis study on the effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement, highlight the importance of superintendents working with school board members in establishing non-negotiable district goals for student achievement. Effective districts, as measured by higher student achievement, establish and maintain learning goals as the primary focus of district efforts (Eight Characteristics; Dervarics & O’Brien, 2015, Marzano & Waters, 2009; Reeves, 2011). Resources are allocated to reach student achievement goals. The superintendent and board, play critical but different roles in monitoring student achievement (Reeves, 2011).

The Iowa Lighthouse Study, conducted by the Iowa School Board Association, capitalized on the importance of the collaborative relationship between the school board and superintendent (Rice et al., 2000). Researchers interviewed 159 school board members, superintendents and school staff members in high and low-achieving school districts. Their goal was to compare the board/superintendent teams’ ability to encourage positive change by exploring the presence of seven working conditions for school renewal. They classified boards/school districts as moving or stuck on the seven conditions for school renewal. Research findings echoed the Waters and Marzano (2009); Eight Characteristics; Goodman, Fulbright, & Zimmerman (1997); and Dervarics & O’Brien (2015) study by emphasizing the importance of clear district-wide goals and expectations for improvements in student achievement by the school board and superintendent. Staff members from the Iowa Lighthouse Study (Rice et al, 2000) also described the school board as supportive of their work and board members articulated knowledge about learning in the schools and list specific initiatives.

By contrast, less effective boards fail to define a vision. This has implications in the hiring process because school boards who have not done the work of creating a shared vision often recruit a superintendent with his or her own ideas and platform, leading to boards with multiple agendas, tendencies to micromanage, and other nonproductive patterns of behavior. Less successful districts featured boards and superintendents that were not in alignment, as the superintendent “may develop solutions without board engagement” (Center for Public Education, 2011).

Kowalski (2006) former school superintendent and currently a professor of educational leadership and Carver (2006), noted expert on school boards that make a difference, agree there is no single relationship in the organization that is more important than that between the board and the CEO (in the case of schools, superintendent). No relationship in a school district that has a greater impact than the relationship between the school superintendent and the school board. Carver contends “a multitude of ethical, moral, professional, and social issues frame the relationship between a superintendent

and school board members” (p. 146). Kowalski points out that role confusion and dissatisfaction can emerge when boards are ethically bound to listen to the superintendent, but they are not obligated to act on the superintendent’s recommendations. When there is no harmony in this relationship, tension and relationship problems can emerge and impact the governance of the school district. Carver asserts this “relationship, (when) well-conceived can set the stage for effective governance and management” (p.153). Although Carver acknowledges one of the most important tasks of a board is the hiring of the CEO, he also contends that establishing an effective relationship is equally important. Defining roles, relationships, and responsibilities of the superintendent (CEO) with the board are of critical importance.

Board Roles

The research around characteristics of school boards in high and low achieving districts clearly distinguishes between habits and characteristics that effectively impact student achievement and those that do not (Dervarics & O’Brien, 2015). Boards in high achieving districts work continuously with their communities and faculty to clarify values and vision, establish strong communications structures, base decisions upon data and work hard to align and sustain resources to meet district goals (Eight Characteristics). This focus on student achievement based upon clear learning goals creates conditions where board members understand their role in holding the superintendent and his or her colleagues accountable for progress without engaging in the daily administration of schools (Center for Public Education, 2011). Effective boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement (Center for Public Education, 2011).

Board members educated on the specific roles, relationships, and responsibilities of the superintendent of schools can more effectively design interview questions to address the candidate’s competencies and reflect the needs of the local school district. Strained relationships can occur due to role confusion, federal control, and the lack of board training (Mountford 2004) Board development sessions and training in educational leadership preparation programs can alleviate many problems with role confusion and tendencies to micromanage (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Center for Public Education, 2011). Hopkins, O’Neil and Williams (2007) investigated emotional intelligence and school board governance and found a strong relationship existed between behaviors indicative of effective board governance and emotional intelligence competencies. “Public school boards as well as corporate and non-profit boards of directors face a complex range of responsibilities that require self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, the pillars of emotional intelligence” (p. 696).

Hiring competent superintendents has become a much more critical task for school board members in the last decade due to the pressure placed on boards of education and superintendents to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a demand set forth in the legislation of the No Child Left Behind Law of 2002. Since ISLLC and ELCC standards were designed for Educational Leadership graduate programs to ensure adequacy of performance in critical areas, research is beginning to emerge that analyzes the perceptions school board members have on the critical performance indicators associated with these standards. Rockwood (2010) focused on the differences in

perceptions of unit district school superintendents and school board presidents on the performance competency indicators that are most critical to a superintendent's success. The study utilized the six standards developed by the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). One of the findings relating to gender indicated females selected "promoting academic excellence" as a top indicator while males selected "models core beliefs and takes actions to achieve goals" as their top indicator for a performance (p.119). Rockwood suggests that gender does influence how people perceive their world and she posits that males tend to be more directive in their managerial style. The results of the study also indicated school board presidents and superintendents deemed ISLCC Standard 1 "Facilitating a Vision of Educational Excellence" as the most important standard followed by Standard 2 that focused on the learning environment and instructional programs that focus on high expectations for all students and providing a respectful, positive climate for learning.

Orr's (2009) quantitative study investigated qualities school board members were looking for in terms of hiring a superintendent in Indiana. Results indicated that there were no major differences in terms of the size of the school district, location and years of service. School board members expected their future superintendents to be "well versed in all aspects of the job" (p.75). According to Orr, the findings suggest school board members desire a superintendent candidate to be proficient in personal skills and be well prepared in all aspects of the superintendency.

Figuring out what a specific school board and individual members seated on that board perceive as being well prepared for all aspects of the superintendency is critical to successfully accomplishment of district goals. School boards who take seriously their responsibility to create a vision for their district (Center for Public Education) and based upon that vision, create a shared vision for the district, will take time to understand what their district needs in a superintendent. "Understanding the competencies that are needed for a position and recruitment or development of internal talent is a better use of your time than to put all the focus on the evaluation of poor performance" (Kirtman, 2014, p. 123).

Superintendent Roles

There is certainly no dearth of leadership theory or advice about what school leaders should do in order to successfully turn around school districts. Typically researchers distill their ideas into a list of key leadership behaviors, characteristics, competencies, etc. The foundation of the synthesis that follows came from Marzano and Waters (2009), the Center for Education, Bjork and Kowalski (2005), and Kirtman (2014).

Marzano and Waters (2009) used meta-analysis to determine the strength of relationships between district-level administrator actions and student achievement and more specifically, the district level leadership behaviors associated with student achievement. In answering the first question, they concluded that district level leadership does make a notable difference with a correlation between district leadership and student achievement at .24 that was statistically significant at the .05 level. Addressing criticisms that superintendents are irrelevant to improving student achievement, they conclude, "when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected" (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 5).

Marzano and Waters (2009) first responsibility for effective district leadership is ensuring collaborative goal setting. “Effective district leaders include all relevant stakeholders, including central office, building level administrators, and board members” (p. 6). Marzano and Waters’ second responsibility identified establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction. These goals must result in teacher and building level administrator action related to student achievement and classroom instruction. These first two responsibilities are consistent with the findings from the study “Eight Characteristics of Effective Boards” (Center for Public Education, 2011). that described the importance of establishing a high vision based upon common beliefs and values. Kirtman’s (2014) responsibilities described the process of collaborative goal setting and establishment of non-negotiable goals for student achievement while (Marzano and Waters, 2009) study included creating a commonly owned plan for success and a high sense of urgency for change and sustainable results. Another competency defined by Kirtman (2014) involves challenging the status quo. This competency requires that superintendent’s challenge the district’s constituents that include teachers, building level administrators, community and the school board to develop collaborative goal-setting, productive monitoring, and readjustments necessary to improve student achievement (DuFour and Marzano, 2011; Reeves, 2011).

Marzano and Waters’ (2009) third district leadership behavior, creating conditions where board alignment and support of district goals speaks directly to the purpose of this study. Similarly, the Eight Characteristics of Effective Boards addressed the need for boards and superintendents to form a united team to accomplish district goals. Kirtman’s (2014) competencies include building trust with all teams, which includes the school board and focus on team over self. This requires that members subordinate their own self-interests in favor of achieving the goals of the district. District educational leaders, especially the superintendent, must take primary responsibility to translate broad goals into actionable steps so teachers, building level administrators and the school board understand what is required for success (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

Monitoring achievement and instructional goals from multiple levels is a critical leadership skill (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Reeves, 2011). The school board characteristics that empower monitoring of goals include the need to first understand the importance of accountability and take seriously the need to use data as the basis for decisions (Center for Public Education). A primary role of the superintendent is to serve as the individual in the district with the expertise and positional influence necessary to create learning conditions for the board to operate from a decision-making processes based upon data.

The superintendent and board share responsibilities to allocate resources, each in different capacities (Marzano and Waters, 2009; Center for Public Education). Resource allocation includes professional development for teachers, administrators and school boards in order to effectively move forward in accomplishing non-negotiable learning goals.

Superintendents must provide leadership for both vertical and horizontal relationships within the district, while also providing leadership needed for those relationships outside the district (Kirtman , 2014). A superintendent effectively leads vertically by establishing and maintaining a strong partnership with the school board. Effective horizontal leadership connects the district with other superintendents through

professional organizations at the local, state, and national level while also working effectively with local community leaders. Community leadership has become increasingly important, as accountability measures at state and national levels have increased. Superintendents who fail to attend to their own learning about current initiatives and mandates will not serve their districts well because they understand that “accountability and evaluation are management tools, not strategic approaches for leadership to reach our goals for students” (Kirtman, 2014, p. x). Kirtman’s (2014) competency to a commitment to continuous self-improvement is intended to identify effective school leaders, but could also be applied to school boards.

Bjork and Kowalski (2005) identified five major role conceptions related to the superintendency: Superintendent as Teacher-Scholar, Manager, Democratic Leader/Statesman, Social Scientist and Superintendent as Communicator. The *American School Superintendent 2010 Decennial Study* (Kowalski, et al, 2010) investigated how often school boards emphasized each of these five major roles. According to the school superintendent respondents, the “highest level of substantial emphasis was placed on being an *effective communicator*, followed by *manager*, *instructional leader*, *statesman/democratic leader*, and *applied social scientist*” (p. xvi). Nearly all superintendents (95.3%) acknowledged that they were the board’s primary source of information (Glass, et al., 2000). Given rapidly changing technologies, the superintendent’s communications role with various publics is increasingly complex and important (Bjork & Kowalski).

Richard (2006) investigated the leadership behaviors in terms of “what is occurring” and “what should be” occurring in Ohio superintendents as perceived by board of education members. Findings indicated board members held high expectations of superintendents and that the expectations were higher than their perceptions of superintendents’ actual behaviors. In addition, female board members held higher expectations of the superintendent in the area of consideration of people and generally rated the actual behavior lower as compared to the male board members. Results of the study also suggest the importance of the superintendent being “students of the profession, learn lessons through the experiences of both self and others, and to work diligently to understand the board as a collected whole” (p.81). Richard asserts the importance of self-awareness on the part of board members in terms of their experiences and how increased self-awareness could possibly lead to better evaluation procedures for the superintendent.

Female school board presidents demonstrated high self-efficacy and recognized the importance of shared governance towards the ends of school improvement (Van Tuyle, 2015). Employing a measure designed to measure self-efficacy, Palladino, Haar, Grady, and Perry (2007) found that rural female superintendents described participants’ relationship skills as both cognitive and behavioral forms of engagement.

Superintendents play an essential role in developing conditions where boards engage in team building and collaborative efforts as a continuous process. Protocols and operating procedures must be continuously evaluated to ensure student learning remains the focus of superintendent board decisions and actions (Moody, 2011).

Methodology

The study employed descriptive-survey study design (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2006) and subjects were Illinois school board presidents. The researchers developed a self-administered survey, which was subsequently field-tested by selected staff members of the Illinois Association of School Boards. The instrument and procedures were modified based upon feedback gathered. The questionnaire received appropriate Institutional Review Board approval.

Part I of the survey asked respondents to provide demographic data type and characteristics of the district, years as board president experience, years of total school board experience, gender, enrollment of the district, and percent of free and reduced lunch eligible students. Respondents were also asked to comment on the AYP status of the district and the fiscal status of the district. In Part II, respondents were asked to respond using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Unimportant*), 2 (*Somewhat Important*), 3 (*Important*), 4 (*Very Important*), to 5 (*Essential*) to rate their perceptions of the importance of each prompt pertaining to superintendent skills needed.

A web-based survey method was utilized for data collection. The previous study, conducted in 2011, gathered insights of practicing Illinois school superintendents regarding the essential knowledge and skills superintendents need to be successful school leaders. The Illinois Association of School Boards sent an email to all 869 Illinois School Board presidents, which included a cover letter from the researchers and a link to the survey. Participants were informed that their response implied informed consent to participate in the study.

Qualtrics provided frequencies and percentages of closed-end responses. Data were analyzed to identify trends that might appear within the categories (Maxwell & Loomis, 1996). Using SPSS, independent samples t-test was conducted to test group differences between male school board presidents and female school board presidents. The effect size was also measured, where Cohen's (1992) conventional guidelines state that .01, .06, and .14 represents a small, medium, and large effect size, respectively. The alpha level of significance for this study was set at the .05 (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). Through an inductive analysis (McMillan & Wergin, 2006, p. 94), "data are gathered first and synthesized inductively for understanding. Conclusions are grounded from the bottom up." For the purposes of this paper, the significance of the differing responses were analyzed based upon the gender of school board presidents.

Data Analysis

A total of 276 school board presidents provided valid responses to the survey. This constitutes 31.8 % of the 869 school board presidents in Illinois. Illinois is somewhat unique because it has three distinct types of school districts. Of the 869 school districts in Illinois, 378 districts, or 43.5 %, are elementary school districts, educating students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. Another 101 school districts, or 11.6 % of the total, are high school districts, educating students in grades nine through twelve. The remaining 390 school districts, constituting 44.9 % of the total are unit school districts, educating students from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Among the 276 school board presidents completing the survey, 41.3 % represented elementary districts, 15.6 % represented high school districts, and 36.2 % served unit districts. Another 6.9 % concurrently served on elementary and high school boards. Generally, the percent of respondents from elementary districts was fairly similar to the percent of elementary districts statewide. The high school respondents were slightly overrepresented when compared with the percent of high school districts statewide, as the percent of respondents representing unit district was underrepresented when compared with the percent of unit districts, statewide.

Among the 276 responding school board presidents, 188 were male and 88 were female; therefore, 68% were men and 32% were women. The range of experience of school board service was also interesting, with the experience range separated into categories of one to two years' service (.7%), three to five years' service (12.7%), six to ten years' service (38.8 %), eleven to fifteen years' service (24.6%), and over fifteen years' service (23.2%). Since a typical school board term in Illinois is four years, a minimum of 86.6 % of the board members had served more than one term. A notable 47.8 % of the respondents had served eleven or more years as board members.

The respondents were asked to self-report themselves as representing urban, suburban or rural districts. In this category, 3.7 % claimed to serve urban districts, 41.5 % self-reported as suburban representatives and the remaining 54.8 % said they were from rural school districts. Perhaps somewhat related to this was the question about district student enrollment. Those representing districts with fewer than 500 students comprised 20.7 % of the total. Another 27.5 % came from districts of 500 to 1000 students. The largest percent of respondents, 40.6 %, represented districts with 1001 through 4000 students. Only 8 % came from districts with enrollments between 4001 and 10,000 students. Finally, the remaining 3.3 % represented districts with enrollments over 10,000 students.

The quantitative portion of the survey asked board presidents to respond on a five point Likert-type scale to 29 questions pertaining to knowledge and skills related to the superintendency. Respondents were asked to rate superintendent knowledge and skills from the Unimportant to *Essential*. Based upon independent t-tests, differences in the responses of male and female school board members to the survey questions were significant. In all questions, female board presidents rated the necessity for knowledge and skills pertaining to the superintendency more highly than their male counterparts. For example, of the 29 questions, male board presidents rated 14 of the 29 with a mean score of 4.0 or higher, while female board presidents rated 26 of the 29 with a mean score of 4.0 or higher. Independent samples t-tests results revealed that the difference between male and female board presidents' responses was statistically significant in 26 questions. Among these male versus female differences, 9 showed a close to moderate effect size and another five responses had moderate effect size.

There were five superintendent characteristics that were rated with a mean score of 4.32 or higher by men; women rated every item higher than men (see Table1).

Table 1

Independent Samples t-test for Gender on Superintendent Characteristics

	Males (<i>n</i> = 188)		Females (<i>n</i> = 88)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Establishing and communicating high expectations for effective teaching and student learning around the district's instructional goals	4.53	.62	4.67	.52	-1.89	.06	0.01
Inspiring and modeling high expectations for staff, students, and school Board members.	4.49	.58	4.72	.50	-3.31	.00**	0.04
Ensuring that financial, human, and material resources are directed toward achieving the school district's mission, vision and goals.	4.37	.68	4.61	.56	-3.17	.00**	0.04
Developing, monitoring, and sustaining effective teamwork among administrators, teachers, parents, and school board members.	4.32	.68	4.60	.58	-3.55	.00**	0.04
Demonstrating self-confidence and transparency in leading the school district.	4.32	.71	4.53	.57	-2.58	.01**	0.02

Note. 5-point scale (1=unimportant, 2=somewhat important, 3=important, 4=very important, 5=Essential)

p* < 0.05. *p* < 0.01.

None of the five characteristics in table1 are surprising in today's environment. The most highly rated item, *Establishing and communicating high expectations for effective teaching and student learning around the district's instructional goals* (4.53 males /4.67 females) deals with communicating high expectations for teaching and student learning. In an era of districts striving to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the fact this item tops the list is probably to be expected. Not only is there a negative public relations component to the failure to make AYP, but there may also be federal sanctions if the district or schools within the district receive Title I funding.

The second item, *Inspiring and modeling high expectations for staff, students, and school Board members* (4.49 males /4.72 females), while certainly related to the top item, is a bit broader in scope. The superintendent is expected to inspire and model high expectations for staff, students and school board members in all areas, not just academics. Essentially, the superintendent is expected to act as a district cheerleader and the district visionary in this response item. It may also be assumed that while the first item was primarily focused internally, with a few external implications, this second item spills out more quickly into the public domain. This is the type of superintendent behavior, which not only inspires those within the district, but also tells the public that this is a district on the move.

Least surprising (4.37 males /4.61 females) is the third item *Ensuring that financial, human, and material resources are directed toward achieving the school district's mission, vision and goals*, which deals with ensuring that financial, human, and material resources are being directed appropriately. Especially in Illinois, where the

state's financial situation is questionable, board presidents' concern in this area makes sense. Perhaps the only surprise is that it did not receive the highest mean rating. On the other hand, the fact that it was not is also somewhat encouraging, showing that board presidents are still concerned with academic achievement and overall high expectations.

The fourth competency area, *Developing, monitoring, and sustaining effective teamwork among administrators, teachers, parents, and school board members* (4.32 males /4.60 females), was related to the superintendent's responsibility for developing, monitoring, and sustaining teamwork among various constituencies. Schools have certainly shifted from a "closed door" scenario to one in which teachers work in team situations. Administrators must work with teachers, parents and school board members in order to effectively run a school district with all of the challenges existing in today's educational environment.

The final item, *Demonstrating self-confidence and transparency in leading the school district*. (4.32 males /4.53 females) among the top five is the need for a superintendent to demonstrate self-confidence and transparency in leading the school district. Both traits are extremely important in today's world. Much can be accomplished by a superintendent with the skills to remain calm and with the ability to reassure staff, parents, and community the district is on an even keel and on the correct path. The transparency issue is somewhat related to the previously mentioned skills in teamwork. Gone are the days when a superintendent could operate in secrecy or in a vacuum. Today, most individuals are more inspired by openness and invitational behavior.

In addition to the five items that male board presidents rated between 4.32 and 4.53, there were an additional six items which female board presidents rated at 4.32 or higher, but which male presidents rated below 4.32 (see Table 2).

Table 2

Independent Samples t-test for Gender on Superintendent Characteristics

	Males (n = 188)		Females (n = 88)		t	p	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD			
Exercising excellent decision-making skills in district and community.	4.19	.69	4.58	.56	- 4.56	.00**	0.07
Demonstrating the ability to bring about needed change and formulating the district's reform agenda that is aligned to the Board's core values, mission and vision.	4.12	.74	4.49	.59	- 4.09	.00**	0.06
Understand and execute the skills necessary to bargain with employee unions, implement terms of collective bargaining agreements, and establish productive relationships with various employee associations.	4.13	.78	4.45	.64	- 3.32	.00**	0.04
Demonstrating the ability to listen intently to fully grasp others' perspectives on challenges and issues in the school district and community.	4.08	.76	4.41	.64	- 3.51	.00**	0.04
Ensuring the use of a continuous improvement	4.13	.73	4.35	.72	-	.02*	0.02

process in school and district improvement planning.	2.27							
Exercising excellent problem-solving skills in district and community.	4.05	.76	4.32	.65	-	.00**	0.03	2.86

Note. 5-point scale (1=unimportant, 2=somewhat important, 3=important, 4=very important, 5=Essential)

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

In this category of items, female board presidents rated items at 4.32 and above while the males did not. T-test results showed statistically significant difference between women and men with moderate effect size in two items. These two were those that the women rated most highly; decision-making skills and the ability to bring about change in formulating a reform agenda. About the question of decision-making skills, female board presidents rated ($M = 4.58$, $SD = .56$) much higher than male board presidents ($M = 4.19$, $SD = .69$) and difference was statistically significant ($p < .01$) and effect size was moderate (0.07). About the question of the ability to bring about change in formulating a reform agenda, female board presidents also rated ($M = 4.49$, $SD = .59$) higher than their counterparts ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .74$) and difference was significant ($p < .01$) and effect size was moderate (0.06). It is interesting to speculate upon this difference between men and women on the need for a strong decision-maker as the district's C.E.O. Regarding the second issue; it could be that some board presidents may be more interested in protecting what the district already has in place rather than making major changes. At the same time, the gender difference on this one is interesting.

Between the remaining four from this category, two items rose to the level of close to moderate effect size regarding differences. These were the items dealing with listening intently to grasp others' perspectives, understanding and executing the skills necessary to bargain with employee unions, implement terms of collective bargaining agreements, and establish productive relationships with various employee unions. About the question of listening intently to grasp others' perspectives, female board presidents rated ($M = 4.41$, $SD = .64$) much higher than male board presidents ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .76$) and difference was significant ($p < .01$) and effect size was close to moderate (0.04). About the question of the skills necessary to bargain with employee unions, female board presidents also rated ($M = 4.45$, $SD = .64$) higher than their counterparts ($M = 4.13$, $SD = .78$) and difference was significant ($p < .01$) and effect size was close to moderate (0.04). In the previously mentioned statewide study of Illinois superintendents' perceptions of needed skills among superintendents (Hunt, Watkins, Kersten, and Tripses, 2011), listening intently to grasp others' perspectives was also rated very highly by respondents. Since Illinois has historically been a strong union state, the skills called for in the last item, pertaining to establishing productive relationships with employee unions, would seem to be particularly important, unless the district regularly employs an outside negotiator for collective bargaining purposes.

Limitations

A limitation to be considered when interpreting results of this study is that since it is state-specific, generalizations beyond Illinois are limited. Although all Illinois school

board presidents were surveyed, only 31.8 % of the 869 school board presidents responded to the survey, so perceptions of a larger percentage subjects is not represented here. As previously stated in the study, Illinois is organized into elementary, high school and unit (pre-K through 12) districts. The high school districts were slightly overrepresented among the respondents and the unit districts were slightly underrepresented. Other states having different school district structures may reveal other board member perceptions.

