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Kenneth Young, Editor
Lamar University

Casey Graham Brown, Associate Editor
University of Texas Arlington

Sandra Harris, Associate Editor
Lamar University



ICPEL Publications Director, Brad Bizzell
Radford University

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

From the Editors

The publication of this issue of *Education Leadership Review* comes at a time of transition for the journal, as I (Ken Young) take over the editorial responsibilities from Dr. Casey Graham Brown, who has served as editor for *ELR* since Fall 2016, and was an assistant editor for several years preceding her tenure as editor. Dr. Graham Brown has not only done an amazing job as editor but was also an incredible mentor throughout the transition. Fortunately, she and Dr. Sandra Harris, who served as editor for *ELR* from Spring 2014 until Spring 2016, are both staying on as assistant editors to assure that this journal maintains the high level of quality you have come to expect since its inception. I am truly indebted to both of these exceptional educational leaders and value their outstanding contributions to the editorial process.

In addition to the changes in editorial leadership, we are also transitioning in our reviewing process. Although we will continue publishing one issue per year for the foreseeable future, we will begin sending articles for review on a monthly basis in an attempt to provide prospective authors with prompt feedback regarding their submissions. We hope this will not only provide prospective authors with more immediate documentation for tenure review and/or annual evaluations, but also will help with the reviewing load for the editorial team and our faithful reviewers.

We hope you enjoy this issue and the many invaluable contributions to the field of educational leadership it provides. As with previous issues, the research findings of our authors extend and enrich the global conversation about quality leadership and education, with the desire to keep the field moving forward and endeavoring to grow students into an educated and involved citizenry.

Sincerely,

J. Kenneth Young

Casey Graham Brown

Sandra Harris

Editors, *Education Leadership Review*

A Summary of the Current Landscape of Superintendent Evaluation Practices and Preferences

Robin Henrikson
Seattle Pacific University

Increasing emphasis on evidence-based evaluation processes in districts across the United States challenges school board directors to call into question their current evaluation practices of superintendents. Existing methods tend to be inconsistent and not aligned to specific criteria (Hendricks, 2013). This study investigates the current landscape of superintendent evaluation across a variety of districts in Washington State and to determine any differences between current practices and superintendent preference. Survey data were collected from 57 superintendents. Descriptive statistics and paired samples t-tests were used to analyze results. The findings from this research confirmed that current practices for evaluation of superintendents are inconsistent across the state and often subjective. Typically, feedback is moderately helpful and not supported with measurable data. In many cases, there was a statistically significant difference between evaluation practice and superintendent preference.

Keywords: Superintendent, evaluation, accountability, leadership, governance

With the increased implementation of a standards-based approach to evaluation using instructional frameworks for teachers and principals, many districts and states are seeking out methods for replicating this type of practice with superintendents (Lashway, Cohn, Gore, and Sharratt, 2013). Results of research over the past two decades reveal that the evaluation of superintendents has been inconsistent both in practice and in what and how they are being evaluated (Eadie, 2008). Furthermore, superintendents have indicated a lack of satisfaction with current evaluation practices (Mayo, and McCartney, 2004). There is limited professional learning support for school board members on how to successfully implement a cycle of evaluation, both summative and formative that reflects the dynamic, multi-faceted and increasingly political role of the superintendent (Bjork, Kowalski, and Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). This political and social pressure is often ubiquitous and may affect the relationships between the board members and superintendent (Moody, 2011). The superintendent must learn how to decipher this landscape to be successful both with the greater community as well as with the respective board members (Tekniepe, 2015). The evaluation process can be viewed as a support mechanism for nurturing relationships and fostering improvement through articulating clear expectations and goals for improvement (Vranish, 2011).

The interplay of a school board of directors as a governing body and evaluator of the superintendent brings with it unique challenges. Even if states or districts have a policy or contractual language that outlines the evaluation method for the superintendent, the implementation of the evaluation process can be inconsistent (Eadie, 2008). School board members maintain a level of governance that remains primarily outside of the daily operations of a district. Board members often lack the understanding of how to utilize a system for evaluation in a sustainable way (Hendricks, 2013; Vranish, 2011). This creates a reliance on the superintendent to train her/his board on how to evaluate in a productive and effective way (Henrikson, 2018). It is also difficult to create a comprehensive sense of “voice” or utilize an evidence-based process when typically only the superintendent offers the evidence of fulfilling his/her duties as the district leader. Candoli, Cullen, and Stufflebeam (1997) found that current superintendent evaluation systems are not serving the educational community sufficiently.

One of the most indispensable duties of the school board is to effectively evaluate the superintendent to ensure he/she is serving his/her constituents effectively (Washington State School Directors Association, [WSSDA] 2012). Unlike that of most states where the evaluation of teachers and principals is prescribed, superintendents typically can provide input into the details of their evaluation process. It is critical to better understand what superintendents prefer to be included in their evaluation cycle to promote a positive, learner-centered process that balances accountability for their role as district leader with opportunities to speak into their own professional learning needs and goals (Hendricks, 2013). The evaluation ought to inform next steps and be used within a cycle of ongoing improvement as well as used as a summative tool. Yet, current practices leave many superintendents dissatisfied even when there is a prescribed evaluation process in place. Because the superintendent contract and evaluation are negotiated solely between the board and the superintendent there is tremendous potential for improvement of this process and gaining a greater understanding through school board and superintendent dialogue (Vransih, 2011). School board members and superintendents alike need to better understand the power and potential for district improvement through utilizing a sound evaluation process. These improvements cannot happen without input from the both parties.

With the shift towards increasing the use of a standards-based approach to superintendent evaluation much like that of principals and teachers, the researcher wondered whether there has been a shift in superintendent satisfaction of their evaluation processes over the past decade. This current study seeks to, in a way, replicate a study by C. Russell Mayo and Gary McCartney (2004) which explored the satisfaction of superintendents regarding their process for evaluation. This study provides current information in three areas: 1) effective methods for superintendent performance evaluation that will inform school boards, superintendents and other policy-makers, 2) collective perspective from superintendents about current practice and their preferences for their performance evaluation processes within Washington State, and 3) future researchers on effective evaluation practices.

Research Question 1: What is the current landscape of superintendent evaluation processes in Washington State?

Research Question 2: In what cases are practice statistically different than preference?

Research Question 3: What are implications for improving evaluation practices given this current landscape?

To address these questions, the researcher collected survey data from 57 superintendents across Washington State. The questions were the same as in the original survey which were generated based on superintendent feedback, review of literature and the Educational Research Service (ERS) study (Robinson & Bickers, 1990), The Study of the American Superintendency 2000 (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Mayo & McCartney, 2004).

Theoretical Perspective

Evaluation is imbued into all aspects of society to consider how to improve systems, structures and processes (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). Tyler (1942), a leading theorist and researcher on evaluation theory, described one of the primary purposes of evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of an educational organization in order to determine whether improvements are necessary and in order to make wise decisions by the stakeholders. Theories and practices of evaluation has its origins in the late 1960's when the federal government wanted to determine the effectiveness of a growing number of human service programs (Madaus, Stufflebeam, & Scriven, 1983). Evaluation theory stems from two primary origins of thought: social inquiry and the need for a foundation of accountability (Alkin & Christie, 2004). From these two origins of thought, Alkin and Christie (2004) described evaluation theory as having three main branches: "Use," "Methods," and "Valuing," where the use of data within the valuing branch may be the most critical component of evaluation theory and the main role of an evaluator (p. 13). Evaluation theory is broadly defined with each of the three branches as outlined by Madaus et al. (1983). In a literature review, Johnson, Greenesid, Toal, King, Lawrenz, and Volkov (2009) found that two critical components of effective evaluation include stakeholder involvement and evaluator competence. They also found that "engagement, interaction and communication between the evaluator and client is critical to the meaningful use of evaluation" (p. 389). Broadly speaking, Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014) define evaluation as "determining whether objectives have been achieved" (p. 6). The authors expand this definition to articulate key steps involved in carrying out a sound evaluation, utilizing descriptive and judgmental information, and consider the audience and stakeholders of the evaluation as part of the process.