Unlike the previous study conducted by the researchers, in which the superintendent respondents were asked to comment on the quality and needed improvements in superintendent preparation programs (in which they had personally participated), the researchers found it necessary to interpolate the data from this study in order to transfer the findings to information useful for superintendent preparation programs.

Discussion/Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to gather perceptions of school board presidents from three performance levels: competencies for a superintendent; necessary skills for superintendents in changing environments; and critical personal and social competencies of superintendents. The research sought the opinions of school board presidents in order to inform both school boards and graduate school superintendent preparation programs.

The results were clear that school board presidents value superintendent expertise in all items included in the survey. As in all complex undertakings and especially those that involve developing and sustaining board/superintendent relationships, the devil is in the details. The research reports that superintendents and boards must pay close attention to shared vision based upon high student achievement; monitoring not only progress of efforts to raise student achievement but also the processes used by superintendents and boards to increase student learning; tend to the professional development needs of educators throughout the district as well as their own; and allocate resources strategically. Superintendent expertise that includes highly developed team leadership and interpersonal skills seems critical.

The significant difference revealed in this study was gender. Female board presidents as a group rated the competencies as more important than male board presidents. One way to view this finding might be to teach future superintendents to consider differences of perception based upon gender. We regard this as a limited approach and instead recommend that superintendent preparation programs instead focus on the need to continuously understand and employ practices that value different opinions and bring groups to develop courses of action to accomplish common goals. "Leadership retains the responsibility for synthesizing the needs of many stakeholders and then focusing the entire organization on the best means to achieve its goal" (Reeves, 2011, p. 64). Leadership in this sense involves both the superintendent and other school leaders and the school board working in conjunction based upon the common good.

Further study is needed regarding the gender differences between male and female school board presidents. The differences on our survey between males and females rose to the level of significance in all cases, and 13 of the 29 responses showed either a close to moderate or moderate to large effect size. In all cases, the female board

superintendents, as a group, rated all 29 superintendent competencies more highly than did their male counterparts. Rockwood (2010) suggests in her research that men are more directive in their leadership style, and women, by implication, are more nuanced. Richard (2006) suggests that women have higher expectations of superintendents regarding the importance of their consideration of people.

Effective teamwork, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills in group processes are implied in both ELCC and ISLLC standards, but not explicit. Our recommendation is that superintendent preparation programs carefully consider how these competencies can be taught and developed in their programs. Some students enter preparation programs with these skills, many do not. Implementation of non-negotiable goals (Marzano and Waters, 2009) may cause superintendent board teams to engage in counter-productive behaviors identified by the Center for Public Schools (2011). Alternatively, superintendent board teams who develop visions based upon high expectations for student achievement, work to align and sustain efforts to achieve goals, present as a united team, maintain accountability measures, allocate resources based upon goals, understand school improvement, base decisions upon data rather than unsubstantiated stories from constituents and work hard on their own professional development should experience progress in their districts. The work involved is very difficult and superintendents without understandings and necessary skills to constantly work with boards will encounter difficulties. That's a tall order for both superintendents and boards. Preparation programs have to provide future superintendents with the necessary skills to lead diverse groups as boards tend to be.

The findings of this research reveal that for participating Illinois board presidents in this study, female board presidents hold *establishing and modeling high expectations and devoting financial, human, and material resources along with focused development, monitoring and sustaining effective teamwork necessary to achieve those expectations*, more highly than male presidents. The last significant difference related to gender responses in this study relates to the *superintendent's level of self-confidence and transparency*. Others have noted gender differences between male and female board presidents and or superintendents (Van Tuyle, V. 2015; Rockwood, P.R., 2010; Palladino J, Haar J, Grady, M., Perry, K 2007; Richard J.V., 2006). While we recognize the importance of these findings, we also contend that the broader implication for superintendency preparation programs is to prepare future superintendents to not only be aware of gender differences within the context of other kinds of differences but to focus to a greater extent upon the necessary skills to identify differences in perception as part of the context related to developing high performing superintendent board teams.

Effective boards from the Center for Public Education's study held the superintendent and his or her colleagues accountable for progress. But they did not engage in the daily administration of schools. Explained one board member: "I am not a professional educator....(The superintendent and her staff) are the professionals, and we say to them, 'These are the results we want to see; you are in charge of how to do it.'" While this statement may seem like an unrealistic dream to practicing superintendents working on a regular basis with the school board they have, we believe that this board members attitude should serve as a goal. Superintendent/board teams that recognize their interdependent roles and the need to continuously monitor their progress as a team will

move into the effective school board (Center for Public Schools, 2011) and competent superintendent (Marzano & Waters, 2009) categories.

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Ethical Leadership and Moral Literacy: Incorporating Ethical Dilemmas in a Case-Based Pedagogy

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



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In this paper the authors examine an ethical dilemma approach to case-based pedagogy for leadership preparation, which was used in a doctoral studies program. Specifically, the authors argue that preparing educational leaders for the ethical dilemmas and moral decision-making that define schools requires assessing current programs and pedagogical practices, identifying curricular and pedagogical conflicts that fail to address adequately preparing ethical leaders. To address the research questions, the researchers used a two-tier design. The first tier provides a review of the extant body of case-based pedagogy and ethical leadership literature. The selected works were analyzed, which resulted in a set of case-based pedagogical perspectives. Tier two incorporated a case study approach to examine the use of an ethical dilemma approach to case-based pedagogy.

Introduction

The preparation of education leaders – school and district level – concerned with ethical dilemmas and moral decisions must tightly connect knowledge, interpretive frameworks, and experiences that promote a complex understanding of ethical and moral dimensions of leadership. Increasingly, the literature on educational leadership has placed a greater focus on the moral aspects of schooling perhaps now, more than ever before (Furman, 2003, 2004).

From a focus on *how* moral leadership might be practiced (Sergiovanni, 1996a, 1996b; Starratt, 1995, 2004), to the *why*—or moral purposes of leadership (Murphy, 1999), the ethical imperative is clear: school leaders have a moral responsibility to all members of their organization to be informed, ethical, and capable moral agents who lead democratic schools (Shapiro, & Stefkovich, 2005). The demands of the role of educational leader have changed so that traditional methods of preparation are no longer adequate to meet today's challenges. The literature points to an expanded interest in ethical leadership practices (Jackson & Kelley, 2002), and a concern with social contexts has provoked greater attention to issues of diversity, race, gender and equity (Rebore, 2001).

Kimbrough's *Ethics: A Course of Study for Educational Leaders* (1985) was perhaps one of the first significant attempts to introduce ethics into the preparation of school administrators.

More recently, several key research studies and scholars cogently support the need for including ethics in the study of educational leadership preparation. In *School Leadership Study: Developing Successful Principals* (2005), Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson point to the need for educational leadership preparation programs to connect candidates with real-world dilemmas through the process of ethical decision-making. Young, Crow, Orr, Ogawa, & Creighton (2005) further this argument, noting the need for leadership curricula to be integrated, comprising topics that reflect extended periods of deliberation around social justice, interpersonal relations, and moral and ethical leadership. As Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) posit, ethics is a necessary inclusion in the preparation of prospective educational leaders.

A central, and perhaps defining element of ethical leadership centers on the nature of ethical dilemmas that leaders are confronted with on a daily basis, ethical dilemmas that draw into specific relief the increasingly complex context in which leaders work (Cooper, 1998; Cranston, 2002) and the view that educational leadership represent a values-based process (Walker, 2003). Hodgkinson (1991) further explains, "values, morals and ethics are the very stuff of leadership and administrative life" (p. 11). Communities expect those holding leadership positions to demonstrate moral and professional accountability (Greenfield, 2004).

Toward the goal of preparing ethical leaders, the use of case-based pedagogy has been defined as an active-learning pedagogy designed for problem analysis and problem-solving, stressing a variety of viewpoints and potential outcomes (Cranston-Gingrass, Raines, Paul, Epanchin, & Roselli, 1996). Case-based pedagogy as a vehicle to advance epistemological understanding of teaching and learning is extensively cited in extant literature (Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007; Shulman &

Colbert, 1988; Shulman, 1986; Whitehouse & McPherson, 2002), especially in reference to its potential to serve as a catalyst for deconstructing meaning (Shulman et al., 2002).

Preparing education leaders to accept the moral responsibility of leading schools ethically requires learning experiences that develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to enter the educational setting and engage in addressing ethical dilemmas and making moral decisions for the common good of all. The purpose of the study was to examine, through a lens of moral literacy, an ethical dilemma approach to case-based pedagogy for leadership preparation. To this end, five central questions guided this study:

RQ1 What are the dominant case-based pedagogical approaches in the literature and research on preparing ethical leaders for schools?

RQ2 What is the role of moral literacy in educational leadership?

RQ3 What are the difficulties that students of leadership face with respect to understanding ethical dilemmas and moral decision-making?

RQ4 What do students of leadership identify as major ethical dilemmas in their practice and how do students recreate these dilemmas as cases for analysis?

RQ5 What does a case-based approach concerned with preparing ethical leaders look like that serves as a guide for developing moral literacy through ethical dilemma pedagogy in a course, set of courses, or an entire program?

In the following sections the authors present a theoretical framework for the study, followed by an examination of the research methods. A discussion of an activity used in the study is presented, followed by a case study that frames the experiences and findings related to the examining the use of case-based pedagogy to foster moral literacy and ethical leadership.

Conceptual Framework

American society has come to expect that educational leaders will make ethical decisions for the common good (Starratt, 2004) and that their actions will be guided by a moral commitment to students. A survey of the literature finds that the argument for education leadership as a fundamentally moral endeavor has been developed by many scholars in recent years (Begley, 1999, 2005; Branson, 2007; Enomoto, 1997; Ehrich, 2000; Furman, 2003; Greenfield, 1991; Greenfield, 2004; Hodgkinson, 1978, 1991, 1996; Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1996a, 1996b; Tuana, 2007).

Goldring and Greenfield (2002), in their work on the “roles, expectations, and dilemmas of leadership,” state that the “moral dimensions of educational leadership and administration” constitute one of the special conditions that make administering schools “different from such work in other contexts” (pp. 2-3). As professors in leadership programs, how we prepare educational leaders, and those aspiring to such positions, to deal with ethical dilemmas has become increasingly problematic given the value-laden nature of such dilemmas (Starratt, 2003; Willower, 1999).

As the challenges facing education leaders have become more acute, attention to the area of ethics and ethical dilemmas is required (Duignan & Collins, 2003). What is known, when considering the responsibility of preparing education leaders to meet the challenge of ethical dilemmas and make moral decisions, is that theoretical approaches cannot be applied entirely to solving problems or dilemmas due to the abstract nature of theory and the complexity of practice. Yet, there is an advantage that knowledge of theory holds in that it helps students of leadership organize their beliefs and perspectives, in a more coherent and meaningful way. What is also known is that using a case-based approach to leadership preparation, which focuses on ethical dilemmas, has pedagogical value (Davis, et al., 2005; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Merseth, 1996; Miller & Kantrov, 1998; Orr, 2006; Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007; Sherman, 2008; Shulman, 1992). Connecting the theoretical and the pedagogical together can bridge the learning experience and enable the student of leadership to understand the nature of ethical dilemmas and moral decision-making. Concomitantly, there is a need for leadership preparation programs to reorient their focus on the nature of moral literacy and the ethical dilemmas faced by leaders; a need to understand the complexity of preparing leaders to make moral decisions.

The nature of case-based pedagogy, ethical dilemma, moral literacy, and ethical frames are examined, providing a theoretical examination that addresses research questions RQ1 and RQ2. The analysis reflected in the following paragraphs attempts to fulfill the requirement of tier one of the research design.

Case-based Pedagogy

Educational leadership authorities have called upon Pre-K-12 leadership preparation programs to improve their curricular coherence and application of theory to practice (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Levine, 2005; SREB, 2006; UCEA, 1987). Case methods of instruction have been advocated as a signature pedagogy for the preparation of educational leaders that would effectively provide authentic assessments of future leaders' ability to apply theories in context. Pedagogically, learning to lead that is case-based, situates learners so as to require them to attend to details, to exercise judgement as they identify the nature of complex problems, and to engage in analyzing and arriving at solutions.

An important aim of case-based pedagogy in preparing ethical educational leaders is to challenge students' assumptions about the ethical, moral, political, and pragmatic role and responsibility of educational leaders and to enable them to incorporate new knowledge, skills, and capacities into their working repertoire (Orr, 2006). Cases can provoke students of leadership to self-critically reflect on the multivariate, often complex, demands of real life as an educational leader.

McNergney et al. (1999) make this point: "Submersion in a provocative case enables students [of leadership] to imagine things different from their own perspectives, to consider the implications of various policies or actions, and to learn of their peers' views" (p. 11). Using cases in learning to lead helps students to see real applications of their class work while placing the bulk of the responsibility on

the student to analyze situations presented in a case narrative and to present viable solutions (Grupe & Jay, 2000).

Pedagogically, case method is based on the conception that knowledge is constructed, built on prior knowledge, coupled with experience, transformable, evolving, and consequential and, thereby, provides students with insight into alternative solutions rather than 'correct' answers. Encouraging students to evaluate these alternative solutions from various perspectives (e.g., interpretive, normative, and critical perspectives) will further foster professional reasoning. In addition, cases conveying contextual knowledge to students provide them with opportunities to develop an understanding of the situatedness of evidence, the interrelationship between theoretical and practical knowledge, and the moral nature of teaching (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 1991; Harrington & Garrison, 1992; Shulman, 1986).

A case-based pedagogy draws on case discussion method to create a unique, situated learning experience. In a case-based learning experience, a common understanding can be constructed with participants about the issues and ideas in a particular case: it establishes an equivalent distance from the events for all participants (Miller & Kantrov, 1998).

There are three core steps involved in case methods, including: analysis of ill-defined dilemmas; action planning or decision making that applies knowledge to a unique situation or context; and evaluation of the decision-making actions and reflection on how theoretical frameworks apply within the specific context. Effective case methods draw upon multiple perspectives through interaction and group discussion (Merseeth, 1990; Merseeth & Lacey, 1993; Spiro, et al., 1987; Tally, et al., 2002). It is noted that evaluation and reflection based on analysis and feedback are important aspects of case-based pedagogy (Bransford, Goin, Hasselbring, et al., 1986; McAninch, 1993; Merseeth & Lacey 1993).

Case-based pedagogy or method proponents argue that a case's problematic situation requires analytical skills, and fosters deep understanding of specific concepts by bridging theory and practice (Diamantes & Ovington, 2003; Griffith & Taraban, 2002; McAninch, 1993; Merseeth, 1994; Zuelke & Willerman, 1995). Advocates report that when properly used, cases can help educational leaders experience, and therein formulate social practice of, how to think professionally about school-based problems, solutions, and alternatives (Lacey & Merseeth, 1993; Merseeth & Lacey, 1993; Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007; Snowden & Gordon, 2002).

Ethical Dilemmas

Beck and Murphy (1994) reported in their research on the use of case dilemmas as course content and of case analysis as a central teaching strategy, practices we as authors of this article discovered in a large number of courses. The authors noted a set of factors influencing the importance of ethical dilemmas, including a growing concern for developing moral reasoning skills; a belief that moral reasoning skills should be practiced in simulated situations; an acceptance that many problems facing leaders are complex and therefore do not lend themselves to neat, easily discovered solutions; and an interest in preparing prospective leaders for the

responsibility of discussing moral issues and presenting thoughtful rationales for positions and decisions (Beck & Murphy, 1994, p. 72).

Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2003) state, with respect to the nature of an “ethical dilemma,” a dilemma “. . . can be described as a circumstance that requires a choice between competing sets of principals in a given, usually undesirable or perplexing, situation. Conflicts of interest . . . are possibly the most obvious situations that could place school leaders in an ethical dilemma” (p. 137).

Robins and Trabichet (2009) are instructive in their discussion of an ethical dilemma, noting that a dilemma is a situation where one has to choose between two or options, but the choice is complicated due to the complex nature of the situation, those involved, time intervals, and conflicting values and beliefs as well as the demand placed on individuals by internal and external forces. In many cases, the choices “ seem legitimate” (Robins & Trabichet, 2009, p. 52). This approach to making decision has different possibilities. “[E]ither the contradiction is only apparent because a superior or objective solution exists. I this case the problem is epistemic: the dilemma needs to be overcome to find the best outcome” (p. 52). Alternatively, “the contradiction is real and one needs to make a choice, but according to which norms? In either case the problem revolves around finding criteria for decision-making when faced with ethical dilemmas. (p. 52)

Ethical dilemmas, as Enomoto and Kramer (2007) explain, require that “ leaders engage in careful analysis and discernment to arrive at ethical judgments” (p. 16). This evokes the importance of Tuana’s (2007) components of ethical sensitivity and ethical reasoning. Enomoto and Kramer suggest a set of framing questions to guide the analysis and discernment:

What antecedent factors, both personal and professional, need to be considered? What likely consequences might result from the actions taken? What means have been suggested to arrive at what ends? Have we weighed all the factors related to the decision? Have we sufficiently thought through the positives and negatives that might result from our actions? (p. 16)

Educational leaders confronted by the complex and challenging responsibilities of schools in a changing society often have to examine their ethics in relation to particular circumstances, at times faced with deciding between multiple “right” or “wrong” decision paths. Badaracco (2006) suggests the need for educational leaders to develop moral-ethical codes that are sufficiently “complex, varied, and subtle as the situations in which they often find themselves . . . enables leaders to fully understand the complexities of the situations they face” (p. 33). Often the leader does not see the situation “in the same terms as others do, and to communicate more powerfully and effectively. (pp. 33-34)

Enomoto and Kramer (2007) draw forward the importance of discerning “the sources of ethical tension in a dilemma is helpful in that it exposes the reasoning or logic that may be underlying the decision” (p. 16). The authors further explain the complexity of ethical decisions, noting that “the nature of a dilemma is in the complexity of the choices it offers, the deliberation related to values or right and wrong, and the judgments that one must make as a result of such choices” (p. 91). The dilemma might be perceived as “a small problem to resolve for one person,” which “may be a tough decision for someone else” (p. 91). A leader’s relative

experience, “the perspectives of varied participants, and the cultural context all affect working the dilemma. These factors force us to probe for deeper understanding of the unique context of the situation” (p. 91).

When educational leaders find themselves in perplexing situations that necessitate their choosing among competing sets of principles, values, beliefs or ideals, ethical dilemmas emerge. Kidder (1995) maintains that many of the ethical dilemmas facing professionals and leaders “don’t centre upon right versus wrong [but can] involve right versus right” or wrong versus wrong” (p. 16). Preparing educational leaders as ethical and moral agents equipped to address ethical dilemmas is a complex undertaking (Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber, 2005). Moral literacy is a key element of preparation; preparing educational leaders with a grasp of what it means to be ethically sensitive, to be able to reason ethically, and to apply moral imagination is a necessary step in meeting the challenge of ethical dilemmas as educational leaders.

Moral Literacy

Barbara Herman (1998), in her examination of the fundamental nature of moral literacy, explains it “is a culture-dependent, intentional process. To be literate in a domain is to have the capacity to recognize and perform at some specified level of competency” (p. 3). Moral literacy, in consideration of what it means to be a moral leader, relates to the conceptual and practical capacity of school leaders to make and encourage morally grounded decisions, decisions that take into consideration values and beliefs within the cultural setting of the school (Begley & Johansson, 2003). Educational leaders face increasingly complex and conflicting demands, and in turn “leadership decisions are unavoidably complex as they are connected to and interconnected with different contexts simultaneously, contexts that are themselves shifting” (Walker, Haiyan, & Shuangye, 2007, p. 380).

Moral literacy, as Herman (1998) points out, does not come naturally. Like other forms of literacy, the educational leader requires practice and experience in decision-making. Developing moral literacy is analogous to ongoing learning Tuana (2003), in her examination of moral literacy, posited three basic components of moral literacy: becoming knowledgeable, cultivating moral virtues, and developing moral reasoning. With these components in mind, Walker, Haiyan, and Shuangye (2007) note that development of moral literacy in leaders is made problematic when a leader’s “traditional socio-cultural orientations diverge from those of their school community,” in particular “in intercultural schools,” which is “due to the interplay of the divergent cultural values, inequality of opportunity, and often, social disadvantage, carried by their students, teachers, and broader communities” (p. 381).

Intercultural schools vary in terms of demographic make-up and in relation to the social and cultural contexts (Blackmore, 2006). Each of the various groups and sub-groups have their own sets of values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors that define who they are and which are part of their identity as they enter the educational setting. Based on these factors, leaders in intercultural schools often face conflict and confusion juxtaposed with opportunity, due to the interplay of the

diverse and divergent cultural values, inequalities of opportunity; often social disadvantage has defined students, teachers, and the larger social geography of the communities; social disadvantages also manifest through policy and external forces from other educational and governmental agencies (Walker, Haiyan, & Shuangye, 2007). Moral literacy requires that leaders learn in context of the school “a complex set of skills, abilities and habits that can be cultivated and enriched” in the day-to-day functions of the school and “in line with the needs, desires and aspirations of their communities” (Walker, et al, 2007, p. 379).

In considering moral literacy and ethical leadership, Tuana (2006) offers the following definition of moral literacy:

- the ability to recognize moral problems and to assess the complex issues that they raise;
- the ability to evaluate moral problems from many perspectives; and
- the ability to assess disagreements on, and proposed responses to these problems. (p. 2)

As Walker et al. (2007) argue, to make a difference in schools, in particular in schools with rapidly shifting demographics, “leaders to need to know, connect to, and be responsive to their communities, even if values, expectations, and traditions diverge” (p. 382). The ability to recognize moral problems requires the leader becoming knowledgeable. As Tuana (2003) states, becoming knowledgeable is integral to personal and institutional development of moral literacy. Self-knowledge, community/social knowledge, leader knowledge, and curriculum/pedagogical knowledge are critical to becoming knowledgeable (Walker et al., 2007).

Tuana (2003) defines “common moral values” as, “virtues that are shared across cultures [and] include honesty, fairness, respect, responsibility and caring” (p. 2). Cultivating moral virtues means living and modeling certain values, leaders authentically practicing them themselves. Moral problems may arise in the educational setting when moral values are rhetorical in nature and not lived or practiced. Conflict ensues when socio-cultural orientations are not honored or treated with respect, and if equity and fairness are not practiced as common values.

The ability to evaluate moral problems requires the leader be self-aware of his or her ethical positioning with respect to theoretical and philosophical frames. As well, the leader must be able to see the factors contributing to the nature of a moral problem, whether it is a socio-cultural conflict in values on an institutional or personal level. Tensions related to common values, or conflict between values come into play as cultural patterns shift, and the leader is not only responsible for recognizing the emerging moral problem but is equally responsible for evaluating the problem from multiple perspectives, theoretical and philosophical as well as cultural and political. The leader is responsible, in terms of him- or herself and other persons, with respect to discerning when conflicting values, beliefs and cultural patterns contribute to moral problems.

The ability to assess disagreements requires the leader to developing moral reasoning skills. As Tuana (2003, p. 2) explains, “Along with critical-reasoning skills of identifying unwarranted assumptions or prejudices, moral reasoning requires identifying the values at play in any moral situation.” As Walker et al. (2007) further elaborate, “Such reasoning operates at multiple levels and is complex in that it

requires attention to ‘rights and duties, codes of action, the intentions of actors, and the consequences of actions’” (p. 387). The leader who is developing moral literacy will embrace the need “for openly engaging with and listening to others, critiquing personal and organizational positions, debating the ethical implications of situations and decisions and . . . accepting responsibility for beliefs and actions and the congruence therein” (p. 387). Moral reasoning is essential to addressing the many complex ethical dilemmas presented in the day-to-day life of the educational leader.