The Changing Role of the Superintendent

This section begins with a brief review of the changing role of the superintendent in recent decades, relative to evaluation processes, then continues with the role of the board as evaluators. This includes a summary of historical evaluation practices through the present time. This section concludes with the challenges associated with current evaluation practices.

In the early 1800's, states recognized a need to take on the responsibility of education and needed help in leading schools (Newsom, 1932; Stufflebeam, 1994). The first superintendents were representatives for schools within entire states, whose primary goals were to plan common school systems, report on management of public funds, and provide information to the state regarding school-related issues. Once there was recognition that districts within a given state had disparate needs and contextual differences, including issues of inequity, there was a push to advocate for the common school model. This in turn gave local control to schools to hire superintendents to become district representatives (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). Later, in many states, regional or county-based superintendents were also hired to act as liaisons between district and state entities. These county superintendents were looked to for ensuring state requirements were being communicated to districts and implemented in a consistent manner (Newsom, 1932). To date, only about three-fifths of all states have county superintendents (Education Commission of the States, 2018) which in many cases would also add to the responsibilities of the district superintendent.

Compared to what the position of the superintendent is now, often thought of as the Chief Executive Officer of a school district, this role has seen many drastic changes since its inception (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2005). By the end of the 19th century, the role of the district superintendent as well as the school board evolved drastically. Early on, during the late 1800's to early 1900's the school board was in charge of making most administrative and policy decisions while the superintendent was charged with training teachers and leaders, advising the school board, reforming schools and completing administrative paperwork and other duties (Kowalski, 2005; Stufflebeam, 1994). With the onset of the industrialized society in the early 20th century, there began a concern with the efficiency of school districts and as such, shifted the role of the superintendent to one of a manager. The main duties during this time included managing budgetary, personnel, facilities and other operations throughout the district (Kowalski, 2011). During the mid-1900's, scholars began to recognize the importance that politics plays in the role and duties of the superintendent (Bjork & Lindle, 2001). This, coupled with the impact that the Great Depression had on public schools, is also when the perception of the superintendent as democratic leader began to take root (Bjork, 2008; Kowalski, 2005). Superintendents were faced with a new political pressure to compete for state funding with other state agencies and needed to learn how to be a positive force not only within the school district, but as an advocate within their respective communities. This was short lived, however and nearing the second half of the 20th century, superintendents were considered essential for managing a district's operations and should be focused not on scholarly or idealistic activities, but rather the day-to-day management of a district's operations. The end of the 20th century saw a slight adaptation to this, recognizing once again the importance that democratic leadership plays in the superintendent's role, specifically regarding public relations. Kowalski (1991) illustrated this when he emphasized the communication responsibilities between the school district and community for support of school initiatives.

With an emphasis on the superintendent role as “communicator,” Kowalski, (2005) acknowledged the politicized nature of the position and brought attention to the need for superintendents to be cognizant of political pressures they may encounter. Moffett (2011) described the superintendent as one who needs to be an “instructional leader, fiscal guru and diplomatic human resources professional” (p. 2). Growing attention to academic accountability through high stakes assessments, pressure for data-driven results, and improved teacher evaluation systems created an even more complex set of responsibilities for the superintendent (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). Given this increasing level of accountability with often times funding shortfalls, superintendents needed to become expert communicators to the educators within their district, their community and serve as the primary source of information to their boards (Bjork et al., 2014). Many states and certification standards recognize the role of superintendent as communicator and include effective communication as a competency (Kowalski, 2005). This role of superintendent as communicator is still present to date. However, an issue with conceiving the superintendent as an effective communicator as part of his/her role is that it is difficult to measure this skill given the numerous audiences the superintendent addresses (Kowalski, 2005). Perhaps the most high-stake audience is the school board. While the trends of the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent across the United States is broadly stated, it is important to recognize that there are differences across and between states and in urban versus rural landscapes in how this role has transformed over time.

Negotiating the external pressures relative to school district issues is inherent to the work of the superintendent and school board. Ongoing challenges between two groups are also “both constant and evolving” (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011, p. 160). The superintendent evaluation process can be used to recognize the dynamic and complicated nature of this position within its specific context while at the same time providing support, feedback and opportunities for continued professional growth. Ideally, the evaluation process could be used as a means for strengthening the relationship between the board and superintendent through clear communication and long-term vision (National School Board Association [NSBA], 2014).

History of School Board Evaluation Practices

As the superintendent position continued to evolve, there was also an attempt to define the roles and responsibilities and to quantify and measure the effectiveness through superintendent evaluations. In 1980, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and National School Boards Association (NSBA) jointly produced a set of processes to evaluate the superintendent (DiPaola & Stronge, 2003). There was limited information on the superintendent evaluation practices (Hoyle & Skrla, 1999) during the first two decades of the formalization of the process. In fact, in the 1990’s multiple studies showed that while 90% of superintendents were evaluated, there was little to no explicit knowledge of the criteria used to evaluate the superintendent (DiPaola & Stronge, 2003). In 1999, Candoli, Cullen and Stufflebeam synthesized the purpose and characteristics of the superintendent evaluation process. They wrote,

Among the commonly stated evaluation purposes are to clarify superintendent and board roles, inform the superintendent of the board's expectations, assess performance with standards, identify areas needing improvement, improve educational performance, improve superintendent/board communication and relations, improve planning, aid in the superintendent's professional development, inform personnel decisions, assure

accountability, and fulfill legal requirements. These important purposes clearly require pertinent and dependable performance evaluations. (p. 4)

Since the development of effective evaluation practices tended to be inconsistent and inadequate, superintendents were typically evaluated through a credentialing process (Candoli et al., 1997). If superintendents obtained the needed credentials through the state's certification process, they were deemed acceptable. This turned out to be flawed due to the differential minimum certification requirements across states and even districts. In response to this, AASA further developed a set of standards for superintendents in 1994, which specifically outlined the requirements. This included three sets of competencies that encompass preparation, certification and professional development. These were derived from the earlier evaluation standards produced from AASA that fit under their corresponding AASA Professional Standards (Candoli, et al., 1997; DiPaola & Stronge, 2003). In the 1990's with the rapidly increasing emphasis on academic achievement, the nature of the evaluation changed to reflect the growing accountability of ensuring increasing levels of student success. According to Glass, Bjork and Brunner (2000), this move towards greater accountability also shifted the emphasis of evaluation to four main areas: educational leader, political leader, managerial leader, and leader of reform (p. 63). While these four roles have remained relatively consistent over the past 15 years, little has changed in regards to creating a reliable and consistent system for evaluation that aligns closely to these responsibilities (Dawson & Quinn, 2010).

Over the past decade, there has been an emphasis on creating a more standards-based approach towards superintendent evaluation that includes the integration of the administrator's job description, leadership standards and district goals. Often this is organized through utilizing a framework that reflects the dynamic nature of the position (WSSDA, 2012). National and state school board associations recommend utilizing a formative process of evaluation rather than the more traditional summative approach. The heart of this formative process includes the superintendent and her/his board regularly reviewing goals and documenting evidence of progress towards goals (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). Of course, the development and adoption of evaluation practices do vary from state to state. Whether there are adopted practices either statewide or at the local level, issues still exist in regards to the extent that evaluation process is aligned to the needs of the superintendent to promote his/her further growth, and how equipped is the school board to utilize the process in a meaningful way for both the superintendent and to meet district goals. Adopting and implementing an evaluation process is simply the first step. Ensuring this process is helpful in providing ongoing communication, feedback and direction for the superintendent while also recognizing the unique context of the district ought to be investigated.