Tuana (2007), in her essay “Conceptualizing Moral Literacy”, advances her framing of moral literacy, refining what she believes are the three basic components. These include ethical sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and moral imagination. Figure 1 presents a conceptual framing of Tuana’s (2003, 2006, 2007) refined perspective of moral literacy, synthesizing the three components and a set of related literacy abilities to serve as a heuristic for examining moral literacy and ethical leadership. While ethical sensitivity and ethical reasoning align with her earlier components of becoming knowledgeable, cultivating moral virtues, and developing moral reasoning, the emergence of moral imagination reflects a blending “of affective and rational components that contribute to the imagination” (Tuana, 2007, p. 374).

Moral Literacy Component	Literacy Abilities
Ethical Sensitivity – necessary for leaders to adjudicate between ethical controversies and understand the reasons why individuals or groups disagree	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The ability to determine whether or not a situation involves ethical issues; 2. Awareness of the moral intensity of the ethical situation; and 3. The ability to identify the moral virtues or value underlying an ethical situation.
Ethical Reasoning – necessary for leaders to understand the ethical frameworks which guide decisions (consequentialist, non-consequentialist, virtue ethics, and care ethics)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The ability to understanding of the various ethical frameworks; 2. The ability to identify and assess the validity of facts relevant to the ethical situation, as well as assessing any inferences form such facts; and 3. The ability to identify and assess the values that an individual or group holds to be relevant to the ethical issue under consideration.
Moral Imagination – necessary for leaders to appreciate responsibilities as moral agents and to blend reason and emotion through attending to what is taken for granted, what is left out of a situation, how possibilities could be otherwise envisioned.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The ability for empathy, to imagine oneself in the situation of another; 2. The ability to develop an aesthetic attunement to the complexities of the situation; and 3. The ability to see alternative possible solutions to complex ethical dilemmas.

Figure 1. Components and abilities associated with moral literacy and ethical leadership. (Adapted from Herman, 1998; Tuana, 2003, 2006, 2007; Werhane, 1998)

Tuana takes direction from the work of Johnson (1993) who explained moral imagination as the “ability to imaginatively discern various possibilities for acting in a given situation and to envision the potential help and harm that are likely to result from a given situation” (p. 202). Moral imagination, as Werhane (1998) explains, requires: “(a) Awareness of one’s context, (b) Awareness of the script or schema functioning in that context, and (c) Awareness of possible moral conflicts or dilemmas that might arise in that context, that is, dilemmas created at least in part by the dominating script” (p. 85).

The leader’s responsibility, as moral agent, requires an integration of the three components of moral literacy, developing the leader self as an ethically sensitive, reasoning, and morally imaginative person with the abilities to see the complex nature of ethical dilemmas and moral problems. Moral literacy also requires that the ethical leader model and practice these components, in integrated applications, within the culture and on a day-to-day basis.

Ethical Frames

Various scholars including Begley (1999), Cranston et al. (2005), Furman (2004), Nash (1996), Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), Starratt (1994, 2004), Strike, Haller, and Soltis (1988, 2005) and others have focused extensively on ethical frames. The derivation of the scholarly examination of different ethical leadership perspectives has resulted in a fairly constant framing of ethics that includes: ethic of justice, ethic of care, ethic of community, ethic of critique, ethic of profession, and ethic of presence to note the more common occurring ethics of educational leadership. When examining case-based pedagogies and case methods (Cranston, et al., 2003; Strike et al., 2005) for leadership preparation, two specific philosophical perspectives emerge, consequentialism and non-consequentialism.

Consequentialist. Consequentialism is often aligned with utilitarianism, or ends-based thinking. Strike, Haller, and Soltis (2005) explain that a consequentialist, in ethical decision making, holds that the rightness of an action can be determined based on consequences and a commitment to the “principle of benefit maximization” (p. 19). The best decision or choice is the one that results in what is intrinsically valuable or of the most good or the greatest benefit to the most people. Therefore, outcomes or consequences decide the morality of our actions.

However, consequentialism is often criticized because it fails to attend to the needs of the individual and its lack of focus on either short term or long-term results (Duignan, 2006, Haynes, 1998, Jarvis, (1997). The consequentialist approach presumes that the greatest good can be discovered independently of any ideological or conceptual schema. Critics have rejected consequentialism because they believe we cannot always predict the outcomes of our actions, therefore the end is often unknown and uncertain. Therefore, the morality of an act cannot rely on its repercussions.

Freakley & Burgh, (2000, p. 120) explain the consequentialist as an individual that takes the perspective that actions can only be justified with reference to the end or outcomes they achieve. A consequentialist would make a decision only

after carefully weighing the foreseeable consequences and choosing the alternative that produces the better result.

Non-consequentialist. Non-consequentialism, often referred to as a duty-bond ethic, requires the application of human rationality and the same principle or moral law, universally. Kant (1993) argued that a duty-bond ethic is a compulsory rule or 'categorical imperative' that, if applied to one person must be applied to everyone. This imperative states: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law" (Kant, 1993, p. 30).

A non-consequentialist, in ethical decisions making, is concerned with treating others as ends rather than means, following the "principle of equal respect" by considering their welfare rather than our own gain, and considering that all people are free, rational and responsible moral agents, therefore all deserving of equal treatment and opportunity no matter what our interests or ability (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005, p. 17). The non-consequentialist is not oblivious to consequences, however "the crucial point that makes an action a moral action is that the action taken gives first consideration to the value and dignity of persons" (p. 17).

Burke (1997) explains the non-consequentialist as an individual who lives his or her life "by an uncompromising, moral legalism which requires adherence to duty, principle or absolute truth, etc., as more important than consequences . . . in determining what is good, just, right and fair" (p. 15). The non-consequentialism makes ethical judgments based on duty, rights, laws, motive, intuition, or reason (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005).

Research Method

A two-tier research methodology was used in the study. To address RQ1 and RQ2, tier one, the researchers adapted Capper, Theoharris, and Sebsation's (2006) meta-synthesis technique for examining the literature on moral literacy and case-based pedagogical approaches to leadership preparation that incorporate ethical dilemmas and ethical decision-making. In the selected works that were analyzed, common recommendations focused on case study, case method, case discussion method, case-based learning, and case-based pedagogy. No theoretical or pedagogical perspectives or frameworks offered a singular approach to writing narrative cases of ethical dilemmas combined with articulating a theoretical lens for analysis.

To address RQ3, RQ4, RQ5, in the study the researchers followed a case-study approach in tier two of the analysis (Merriam, 1998). Participants included 52 doctoral students across three doctoral cohorts, each cohort participating in an ethics and philosophy of leadership course, specifically in an "Ethical Synthesis Activity" designed around identifying an ethical dilemma, writing a richly detailed case (following a set of guidelines), and then developing a theoretical lens of ethical leadership to use in analyzing the case. Following IRB approval, participants were invited to participate and informed consent was obtained. The time frame for the activity was approximately four weeks during the semester within which each cohort completed the course. Sherman's (2008) work on use of case studies and

visualization were incorporated as a heuristic lens to guide the evolution of the ethical dilemma case.

The ethical dilemma case, the theoretical lens, and the analysis completed by the doctoral student provided three sets of data from each participant. As well, student discussion related to the case and case analysis were analyzed to identify specific issues related to conflict, moral considerations, and decision-making patterns. Subsequent to completion of data collection and organization of the data sets, the researchers analyzed each ethical dilemma case, theoretical lens discussion, and student analysis of case. The first author took primary responsibility for collecting the data sets. The second author worked in concert with the first author to organize and analyze the data sets.

The ethical dilemma case was analyzed for content and evidence of ethical sensitivity (i.e., to the situation identified as an ethical dilemma), ethical reasoning (i.e., in terms of when the participant self-identified the ethical dilemma and the ethical lens used). The ethical lens was analyzed for its theoretical coherence and the case analysis was examined for patterns of alignment to the theoretical lens and for emergent patterns/themes of leadership practices that reflected an understanding of complexity of the dilemma as well as what constituted the dilemma, and what were the alternative decision paths that constituted the dilemma. A coding schema, following Creswell (2007) using open and axial coding (guided by the moral literacy framework in Figure 1), was used to identify themes aligned with the situation or nature of dilemma identified, evidence of ethical sensitivity, ethical lens used for reasoning the nature of the dilemma, and emergent themes within and across participants' analysis and narrative discussion. The participants' narrative analysis of the ethical dilemma case served as the data set for examining the presence of moral imagination, the third dimension of moral literacy.

Ethical Dilemma Case Activity

The ethical dilemma case activity was designed by the first author (Patrick) and evolved over 5 years. The activity was first introduced in a doctoral course titled "AED 602 – Inquiring Into the Foundations of Ethics and Philosophy of School Leaders." The activity has remained as a core learning experience in the course. The course is one of six core courses in the residence requirement of the doctoral sequence, following in the first academic term of two required for residence, which includes three courses each. The course description states:

This course is a survey of major ethical and philosophical influences of importance for educational leadership. The educational leader as scholar-practitioner will serve as a focus for examining the relevant dimensions of leadership. Specific focus will be given to the inner self and understanding the relationship of philosophical foundations, ethical and moral theory, spirituality, and social justice and caring to the development of educational leaders.

The evolution of a case-based pedagogical orientation to the ethics and philosophy course was instructed by the work of McDade (1995), McNergney, Ducharme, and Ducharme (1999), Nash (1996), Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), and Strike, Haller,

and Soltis (1998, 2005). The ethical dilemma approach to a case-based pedagogy was informed by the work of Begley (1999); Begley and Johansson (1998, 2003); Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2003; 2005), Greenfield (1985, 1995); Grogan and Smith (1999); Langlois (2004); Shapiro and Smith-Rosenberg (1989); and Starratt (1991, 1994, 2003, 2004). An emphasis on developing moral literacy in educational leaders was incorporated to foster an understanding of the complex nature of ethical dilemmas and need for ethical sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and moral imagination (Begley, 1996, 2006; Branson, 2007; Greenfield, 1985, 2004; Tuna, 2007; Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007; Walker, Haiyan, & Shuangye, 2007).

The ethics and philosophy course is taken in the spring academic term, and therein the activity was conducted in 2009, 2010, and 2011. In each cohort, the activity is shared with the cohort members and discussed. The activity is designed in three parts (see Appendix A), with Part I focusing on an autobiographical approach to writing a case about an event that each doctoral student self-selects as an authentic event premised on an ethical issue. Part II focuses on each student self-selecting an ethical leadership perspective from the theoretical and philosophical readings for the course as well as drawing from additional literature appropriate to clearly delineating an ethical leadership perspective or lens. The purpose of Part II and the ethical leadership lens is discussed with the students following the completion of a full draft of the ethical case. Part II of the activity focuses the doctoral students on preparing an ethical leadership perspective/lens they will use to critically, self examine the ethical case to determine the factors and conflicts in the case and begin to delineate and determine the nature of the ethical dilemma in the case. Part III of the activity is the use of the ethical leadership perspective/lens to analyze the case, and then reflectively discuss the salient elements of the case as well as analyze the original leadership decision paths presented in the case.

In effect, as Tuana (2007) and Walker, Haiyan, and Shuangye (2007) state, developing ethical sensitivity (one of three elements of moral literacy) requires individuals to situate in an authentic social text of experience, contextualize the event, and engage in a dialogic examination of the event, questioning the underlying factors contributing to the event as well as identifying the individuals involved and the implications of the event, not only in the present but the future as well. In Part I, the students prepare the case narrative, which is recursively examined and refined based on a series of clarifying questions and peer-feedback. The intent here is to have the students write a narrative from memory, realizing that the student has formulated at this point a theoretical understanding of moral literacy and in particular the dimensions of ethical sensitivity and ethical reasoning as the student enters the process. Rather than being concerned with setting a baseline measure to test a student's knowledge, the intent is to have the student engage authentically with the memories of the event and pursue articulating and clarifying the elements of the event. The clarifying questions are intended to guide the students in providing a thick, rich description and discussion of the situation including humanizing the case to give the reader specific details and insight. The questions are also designed to help the students to contextualize the case, giving the reader an understanding of the social, cultural, and political contexts as well as identifying roles and relationships of actors or participants either directly involved or peripherally.

Writing the case is about working with memory to extract elements of the original event in order to reconstruct the event and all its detail. Ethical sensitivity, as determined by the professor of the course reading the case, emerges as the doctoral students engage in structured self-reflection of the event and their role and/or experience in the event. Ethical sensitivity, in this process, is not measured per se using an instrument. Rather the professor draws from Figure 1 (see Figure 1 in an earlier section), using the literacy awareness indicators as the basis of a rubric to assess the level of sensitivity the student has as he or she develops the case. Each student's ethical dilemma case is revised and assessed with each draft of the case, the professor providing prompts to guide further development of the case and evoke new levels of self-awareness; a formative process of writing from memory and delving deeper into the experience.

Part II further heightens ethical sensitivity as the doctoral students engage in developing an ethical leadership perspective/lens. Heighten ethical sensitivity is a phrase denoting the intent of the process step in the activity, not a "truth claim" in terms of what did or did not occur. The determination of increased ethical sensitivity follows a similar process as previously denoted, the professor reads the case and examines the text for indicators of awareness. An important contributing factor in the process is the immersion in philosophical and theoretical literature related to ethical decision making frames. As the students are immersed in the literature, and the student perspective is constructed, each student focuses on philosophical positions such as consequentialist versus non-consequentialist views of ethical decision making in leadership. As the doctoral students examine and prepare the ethical leadership perspective, there is an evolving level of self-awareness and ethical sensitivity; the professor is constantly providing narrative feedback, analyzing students' discussions. Importantly, Part II also fosters an emerging understanding of ethical reasoning (one of the three elements of moral literacy). Ethical reasoning takes direction from the philosophical positions adopted in the leadership perspective/lens. As Part II takes form, clarifying questions and peer-feedback contribute to the evolution of the ethical leadership perspective/lens, however the emerging perspective is not finalized until the respective doctoral students have actually applied the perspective/lens in the analysis process that occurs in Part III. The importance of the perspective remaining open to refinement is that in the application of the perspective/lens, the doctoral students become increasingly self-aware of their understanding of both the ethical perspective/lens and the complexity of the ethical dilemma case. The process is highly interactive and formative, the ethical perspective/lens further evolving as it is applied in analysis.

Part III requires the doctoral students to analyze the ethical case, using the ethical leadership perspective/lens, and to deconstruct the case to identify the nature of the dilemma in the case. It is this process of analysis that evolves and further heightens ethical sensitivity and ethical reasoning, resulting in a careful analysis of the complex and problematic nature of the ethical dilemma. As well, Part III presents the doctoral students with the question of what the moral consequences are in terms of how the original event was resolved, and to examine alternative possible solutions. Moral imagination is fostered, as the doctoral students conscious

awareness of the moral interplay between decisions made in the “present” and the implication of those decisions for individuals in the “future”.

Case Study—Exemplar of Ethical Dilemma Case

In this section, an exemplar of an ethical dilemma cases is presented. The complex nature of the ethical dilemma becomes apparent as the doctoral student presents her case. It is noted that all doctoral students granted permission per informed consent to present the data collected from the ethical dilemma cases. The exemplar of an ethical dilemma case presented in the following section, authored by Toni (pseudonym), concerns both her and her husband Don (pseudonym). The intersection of personal and professional life events introduces a complexity into the nature of the dilemma that defines and directs actions and decisions. For Toni, the authoring of the case was very emotional, and as she later self-acknowledges, it was also cathartic in nature. She had carried the trauma of the life event with her for some time. The engaged self-reflective, self-reflexive nature of authoring the case draws into specific relief the role relationships and rule-based logic are often turned upside down by a single unexpected event. Whether one adheres to a consequentialist or non-consequentialist logic, emotion is or can be a governing factor in decisions.

Exemplar of ethical dilemma case.

During the summer of 2007, my husband, Don, and I applied for and received jobs as assistant principals within the same rural school district in Oklahoma. The district, Hillside I.S.D., had a little more than 2700 students and contained five campuses. Hillside I.S.D. was the hub of the quaint community named Grapeland. Don and I were drawn to the community because of its small size and sense of small town values. Thus, we bought a home, moved to Grapeland, and began a new chapter in our lives.

Don became the assistant principal at the intermediate campus, which housed 2nd through 4th grades and contained 600 students. I was the assistant principal at the high school, which encompassed roughly 850 students. This was an exciting time for us as we had both received significant pay increases, and this was the first time that our entire family, including our children Shanna and Kent, were in the same school district.

Don and I were amazed at the fact that we were to be able to start our administrative careers in the same district at the same time. We felt blessed, but there was no time for relaxing. Don and I no longer had summers off as we did as former classroom teachers. We began working as soon as we learned the school board hired us in June, and we hit the ground running. Don and I worked hard, and we were exhausted at the end of each day. However, we found the job of an assistant principal to be exciting and never the same two days in a row. Consequently, Don and I would often discuss our daily experiences by comparing notes at the end of each work day.

Even though Don and I were both assistant principals, the two different campus levels, intermediate and high school, made the respective positions unique. I felt I had a pretty fair grasp of discipline at the high school

campus. In fact, discipline, student attendance, and campus safety were the only duties for which I was responsible. This was an easy task and transition position for me, coming straight out of the classroom. However, Don was not as successful in initially acquiring the skills and intuitiveness that eventually comes with being an effective assistant principal. Thus, Don would ask me questions about how to solve problems on his campus such as: (a) figuring out the electronic time sheet requirements, (b) organizing parties for the students, and (c) working for a principal who was highly demanding. I was unable to assist Don with these matters because I did not have the same requirements of my position, and my principal was a collaborative leader, not authoritative. I made suggestions, but all I could really do was to tell Don to ask various people questions who could provide answers.

Toni is self-reflectively engaging in revisiting her memories of the life event that is the basis of the ethical dilemma. What is important to understand here is that as Toni recounts the event, she is also consciously engaging in a level of self-discovery of ethical sensitivity (Tuana, 2007) to the event; she is disclosing what made the event an ethical dilemma (see Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2003). As Toni recounts the events that set a backdrop for the ethical dilemma, she reveals elements of her professional and personal relations that are instrumental in understanding the nature of a duty-based approach to decision making (Strike et al., 2005). Keeping in mind the elements of moral literacy, when one encounters an ethical dilemma, being sensitive to the nature of the dilemma is important, as is ethical reasoning (Werhane, 1998, Tuana, 2007).

At the end of September 2007, after several weeks of being assistant principals, Don stopped talking about his job. He would simply say that it was great working at the intermediate school, but he failed to articulate details. I asked repeatedly if everything was alright with him, and he always responded with a compliment such as, "Do you know how proud I am of you?" Ignoring my questions by diverting the conversation always seemed to be Don's preferred method of communication. Obviously, I was intuitively receiving a negative vibe that something was different, but I could not put my finger on it.

On October 4, 2007, I attended a workshop pertaining to an update on school discipline at the regional service center. Another assistant principal attended this workshop with me, and as conversation would have it, he asked about Don. I told him everything was great. However, I had a knot in my stomach. I just felt as though things with Don were not right. Therefore, during a workshop break, I called the intermediate school to check on Don. Mysteriously, I was told that Don was not in his office. I asked when he was expected to return. The secretary said, "I don't know. He left at 10:00 and hasn't been back. No one knows where he went."

At that point, I left the workshop. I did not care that the workshop was not over. I could have cared less. Something was wrong with Don. I drove back to the district, and I pulled into the intermediate campus parking lot with the intention of picking up Shanna. Since Don was not at school and no one knew where he was, I could not rely on him to get Shanna and take her

home with him, as was the normal routine. However, before I could get to the awning of the school, the principal happened to see me, and she pulled me aside to ask me some questions: "Where is Don?" "What is wrong with Don?" "He just left campus. Doesn't he know that he can't do that? This is just not good."

I did not know what to tell her. I knew nothing pertaining to my husband and his dereliction of duties. I left the school with the principal telling me to give Don the message that he needed to call her.

At this point in the reconstructing of the life event, Toni is entering a deeply emotional phase of the ethical dilemma (Robins & Trabichet, 2009), retrospectively, self-consciousness gives direction to her ethical reasoning as she unpacks the event and relives the trauma. Here we also see that Toni had drifted, ethically, from her duty-based obligations to the school district (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005), moving more so toward her personal duty-based obligations as a spouse. Ethical dilemmas are often complex as earlier noted, and Toni experienced the complexity as it played out in judgment and decision making. Ethical reasoning is critical to making ethical decisions, both professionally and personally (Tuana, 2006; Walker et al., 2007).

After picking up both Shanna and Kent from school, I drove home hoping to find Don. I failed in this endeavor, but I could tell that Don had been there because the lights were turned on throughout the house. My negative intuition was intensifying, and I was becoming anxious. I drove over to a friend's house and told her about Don. She did not appear bothered by the situation and seemed to think that I was prematurely worrying. She suggested that I look for Don at another friend's house.

I jumped back into my mini-van with children in tow. Don was fond of a particular friend who he liked to visit. Jake (pseudonym), the friend, did not live more than quarter of a mile away, close to our own house. Therefore, I turned toward Jake's house. For some reason I made note of the time. It was 5:30 in the evening, on a Thursday.

As I drove toward Jake's house, I saw the ambulance in the front yard, and then I saw two paramedics take Don on a gurney from the house to the back of the ambulance. I could tell that Don's body was still, unresponsive. I had my children with me, and I did not know what to do with them. I wanted to stop, but I did not want the kids to see Don in this condition. I drove past Jake's house simply because I did not know what else to do. I drove down the road a little further, and then I finally parked the mini-van in the middle of the road and instructed my 13-year-old son to drive the van home and to stay at the house with Shanna. Our house was less than five minutes away.

I ran back to Jake's house, and I could not ask questions fast enough. Time stood still. A police officer was also at Jake's house. She began asking me questions. I said, "Wait. Is he dead? Is he dying? What happened?" Jake and the police officer told me that Don had taken a large quantity of pills. Don had attempted suicide, and I was not allowed to see him in the ambulance. I was only told that Don was in bad shape.

The police officer showed me the prescription bottle. It was Phenobarbital. Don had taken the medicine that was intended for our Great

Dane, but our dog died the previous week. I simply had not thought to throw away the dog's medicine. I knew there were originally several pills in the bottle, over 100. Don had taken the majority of the pills.

In this case, Toni has written a life event, reflexively reentering a deeply emotional experience that crossed personal and professional boundaries, raising ethical issues on a number of levels, which Walker et al. (2007) acknowledge requires attention to "rights and duties" (p. 387). While the intuitive nature of ethical leadership is focused on duty-based action (non-consequentialist as noted by Strike et al., 2005), often times the stress and emotive tensions of life intersect with rational judgment. Toni later reflects and shares the following:

Dilemmas of any sort normally weigh heavily on the mind. Dilemmas often cause pensiveness and mental anguish with one's moral compass. Without such struggle, dilemmas would simply constitute decisions without contemplation of affect or effect. This leads me to ask, what elements determine whether something becomes a situation, problem, or dilemma? In other words, what compels a person to approach a dynamic, or a set of dynamics and label it either as a small issue or situation (involving little or no cogitation), a problem, or a dilemma? My answer lies in the belief that a person's perception determines how one approaches the presented dynamic(s). Furthermore, I contend that one's personal perception is developed from society (people, relationships, customs, etc.), environment (time, space, location, conditions, etc.) and culture (morals, beliefs, values, etc.). Consequently, a person's perception of a dilemma and the manner in which one applies a solution is based on his or her lived experiences. Thus, for the scholar-practitioner leader, creating a framework based on a personal understanding of one's self is critical.

For Toni, engaging in structured reflection situated her in the event, drawing her into reliving the experience and at the same time engage in deep ethical reasoning about the event (see Tuana, 2003). Her sensitivity to the complexity of the ethical dilemma heightened her awareness of the many dimensions of the event. Here we also see elements of ethical reasoning presented, importantly albeit retrospectively. She goes on to note another element that influenced her reasoning through the event. It is noted that intermingled in her logical reasoning were levels of self-awareness that enable her to further deconstruct the event. She shares:

Another crucial element influencing one's approach to a dilemma is time. For instance, if a high level dilemma is given a deadline for a solution at the end of six months, then a great deal of deliberation can occur. Usually, within a six month time period, a person can research other potential options in which to solve the dilemma, dialogue with others to receive opinions and gain information, and consider the pros and cons involved. However, having an extended period of time in which to solve a dilemma is not always favorable. For example, a person can suffer emotional distress when having to apply the best of a bad solution to a dilemma at the end of a deadline. On the other hand, when given a short amount of time, minutes or hours, in which to formulate a solution, a person may not apply the best possible option. Hence, time is crucial in making decisions, and rarely does a scholar-

practitioner leader have time to pull a textbook from off a shelf to use as a reference in formulating a solution to an ethical dilemma.

Toni's ethical dilemma case is unique and perhaps not the ordinary day-to-day routine dilemma one expects to encounter as an educational leaders. However, the nature of an ethical dilemma is anything but ordinary and often enters one's personal and professional life unexpected and certainly undefined in the moment. Toni's situation required her to make choices between multiple options. Confronted with concern for her husband and at the same time her administrative responsibilities to the school district, she had to make a decision.

In making the decisions illustrated in Toni's case, each step forward added a level complexity the situation and making the dilemma epistemic (Robins & Trabichet, 2000). Here Toni is confronted with a contradiction of concern for her husband and her administrative duties, both of which are legitimate albeit one personal and one professional. The need for careful analysis and discernment (Enomoto & Kramer, 2007) is set aside in the moment as Toni's confusion over her husband's absence evokes concern. Her ability to be ethically sensitive to her the situation and ascertain what the exact nature of the situation is distracts her from the dynamics that contribute to ethical decision making overpowered by the dynamics that shape the dilemma. As well, the ability to ethically reason through dynamics and make well-reasoned decisions is compromised. Toni's decisions, her actions, the choices she makes are governed by a force that distracts her from professional duties and responsibilities. The nature of an ethical dilemma, as Robins and Trabichet (2000), explain, is that a situation revolves around making decisions often conflicted as to which norms to follow. Choices are not always clearly delineated or easy, nor are choices aligned as two rights versus a right and wrong. Sometimes choices are degrees of right or wrong dependent on the consequences for self and others. The importance of the moral literacy framework lies in the cultivating of a level of ethical sensitivity and ethical reasoning that can lead to moral imagination that profits alternative possible decisions and actions.

Findings

Addressing the first research question (RQ1) the analysis of extant literature related to case-based pedagogy resulted in a delineation of the following types of case-based pedagogies: profession aligned cases (UCEA, ISLLC case studies, etc.); research-based cases (case study, ethnographic, phenomenological, etc.); professor-authored cases (personal/professional experience); and edited or authored case books. What was notably absent was substantive research that focused on autobiographical approaches to ethical dilemma cases, i.e., where the student was responsible for authoring his or her own ethical dilemma case.

The authors found, in response to the second research question (RQ2) that participants emphasized the need not only for ethical organizational cultures but also the importance of having clear personal ethical values and professional ethics. Participants emphasized the need not only for ethical organizational cultures but also the importance of having clear personal ethical values and professional ethics. Such an understanding implied that leadership has a moral basis. Moral literacy

surfaced as an essential element of preparing leaders. In a sense, data reported in this study draws to the foreground the notion of a “web of tension” surrounding the working lives of educational leaders (Sergiovanni & Carver, 1980, p. 19). Further, data resonates with research by Duignan and Collins (2003), which indicated that the tensions or dilemmas facing principals “are usually people centered and involve contestation of values” (p. 282). Table 1 reports that 80.8% of the cases were person-centered and 19.2 % were non-person centered ethical dilemmas. It is noted that in analyzing the 52 cases and determining whether a case was person centered versus non-person centered, the authors found that in all cases there is a level of involvement of individuals; no case is totally non-person centered. In order to analyze the cases, the authors used a rubric that evaluated whether persons involved were directly integral to the event discussed in case or were peripheral to the event. In 19.2% of the cases, the event was more non-person centered and related more directly to fiscal resources, curriculum issues concerning racial bias in content or not sensitive to minority students, programmatic issues related to inequities in scheduling (which indirectly impacted teachers based on principal decisions), and accountability issues related to standards that impacted minority students.

Table 1
Person Centered versus Non-Person Centered Ethical Dilemmas

N=52	Person Centered		Non-Person Centered	
	n=	%=	n=	%=
Social arrangements	6	11.54	0	0
Conflicts emerging when personal and professional boundaries are crossed	4	7.7	0	0
Internal versus external relationships	5	9.6	0	0
Students, staff, finance and resources	0	0	1	1.9
Equity/inequity in decisions, actions, practice, etc.	5	9.6	0	0
Accountability, both within the system and to others, and competing accountabilities between social groups	3	5.8	6	11.5
Sexual orientation	3	5.8	0	0
Social performance	7	13.5	0	0
Politics – community, professional, cultural, etc.	5	9.6	0	0
Teacher and student relationships	4	7.7	0	0
Curriculum and programmatic issues	0	0	3	5.8
	42	80.8	10	19.2

In answering the third research question (RQ3), based on the first author’s observation during each class and across the courses/semesters, student feedback during the activity and in end-of-course student evaluations highlighted the experience as a personal journey that changed their lives. In reading the 52 cases during the activity as well as during analysis of collected data, it was noted that students found the experience of writing a case drawn from personal experience memory of an ethical dilemma enabled them to resolve remaining personal conflicts. Exemplars of doctoral student’s personal reflections conflicts are

presented to offer the reader an understanding of the nature of struggles students have experienced.

One doctoral student, Christine, in reflecting on the ethical case dilemma activity shared:

I did not feel the administrators' decision was ethical but was not able to prevent them from following through. I did fail to have the courage of conviction to completely stand against it and for that I will forever be angry at myself. My hope is to be the influencer of change in the future of our organization. The issues that presented themselves in this situation and pervade our organization will not be solved quickly. I hope to model this leadership perspective in my daily actions.

Here Christine is noting an internal conflict she struggled with as a result of decision made by administration. Her case was concerned with a teacher's performance, over which Christine was responsible and had evaluated as inappropriate and yet her immediate supervisor overruled Christine's decision.

Personal struggles and internal conflicts remained a part of the doctoral students' memory. Lauren, shared her inner struggle still present after seven years:

I struggle with the concept of balanced processing. I did attempt to consider all sides of this issue, and the more I considered the consequences of the actions taken, as well as the ones not taken, the less comfortable I felt with any of them. It is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to objectively analyze a situation when the ramifications of decisions for colleagues, as well as self, are so significant. Seven years later, I still wrestle with this event, and wonder what would have happened if another course of action had been taken, and how it would have impacted the lives of these three young adults.

Lauren notes she still wrestles with the event that she detailed in her ethical dilemma case. The issues of objectivity and balanced processing related to internal relationships in her school setting at the time of the event. The concern Lauren is one of alternative decision paths and the consequences that occurred versus what might have been a more balanced or equitable consequence for parties involved.

Karina, an experienced principal faced with making decisions that required a deep understanding of the levels of consequences, dealt with a student death following a sequence of events. As Karina noted, she strove daily to make good decisions for the individual and the group but sometimes the two parts of the whole were in conflict. She shared that in her experience the conflict between doing the right thing for the children cannot always be defined by the individual student, unfortunately, and this fact combats the very essence of her belief system. In her ethical dilemma case she was confronted with making decisions to save a high school student, Sam, who was dealing with psychological issues and at the same time drifting into a drug culture. Karina's decisions as expressed in the case reflected conflicts in her responsibility to other students and school policy, and her decisions related to a single student, Sam. Ultimately Karina made the decision to expel Sam from school, following school policy. In the end, Sam was murdered by a meth dealer. Karina reflected back on the event and her decisions:

As I reflect on the events some years later, I believe I had no choice but to expel Sam. I had an obligation to keep the environment safe and I did feel

that Sam was a threat to the teachers and students. But I also feel that Sam was failed. Society failed Sam because community members did not take steps to intervene on his behalf. The school failed Sam because they quietly accepted his plight and did not act with courage to defeat binds that held him in a perpetual downward spiral created from a lack of hope. I failed him as his principal because I failed to take action before it was too late to stop it.

The inner conflict represented in Karina's sharing about the ethical dilemma she faced was recorded as post-activity reflections. Because principals are faced with situations like the one Karina wrote about in her case, understanding ethical leadership provides a lens to evaluate the decision-making processes. Ethical sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and moral imagination are interrelated dimensions of moral literacy that, when embraced in practice, enable the principal as leader to make decisions (Tuana, 2007; Walker, et al., 2007).

Each of the 52 doctoral student shared post-activity reflections that characterized the inner conflicts they had felt months and years prior. Writing about the event, framing the theoretical lens, and analyzing the case enabled the participants to step back from the case, frame the ethical lens, and then examine the case from a different perspective, adding yet another level of understanding. The original perspective that each doctoral student exhibited in the case, at the time of event as presented in the reconstruction of the event from memory in rich detail, was juxtaposed with the ethical lens perspective introduced in Part II of the activity. The ethical lens perspective introduced a different perspective grounded in philosophical positions such as consequentialism as non-consequentialism. As each doctoral student developed his or her ethical lens in order to analyze the ethical dilemma case, the beliefs about leadership practice exhibited in the case were called into question

With respect to use of the ethical dilemma case-based activity, and the authors' inquiry concerning this approach to preparing ethical leaders, it is notable that reoccurring and specific patterns and factors were identified that determined prospective leaders' critical thinking and moral reasoning processes. The authors, in analyzing the data sets, within and across the cases, identified patterns in the narrative discussions that were emblematic of reasoning processes, both critical and moral in nature. The theoretical frame used in analysis was based on the work of Begley (1996, 1999, 2005, 2006), Cranston et al. (2003, 2005), and Tuana (2003, 2006, 2006). The focus on moral literacy and the three components of ethical sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and moral imagination were reported as helpful by the doctoral students, albeit the moral imagination component seemed to be an outlier for some. In analyzing the original ethical case and the case analysis narratives, the three dimensions of moral literacy served as framework. In approximately 93% of the cases, evidence of ethical sensitivity was determined in varying degree. Ethical reasoning was determined in approximately 87% of the cases, in varying degree of application to the primary issue central to the dilemma. Moral imagination was not as evident in terms of applying the self-selected ethical lens to analyzing the case, with only 79% of the cases demonstrated a clear understanding this dimension of moral literacy. In examining both original decisions and their implications and presenting alternative possible decision paths that could have been considered,

many of the doctoral student analyses were less well formulated in terms of imagining alternative possible decision paths. Overall, the experience of participating in the ethical dilemma activity illuminated for the participants the array of social, political, emotional, and moral considerations that affect leaders in all stages of their careers.

Turning to the fourth research question (RQ4), the authors found that typically, the dilemmas authored and analyzed by the doctoral students focused on difficult personnel and student issues, however there were instances of personal ethical dilemmas that involved complex moral considerations that left the participant emotionally charged (see Table 2). In particular, conflict among the dimensions of ethical conduct and conflict emanating from blurred or competing accountability, as Begley (2005) noted, seem to have been the most prevalent.

Table 2

Themes of Ethical Dilemma Cases and Embedded Issues

Dilemma Themes and Related Issues	<i>N=52</i> <i>f=</i>
Social arrangements	6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues between student and student (within and across grade level, bullying, etc.) • Issues between teacher and teacher (early career versus experienced) • Issues between principal/superintendent and teachers 	
Conflicts emerging when personal and professional boundaries are crossed	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues between teacher and teacher (within and across disciplines) • Issues between teacher and parent or guardian • Issues between male and female personnel • Issues between teaching and non-teaching personnel 	
Internal versus external relationships	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues related to school personnel and non-school personnel • Issues related to public demands concerning school personnel performance • Issues related to school personnel personal relationships 	
Students, staff, finance and resources	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue related to fiscal resource allocation and inequity based on race 	
Equity/inequity in decisions, actions, practice, etc.	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues directly related to diversity • Issues directly related to placement of students and assignment of teaching personnel • Issues directly related to gender bias and salary 	
Accountability, both within the system and to others, and competing accountabilities between social groups	9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues related to standardized testing and test administration • Issues related to accountability standards and adherence to standards across campuses • Issues related to principal accountability to school district policy and decision making • Issues related to state and federal guidelines for funding • Issues related to competing social groups seeking to mediate inequities 	
Sexual orientation	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues related to gay/lesbian teachers and students personal relationships • Issues related to “outing” gay/lesbian teachers and students by principal or colleague 	

Social performance	7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues related to teacher behavior and decisions in public at school and non-school activities • Issues related to social media and teachers using social media for non-school related activity • Issues related to teacher and student interactions • Issues related to principal decisions based on public actions of teachers and students • Issues related to superintendent decisions concerning actions of personnel 	
Politics – community, professional, cultural, etc.	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues related to internal politics in the school district • Issues related to external politics and control of school personnel • Issues related to manipulation of school policy and decision making for political purposes 	
Teacher and student relationships	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues related to male teachers and female students • Issues related to female teachers and female students • Issues related to principals decisions concerning teacher and student relationships 	
Curriculum and programmatic issues	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues related to curriculum requirements that disadvantage minority students • Issues related to principal decisions concerning teacher selection of curriculum 	

With respect to RQ4, the set of themes reported result from an analysis of the life events that served as the basis for the ethical dilemma cases authored by doctoral students. The frequency of themes appearing in an ethical dilemma case is presented for each theme. It is noted that the themes are not narrowly defined, but rather the themes are representative of life events that shape the day-to-day practices and experiences of the doctoral students. It is also noted that in some instances there was a tendency for more than one theme to present within a case and therefore the dominant theme is reported.

The mental rehearsal and revisiting deep-seated memories of practice related to ethical dilemmas enabled the students to think, critically, about issues in a practical way. Writing the ethical dilemma enabled the student to examine his or her memory of practice, whereas the theoretical lens served as a mirror within which to reflect and examine the dilemma and make sense of its ethical and moral dimensions.

As the doctoral students engaged in deconstructing the ethical case, identifying the ethical dilemma embedded in the case, the original experience that fostered the ethical case was revisited and the doctoral students often reported and shared emotional tensions and levels of emerging self-awareness concerning their original response to the event. The doctoral students self-examined their own decisions and actions in relation to the event, evolving their own self-awareness of who they are as ethical and moral beings. As Branson (2007) noted, structured self-reflection, such as in an autobiographical approach to ethical dilemma case-based pedagogy, nurtures moral consciousness, and at the same time fosters ethical sensitivity and reasoning.

Concerning the fifth research question (RQ5), the earlier discussion of the ethical case dilemma activity as well as in the exemplar ethical dilemma case offer insight as to what the case-based approach looks like in terms of its pedagogical

orientation and interface with doctoral students as a situated learning experience. The overall discussion presented in this paper of case-based pedagogy, as well as the focus on what an ethical dilemma is in relation to fostering ethical leadership and moral literacy, presents a detailed examination of the pedagogical and ethical/philosophical underpinnings of a doctoral studies program course and the complexity of advancing self-authored ethical dilemma cases as a context for learning.

Conclusions

One conclusion that is drawn from the study is best represented in the words of Greenfield (1985), writing:

Moral socialization does not occur in a contextual vacuum, and thus aspects of the work setting itself are believed to have an important mediating influence regarding both the substance of moral socialization outcomes as well as the processes through which such learning occurs. In this regard the culture of the school organization, the role relationship between the socializee and socialization agents, and the day-to-day work activities of the socializee are salient. (p. 102)

The findings of this study reveal that education leadership preparation should be concerned with moral awareness and responsibilities, and that identifying and resolving an ethical dilemma is a reality in educational settings. Moral literacy and ethical leadership are premised on personal values and valuations of leaders.

Equally important, this study demonstrated that leadership dispositions, skills, knowledge, and practices relevant to educational leadership are only part of a complex equation of preparing ethical leaders with the moral abilities to take on the day-to-day work and responsibilities. Starratt (1994) is instructive in matters of preparing ethical leaders when he states:

. . . ethical behaviour, while always involving interpersonal relationships, is shaped by the circumstances and status of the persons involved. Acting ethically requires one to be sensitive and responsive to the other person within the circumstances as well as the context. So it is not simply a question of one person in relation to another person; the relationship is supported as well as limited by the culture in which the two parties live their lives. (pp. 34-35)

It is important to understand the pedagogical needs for preparing leaders who embrace an ongoing learning of moral literacy as part of the responsibility of ethical leadership. An ethical dilemma approach to case-based pedagogy where students are situated in an authentic learning experience presents a unique and important pedagogical approach to understanding the complex and problematic nature of leadership. At the same time, the introduction to moral literacy as a heuristic for self-reflection and development of moral consciousness presents important considerations for the preparing morally literate leaders.

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Book Study Blogs: Creating Self-Sustaining Online Learning Communities for Graduate Students of Educational Leadership

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



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Collaborative online learning has been adopted at all levels of education, in PK-12 public schools and universities, yet studies find student responses to the experience somewhat unpredictable. In this study, the authors draw on the practice of incorporating book study blogs at the University of North Dakota to engage doctoral students in a collaborative discourse and knowledge creation. Self- and peer-assessment data derived from end-of-course evaluations in 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2014 are used to frame a discussion concerning the development of self-regulating online collaborative learning communities. This study highlights positive outcomes for book study teams sharing high expectations of academic achievement and professional behavior, supportive relationships, and modeling of leadership qualities.

Keywords: Online collaborative learning (OCL), professional learning community (PLC), networked learning community (NLC), book study blogs, graduate education, educational leadership, group dynamics, and team skills

Introduction

Theories of learning for the 21st century, often referred to as the “Knowledge Age” (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006), emphasize collaboration and knowledge-building rather than the transmission of knowledge more commonly associated with 20th century instructional practices. Writers claim this shift challenges educators to meet new and unprecedented learning needs while also redesigning instruction to take advantage of the exponential growth of the Internet. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2013), a national organization claiming broad-based support from educators, business leaders, and civic and community groups, posits the essence of the current debate regarding instructional change to be summarized as the “3Rs” (reading, writing, and arithmetic) and “4Cs” (critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation). The 3Rs, reflected in basic standards of literacy and numeracy, are publically decried as inadequate for learners in the “Knowledge Age.” While arguing that effective teachers in any century have enabled the development of the 4Cs, the current debate implies the need for intentional planning of instruction designed to achieve the highest level of thinking and teamwork. Learners are now expected to collaborate through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Networked Learning Communities (NLCs), and Online Communities of Learning (OCLs). Positive interdependence among participants in online communities is enhanced through diverse instructional methods (Woo Nam & Zellner, 2011).

Professional Learning Communities

Graduate courses for PK-12 instructional leadership at the University of North Dakota (UND) engage students in action-based PLCs modeled on seminal works spanning a decade. (DuFour & Eaker 1998; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many 2006; and Hord & Sommers 2008). A framework practiced in local schools, PLCs are “inclusive groups of people, motivated by a shared vision, who support the work of each other, finding ways . . . to enquire on their practice and together learn better and new approaches that will enhance all pupils’ learning” (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007, p. 6). Driven in large part by high profile conferences and step-by-step manuals, the PLC movement gathered momentum in the early years of the 21st century to become a widely accepted model for continuing professional development. Typically, groups of teachers in individual school districts meet routinely to analyze student test data and plan actions designed to improve student performance in standardized tests.

Popularized leadership theory advocates for collaborative professional learning to enhance professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Graduate students bring a note of skepticism to the PLC debate with stories of failed efforts in practice and anecdotal evidence of mixed reactions to face-to-face professional learning communities in their schools. The classroom controversy is exacerbated by the lack of research evidence about the usefulness of PLCs (Snijders, Matzat, & Reips, 2012; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). While there is emerging literature critical of PLCs (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2008), published materials are generally promotional. According to students, implementation practices often reflect a ‘cookie-cutter’ approach with scant regard for local conditions in PK-12 schools. Leadership of face-to-face professional learning teams has become a

priority in the training of PK-12 administrators at UND. The Educational Leadership program also requires students to explore the potential for PLCs to reshape as networked learning communities (NLCs) or online learning communities (OCLs).

Networked Learning Communities

The relative isolation of educators in much of rural North Dakota has created a demand for continued professional learning beyond the limits of individual school districts. NLCs encourage collaboration between professionals in multiple school districts and can often involve stakeholders from further afield. The North Dakota University System (NDUS), Regional Education Associations (REAs), and the North Dakota Leadership and Administrator Education Development (NDLEAD 2013) Center support educators' life-long learning and integrative networking. Professional organizations, for example the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), now provide self-paced courses in online Professional Interest Communities modeled on communities of practice (Holmes 2013, and Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder 2002). The trend towards networking reflects a response to the demand for what Jackson and Temperley (2008) describe as "a new unit of meaning, belonging and engagement" (p. 45). Arguing that an individual district may be too small scale and isolated to afford professional learning in a networked world, Jackson and Temperley propose a model for a highly integrated relationship between the PLC and NLC. NLCs often equate to OCLs.

Online Collaborative Learning

New theories of learning have evolved to accommodate changing demands in education. Relevant pedagogies and technology have emerged to inform educators who are "confounded and unsure of how to proceed" in an online environment (Harasim, 2012, p. 82). OCL theory builds on the work of Bruffee (1999), Scardamalia and Bereiter, (2006), and Vygotsky (1962) to elevate the social processes in learning. OCL is designed specifically for online learning environments and, by emphasizing collaborative discourse, knowledge-building, problem-solving and planning, fulfills the 4Cs.

Study Context

The UND Department of Educational Leadership doctoral course, "Leading Curriculum and Learning," is a required class delivered in a blended format with 45 hours of seat-time supplemented by online group activities including a collaborative group book study. The class is offered in three locations for cohorts in Grand Forks, Bismarck, and Fargo. The instructional challenge is to model effective adult learning practices while also addressing the leadership problem of building effective learning communities in PK-12 schools, both online and face-to-face. While Garvin (2000) and Marquardt (2011) emphasize the role of groups in solving complex problems, the practice itself is not problem-free. Uncooperative behaviors students associate with PLCs in the PK-12 context are sometimes apparent in face-to-face and online learning teams in the college environment. The book study blog assignment for this course is designed to enmesh participants in the challenges of leading and collaborating as members of a diverse group.

Learning teams are created to collaboratively read and reflect upon the course books: *Disrupting Class* (Fall 2009); *The Global Achievement Gap* (Fall 2009 and 2012); *Catching Up or Leading the Way* (Fall 2012); and *Finnish Lessons* (Spring 2014). Before engaging in online book study blogs housed in the Blackboard course site, the groups determine expectations of each other with reference to guidelines for working in the blog; grading rubrics generated by doctoral students in 2008; work samples from previous classes; and the Educational Leadership article, *Learning with Blogs and Wikis* (Ferriter, 2009).

Care is taken to identify effective teams before beginning online assignments recognizing the “I hate groups” phenomenon (Kass, 2008) often expressed by students reporting uncomfortable past experience of working with peers. In the first face-to-face class, trial learning teams are required to work together to build a tower with toothpicks and marshmallows; the winning team has the tallest tower standing at the end of a timed period. Typically, the activity prompts individual and group reflection on team dynamics and serves to identify groups for future face-to-face and online activities.

The blog, or weblog, is a time-sequenced repository for online interactions while students conduct a sequenced reading of a course text. Learning team members are required to take turns leading the blog by creating prompt questions to assigned readings and by maintaining the pace of postings. The instructor provides individuals with written feedback and provisional grades but does not engage directly in the blog during the six-week life of the assignment.

Pedagogical Problem

In 2009, the pilot launch of the online book study blog in the UND Educational Leadership program received mixed reviews from student participants. While one of the two groups reported high levels of satisfaction, the other functioned less effectively despite interventions by the instructor to remedy dysfunctional behaviors. “Online communities evoke excitement, anger, boredom, dissent, and commitment—often all at the same time!” observed Linn in Falk & Drayton, 2009, p. ix. This qualitative study provides an interpretation of student evaluations to better understand group behaviors in the blog. What conditions are required for effective interactions in the book study blog? What actions should the instructor take to ensure optimum conditions for all online learning groups? How are an individual’s leadership skills and dispositions best evaluated through the use of blogs?