Current Evaluation Challenges

With the ongoing refinement of the superintendent evaluation process, it is imperative to discuss what a synthesis of research has formulated as the purpose of the evaluation process. Candoli et al. (1997), conducted a review of literature that identified the main purposes of the superintendent performance evaluation that was included in board policy. These purposes are as follows:

- improve educational performance
- improve communication between the board and the superintendent
- clarify the roles of the superintendent and the board members
- improve board/superintendent relations

- inform the superintendent of the board's expectations
- improve planning
- aid in the professional development of the superintendent
- use as a basis for personnel decisions
- use as an accountability mechanism
- to fulfill legal requirements (pp 47-50).

While this list provides an overview of the general purpose of evaluation, there can be preconceptions that exist among and between states' district board of directors regarding the purpose of evaluation. Some of these differences could be due to the need for alignment of job responsibilities and perceived role of the superintendent within a given context. As noted in a report by the Council of Chief State School Officers, while there may be inconsistency among job descriptions and expectations, specific leadership development needs are unique to the individual and context of the district (CCSSO, 2013). This inconsistency of understanding the purpose of evaluation and resulting practices has led to often arbitrary goal-setting and vague guidelines for performance. Relational issues tend to determine the tenure of a superintendent more than the performance itself. As Hoyle and Skyrila (1999, p. 405) write,

The annual evaluation of the superintendent by the school board can be a process characterized by mutual respect that emphasizes improvement of the leadership performance of the superintendent or, conversely, it can be an intensely stressful process that fosters the worst forms of political game playing.

The evaluation process can be a means for ongoing improvement. Yet, there is an inconsistent set of criteria and expectations for determining whether a superintendent is performing satisfactorily (DiPaola, 2010). Given the proliferation of information that an effective evaluation system could be built upon, DiPaola (2010) stated that there is often a lack of clearly defined job expectations and performance goals developed between the superintendent and her/his respective board. A report produced by AASA (2014) further concluded that there is still a lack of a clear process with objective measures for evaluation. This report suggested that there exists a challenge for a school board to remain objective during the evaluation process due to personality and political differences. Furthermore, the very structure of the evaluation process encourages a stance of proving one's ability to meet the goals set forth rather than utilizing a process of ongoing improvement (Henrikson, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

The review of literature on existing challenges to the superintendent evaluation practices further confirms earlier findings. A study conducted by Glass (2007) found that only slightly above 50% of the superintendents surveyed stated that they were evaluated on mutually agreed upon criteria and about one-quarter of the time, the board alone determined the criteria. Furthermore, Glass (2007) found that even with a set of criteria, the board adhered to it only about half of the time. Vranish (2011) offered additional insight into the challenge of creating an evaluation system where the evaluators have limited understanding of the daily activities of the superintendent and often evaluate using hearsay and/or the evidence brought forth only by the superintendent without an authentic and comprehensive board understanding of the nature of their performance. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) reported that most superintendents were not being evaluated based on their job descriptions but rather their relationships between the board members. In fact, the criteria being

used may not even match the unique context of the district or superintendent needs (Glass et al., 2000).

The inability of a superintendent to communicate effectively with the school board leads to mistrust and seemingly negative perspectives of agendas and claims of lack of transparency (Hoyle & Skrla, 2000). Interpersonal relationships between the board and the superintendent are also a factor in determining the tenure of a superintendent and/or receiving a positive evaluation. Grissom and Anderson (2012) found that while the norm is a positive relationship between the board and the superintendent, one of the reasons why superintendents decide to seek employment elsewhere is often times the interpersonal relationships that exist at the board level. Hoyle and Skrla (2000) echoed this finding, explaining that the prevalent reasons board members give as to why they choose to not renew a superintendent contract is based not in lack of ability to perform the job, but rather differences in opinion of the direction that the district ought to be heading.