Data Collection

All students are required to complete self- and peer-evaluations of individual contributions to the successful achievement of group goals and are encouraged to write a narrative to explain the numerical rating of 16 behaviors (see Table 1). The information is provided on the understanding that data will be used to inform guidance for individual students but will have no power to impact final grades. Permission to use data for publication was obtained from the UND Institutional Review Board.

Feedback evaluation data submitted by a total of 45 doctoral students in December 2009, December 2010, October 2012, and May 2014, were used to examine

the functionality of online learning teams initiated in a face-to-face classroom. In practice, the information was gathered to better understand the outcomes of learning team work in the blog and explore factors promoting or preventing effective teamwork. Students are matched with peers by the instructor during the first class meeting and then given time to establish team expectations, using a nominal group process (Gregory & Kuzmich 2007), and to assign responsibilities within a weekly schedule.

Table 1.
Learning Team Self and Peer Evaluation Rubric

SELF/PEER EVALUATION		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Takes active role on initiating ideas or actions					
2.	Is willing to take on task responsibilities					
3.	Is willing to frequently share ideas and resources					
4.	Accepts responsibility for tasks determined by the group					
5.	Helps promote team 'esprit de corps'					
6.	Respects differences of opinion and backgrounds, and is willing to negotiate and make compromises.					
7.	Provides leadership and support whenever necessary					
8.	Acknowledges other members' good work and provides positive feedback					
9.	Is willing to work with others for the purpose of group success					
10.	Communicates online in a friendly tone					
11.	Keeps in close contact with the rest of the team so that everyone knows how things are going					
12.	Produces high quality work					
13.	Meets team's deadlines					
14.	Sensitive to the needs and feelings of members of the team					
15.	Understand problems with helpful comments					
16.	Openly shares needs and feelings with team members					

Note. Adapted from CSCL Syllabus (University of Texas at Austin, 2008).
Always demonstrates the quality = 5; frequently demonstrates the quality = 4; sometimes demonstrates the quality = 3; seldom demonstrates the quality = 2; never demonstrates the quality = 1

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was conducted in two stages: scores for each of the 16 behaviors were aggregated for individual students and teams (see Tables 2-9); comments were coded to reveal themes raised by participants in each of the learning teams (see Table 10). A cursory glance at the shaded boxes in Tables 2-9 reveals self-assessment scores. A quick comparison of Mean (with self) and Peer Mean (without self), as well as Peer Range scores, illuminate a fascinating difference in perceptions of performance.

Table 2
Book Study Evaluation Data (2009)—The Global Achievement Gap

	Group Member	Points Received						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Points Awarded	1	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
	2	80	77	80	80	80	N/A	80
	3	80	80	77	80	80	80	80
	4	80	80	80	78	80	80	80
	5	80	80	80	80	76	80	80
	6	77	74	75	80	80	69	73
	7	79	79	80	80	79	78	78
	Total	556	550	552	558	555	467	551
	Mean	79.4	78.6	78.9	79.7	79.3	77.8	78.7
	Peer Mean	79.3	78.8	79.1	80.0	79.8	79.6	78.8
	Peer Range	3	6	5	0	1	2	7

Table 3
Book Study Evaluation Data (2009)—Disrupting Class

	Group Member	Points Received					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Points Awarded	1	71	67	44	38	69	N/A
	2	80	71	59	40	80	N/A
	3	65	58	49	56	69	N/A
	4	58	59	64	63	62	67
	5	80	69	56	56	73	69
	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	354	324	272	253	353	136
	Mean	70.8	64.8	54.4	50.6	70.6	68.0
	Peer Mean	70.7	62.3	55.7	47.5	70.0	68.0
	Peer Range	22	11	20	18	18	2

Table 4
Book Study Evaluation Data (2010)—The Global Achievement Gap

	Group Member	Points Received					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Points Awarded	1	51	72	76	67	67	73
	2	74	70	79	79	80	80
	3	77	77	73	80	80	79
	4	73	71	74	72	75	69
	5	64	74	66	72	62	67
	6	65	67	65	66	66	64
	Total	404	431	433	445	430	432
	Mean	67.3	71.8	72.2	72.6	71.6	72.0
	Peer Mean	70.6	72.2	72.0	74.6	73.6	73.6
	Peer Range	13	10	14	14	14	13

Table 5
Book Study Evaluation Data (2010)—Disrupting Class

Points Awarded	Group Member	Points Received					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
	1	80	80	80	80	80	80
	2	80	79	80	80	80	80
	3	78	79	75	78	76	80
	4	76	78	75	76	73	80
	5	68	77	72	71	75	75
	6	78	77	79	77	80	71
	Total	460	470	461	462	464	466
	Mean	76.7	78.3	76.8	77.0	77.3	77.7
Peer Range	Peer Mean	76.0	78.2	77.2	77.2	77.8	79.0
	Peer Range	12	3	8	9	7	5

Table 6
Book Study Evaluation Data (2012)—The Global Achievement Gap

Points Awarded	Group Member	Points Received						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	1	72	80	80	80	80	80	N/A
	2	78	70	78	79	80	79	78
	3	80	80	73	80	80	80	80
	4	78	80	77	61	76	78	77
	5	74	77	72	78	54	79	74
	6	75	72	77	67	77	72	76
	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	457	459	457	445	447	468	385
Peer Range	Mean	76.2	76.5	76.2	74.2	74.5	78.0	77.0
	Peer Mean	77.0	77.8	76.8	76.8	78.6	79.2	77.0
Peer Range	Peer Range	6	8	8	13	4	2	6

Table 7
Book Study Evaluation Data (2012)—Catching Up or Leading the Way?

Points Awarded	Group Member	Points Received				
		1	2	3	4	5
	1	70	80	78	75	78
	2	79	71	80	77	77
	3	78	72	74	78	74
	4	76	76	73	60	70
	5	78	75	77	72	71
	Total	381	374	382	362	370
	Mean	76.2	74.8	76.4	72.4	74.0
	Peer Mean	77.7	75.7	77.0	75.5	74.7
Peer Range	Peer Range	3	8	7	6	8

Table 8

Book Study Evaluation Data (2014)—Finnish Lessons: Group 1

Points Awarded	Group Member	Points Received			
		1	2	3	4
	1	66	80	80	80
	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	3	78	79	74	77
	4	68	71	68	69
	Total	212	230	222	226
	Mean	70.7	76.7	74.0	75.3
	Peer Mean	73.0	76.6	74.0	78.5
	Peer Range	10	9	12	3

Table 9

Book Study Evaluation Data (2014)—Finnish Lessons: Group 2

Points Awarded	Group Member	Points Received			
		1	2	3	4
	1	80	80	80	80
	2	79	73	80	64
	3	78	80	74	77
	4	68	71	68	69
	Total	305	303	302	290
	Mean	76.3	75.8	75.5	72.5
	Peer Mean	75.0	77.0	76.0	73.6
	Peer Range	9	9	12	16

Findings

Tables 2-9 reflect aggregated self- and peer-evaluation data for each of the 16 behaviors identified in the rubric (see Table 1). Tables 2 and 3 report data for 13 students in December 2009, Tables 4 and 5 for 13 students in December 2010, Tables 6 and 7 for 11 students in October 2012, and Tables 8 and 9 for 8 students in May 2014. Self-evaluation scores are highlighted and means calculated both with and without self-evaluation scores. With some exceptions, self-evaluation scores were more modest than peer-evaluation scores. While students were assumed to be honest in their responses, cautious interpretations of the numerical data preceded an analysis of freely written comments.

Comparative differences in satisfaction rates reported by the team members and expressed as a group mean are noticeable in all data sets for 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2014. The difference in the pattern of scores between teams studying *The Global Achievement Gap* (GAP) and *Disrupting Class* (DC) in 2009 show the greatest contrast in outcomes reported by participants. Team GAP (2009) proved a culturally tight and high performing group, reflected in the preponderance of maximum scores of 80 out of 80 and mean scores (excluding self-evaluation) between 80 and 77.8. Team DC appears much

less cohesive with only two maximum scores and a range of mean scores between 70.7 and 47.5. DC Team Members 3 and 4 were flagged as underperforming by peers and the higher range scores indicate a lack of agreement between members regarding expectations. This pattern is found, to a lesser degree, in the 2012 data set as demonstrated by a comparison of Team GAP, with peer mean scores of between 74.6 and 67.3 with *Catching Up or Leading the Way?* (CULW) with peer mean scores of 77.7 and 74.7. The statistical data highlights areas for deeper analysis using the narrative data provided by students to explain their responses to the tick-box section of the evaluation form.

The reasons for differences in outcomes between the teams in 2009 and 2012 are suggested in written evaluations. One student in 2012 observed, “Our group was not very effective in the blog. I couldn’t afford the time to waste looking at nothing new; it frustrated me.” Another in the same group wrote, “I know I need to be a better group member and participate in the blog more frequently.” Responses by students in the second of the two 2012 groups reflected more positively on the experience, “The blog, the readings and my group have moved me in the direction of questioning the things we do to prepare kids and to seek the answers.” In this group, students took the time to acknowledge skillful leadership; for example, “K has good insight as a high school principal. His experience gives me more to think about.” Another group member was described as “Professional and serious about our work. She is constructive and thoughtful. She aims to produce high quality work.”

Once collated, the combined narrative data for 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2014 were coded and sorted as either negative or positive (see Table 10). Six main themes emerged from the data:

1. Group Expectations and Relationships
2. Academic Expectations and Learning
3. Professional Expectations and Leadership Modeling
4. Personal Needs and Dispositions
5. Time Constraints and Response to Conflicting Demands
6. Response to Technology

Table 10
Self and Peer Evaluation Narrative Codes and Themes

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Codes</i>	
	<i>Positive Attributes</i>	<i>Negative Attributes</i>
Group Expectations and Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support for completing assignments: “I believe all members of Team GAP would agree this project was a success” - Encouragement for team cohesiveness and problem-solving “I appreciated your willingness to step in and fill in for C and to take on some of her chapters” - Responsibilities: “I was confident all members would be prepared and ready to go” - Willingness to reply to posts more than once to facilitate an “online discussion”: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delayed postings and responses - Failure to honor the agreed schedule or commitments: “Two of my blog team members enforced the ‘Indian Time’ mentality” - Group dynamic “a bit off balance” - “Harsh” comments regarding cultural group - Communication: “When the information was not received by the due date, I wish you would have sent reminders out so that everyone was aware and could have applied

	<p>“The flow of the discussion was natural and productive”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Responsible and timely with tasks” - “Sought out feedback and support <i>from</i> others” - Humor: “Makes things fun” - “Sets the tone for the group” - Communication: “Communicates with the team outside class” - Provides constructive feedback - Organizes team efforts and responsibilities and maintains pace - “Challenged team members” 	<p>some ‘pressure’”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Judging: “I am lacking the words to give anecdotal evidence without feeling like I am judging my peers” - Commitment: “ I think he chose not to [contribute to the blog] he did not see it as important and ‘blew it off’ ”
Academic Expectations and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition of intelligence - Appreciation for writing and presentation skills, “quality work” - Collective efforts: “The collective efforts/expectations of the group can either help or hinder the learning process – in this case it helped” - Probing questions: “Asks tough questions” - Research beyond the book study - Analysis, comparisons, and reasoning: “making sense of and applying text to real work situations” - Commitment to reading and understanding each chapter - Meaningful and extensive discussions - “Validation through examples, resources, readings, and research” - High expectations - Perspective-taking - “Force re-thinking” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fear poor group performance would negatively impact grade and perception of individual achievement - Negative assessment of group members’ commitment to doctoral quality work and ability/willingness to follow guidelines - Plagiarism: “Your original submission was so similar to that which is posted on the website [address provided] I believe that looking at what others have said about the book can be beneficial but I was not comfortable passing it off as our work”
Professional Expectations and Leadership Modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive reinforcement of leadership qualities: L is very professional and has a great understanding of how schools operate” - Prior knowledge and experience: “. . . this was a ‘power-house team, great thinkers with high expectations of themselves and one another” - Modeling leadership: “R has been a constant and positive role model for our group. She has a wealth of knowledge and expertise . . .” - Reframes problems into possibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Unprofessional” behaviors not tolerated in the workplace: “In the workplace I would have been more proactive – I am truly surprised that those same strategies have to be used here.” - Work ethic: “I find myself not wanting to work with you, not because of your abilities but because of your work ethic”
Personal Needs and Dispositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insightful: “Sees possibilities and puts ideas into action” - Methodical - Friendly - Positive, “up-beat outlook” - Detail-oriented - Grounded - Reflective - Compassionate - Meticulous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frustration - Personal preference for order: “I am concrete sequential, organization is a strong point for me but is not for others” - Doctoral inexperience: “I am new at the doctoral level and I really need to be more focused on timelines and team-work” - Bias

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Calm/Quiet - Open-minded and “willingness to think” - “Not defensive” 	
Time Constraints and Response to Conflicting Demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New job experience contributes to successful work: “With her new job she was very busy . . . yet she was always there to contribute and help when asked” and “Despite significant stressors with work, school, and family, J continued to produce high quality work on a regular basis” and “As a new administrator, T had very positive and unique perspectives on some of the issues” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional demands vs. academic responsibilities - New job demands: “Due to the chaos going on in my professional life . . . I found it difficult to always demonstrate each of these [16] characteristics”
Response to Technology Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Successful adoption of new and untried technology tools: “I really enjoyed having the Wimba session for the first time in my life” and “I have not done much blogging . . . so it was a great activity for me” - Blog effective tool for book study: “I think the blog was a very effective tool for working through this book” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenges to personal skills, knowledge and experience - New technology tools and confidence levels - “I find it difficult to ‘read’ people in an online environment”

Group Expectations and Relationships

Positive learning experiences include participants’ timely posts, provision of constructive feedback, organization of the team’s efforts, contribution to ongoing blog discussion, and encouragement and support for the successful completion of assignments. References were also made to aspects of tone, including the use of humor to “make things fun.” Opposites were reported in less effective teams in which posts were delayed, members failed to honor commitments, and the “group dynamic was a bit off-balance.”

Academic Expectations and Learning

The sense that team members shared high expectations demonstrated by their efforts to research beyond the study book, validate opinions, ask “tough questions,” and “force re-thinking” was reassuring to team members. Those judged to be unwilling or unable to meet the rigors of doctoral work were thought likely to compromise the team’s efforts and final grade. Evidence of self-regulatory processes leads to the conclusion that, despite the frustration for participants, incidents like the copying and pasting of material from an external source into the group blog create opportunities for ethical problem-solving and the practice of leadership skills. In such cases of plagiarism, instructor intervention is crucial.

Professional Expectations and Leadership Modeling

Effective collaborative work in the blog was often related to the professionalism, leadership skill, and experience of team members. Respondents commented on the wealth of prior knowledge brought to the learning experience by individuals—one described as “a constant and positive role model”—and the combined experience of one team as a

“power-house.” Conversely, the lack of professionalism, in one case perceived as “unworthy in the workplace,” surprised the respondent who adopted strategies used in her school district to solve a problem in her team.

Personal Needs and Dispositions

Students reported the dispositions they appreciated in team members; e.g., methodical, friendly, positive, grounded, reflective, meticulous, compassionate, and open-minded, but also criticized a minority of their peers for bias and lack of organization. Self-reflective comments show individuals to be aware of short-comings likely to impact both the success of teamwork in the blog but, perhaps more importantly, their success in the program as a whole.

Time Constraints and Response to Conflicting Demands

The majority of the UND EDL students are employed in full-time jobs, many in PK-12 leadership roles, when they begin the doctoral program, or are promoted during the life of their program of study. The data show variation in response to the pressures of studying while trying to maintain a healthy balance between personal and professional responsibilities. Respondents observed individuals who seemed able to manage the stress of a new position while also maintaining a positive presence in the blog, “Despite significant stressors with work, school, and family, J continued to produce high quality work on a regular basis.” Another commented, “As a new administrator, T had very positive and unique perspectives on some of the issues.” Not all participants were able to manage professional demands and academic responsibilities as one commented, “Due to the chaos in my professional life . . . I found it difficult to always demonstrate each of these [16] characteristics.”

Response to Technology Tools

While some respondents reported enthusiasm for the new experience of using blogs, a minority found the tools challenging because of limited experience and lack of confidence in their ability to operate effectively in an online environment. One respondent, a practiced user of a range of technology tools, reported finding that such technologies made the situation “difficult to ‘read’ people in an online environment.”

Study Findings and Limitations

Within the relatively new arena of online collaboration in graduate higher education, this study data validates the benefits and challenges of study blogs. Data reflect teamwork functionality, lessons that may be used to evaluate any prescribed online classroom experiences which include a group component. Handy (2013) noted online community members recognize online blogging as “an emergent process and one that is not static but flexible in its means and modes of operation.” The study’s data analysis lends itself to additional studies with topics for subsequent research.

Study groups were determined by the instructor based on the results of team-building activities. Yet, when grouping decisions are made by the instructor, choices and group composition are removed from the purview of the student. All graduate students in Educational Leadership are designated as adult learners. Within the andragogical lens of the adult learner, instructor selection negates one of the key non-traditional precepts of “self-concept” which denotes that adult learners choose to be responsible for the decisions affecting their learning. Adult learners wish to be involved in the development and planning of their own learning, an element which is eliminated with group pre-selection. Thus, a discussion of and explanation for this decision is a helpful accompaniment to the beginning of the assignment.

Perceptions on the efficacy of the groups are unilateral as the instructor makes all decisions pertinent to individual capabilities based on responses within the blogs. Students have differing study styles which may not necessarily meld well with others in their group. Characteristics exhibited by individuals in group participation may not be discovered until the first assignment deadline. Time preferences, from the opposite spectrums of proactively getting work done early to procrastinating until the final required submission date for an assignment, may strain the collaborative aspect of group work. Transparency in addressing the impact of study vagaries with the group at-large has the potential to encourage an appreciation for the interdependence of the group effort.

Difference Among Level of Maturity

Although student input in the study blog assignment may not have a direct correlation with level of maturity, the participation of each member reflects a commitment to group success. A degree of pride in exemplifying trustworthiness, honesty and collegiality, and a personal goal to meet or exceed class expectations goes beyond the basic mastery of skill in blogging to the desire to gain expertise in an area of technology applicable in the educational milieu.

Constructively critical self-reflection combined with forthright observation of the contributions of others provide insight to the group. Soliciting responses from group members demonstrates active engagement with peers enhancing leadership and collaborative skills while using a professional online learning style. The skill with which a student contributes to the blog may indicate an awareness of personal strengths and limitations. Recognition of bias, positive or otherwise, in the approach to the required use of study blogs may contribute to an evaluation of changes in personal learning. Individual input to a blog may characterize development in complex contextual factors, such as working with ambiguity or colleague reticence and dealing with frustration.

Researcher’s Role

Research validity in this study is documented through member checking and triangulation. The numerical data is explained through narrative; an independent researcher analyzed and confirmed data outcomes; longitudinal data explicate patterns emerging from Self/Peer Evaluation. As confirmed in the section “Professional Learning Communities”, graduate students may conceal a subliminal distrust of study blogs due to previous unproductive or unsuccessful participation. With the personal demands on time

and the inherent leadership qualities of some students, combined with the lack of those qualities in others, initial acceptance or resistance is best addressed proactively by the instructor as evinced through this study. This study blog is a course requirement; however, the peer- and self- evaluations are not a grade requirement. Thus, the degree and the honesty with which a student might participate encompass a bond of trust with the instructor.

Conclusion

There is much in the data to support the initial claim that online communities engender multiple, often emotional responses. While at first glance anger, boredom, and dissent might be interpreted as negative effects to be minimized at all costs, the study suggests that, in the context of a doctoral educational leadership program, the challenges of collaborative teamwork in a blog present learning opportunities replicating those encountered in the workplace. Educational leaders are expected to professionally connect with colleagues, parents, and students within a variety of interactive settings. Exposure to and practice with blogging encourages an understanding, if not a comfort level, in a style of communication used by many. Issues emanating from student comments to the blog requirement indicated a concern for the commitment and participation of some classmates and personal expectations and accountability mingled with a positive learning curve.

Written evaluations indicate that learning teams at their best function supportively and collaboratively, assisting one another in arriving at integrative solutions within respectful discussion. In the minority of cases where groups functioned less well, members were challenged to deal with a disregard for negotiated expectations from one or more of the group's members. Frustration surfaced when those students invested in the group's success were faced with a perceived lack of professionalism from other team members. Responsible, dedicated students, particularly those already in professionally accountable leadership positions, found delayed or protracted responses to be unsettling and exasperating.

School systems and instructors who include blogging in their course curricula would benefit from first addressing group dynamics and team skills. As established in this study through data and multiple codes, an understanding of group functionality would include elements to foster collaboration, factors which promote team interaction, and a component to engage group members in peer feedback. A recognition that the understanding of the term "functionality" may differ with each program and each instructor is a factor to clarify prior to implementation of a course-required blog.

Further research might include a comparative study of self-selected blogging groups versus instructor-selected; the impact professional or career leadership experience has on group dynamics; leadership qualities exemplified by individual students within their blogged responses; leadership qualities of individuals based on their feedback to peers; management skills of individuals based on judicious responses; leaders who exhibit skill in task-oriented actions. A number of leadership fundamentals may be gleaned from the promptness, quality, and thoroughness of student participation in course-required blogs.

This study demonstrates aspects which facilitate contributions of group members in a prescribed course-required activity. This study recognizes the importance of the contributions of each individual in a technology-driven communication component unheard of in past decades of educational leadership study. The difficulty of developing online or face-to-face professional learning communities should not be underestimated, but the benefits are well worth the effort.

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Emerging Challenges Facing School Principals

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



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This article provides insights into the challenges facing US public school principals. A survey was sent to a random sample of over 10,000 principals throughout the US. Written responses from a representative sample were analyzed for content and themes. Results indicate that principals are facing emerging challenges never before seen in education, including the overwhelming effects of poverty, increasing pressures on student achievement, the breakdown of communities, lack of financial resources, and a host of other issues, many of which coalesce to further complicate the work of principals. The voices of these principals suggest a need to radically rethink our preparation programs for school administrators.

Introduction

The role of the school leader is changing even more rapidly than the changes in schools themselves (Bossi, 2007; Ediger, 2014; Fullan, 2001). A recent national survey summed up findings by stating, “Most principals say that their responsibilities today have changed compared to five years ago and that the job has increased in complexity” (MetLife, 2013, p. 23). In order to be successful, the principal in today’s public schools must not only cope with the administration of a complex human organization in the rapidly evolving dynamics of schools and society, but also must be an effective leader in a wide variety of areas with an increasing emphasis on the achievement of all students (Crow, Hausman, & Scribner, 2002; Elmore, 2007; Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Those who prepare the educational leaders of tomorrow must be aware of the emerging issues that principals face and it is to that audience that this article is primarily directed. University preparation programs certainly need to prepare future school principals with the knowledge and skills to manage the organization, but also to provide effective instructional leadership that can lead to increasing academic achievement of all students (Conley, 2010; Garza, Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson & Merchant, 2014; Gronn, 2003; Jean-Marie, Normore & Brooks, 2009). But these aren’t the only challenges that leaders must be prepared for; recent literature notes other changes in our schools and their communities, including but not limited to an increase in minority student enrollment (Grigg, 2012; Holme, Diem & Welton, 2014; Maxwell, 2014), the primary language of many children and their parents no longer being English (Cline, Crafter & Prokopiou, 2014; Zarate & Pineda, 2014), the devastating poverty in the lives of so many students and their communities (Haig, 2014), the effects of bullying and cyberbullying of students on and off the school grounds (O’Brennan, Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2014), and the increasing difficulty in creating and maintaining a positive school climate and culture that are considered so important to current school success (Kallestad, 2010). Many of these issues mirror changes in our society and school leaders must be prepared to deal with them.

This article began as a national research study on educational leadership coaching conducted by Wise and Cavazos (2015). In this mixed methods study, a single question on the survey instrument asked school principals to describe major challenges that they face. The original purpose of the qualitative data we requested was to extend our understanding of the quantitative results (Creswell, Shope, Plano, Green & Green, 2006). An astonishing 90.8% of school principals, busy as they are, responded to that open-ended question. We received 1,236 written responses to that single question, many a paragraph or more in length that indicated a great need to share the input of principals regarding the increasingly difficult job that they face each and every day. This article is dedicated to that purpose of sharing important voices from the field while providing insights to those who teach educational leadership in master’s and doctoral programs.

Methods

A review of the literature, described in our previous article (Wise & Cavazos, 2015), provided a theoretical framework of leadership coaching and the challenges faced by school principals upon which survey questions were developed. The survey questionnaire was sent to a representative cross-sectional sample of public school principals across the US ($n = 10,424$). To obtain a representative sample, we contracted a national market research firm (<http://www.school data.com>) specializing in education products including a database containing the current email addresses of approximately 70 to 75% of all public school principals in the US. We requested a randomly-selected list of approximately 10,000 email addresses of public school principals, which was the maximum amount we could budget for, stratified by the overall percentages of principals in their database at each of three levels: elementary, middle/junior high, and high school. Email addresses were randomly selected by the market research firm for 6,827 (65.5%) elementary principals, 1,509 (14.5%) middle school/junior high principals, and 2,088 (20.0%) high school principals for a total of 10,424 email addresses. The market research firm sent emails to all the principals selected with a message from us and a link to our survey. A limitation of this methodology was that we did not have access to those principals who did not respond to the email request and consequently were unable to send follow-up emails to non-respondents.

A total of 1,361 usable surveys were received, divided into elementary (835/61.4%), middle/junior (191/14.0%), and high school (323/23.7%) levels, plus 12 responses that did not indicate their principalship level for an overall response rate of 13.1%. Responses were received from all states of the US. While there are limitations to the sample due to the stratified random sampling technique, the sample size, and closely matching percentages of levels of respondents with the population of school principals, we believe that the sample does adequately represent the population of public school principals. According to Patten (2007), for the total population of almost 100,000 public school principals, a representative random sample would be a total of 384 participants. With a response of 1,361 participants, we consider the sample to be representative not only of the population of public school principals in the US, but also for the larger subgroups derived from the sample. Table 1 provides information regarding surveys sent and returned completed.

Table 1
Surveys Sent and Returned Completed

Level	Sent		Returned	
Elementary	6,827	65.5%	835	61.4%
Middle/Jr. High	1,509	14.5%	191	14.0%
High School	2,088	20.0%	323	23.7%
Level not indicated	---	---	12	0.9%
Overall	10,424	100.0%	1,361	100.0%

The survey instrument contained 34 questions in total. The first part of the survey contained questions regarding demographics of the principals, including level of the school, state, location (rural, suburban, urban), number of students, years in the principalship, and if they had received leadership coaching or not. One additional question was asked to frame the circumstances of leadership coaching that they receive: What are the major challenges that you face as a principal?

Of the 1,361 surveys received, 1,236 responded to this question, providing a response rate of 90.8%. Such a high response rate to an open-ended question, in itself, is an indication of the enormity of the challenges facing principals. While some principals responded with a few words, many responded with sentences or even paragraphs detailing the challenges they faced.

The 1,236 responses were uploaded into nVivo software and analyzed using open and axial coding, providing both thematic and content analysis. A total of 2,504 separate items were coded. Essentially, a concurrent embedded strategy (Creswell, 2006) was utilized to analyze the data, because:

The concurrent embedded model can be used to serve a variety of purposes. Often, this model is used so that a researcher can gain broader perspectives as a result of using the different methods as opposed to using the predominant method alone. . . . One method could be used within a framework of the other method. (p. 215)

Challenges that School Principals Face in the United States

Analysis of the responses to the open-ended question yielded six major themes and a number of related and other themes. Table 2 provides information on how many times a particular theme was mentioned by principals. Since a principal might have mentioned more than one theme in her/his response, the results total more than 100%. While a weakness of such content analysis is that a participant may have mentioned a particular theme multiple times and another may not have mentioned it at all (Berg, 2009), we noted that themes were rarely duplicated within responses but rather the respondent added additional, different themes to the response.

Table 2
Major challenges facing principals in the US

	n	% of total responses
Financial resources	486	19.4%
Home/community issues	445	17.8%
Test scores/accountability	325	13.0%
Instruction/assessment	301	12.0%
Lack of time	179	7.1%
Too many responsibilities	172	6.9%
All other responses	596	23.8%
Total	2504	100.0%

After completion of coding, responses that typified each theme were identified. Those responses that best represented each theme were then selected and linked to the respondent's demographic information. These responses offered insights into each of the themes and gave a voice to the principals through quotes that are provided along with the level of the school of the principal responding, school context (rural, suburban, or urban), and location (state). Where the principal was new to the position or had many years of service, this was also indicated. In this manner, our desire was to paint a picture of representative responses from principals and schools throughout the nation. To accurately represent the written comments, we copied them exactly as they were written, including any spelling and grammatical errors.

Financial Resources

As seen in Table 1, a lack of financial resources was the main theme identified and was mentioned in almost 20% of the responses. Within this major theme, the primary issue identified was lack of funding from the state. A first year high school principal from a rural area in Idaho wrote,

Few resources and few electives all due to financial cutbacks. Our state ranks second-to-last in per-student expenditures (thank you, Utah) and our hands are very tied as far as budgets go. I have not had a budget all year as the district has chosen to freeze budgets in case there is a mid-year hold back. We struggle to offer kids the same education that prior groups have had. We are short-handed everywhere while expectations keep rising. Everyone is being asked to do more for less money. A lot of young teachers in our bldg. make less now than they did 3-4 years ago.

While this particular response was longer than most, it contained similar issues commented on by many principals.

A junior high school principal from a rural area of New York mentioned another problematic aspect of finances—that of equity: “- equity of opportunity for socioeconomically disadvantaged students...”

Other principals voiced similar challenges that resulted from reduced funding and consequent concerns over cutting of programs. An 11th year high school principal from Minnesota wrote,

Cuts in funding and the cuts in programs that go with them. We have a very good school and one that has many interventions for students that struggle. These interventions are at risk of being cut. This is not unusual for schools but a big frustration. We know what and how to do it we are just getting cut financially to the point that we can't make it without cuts that hurt students and their education.

Yet another response from a 12th year elementary principal in a rural area of Montana spoke to staffing implications resulting from the loss of financial support, “Lack of funding from the State to maintain staffing for low teacher student ratios.” Another response mentioning the difficulties of reaching high standards with scarce resources came from a suburban elementary principal in Oregon, “Aligning ever decreasing funding with ever increasing expectations.” It is worth noting that nearly all of the

responses regarding the lack of adequate financial support mentioned the detrimental effect on students.

Home and Community Issues

Home and community issues made up the next major theme with almost a fifth (17.8%) of the responses mentioning some aspect of the impact of issues and changes occurring in the home and local community. Several sub-themes were identified within the general theme. The lack of parental and/or community involvement and support was mentioned by most of the principals who wrote responses corresponding to this category. Also included in this theme were student population issues related to home and community including poverty, gangs, bullying, apathy of parents and students, and the home language of parents being other than English. A sixth year elementary principal from a suburban area of Oklahoma wrote, "Parent involvement is a challenge. Parents are not being accountable for their children's actions in regards to their behavior, respect for authority, and just basic skills." A suburban New York state high school principal wrote, "Changing demographics of school. Students and families that have multiple needs that affect their education."

Other principals referred more specifically to the challenges of the local homes and community of their schools. An eighth year elementary principal from an urban New York area wrote, "Community violence, poverty, homelessness, domestic violence. Large number of students in foster care. Large special needs population - 35%. One parent families over 50%. 98% of our students receive free or reduced lunch. Large number of students suffering with asthma."

The issues of home and community are not limited to urban or suburban areas. Many rural principals mentioned related challenges that they increasingly face. A second year elementary principal from a rural area of Illinois wrote, "The constant challenge is fighting the effects of an ever growing number of at-risk students who face greater challenges at home that seem to be brought into school more every year." A elementary principal from a rural area of Arizona close to the Mexican border wrote,

High mobility rate over 40% and over 90% free and reduced lunch. We are close to the border (w/in 25 miles) and many families go to relatives homes for extended weekends, leaving Thursday after school and not returning until Tuesday. Thus our absent rates are high and our average daily attendance is between 89-93 percent.

Another rural principal, this one from a middle school in Indiana, wrote of the challenges of establishing a culture of learning and of concerns that social networking have brought to the development of students,

1) Establishing a school climate/culture of learning (this problem is reflective of the community); 2) Interpersonal/Intrapersonal development concerns in the age of social networking (issues with bullying & cyberbullying and its affect on the healthy emotional and cognitive development of young adolescents).

An elementary principal from an urban district in Colorado referred to a major shift in the home language of her school population, "Most of my students (over 50%) come to school not knowing English. Additionally, because they come from very

impoverished homes in their native countries (mostly Mexico), many of the parents are not literate in their native language.”

A high school principal from rural Oklahoma made a statement regarding apathy. This particular challenge was echoed by many other principals. “Student and parent apathy are increasing making it difficult to engage students in rigorous curriculum aims.”

Surprisingly, gang activity and related problems were mentioned by principals not only in urban, but also in suburban and rural areas and at all school levels. An elementary principal from urban North Carolina stated the problem succinctly, “95% poverty, gangs, crime, limited parent involvement.” A suburban high school principal in California appeared to link the gang issue to reading level, “...significant gang activity; ready availability of illegal drugs; high percentage of students reading below grade level.” An urban elementary principal from California made a link to the community, “...impact of poverty and gang activity in the neighborhood.”

Test Scores/Accountability

Issues related to the strains of continually raising test scores and the pressures of accountability were next in overall percent of all responses (13.0%). Three primary subthemes were identified within this major theme: Pressures from above for NCLB (No Child Left Behind) compliance and scores, Subgroups not meeting AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) goals, and Testing not aligned with 21st century learning needs.

An eighth year elementary principal from a rural area of Texas wrote of the compliance and AYP issues, “Maintaining high test scores on the State test (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) while the test changes and becomes increasingly more difficult.” Similarly, a sixth year high school principal from an urban district in Colorado wrote, “A significant increase in testing this year has reduced our instructional time. Teachers, students, and administrators are stressed. The result is too much data that we do not have time to do anything with.” Another response, this one from an 18th year veteran elementary principal in an urban area of California seemed to carry quite a bit of emotion:

Too many meetings, too much paperwork, RAISING TEST SCORES, too many time consuming useless tasks, finding time to supervise instruction; fewer and fewer resources and support, yet more and more work! Too much emphasis and focus put on test scores and not enough placed on the quality of instruction - - teaching to the test instead of delivering high quality, rigorous, standards-based instruction!

A middle school principal from rural Ohio mentioned a challenge with invalid data being used for accountability purposes: “State and federal mandates of accountability. The ‘data’ they shove down our throats is not valid data, thus all our planning and focus is on measures that do not truly measure student success.” This concern was identified in other responses as well. A high school principal from rural Virginia mentioned a common concern relative to state and federal standards not being the same: “meeting AYP goals, even though we meet state standards.”

A middle school principal from suburban Texas was one of several mentioning the 21st Century learning needs: “Balancing state expectations/standards/assessments/accountability with high quality 21st century education.” A principal of a large suburban

high school in Ohio had this to say, “NCLB and associated types of accountability minimize the importance of problem solving, thinking skills, creativity, and 21st century skills like use of technology, resource utilization...”

Instruction/Assessment

Another major theme mentioned in slightly fewer (12.0%) responses was focused on teaching, curriculum, and the use of assessments to drive learning. Several subthemes were identified within the major theme including helping teachers change/improve instruction to meet the needs of changing student populations, moving away from authentic assessment, and an increasingly narrowed curriculum. A high school principal from a rural district in Mississippi wrote, “Changing the instructional culture to data driven decision making; changing teacher thought process from grade base to skill mastery.” A middle school principal from rural Georgia brought up the issue of interventions, “Implementing the Tier 2 interventions for our struggling learners. Impacting student achievement for all AYP student sub-groups.”

A number of principals mentioned the emerging challenges of teaching students that may not have been in regular classrooms a few years ago. A middle school principal from suburban California wrote, “Increased number of high risk special education students that are attempting to attend a “regular” school with supports in place. The number of ED students is rising faster than our capacity to accommodate them.” Similarly, an elementary principal from an urban district in Massachusetts stated, “Teaching many students whose first language is not English.”

Like many respondents, a high school principal from suburban Washington referred to challenges present in the areas of teaching and curriculum:

1. Continue to meet evolving state exit exam standards with a high-risk, alternative student population and dwindling resources.
2. Continue to deliver "out-of-the box" education in a climate of narrowing curriculum and options.
3. Continue to meet the needs of a diverse student population in the midst of a conversion or narrowing of curriculum expectations.

An elementary principal from rural Minnesota mentioned another topic brought up by many--the need for much more coaching of teachers, “A move towards my time being spent with teachers rather than students. Much more individual teacher coaching....”

A junior high principal from an urban district in California mentioned several challenges regarding teachers that were also mentioned by other principals,

Helping teachers change practice to better meet the needs of students, focus on learning rather than teaching, ... technology comfort levels of more experienced teachers, us vs. them attitude, ... teacher attitudes that only some students can learn (those that want to learn), driven by the master schedule, union contracts...

Lack of Time

Of the respondents, a fair percentage (7.1%) directly mentioned a lack of time to do what principals need to do or tasks that are time consuming as a significant challenge. Many respondents wrote about what they wanted to do but couldn't while others mentioned

having to take shortcuts that were not adequate solutions. A middle school principal from suburban Iowa communicated the lack of, “Time to complete administrative requirements and provide instructional leadership concurrently.”

Within the issue of time, several principals mentioned that central/district office meetings kept them away from school too much. A high school principal in a Texas suburb stated,

Meetings called by people in admin building that require excessive time off campus. They are to be a support to building principals, not hindrances. Many of the reports they ask for they have the information and staff to put that information in the proper format for those reports. Very difficult for building principal to spread the message and vision when we are hardly on campus due to admin meetings.

An elementary principal from an urban California district wrote, “The most significant challenge is finding time to do everything that is required of the job with full effort. I don't feel I have enough time to do everything well.” Another, this one a first year principal from rural Michigan, stated the challenge concisely, “Too much to do and not enough time to manage it all.”

A sixth year elementary principal from suburban West Virginia seemed to shout frustration when responding:

TIME!!!! There is not ample time to plan and present staff development, handle discipline, improve parent involvement, reward students and staff, complete necessary paperwork, & document every time you speak to someone. This all needs done AND we need to be in classrooms 50% of our time. There just is not enough of me OR enough time to do all of the necessary tasks well.

Too many responsibilities

A theme mentioned in slightly less (6.9)% of the responses was that of having simply too many responsibilities to be able to do an adequate job. Many principals felt completely overwhelmed. While this theme is related to time, many comments approached this as a separate theme. For example, a number of principals responded regarding the number of new initiatives taken on in a short amount of time. A 3rd year elementary principal from an urban district in New Mexico listed several initiatives,

Too many initiatives started at one time. We have continuous school improvement, a new language arts curriculum, PDSA, new administrative software, addition of new programs at the building level, after school programs, web EPSS, etc. All way too many things to do and do well. I feel splintered and not as effective as I could be if I could focus on a few initiatives. I have counted that we have 15 new initiatives currently running this year alone, on top of the many new initiatives that were started last year. Overwhelming.

Other principals mentioned the challenges of being both a manager and an instructional leader with so much to do. An elementary principal from rural Colorado described the situation with these words, “Balancing the expectations of the office (discipline, attendance issues, parent issues, classroom/staffing coverage) with the expectations of being an instructional leader throughout the building (teacher

observations/evaluations, grade level collaborations, designing and coordinating professional development opportunities).”

Like many other respondents, a high school principal from a large school in an urban area of California seemed to take this question about significant challenges as an opportunity to vent frustration,

Seriously? How much time do you have? Balancing required management duties with my role as instructional leader is #1 challenge. Dealing with adults: Difficult and/or demanding parents, Incompetent or mediocre teachers. Continuing to do more with less (all resources- people and supplies/materials).

Some principals had much to say. The most comprehensive response came from a second year high school principal working in a suburb in Oregon,

Boy... the list is really long. At this point, the top challenges I face include:

- Maintaining a positive and inspiring climate for teachers during budget cuts and a political culture that attacks teachers (for example, the ideas that come Waiting for Superman).
- AYP... we have a "needs improvement" designation and are designing and implementing interventions, which we hope are successful. This has been positive and meaningful but hard work.
- SIP- We are revamping our school improvement plan to meet the above need and new grad requirements in Oregon... this has been great but tough work.
- Sheer volume of work- This is a great school and very meaningful work... but the sheer volume of things to do is overwhelming. For instance, I started my workday at 6:30 am and I am completing this survey at 5:15 pm. I will go to the gym, have dinner with my wife and work until 11:30 pm or later... I try to be efficient but so much troubleshooting has to occur. Whew...

Other principals were more terse in their responses. One elementary principal from an urban New Mexico district stated the issue clearly, “I don’t have time to answer that, which is the challenge.” A first year principal from a very large school (1,013 students) in rural Pennsylvania simply wrote, “The list is too long.” Finally, an elementary principal from a suburban area of California summed up the many emerging challenges faced by school principals throughout the country in one word, “Everything.”

Other challenges

There were other noteworthy challenges mentioned by the principals responding to the survey that had fewer responses than those noted above. Those mentioned included district/state/federal issues, special-needs students, teacher morale and teacher resistance, student behavior, technology, union problems and a host of yet others, some mentioned only one to three times.

Conclusion

The responses cited in this paper represent only a small portion of the many, many written statements by principals, who, busy as they are, took time from their day to write about their challenges in response to a single question on a survey sent to them electronically. A glance at the entire set of responses, which takes up a full 74 pages, single-spaced, indicates that public school principals face emerging challenges that make

their work difficult and at times, impossible to do well. The responses are telling of a group of leaders, serving in the relatively prestigious position of school principal, trying to do their very best with limited resources and time. It is of note that these leaders are fairly well-paid professionals (the median salary for principals was about \$88,000 as of May 2010) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015) who are, in general, very carefully selected for their positions.

This article was written primarily for those who prepare these educational leaders. Current university courses of preparation rarely deal with many of the challenges that were mentioned by so many principals whose voices were shared here. These are not regional challenges as seen by the responses; they are found in schools of every type and in every location throughout the entire country.

How do we support these principals in facing the challenges they have so articulately pointed out? How do we prepare principals for what is becoming an overwhelming task? These are just some of the questions that are suggested by the responses from principals.

One thing is clear: We cannot continue to prepare school principals in the same way we have done for far too long. Indeed, there are some innovations in the field. Some schools of education are beginning to include longer and more extensive fieldwork and internship opportunities in schools that are carried out in collaboration with the school leadership of those schools. Standards for preparation that once were more generic and sometimes vague and overarching now require quite specific tasks to be completed in a school setting. We are moving from preparation programs that involved quite a bit of reading and writing to programs that also include performance tasks. The more that preparation programs can actually prepare leaders for the kinds of issues they will face on a daily basis, the better off the profession will be and the better off the students in those schools will be.

However, the larger questions remain: Are we preparing future leaders with the skills and knowledge to deal with rapid change in their schools and communities? Are we providing them with tools that are flexible enough to meet the evolving needs voiced by current principals? Are we preparing them with an equity lens to ensure that traditionally underserved populations will receive the assistance they need? Are we helping them to develop collaborative networks that they can participate in and call upon when needed? Are we injecting in them a passion for this all-important work so vital to our future? Have we reached the point of crisis in our national public educational system? It is our job to seek solutions and we must do so now.

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Exploring Ethics and Teacher Conduct in a Suburban School District: Implications for School Leaders

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



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The relationship between academic dishonesty and ethics has received minimal attention in the research literature. Due in part to the added pressure and stress induced by accountability mandates, researchers hypothesized new demands could trigger an array of undesirable responses. This study examined the relationship between teachers' perspectives of their ethical orientation and their self-reported behavior regarding academic policies. Utilizing a survey instrument to capture perspectives on academic decisions, data were collected from elementary teachers (N=155) in one suburban school district within a large metropolitan area in Southeast Texas. The data were then analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tests. The results suggest elementary teachers did report engaging in academic misconduct to some degree. The findings suggest, as well, that reported misconduct was significantly related to the ethical viewpoint of the respondent. Collaboration and professional development are discussed as potential interventions at reducing academic impropriety.

Introduction

Since the initiation of Public Law 107-110 (i.e., the No Child Left Behind Act, NCLB), reports of teachers violating academic policies have been occurring with greater regularity (Bruhn, Zajac, Al-Kazemi, & Prescott, 2002; Cummings, Maddux, Harlow, & Dyas, 2002; Evetts, 2006; Storm & Storm, 2007). Cases have been reported where teachers and administrators have illegally engaged in fraudulent test activity such as altering scoring sheets of children on high stakes exams (Almasy, 2015). Noting the added pressure and stress associated with ratcheted performance demands and the threat of sanctions, researchers set out to examine to what degree impactful accountability requirements influence choices and ethical perspectives of teachers concerning academic policy.

Because behaviors of teachers, inside and outside the classroom, are of enormous interest to the public, schools must give full attention to these matters. Otherwise, as some studies suggest (Bruhn et al., 2002; Cummings et al., 2002; Evetts, 2006; Storm & Storm, 2007), public opinion and trust may diminish. In view of prior research, this study explores two areas: (a) teachers' perspectives of their past decisions toward academic policies (i.e., did teachers perceive themselves as breaching the law relevant to academic policies?); and (b) the link between teachers' academic policy choices and their self-reported ethical orientation (i.e., to what particular ethical viewpoint do teachers rationalize their interaction with academic policy?). Implications for leadership and decision-making are discussed.

Background

To more fully grapple with teachers' interactions with academic policies, researchers focused on academic impropriety in the workplace and ethics in education. The academic impropriety literature was useful in contextualizing teachers' responses to items that probed their perceived interaction with policy. Literature on ethics also provided a lens to examine, from a philosophical premise, the ethical rationale for teachers arriving at a decision or choice.

Academic Dishonesty

Generally considered a violation of an academic policy, academic dishonesty has been a topic of research for decades (Cizek, 1999; Cummings et al., 2002; Finn & Frone, 2004; McCabe, 1999; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001). While much research has focused on student cheating, recent reports of teacher engagement in academic dishonesty have emerged (Bruhn et al., 2002; Evetts, 2006; Storm & Storm, 2007). The shift from students to teachers in the academic dishonesty discourse comes as no surprise in view of the tighter coupling between student academic dishonesty and ethical failure in the workplace (Cummings et al., 2002; Davy, Kincaid, Smith, & Trawick, 2007).

Pressure and conflict have been identified as underlying factors linked to increasing ethical lapses (Colgan, 2004; O'Neill, 2003; Son Hing, Bobocel, Zanna, & McBride, 2007; Stefkovich, 2006). Teachers have reported feelings of extreme pressure stemming from expectations associated with the No Child Left Behind Act. Such

pressures are reported to have engendered conflict between the teacher and the educational organization (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Whisnant, 1988). While examining the effect of mounting workplace stress yields insight, the less salient ethical motives impacting individual choice are considered far less.