Over the past decade there has been a shift towards a more performance and evidence-based evaluation (Lashway et al., 2013). This process includes a formative cycle that utilizes a framework for documenting and tracking progress of goals set forth by the superintendent. A shift is taking place that moves the superintendent from having to prove that she/he has met the evaluation goals to one that encourages a stance of improvement has been emphasized (WSSDA, 2012). This shift highlights the importance of holding the superintendent accountable for meeting his/her goals, while at the same time recognizing the need for ongoing improvement and professional development. However, even if school boards are adopting a standards-based, cyclical process, this will not automatically improve the effectiveness of the experience. If the goal is to measure the superintendent's effectiveness against pre-defined criteria and provide measurable outcomes and next steps for improvement, simply adopting a framework or assessment tool will not accomplish this in and of itself. Transformational shifts in how the superintendent evaluation process is conducted takes professional development by both the board and the superintendent and constant reflection and refinement of the procedures in place. A change in mindset is necessary to enable all participants to understand the implicit interpersonal relationships at play as well as see the larger purpose to improve the general satisfaction of the evaluation process.

These challenges to the evaluation process have been traced back several decades and remain startlingly similar compared to contemporary practices. Mayo and McCartney (2004) sought to determine the satisfaction of current evaluation practices of 1,125 superintendents across the United States. The authors had three objectives: 1) to provide current information on superintendent performance evaluation, 2) to provide a collective perspective from superintendents on their preferences for evaluation practices, and 3) provide future researchers with additional information regarding the progression of the superintendent evaluation process (p. 21). Mayo and McCartney (2004) listed several findings relative to contemporary evaluation methods. Over 90% of the superintendents were evaluated at least annually, about 20% preferred semi-annual evaluations. They also found that even with the "results-based" movement that came with the onset of the 21st century, little changed with the evaluation practices to reflect this. Only 61.3% of boards and superintendents jointly decided on evaluation criteria. Perhaps one of the most notable and relevant findings of the study as it pertains to the current review of literature is that only 16.9% of suggestions for improvement were deemed "very helpful" (p. 26). Considering the context of both the district and the superintendent when determining the criteria for evaluation is extremely important, yet only 26.2% of the superintendents reported that their context was even considered. Recognizing the political nature of the superintendent role as integral to sustaining positive interpersonal relationships, only 56.9% of superintendents reported that their evaluations were

objective. Given a dynamic landscape of issues the board and superintendent face on a regular basis, having an objective evaluation is critical to sustaining a sound and proactive method of communication.

Often the lack of experience of the board in regard to evaluation is a hindrance to the process. The superintendent becomes the one to train and equip the board with how to be evaluated. Relative to this, Mayo and McCartney (2004) found that 71.3% of superintendents claimed that less than half of their board had the knowledge and training to conduct the evaluation effectively.

With an emphasis on an evidence-based process for evaluation across K-12 educators (including principals), it is interesting to also note the perspectives of the superintendents who desire this approach as part of their evaluation process. Only 19% of the superintendents in the original study by Mayo and McCartney (2004) had a result- or evidence-based evaluation. In their study, 88% of the superintendents desired evidence to be included as compared to the practice of evaluating based on personality traits. While the study conducted by Mayo and McCartney was published in 2004, surprisingly similar issues remain in contemporary evaluation practices. Fortunately, there is flexibility in how school boards and superintendents can negotiate the evaluation process even when there is policy in place. In order to further this conversation of improvement in growth-oriented evaluation practices, it is critical to further investigate how superintendents prefer to be evaluated that will both promote their own professional growth and meet district goals.