Ethics and Ethical Framing

Ethics is typically described as the study of right versus wrong. Dewey (1903) underscores the obligation of schools to embed ethics in every function of education. According to Dewey, “the school is fundamentally an institution erected by society to do a certain specific work – to exercise a certain specific function in maintaining the life and advancing the welfare of society. The educational system which does not recognize this fact as entailing upon it an ethical responsibility is derelict and a defaulter” (p. 10).

While definitions vary, the meaning of ethics is oftentimes driven by theory or worldview or as Strike and Ternasky (1993) note “have a strong normative core and provide various ways to appraise the merits and judge the significance of educational policy” (p. 1). For example, social Darwinism (Starratt, 1991), utilitarianism (Sims, 1994; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999), community (Furman, 2003), and Judeo-Christian, Hobbesian or Wilsonian (Casmir, 1997) reflect a few pathways of ethical inquiry. The meaning of ethics within the education purview varies to a point as well. Rebore (2001) describes ethics as an “extremely complex enterprise” influencing one’s choosing of a course of action in a difficult situation. Ethical outcomes or choices, according to Rebore, are linked to three questions:

- (a) What does it mean to be a human being?
- (b) How should human beings treat one another?
- (c) How should the institutions of society be organized? (p. 5)

Similarly, Beckner (2004) sees ethics as a way to reflect on “dilemmas which have no completely satisfactory answer or they may more happily require a choice between two conflicting goods” (p. 8).

Ethical framing provides a promising approach to better understanding teachers’ partiality to particular responses when confronted with an academic policy decision. Shapiro & Stefkovich (2005) offer a multidimensional model allowing for analysis of choice and decisions across four distinct ethical frames: a) the ethic of justice, (b) the ethic of care, (c) the ethic of critique, and (d) the ethic of profession. These ethical frames, while characteristically unique but not entirely distinct, are highly applicable to teachers’ ethical practices.

Under the *ethic of justice*, laws and rules are considered universal and applied and interpreted in a consistent and or fair manner. A guiding principle of the ethic of justice is utilitarianism. In utilitarianism (Locke, 1960), decisions maximize goodness or pleasure and minimize evil or pain. For example, teachers’ ethical decisions using utilitarianism or maximization are intended to benefit the greater good (Mill, 1957; Stefkovich, 2006). Libertarianism is another key dimension within the ethic of justice. Within libertarianism, the equality for all individuals is pursued. As it pertains to school leaders, Enomoto (1997) suggests educational administrators are more apt to rely on the ethic of justice because of its top down orientation, emphasis on universal principles, and maintenance of the status quo.

In response to male oriented moral development theories of Freud, Piaget and Kohlberg, Gilligan's work in the *ethic of care* (1982) placed emphasis on the humanistic "voice" of morality. Addressing Kohlberg's position on moral development specifically, Gilligan challenged the notion of the individual's ability to reflect on "morality rights" as the pinnacle of moral awareness. Rather, "moral responsibility," according to Gilligan, reflected an alternative moral understanding, emphasizing care and relationships. According to Gilligan (1982), "the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract" (p. 19). Gilligan believed women observed and made sense of the world differently from men. The ethic of care for that reason has largely been treated as a gender construct (Enomoto, 1997; Noddings, 1984). In the late 1970s, Nel Noddings broadened the care ethic to describe the relationship as "one caring" and the "cared for" (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2004; Noddings, 1984). In seeking to promote the wellbeing of others, care additionally meant being "oriented toward ethics grounded in empathy rather than dispassionate ethical principles" (McCray & Beachum, 2006, p.5). In a similar vein, Torres (2004, p. 252) notes "Caring [as an ethic] reflects a profound responsibility to ensure that needs are met with the purpose of helping the individual realize and achieve self-liberation." Through emphasis on relationships, collaboration and sense of belonging, the ethic of care focuses on the welfare of individuals (Begley, 2006; Furman, 2003; Shapiro & Gross, 2008).

In contract to justice and care, the *ethic of critique* more closely examines the question of fairness for whom. At the core of the ethic of critique is the pretext of privileged, European-American males establishing traditional rules and laws to reinforce social stratification. According to this frame, traditional rules are in and of themselves unfair to all parties. The ethic of critique serves as a counter response to the justice ethic primarily to "ensure equity and equal opportunity" (Normore, 2004, p. 5) or as Shapiro & Gross (2008) maintain, to achieve the "concept of democracy" (p. 6). Through critique, injustices are revealed and action is taken to correct the injustices or oppression (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Freire, 1970; Furman, 2003; Giroux, 1988; McCray & Beachum, 2006).

Increasing injustice arising from the current policy environment of high-stakes assessments and accountability (Furman, 2003) is usually paraded under the banner of social justice and has acquired a new intensity and urgency in education (McDonald, 2007). Starratt (1991) suggests society has always consisted of different groups struggling for some form of control, and philosophers since the Frankfurt School have examined social arrangements through critical theory, a dominant lens under this ethic. According to Starratt (1991), "the point of critical theory was to uncover which group had the advantage over the others, how things got to be the way they were, and to expose how situations were studied and language disused so as to maintain the legitimacy of social arrangements" (p.189). To this end, more and more teacher education programs are emphasizing social justice as a basis and central concern of teacher education programs (McDonald, 2007).

The fourth and final frame, the *ethic of profession* offers a more holistic approach to the distinct ethics of justice, care, and critique (Stefkovich, 2006). Under profession, teachers and leaders struggle with the alternative concepts of justice, care, and critique, which may spark tensions between professional ethical codes and the ethical beliefs of

the individual. Decisions under the ethic of profession are made in the best interests of the students (Faircloth, 2004; Stefkovich, 2006). Teachers and leaders reflect on choices and decisions from a multi-ethical perspective despite their personal orientation toward particular ethical beliefs (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). Similarly, Begley suggests administrators move beyond the use of a single ethical frame as a “moral rubric” (Begley, 2006, p. 583) and to consciously adopt a multi-ethical perspective as a guide for problem solving in the educational arena.

Minimal research has captured the link between ethics and teacher perspectives regarding their conduct toward academic policy. This inquiry relies on teacher perspectives to more fully understand these ethical constructs and why teachers choose to interact with academic policies in particular ways. By probing perspectives on professional interaction with academic policy, educational leaders may be better able to comprehend the complexity of decisions and choices and develop strategies at minimizing or deterring fraudulent behaviors.

Methodology

Research Questions

Q1: Do teachers engage in some type of academic misconduct?

Q2: To what extent do teachers’ perceived ethical beliefs explain their perceived conduct toward academic policy?

Data Source

Texas was noted by Storm and Storm (2007) as one of a handful of states where academic dishonesty was prevalent on a standardized assessment and where a test security company was hired to monitor irregularities. Specifically, the data source for this study included elementary teachers from a school district with more than 20,000 students located in a large metropolitan suburb in Southeast Texas. The student profile for the school district participating district reflected the following percentages: 5% Asian, 20% African Americans, 45% Latino, and 30% White. Over 40% of the students were designated economically disadvantaged and over 10% were identified as English Language Learners.

Invitations to participate in the study were sent to campus principals. Ten schools chose to participate. Using a random number generator, the campuses were assigned an identification number. Teachers from the self-selected campuses were invited to participate by email from the school principal. Two hundred and thirteen elementary teachers responded to the self-administered questionnaire, providing a return rate of approximately 50%. After selecting out respondents who were teachers of record and indicated complete familiarity with academic policies, 73% (N=155) remained in the data set. Fifty-one percent of the teachers described themselves as persons of color. The majority, 84%, reported their having a bachelor’s degree; the remaining 16% held a master’s degree. Most (75%) obtained their teaching certification through a traditional manner as opposed to an alternative certification program (ACP). Just under half, 48%,

taught in self-contained classrooms; they taught English, reading, math, science, and social studies to their assigned group of students.

Survey Development and Data Collection

Based on well established principles for developing self-administered questionnaires (Creswell, 2003 & Fowler, 1993), a survey instrument was created using well known surveys as models including the Assessment of Academic Misconduct (Ferrell & Daniel, 1995), Attitude Toward Cheating Scale (Roig & Ballew, 1994), Rokeach's Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973) and the List of Values Test (Homer & Kahle, 1988). Selected questions were modified to gauge knowledge of grading policies and procedures. A focus group of 30 master teachers and 15 doctoral students assisted in refining items dealing with realistic grading and testing situations for the survey. The focus group was asked to list violations of grading or testing policies they had witnessed. The reported violations were then consolidated into a single list. A subset of teachers was asked to review a list of common grading or testing situations for authenticity and to provide any other situations that were not addressed on the list. The instrument was administered to the focus group on two separate occasions. It asked respondents to indicate an action related to a grading or testing policy and to provide a reason for the action.

Respondents were then asked to identify which ethical frame (i.e., justice, care, critique, and the profession) most accurately reflected their responses. Respondents were later interviewed to determine if the various items of the instrument were easily understood. While respondents indicated minimal difficulty in identifying an action or reason, connection to the ethical categories caused moderate confusion for teachers. A subsequent iteration of the instrument addressed item problems and was reviewed again for construct and content validity by researchers in the field. Reliability was established using a test-retest method. A convenience sample of 30 teachers was asked on two occasions to complete the survey. Using SPSS, reliability of the test-retest data was calculated at a Cronbach's α of 0.85.

As for policy knowledge, participants were asked to indicate their familiarity with grading and testing policies at the campus, district, and state level. Participants were also asked to indicate if identified policies were reviewed on a continuous basis by their campus and academic team. If respondents lacked knowledge of basic policies, they were removed from the analysis to avoid confounding the results.

Items capturing policy interaction were used to gather participants' responses to common grading situations (see Table 1). An interaction score was determined by assigning one point for each time a teacher indicated that his/her action would violate the district's or state's policy. On a second coding, teachers were categorically coded as a violator if a violation was indicated on any question. Items in the final section pertaining to the ethical frames explored participants' responses to common situations when placed in an educational context or scenario and reasons (premised on the ethical frames) guiding the response.

Identifying respondents' dominant ethical frame called for criteria when subjects identified differing frames depending on the question (see Table 2). The respondents' dominant ethical frame was identified when the respondent referred to a single ethical frame three or more times. If a respondent chose the ethic of profession twice and another

paradigm twice, the paradigm other than profession was coded as dominant. If a dominant paradigm could not be identified, a code of *none* was assigned to the respondent. Researchers acknowledge the limitations in employing rigid criteria as it may oversimplify or distort respondents' ethical identity. Be that as it may, the exploratory nature of this research is intended to generate thought and discussion about ethics and choice as well as encourage future inquiry.

Table 1
Policy and Misconduct Constructs

Data	Conditions	Definition	Category Levels
Policies	Individuals must be familiar with policies before they can be held accountable for policy violation	Familiar with both district and state academic policies	0=No* 1=Yes
Academic misconduct-Direct questions	Responses indicating violation were based on written policies and validation by district administrator	Violation of a written policy	0=Policy not violated 1=Policy violated
Academic misconduct-Scenarios	Responses indicating violation were based on written policies and validation by district administrator	Violation of a written policy	0=Policy not violated 1=Policy violated

Table 2
Ethical Frames

Data	Conditions	Definition	Category Levels
Ethical paradigm	Respondents selected an ethical rationale for each grading decision	Justice: uphold traditional rules, policy or procedures; strives to apply rules equally to all students Care: develop and maintain caring relationship with student; show respect for the student as an individual Critique: level the field for students from different political or social situations Profession: act in the best interest of the child while abiding by parameters of the professional code	1=Justice 2=Care 3=Critique 4=Profession

Data Analysis

This study explored the relationship between ethical frames and teacher's self-reported behavior with respect to academic policy. Logistic regression was used to explore the influence of categorical or interval-ratio variables on a dichotomous dependent variables (Agresti, 2002). The flexible and robust logistic regression did not assume normality, linearity or equal variances. Logistic regression utilized probabilities to determine into which bi-variant category a subject would fall. The linear regression equation (u) is then the natural log of the probability of being in one group divided by the probability of being in the other group. The linear regression equation creates the logit or log of the odds:

$$\ln\left(\frac{\hat{y}}{1-\hat{y}}\right) = B_0 + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + \dots + B_kX_k$$

The model fit was analyzed using a *-2Log Likelihood of 0* and the *Goodness of Fit* statistic; each compared predicted values to observed values. Since the investigation was exploratory in nature, a forward stepping method was utilized; thus only IVs that significantly predicted the DV were included in the model. Data were screened for missing data and outliers (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005).

Results

Overall, 90% of the eligible sample (i.e., among those expressing familiarity with the policies) reported violating at least one policy. The percentage of the reported violation exceeded the upper limit of 75% reported in similar studies of academic dishonesty. Fifty-eight percent of teachers reported violating at least one academic policy (e.g., do you add points, curve grades?). The percentage increased to 72% when the policy was presented using a scenario (e.g., a student struggles academically and comes from a very difficult home life has an average of 67 at the end of the grading period...do you record a passing grade on the report card?).

When dominant ethical frames were regressed on violation of high-stakes testing policies (see Table 3), significance was found (Wald (4) =29.86, $p < .01$). The ethic of profession was designated as the baseline for the regression. The findings suggest teachers orienting to a frame other than profession had higher odds of violating high-stakes testing policies. The range for the odds ratio factor, Exp (β), ranged from almost 12 for those having no identifiable ethical paradigm to a low of approximately 3 for those guided by an ethic of justice.

Table 3

Regression Statistics for Violation of a Standardized Testing Policy with Ethical Frames

Source	Variable	β (logit)	SE	Wald	Exp(β)
Step 1	Dominant Ethical Frame			29.86 [^]	
	No Dominant Frame	2.47	.50	24.35 [^]	11.78
	Justice	1.08	.38	7.82**	2.94
	Care	1.72	.57	9.06***	5.60

	Critique	2.03	.88	5.37*	7.63	
	Constant	-1.12	.26	17.83^	.33	
		Goodness of Fit			Nagelkerke	Percent
Source	-2LL	X ²	df	Sig.	R ²	Correct
Model	221.75	.00	3	1.0	.23	68.3
Constant	257.08					53.2

Note: *p<.05, **p = .005; ***p<.005, ^p=.0001

As for responses to policy scenarios (see Table 4), teachers with no dominant ethical paradigm had the highest odds ratio for violating policy, followed by those guided by an ethic of critique, then ethic of care, and finally by those reporting an ethic of justice.

Table 4
Regression Statistics for Violation of Multiple Testing^a Policies with Ethical Frames

Source	Variable	β (logit)	SE	Wald	Exp(β)	
Step 1	Dominant Ethical Frame			26.39^		
	No Dominant Frame	2.62	.58	20.65^	13.79	
	Justice	1.09	.44	6.24**	2.98	
	Care	1.84	.62	8.68***	6.27	
	Critique	2.53	1.16	4.78*	12.53	
	Constant	-1.14	.30	14.83^	.32	
Source	-2LL	Goodness of Fit		Nagelkerke	Percent	
		X^2	df	Sig.	R^2	Correct
Model	172.62	.00	3	1.0	.26	69.6
Constant	204.74					52.7

Note: Note: *p<.05, **p = .01; ***p<.005, ^p=.0001

Discussion and Conclusions

Due to increasing stress associated with accountability, this study sought to explore the role of ethics in teachers' decisions to engage in academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty has been well documented in the literature (Davis, Grover, Becker, & McGregor, 1992; Ferrell & Daniel, 1995; Whitely, 1998) across diverse participant realms (Bruhn et al., 2002; Cummings et al., 2002; Ferrell & Daniel, 1995; Hamilton, 2006). Despite the paucity of academic dishonesty research involving teachers, studies by Davy et al. (2007) and Lovett- Hooper, Komarraju, Weston, & Dollinger (2007) provided a rationale for pursuing this investigation.

This study first looked at whether teachers reported to have engaged in some form of academic dishonesty. The findings point to teachers reporting violations of grading and testing policies, a finding consistent with prior studies. Teachers reported violating both local and state academic policies; 78% reported violating a local grading policy,

47% reported violating standardized testing policies, and 90% reported violating one or the other. The findings are consistent with previous studies on academic misconduct in other academic realms involving students (Cizek, 1999; Cummings et al., 2002; Ferrell & Daniel, 1995) and professors (Bruhn et al., 2002; Cummings et al., 2002; Hamilton, 2006). Both logistic regression analyses revealed significant associations between specific ethical frames and teachers' self-reported engagement in some form of academic conduct. High odds ratios for both the ethics of critique and care suggest teachers' motives to violate policy may be guided by rationales not strictly legal. As the ethic of care places the human needs foremost and ethic of critique challenges the inherent bias of law and policy, this finding appears to underscore teachers' antipathy toward high impact policy.

The impact of pressure (Booher-Jennings, 2005; O'Neill, 2003) on actions of misconduct should be noted as well. Previous studies found academic misconduct was possibly motivated by pressures to succeed (Evans & Craig, 1990; Schab, 1991). The increased probability (12%) of policy violations by teachers was closely associated with students evaluated under state testing and NCLB. These results appear consistent with prior research on student academic dishonesty, which found students were more likely to cheat if given the opportunity (McCabe et al., 1999). The findings also reveal a peculiar distinction in teacher interaction with policy but one that may be perceived intuitively. Teachers in the study appeared to violate grading policies to a greater degree than standardized testing policies. Thus, the level of risk was inversely related to the severity of sanctions (McCabe et al., 1999). Violations of a grading policy could result in a reprimand or loss of contract, while violations of a standardized testing policy could result in loss of certification, professional credentials and the specter of criminal charges.

This inquiry also sought to address the research gap linking academic dishonesty and ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006). The findings suggest most teachers (83%) made decisions based on a dominant ethical frame. The variation in ethical framing should be a point of consideration for school leaders as academic misconduct is modified and developed. Leaders should consider adopting professional development opportunities that stress a multidimensional approach to complex ethical decision-making. Kahle (1983) in his work in marketing as well as Shapiro & Stefkovich (2005) and Begley (2006) urge leaders to consider multidimensional ethical framing as a context to explore dilemmas.

Governing bodies typically rely on the threat of sanctions to bring about policy implementation (McDonnell and Elmore, 1987). With 30% fewer teachers indicating a violation of a policy carrying severe sanctions, it would appear the policy is modestly successful at deterring undesirable behaviors. On the other hand, if nearly 50% of responding teachers indicate a willingness to violate testing policies, perhaps the results of this study suggest changes are needed to improve policy compliance. The professional code of conduct should be a focal point of discussion for school leaders and a basis for decisions (Kahle, 1983; Sims, 1994). Administrators should be familiar with the various ethical dimensions (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005) that precede a choice or action. School districts should support learning experiences, which introduce teachers and leaders to a variety of complex situations (McIntyre-Mills, 2008; Kahl, 1983; Rokeach, 1973; Simms, 1994). Leaders become the exemplars for recognizing the diversity of ethical perspective as decisions focus largely on students' best interest of (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). As

Fullan (2001) suggests, “leaders in all organizations, whether they know it or not, contribute for better or worse to moral purpose in their own organizations and in society as a whole” (p. 15).

As Heckman and Peterman (1996) argue, the impetus for improvement should emerge from within through dialogue and inquiry to arrive at critical knowledge for change. Highly effective schools are not monolithic institutions but instead “indigenously invented” (Heckman and Peterman, 1996). Professional development can be powerful in designing activities that reflect the needs of the context (Hatch, 2000). By and large, schools are seemingly less able to deal with the range of complexity with regard to human thought and for efficiency sake opt for a “disciplinization” of practice (Simola, 1998). Rigid and static theories of ethics and other bodies of content have begun to control many aspects of the classroom, largely discouraging policy innovation and creativity at the local level. In the end, policy altruism and complacency prevents the critical reflection and consciousness needed for change and improvement.

In sum, the findings revealed an empirical connection between ethics and teacher’s interactions with grading policies and high-stakes testing guidelines. New pressures have emerged for both students and teachers (Colgan, 2004; O’Neill, 2003; Son Hing et al., 2007; Stefkovich, 2006). The birth of consequences and sanctions seem to be resulting in unintended academic misconduct (Bruhn et al., 2002; Cummings et al., 2002; Evetts, 2006; Storm & Storm, 2007). While academic misconduct is not new, the spotlight has been focused mainly on students (Davis et al., 1992; Ferrell & Daniel, 1995; Whitely, 1998). The findings of this research bring teachers into the fold (Bruhn et al., 2002; Evetts, 2006; Storm & Storm, 2007). With greater insight into academic dishonesty, school administrators must engage teachers in dialogue to reduce or prevent academic misconduct and to use ethics as a multidimensional frame to understand decision and choice.

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Culturally Competent Leadership through Empowering Relationships: A Case Study of Two Assistant Principals

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



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The student population in the United States is growing in diversity (Frankenburg & Lee, 2002; Orfield & Lee, 2004; Tefara, Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Chirichigno, 2011), challenging school leaders to develop or fine-tune their cultural competence in order to meet the needs of the changing student population (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). As a result, expanding knowledge of cultural competence is necessary for school leaders as a way to meet state and federal requirements for student subgroups and to meet new credentialing standards for school leaders (ISLLC 2015 Standards Draft Version; Oregon Department of Education Summit on Cultural Competence, 2004; VA Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers, 2011). This is especially important for assistant principals who must navigate the new terrain of school leadership while working to understand students who may not come from the same cultural background (Madhlango & Gordon, 2012).

Through a descriptive case study (Merriam, 1998), this project examines the experiences of two assistant principals, one from an elementary school and one from a high school, who worked as part of a leadership team that increased academic achievement in their diverse schools. The study addresses the following question: How do school assistant principals working at a school with a demonstrated record of success in student achievement, lead schools in culturally competent ways through intentional and enhanced relationships with students? The primary case unit of analysis is the assistant principals, but interviews with teachers and principals provide further confirmation to support the evidence from the assistant principals. Findings indicate that assistant principals can have a positive impact through discipline and community actions. Assistant principals acknowledge that mentors who are deliberate in their work in schools with students of poverty combined with their own personal experiences as teachers is crucial to the decisions they make when interacting with students and their families.

Introduction

Increasingly, as the demographics of United States schools change, the recognition of the importance for culturally competent leadership through empowering relationships with students has emerged in K-12 educational communities. According to the National Center for Cultural Competence, this competency requires organizations to, “have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally” (1989).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2011) indicated that of the 49.5 million children enrolled in United States K-12 schools, 52% were White; 24% were Hispanic; 16% were Black; and 5% were Asian. As demonstrated by the 2010 Census, the Hispanic population within the United States has grown exponentially in the last several decades. High birth rates and increased immigration have contributed to this growth. Hispanic enrollment in public schools tripled between 1968 and 2004 and is projected to be 30% of enrolled students by 2023 (NCES). During that same period, the Black student population increased by 30% and the White student population decreased by 17% (Frankenburg & Lee, 2002; Orfield & Lee, 2004). By 2050, the number of Latinos and Asians in the United States is anticipated to triple, and the number of African Americans is estimated to grow nearly 2 %. With our nation’s children, we expect a similar trend and by 2050, the numbers of students of color in the U.S. will likely jump from 44% to 62% (Tefara, Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Chirichigno, 2011). Additionally, our school aged children who are categorized as Limited English Proficient has grown and is expected to continue to rise.

This increase in diversity increases the urgency for culturally competent leadership by current and future school leaders (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Scholars have emphasized the importance of leaders understanding school culture in a way that allows them to influence instruction and create a sense of personal safety and value (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 1991; Sergiovanni, 2001). As students feel a sense of belonging, emerging research shows that progress can be made in student performance (Brooks, Jean-Marie, Normore, & Hodgins, 2007; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Theoharis, 2007). As state and federal reporting systems require disaggregation and public reporting of academic results, school leaders have begun to face increased scrutiny about subgroup performance. Despite this focus on academic results, there is less focus on areas that are not monitored. For example, disaggregation of student discipline issues and consequences, if not required, is less often examined in schools, at either a school or teacher level. Cultural competence is embodied by a developmental process of assessment, awareness, reflection, and action experienced at both the individual and organizational levels.

As the emphasis on and research support grows in regard to culturally responsive teaching and culturally competent leadership, educator evaluation systems are being updated to address these performance areas. For example, the Commonwealth of Virginia approved new performance standards for principals in 2012. In an examination of the language utilized in that document, it is clear that a collaborative approach that considers stakeholders is expected, and cultural competency is specifically mentioned. In the Virginia Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers, standard 6.4, it is stated, “The principal models professional behavior and

cultural competency to students, staff, and other stakeholders” (Virginia Department of Education, 2011). The revised standards call for principals to evaluate their performance in a self-assessment or with an external evaluator through site visit/informal observation, goal setting, and a portfolio/document log.

Oregon is a state where, with support of the Wallace Foundation, cultural competence has been embedded into the standards for aspiring educational leaders. Educational leaders in Oregon are expected to “demonstrate the capacity to value diversity, engage in self-reflection, facilitate effectively the dynamics of difference, acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge, adapt to the diversity and the cultural contexts of students, families, and communities they serve, and support actions with foster equity of opportunity and services” (Oregon Department of Education, 2004). Similarly, the NEA called for educators to demonstrate four skills related to cultural competence: “valuing diversity, culturally self-aware, understanding the dynamics of cultural interactions, and institutionalizing cultural diversity and adapting to diversity” (2008, p. 1). Finally, the ISLLC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) Standards are under revision in 2014 and include an emphasis on cultural competence and the engagement of families. The 2008 standards are being updated to include creating a “community of care for all students”, “communities of engagement for families”, and “equity and cultural responsiveness” (ISLLC 2015 Standards Draft Version). As both these national and state initiatives begin to explicitly require cultural competency skills and training for leaders, it will be important to understand how best to assess the performance of principals in this area and the impact of those skills on overall student performance and school climate. The evaluation systems in place have not been utilized with enough consistency over a long enough period of time to understand the effectiveness of the measures. The varied nature of these systems between states will make that work challenging.

Educators in the United States have a legal and ethical obligation to maximize the level of equity and equality of opportunity for all students, due in part to legislation such as Title I and IDEA, as well as ethical expectations of the profession (Lashley, 2007; Shapiro & Stepkovich, 2010; Stepkovich & Shapiro, 2003). Specifically, we must seek to understand the role building or school leadership plays in effecting student academic and behavioral performance. According to Leithwood, Louise, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 5) and “is widely regarded as a key factor in accounting for differences in the success with which schools foster the learning of their students” (p. 17). Throughout the history of American public schools, there have been many changes in the demographic profile of enrolled students. Schools have often relied on studies, such as the well known and highly debated Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966), to offer explanations for poor student performance. The Coleman Report pointed to the insurmountable socioeconomic and familial factors at play in student performance. The report was used to mitigate the effects of student funding, curriculum, and teacher quality on student performance, while pointing to a student’s socioeconomic factor as the primary force behind attainment. If we can ascertain that a school leader’s cultural and contextual competence can assist in mitigating those effects, and understand opportunities to scale up those efforts, great gains are possible (Scheurich, Skrla, & Johnson, 2000).

While the influence of school leaders on student performance has been examined, there is less research about the potential influence of assistant principals. For many who begin the role of assistant principal, it is their first administrative role, and for some, it is their first experience outside of their classroom. While most assistant principals will have undergone traditional leadership preparation programs that include an administrative internship, these internships are often only one-semester and can be inconsistent in quality (SREB, 2005) and may not include any direct and explicit instruction or opportunity to discuss issues of social justice and cultural competence. Further, the initial experience as an assistant principal can vary, as evidenced by the variety of descriptions of the assistant principal and their role in the literature. Assistant or vice principals have been described as “neglected actors” (Hartzell, 1993); “forgotten leaders” (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004); and “caretaker of the building” (Koru, 1993). It is clear, however, that assistant principals are often highly visible to students as they are delegated discipline and supervisory roles that bring them in frequent contact with students.

For administrators, negotiating today’s education policy environment requires them to have the ability to stay current with rapidly changing local, state, and federal expectations and also be aware of how those expectations will be carried out in their own buildings. Assistant principals are faced with a greater challenge by trying to figure out how to fit in as a school leader as they are learning to lead while at the same time trying to equalize educational outcomes. The role of the assistant principal is largely defined by principals burdened by other pressures or, at times, threatened by the assistant principal, thus widening the gap between what an assistant principal wants to do and is able to do (Karpinski, 2008). According to Williams (2012), “...little is known about which skills and dispositions enable assistant principals to carry out disciplinary tasks most effectively. This lack of knowledge makes it difficult to identify individuals who are well or poorly suited to become assistant principals, and to provide the necessary training that prepares them to do the task well” (p.93). Ensuring an equitable educational environment in the largely vague role of assistant principal is made more difficult by the undefined responsibilities of this job that finds the school leader not yet tasked with leading a school, and no longer part of the building teaching corps. In addition, research regarding the ways in which individuals in the role of assistant principal are prepared to assume the role of principal is limited; most research is regarding the mentorship of principals (James-Ward, 2012; Parlyo, Zepeda, & Bengston, 2012).

For assistant principals new to their roles, their aspirations of helping to lead a school and providing an equitable education for all students can quickly diminish when the weight of the reality of the position is combined with district outcomes that weaken policies aimed at equalizing educational outcomes for students (Trujillo, 2012). Nonetheless, where there exists an assistant principal with enthusiasm to ensure educational parity for students, it is important to recognize and harness this enthusiasm because of the ways in which the demographics of student populations are changing. As suggested by Madhlango and Gordon (2012), “the majority of principals and teachers of culturally diverse students do not come from the same cultural backgrounds as they do, and a number of studies over the past decade indicate that students’ school performance may be linked to lack of congruence between students’ cultures and the norms, values, expectations, and practices of schools” (p. 178). The weight of this responsibility is

enormous, and in order to succeed in fulfilling a mission of equity, a strong support system for assistant principals needs to be established to ensure success. This paper attempts to unpack some of the challenges faced by new assistant principals through an analysis of current research regarding education policy initiatives aimed at fostering the leadership of assistant principals with the goal of educational equity for all students.

Educational leaders, and perhaps particularly assistant principals who engage in much of the direct student contact via discipline and other activities, stand to exert tremendous influence on the educational outcomes of students. Questions arise for educational leaders in the area of diversity. What are educational leaders at the building level doing to ensure high quality programs and teachers for all students? What can educational leaders do to ensure that school segregation within the school building through tracking and student identification processes is diminished and how do we professionally prepare leaders for that work?

Given that leaders do have a key ability to foster change within their schools, they must be able to monitor the impact of diversity on student outcomes and facilitate measures to maintain conditions which lead to the highest benefit for students. This is particularly challenging given the myriad definitions and conceptualization of what constitutes culture and how that manifests in schools (Brooks & Miles, 2010). As we examine ways to assess principal and assistant principal performance in the dimension of cultural competence in a valid and reliable fashion, as well as develop curricula and practical experiential opportunities for aspiring leaders, we can learn much from principals who have demonstrated success in improving academic achievement in schools with historically underserved and underperforming populations. Specifically, what actions do they take to ensure an organization that is culturally competent and how do they engage their assistant principals in this effort?

Research Design and Study Context

As cultural competency understandings and importance grow in education, infrastructures and mechanisms are needed to both assess current principal and assistant principal performance and prepare aspiring leaders for culturally competent leadership through their impactful relationships with students. The specific aim of this project was to conduct a descriptive case study (Merriam, 1988) to provide a rich and multi-faceted understanding of two assistant principals (one elementary and one secondary) who have, in conjunction with their leadership teams, led their schools to improved student achievement with historically underserved and underperforming populations. The research question addressed in this project and study was: How do school assistant principals, working at a school with a demonstrated record of success in student achievement, lead schools in culturally competent ways through intentional and enhanced relationships with students?

Guided by Merriam's case study (1988) methodological approach, the research team conducted a descriptive case study at two public schools (one secondary and one elementary). These sites were selected based upon student achievement data in concert with a demographic analysis for historically underserved and underperforming students. Specifically, the assistant principals had been at their schools for at least five years, the schools had a greater than 75% minority racial population, coupled with a stronger pass

rate than both district and state averages on the state mandated accountability measure in Reading and Mathematics. The principals of both schools were also in leadership at the school for at least five years. The case study, however, was focused on the role of the assistant principals and levers those individuals used in the overall effort to support student learning.

Site Descriptions

Both schools were located in urban areas with a diverse economic setting, including industries related to national defense, higher education, transportation, and hospitality/tourism. While an elementary and high school were selected, the elementary school studied was not a “feeder” school to the high school as they were in separate communities.

² **Grantwood Elementary School.** Grantwood Elementary School provides educational services to approximately 625 students in grades Pk-5 with one principal and one assistant principal. Eighty-five percent of the students who attend are eligible for free/reduced priced lunches and are racially represented by approximately (3 year averages) 78% Black, 12% White, 6% Hispanic, and 4% Other. From 2011-2014, all teachers in the school are identified as highly qualified according the federal standards and nearly 50% held advanced degrees. The school building was originally constructed approximately 75 years ago, however, there have been construction projects that have updated aspects of the interior and added on to the exterior. There is a community history to the school with some multigenerational families who have attended. When one visits, the pride in the history of the school and facility is evident from comments and events that honor both. Grantwood was selected for this study because it has maintained test scores for Black students that are higher than both district and state averages for all schools on state mandated assessments, and particularly high for schools with similar demographics, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Grantwood Elementary Pass Rates for Black Students.

	2011-2012 English	2012-2013 English	2013-2014 English	2011- 2012 Math	2012- 2013 Math	2013- 2014 Math
School Pass Rate	81	65	65	50	54	71
District Pass Rate	75	50	52	45	47	53
State Pass Rate	80	59	59	52	55	60

Note. Declining English scores from 2011-2012 to 2012-2013 can be attributed to changes in standards assessed and new assessment methods.

Simmons High School. Simmons High School provides educational services to approximately 1870 students in grades 9-12 with one principal and four assistant

² Pseudonyms are used for both school names and participant names to protect anonymity.

principals. Eighty-two percent of the students who attend are eligible for free/reduced priced lunches and are racially represented by approximately (3 year averages) 76% Black, 20% White, 3% Hispanic, and 1% Other. From 2011-2014, all teachers in the school are identified as highly qualified according the federal standards and nearly 48% held advanced degrees. The school was built 25 years ago and has had no major renovations since that time. When the school was originally constructed, it combined several different communities and demographic groups which presented initial challenges to early administrative teams. It appears now that the school has a brand and identity of its own that is evident in the markers of school pride one sees and hears when visiting. Simmons was selected for this study because it has maintained test scores for Black students that are higher than both district and state averages for all schools on state mandated assessments, and particularly high for schools with similar demographics, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Simmons High Pass Rates for Black Students.

	2011-2012 English	2012-2013 English	2013-2014 English	2011- 2012 Math	2012- 2013 Math	2013- 2014 Math
School Pass Rate	93	89	91	63	68	73
District Pass Rate	85	62	65	49	55	62
State Pass Rate	80	59	59	52	55	60

Note. Declining English scores from 2011-2012 to 2012-2013 can be attributed to changes in standards assessed and new assessment methods.

The research team, during the full scope of this study, utilized multiple sources of data including: student learning data, attendance data, student behavioral data, interviews with principal, assistant principal(s), and teachers, document analysis (including the school vision, handbook, and newsletters), and the assistant principal's portfolio for summative evaluation. Data were maintained and analyzed using Atlasti software beginning with emic coding processes and then etic coding processes using existing literature regarding cultural competence. Data were first analyzed within case, and then a comparative case analysis was conducted. The research team also maintained analytic memos to debrief after interviews were conducted.

Findings

The assistant principals who participated at each of these schools were the primary case unit of analysis. By interviewing and examining student-learning data in connection with interviews and documents, we were able to determine key themes regarding the role of assistant principals in working with historically underserved students. The principals and teacher interviews provided important corroboratory evidence to the stories shared by the assistant principals themselves. First, several stakeholders saw discipline and school

community interactions as the most important and prevalent opportunity for the assistant principals to "make a difference" for students. Second, the assistant principals both acknowledged the critical importance of mentors who were intentional about the need to serve students of color who were living in poverty, which they believed, caused them to focus on these issues more deliberately. Finally, both assistant principals often referenced their prior teaching experience as rationale for decisions made and interactions with students and families.

Participants

It was important to gain a deep understanding of the two participants in this study, both as they described themselves, as well as how others described them. Sue, the assistant principal at Grantwood, was in her sixth year as assistant principal at that school and all six years were under the leadership of the same principal. Sue taught for eight years before obtaining her Master's degree and licensure in Administration. The position at Grantwood was obtained on her third attempt at an open position. Sue describes herself as a servant leader (Greenleaf, 1970) in that she views herself as focused on the needs and well-being of all in her school community to include support staff, teachers, parents, and in particular, children. Both her principal and the five teachers interviewed at her school discussed her commitment to accessibility. One teacher said, "Sue is everywhere. Anytime anyone is looking for her, she appears, and the kids really pick up on that. They know her and importantly she knows each of them and it shows." The principal described Sue as someone who has taught her a great deal. She said, "Sometimes I find myself so focused on the mechanics of the school day and when Sue started here, she came in really focused on the people. That taught me a great deal. Reminded me, really, of what counts."

The assistant principal at Simmons was Jeremy, who had been in the role for eight years. The principal of the school had been there for fifteen years. The other three assistant principals were all relatively new to the school with experience ranging from first year to three years. Jeremy attended a doctoral program in leadership preparation that emphasized social justice beginning with his recruitment and admission and through the dissertation process. As such, he referenced that program in the interview. Additionally, several of the five teachers interviewed made mention of his doctoral work indicating that he shared his work and experience with those around him. Jeremy was also a graduate of the school district and, as such, was a source of pride for the community. The principal commented that Jeremy was highly regarded by not only those in his building, but also those in the school district at large. He laughed when he said, "I know they are coming for him soon to be a principal, and I am happy for him, you know. But, how do we replace him? I hate to see him go, even though I want that for him."

As we examined data about the schools, we focused particularly on where the assistant principal role was described and three main themes emerged from both our within and cross-case analysis. Perhaps not surprisingly, given prior research, both assistant principals shared similar foci on issues for children from historically underserved demographic groups. It was evident through the interviews with principals, assistant principals, and teachers that this went beyond rhetoric for both assistant

principals and was something they were deliberate about in their daily work. The three main themes are explored in the next section.

Assistant principal-student interactions. Through examination of all data sources, it was clear at both schools that the discipline process was largely exercised through the assistant principal(s) at the school. At Grantwood, all discipline for all grades was conducted by the assistant principal, with the exception of what the principal called “serious violations” which were handled by both administrators. At Simmons, each grade level was supported by one assistant principal and that person then looped with the grade until graduation. Jeremy was responsible for discipline for seniors in the year he was interviewed.

Both assistant principals discussed the important opportunity they saw through their role as the disciplinarian of the school. While both addressed the need for improved preparation for teachers in classroom management to avert student issues, they did discuss that some offenses warranted a deeper administration involvement. They saw these one-to-one conversations with students as teaching opportunities and openings to connect with students who were struggling, rather than a simple disposition of the case and assignment of a consequence. Jeremy mentioned that he saw his role as that of a counselor in discipline situations and viewed discipline conversations as an opening to identify the deeper issues being experienced by the student. He shared,

This is my opportunity to get at the ‘why’ and give the student a voice to express those peer, family, and social issues that so often undergird behavioral challenges. I have heard students really open up in our conversation about the connection between their struggles and the reason they are in my office in the first place. So it has to be deeper than you did this and this is the consequence. It has to be about what got you here, how we change the challenges you are facing, and if we can’t change those, how do we change your response next time and going forward.

It was interesting to note the similarity in response from Sue when she noted in her interaction with her elementary students,

I have to know who they are as individuals. I want to know their families and what home is like and that helps me know how to approach them in these tough situations. It doesn’t work to do this one size fits all model. Each interaction I have with a child is a learning opportunity for him or her and that’s important to me.

The discussion around discipline also raised specific comments from the assistant principals, principals, and teachers interviewed regarding the equity issues the assistant principals sought to address through data disaggregation. In both schools, the assistant principals were encouraged by the principals to maintain data about referrals and consequences and to disaggregate them by race, gender, and disability status. These findings were shared in different forums in each school, but were shared with all teachers. Alongside conversations about student academic performance, these data discussions about behavioral data were powerful for teachers, especially when the process was new or for teachers newer to the school. One second year teacher who worked with Jeremy indicated,

I arrived here last year and at the end of our first marking period, we had this meeting and out came the numbers by teacher about the referrals. At first I was offended, but then I thought, did I really refer only boys? That can’t be right. It

was like a switch went off and I attended to it completely differently from that day forward. It wasn't about the numbers or what I wanted my colleagues to think about me; it was about is what I am doing with kids the right thing. Jeremy helped me see that.

For other teachers, the "reality check" as one referred to it, was not received as positively. She said, "Look I like Sue, but this idea of publicly shaming me for the kids who act up in my class doesn't work well with me. The reality is it is the boys and honestly the boys with bad homes who are the ones who cause problems." Sue mentioned in her interview that some of the teachers were not comfortable with the approach, but that her principal supported it. She said, "I am comfortable with their discomfort. If it leads to conversation and change, then discomfort is part of the process. Pretending like these issues aren't there does not help us take a step forward." The importance of using discipline as a teaching moment was emphasized, but it was also clear that the assistant principals credited their ability to act to the mentor they had as a principal.

Assistant principal mentor influence. Both assistant principals referenced the support, leadership, and mentorship of their principals in the interviews. Both discussed feeling as though they had a role model and importantly, that they were supported in their efforts to work with children who historically may have been overlooked. Both also discussed their sense of entitlement about their situation by referencing colleagues who were assistant principals where they did not feel a similar level of support. Sue indicated,

I am almost hesitant to share my experiences with my colleagues who work for principals who are not as supportive. I feel like I won the lottery. I can't imagine how hard this job and the work would be if I did not have the support I do. And I've heard it from friends who are in tears because they try to make a difference and hit a brick wall with their principals.

Jeremy, similarly, discussed feeling a stroke of luck through his placement with his principal. He discussed how much he had learned and how free he felt to try things, even if he did not succeed. He also indicated, however, that at his district wide assistant principal meetings, there was not consistency in that type of experience. He said, "I am seeing what a difference the administrative team concept can make. When we work together, it gels. In places where you don't hear and see that, it shows in their data and in their community reputation." As such, both assistant principals felt their capacity to support students in need was encouraged and supported by mentors positioned to influence that process.

Assistant principal socialization through teaching. The final area where there was consistency with the assistant principals was in their reference to their own teaching experience and how that influences their work with students and teachers. Their experiences, though, were quite different. Sue taught second and third grade for eight years and indicated she thought that gave her credibility with the teachers in pedagogy and content. She was able to leverage this credibility in conversations about how to support struggling students. Sue said, "I can walk in and know the instructional piece and the teachers seem to respect that, but it allows us to go deeper in our conversations about what is happening with the kids. They know I've been there and I can use examples from kids I taught when I work with teachers." Sue also said she used the same experience working with kids. "I loved all my babies. And that doesn't stop because I am an assistant principal. I just have more babies to love and care for." Jeremy was an English teacher

for tenth graders for six years and used much of his experience as a teacher in working with his students as an assistant principal. He said,

It's no different than teaching. I always start with the end in mind and say what is my objective from this conversation. I used to do that with a novel...what do I want the kids to know and understand and how will they show me that? It is the same thing with a kid who is struggling with bullying for example. What do I need this child to know and walk away with...what is the end goal?

Jeremy and Sue both saw their teaching experiences as paramount to their preparation for school leadership, but both also said the year they felt they transitioned was year five. Both said after that time, they would have felt ready for the work as an administrator. Jeremy also intends to ask his principal for permission to co-teach with an English teacher one class a year. He said, "Even those of us now in administration who taught need to be reminded. We need to spend time in the classroom as a teacher, not as a disciplinarian or an evaluator or a critic. As a teacher. This is important to me and to my ability to maintain connections to the kids in this building."

Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This small study consisting of a case study with two assistant principals provides an understanding of how two school leaders have interjected their daily work with a purposeful attempt to support struggling students. Although the assistant principals did not specifically reference it about themselves, it was clear that both are keenly aware of their own privilege, and the deep professional responsibility they carry to support those who may not have that same access. Horsford, Grosland, and Gunn (2011) discussed the connection between one's personal journey and one's professional path. It was clear for these assistant principals that the personal journey included an absolute commitment to ferret out discrepancies in equity within their school in both academic efforts, as well as behavioral issues. Ladson-Billings, similarly, in 1994 discussed six tenets of culturally relevant teaching that have clear connection to what was learned about the school leaders in this study. The six tenets include: high self-esteem and regard for others; membership in a community and expectations that others do the same; see teaching as an art; help students make learning relevant and connected to their own lives; inherent belief that all students can be successful; and viewing teaching as a way to give students an opportunity to discover for themselves what they hold inside them. While this work was focused on culturally responsive teaching, it can be aligned to the descriptions offered of the efforts of the two assistant principals.

As these assistant principals used discipline, the support of mentors, and their own teaching background as levers to support the work in equity both valued, there are opportunities for future studies to extend that work. First, additional case studies of successful assistant principals might elucidate more about how and why they do what they do. Additionally, looking at the pairing of assistant principals with principals and leadership teams might provide a model for school districts. Turnover in teaching and leadership in high minority and high poverty schools is an ongoing challenge, but much could be learned from what occurs when the team works rather than just examining individual performance. Next, researchers need to consider the influence of the principal on the development and efficacy of the assistant principal and explore this through both

quantitative and qualitative studies. While some literature supports the importance of this role, more evidence is needed if recommendations are to be made to school district about how best to prepare principals to support assistant principal development.

A few recommendations, that are emergent given the nature of this research methodology, can be made for both school districts and leadership preparation programs. As we look at leadership preparation, there are three main recommendations that emerged from this study. First, programs need to engage in the work of understanding cultural competence in a deliberate and overt manner. The notion that this will be as effective if the programs make assumptions about how their aspiring leaders come to these understandings organically as opposed to engaging in conversations to unearth assumptions and address the personal journey is flawed. Specifically, that Jeremy was in tune with his own journey, as well as attentive to the communities and families in the community he served, was clearly connected to the direct involvement in these conversations in his preparation program. Second, programs need to consider determining how to engage in preparation for the diverse positions their graduates will hold. While programs sometimes use the term “principal preparation program”, graduates are likely to engage in the work of central office or assistant principal first. As such, programs could use existent curriculum in instructional leadership or curricular development and attempt to help program students see the connection to these issues through myriad lenses of different positions. While a principal might think of instructional leadership through evaluation of teaching, how will an assistant principal experience that in the roles they commonly hold in discipline and management? Finally, preparation programs may want to consider including self-advocacy skills to empower new administrators to communicate with supervisors. The examples shared by Sue and Jeremy of colleagues struggling to work with principals highlighted a need to support development in the difficult conversations with teachers, parents, students, and those in supervisory lines.

School districts may also want to consider how best to support assistant principals through induction and mentoring. This work must go beyond the managerial topics of procedures and protocols and include ongoing conversations about how to utilize data to inform instructional changes as a leader. Both assistant principals in this study were adept at navigating, not data awareness, but data use. Both felt like they learned that in their preparation programs and from their principals, but were seeking more support at the district level.

Additional research will also be beneficial in this area. Future plans include expanding the work to understand more about the overall school through an equity audit (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2006) and a building level assessment for equity (Midwest Equity Assistance Center, 2000). Additionally, the team is exploring the Schoolwide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009).

Working to better understand how assistant principals conceive of caring for historically underserved students will assist in preparing and inducting school leaders who will see this work as a priority requiring intentional action, rather than a side effect we hope to achieve.

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