Method

This current study had two major purposes: 1) to further investigate the present-day landscape of the nature of school board evaluation in Washington State and 2) to seek out cases in which the practice of superintendent evaluation is significantly different than the preferred methods. The following subsections describe the instruments, sample, data collection method and analysis. The survey and analysis used will reflect a similar approach to the former research (Mayo & McCartney, 2004), but also seek to continue the conversation in regards to implications for how the results reflect current challenges to superintendent evaluation.

Research Question 1: What is the current landscape of superintendent evaluation processes in Washington State?

Research Question 2: In what cases are practice statistically different than preference?

Research Question 3: What are implications for improving evaluation practices given this current landscape?

Instrument

The survey items were replicated from the original study with permission from the authors and according to Mayo and McCartney (2004), were originally derived from previous surveys developed by Robinson and Bickers (1990) and Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000). In total, the questions developed for this survey came from discussions with practicing superintendents, a review of the literature on superintendent evaluation, the Educational Research Service Study (Robinson & Bickers, 1990) and The American Superintendency 2000 (Glass et al., 2000). One item from the original survey instrument was slightly modified: Question Two from the original survey required one response for both student achievement data and student demographic information. The researcher chose to separate these topics into two distinct questions given the

relevancy of both as separate accountability measures. Additionally, the original survey was sent out as a hard copy to superintendents. This survey utilized an online survey tool and emailed out to participants with a link to the survey. Nineteen questions appeared on the survey with requests for demographic information (gender, size of district, number of years of experience, etc). Nine questions addressed uniform effectiveness of evaluation practices; six questions sought to address the consistency of results-based practices. Most questions included two parts: the current practice (reality) and the preference of the superintendent (Mayo & McCartney 2004). The original questionnaire was also validated through field testing.

Participants

A public records request was made for the email addresses of all the superintendents in Washington State. E-mail addresses for 302 of the 303 superintendents in Washington State were used to send out an invitation to complete the survey. One superintendent did not receive the invitation due to a conflict of interest with the researcher. The instructions indicated they had about a one-month window to respond. A reminder was also sent out one week before the closing date of the survey. Of the 302 superintendents who were sent the survey, 36 of those emails were undeliverable or the superintendent would not be back within the given survey window making the total number of superintendents who received the survey email about 266. This lower number is not surprising given the survey was sent out during a time of high rates of transitions. Fifty-seven surveys were completed. This means the response rate was about 22%. A review of the survey results indicate districts of various student enrollment numbers were represented. The groupings were the same as the original study and in alignment with the AASA 2000 profile of superintendents (Mayo et. al., 2004). The four enrollment groups were (A) fewer than 300; (B) 300 to 2,999; (C) 3,000 to 24,999; and (D) 25,000 or more. Of the returns, 24.5% were from districts fewer than 3000, 46% were from districts of 300 to 2,999; 26% were from districts of 3,000 to 24,999; and 3.5% came from districts with enrollments of 25,000 or more. 79% of respondents were male and 21% were female. 89% of respondents were Caucasian, 3.5% African American, 1.7% reported as Hispanic and 5.2% reported as Other.

Results

1.

The primary purpose of this study was to develop a narrative of the current landscape of superintendent evaluation practices as well as to gain a deeper understanding of what superintendents would prefer for their evaluation process. The researcher was also interested in determining what instances was the perceived practice statistically different than preference. After analyzing the responses for each of the questions, those that appeared to have vast differences between the practice and preference were calculated using a paired samples t-test to determine if indeed there was a statistically significant difference between practice and preference. Nine of the questions appeared to have obvious differences between practice and preference. Of those nine, five were analyzed using a paired samples t-test. The reason only five out of the nine items were analyzed was due to the ability to analyze results of interval data using Likert-Scale questions as part of the paired samples t-test (Field, 2009). Other questions were not written as interval data so a paired-samples t-test was not permitted. For example, for the question “How did the board express their expectations of you at the time of your hiring?” the responses were: 3: Explicit

guidelines, 2: General Discussion or 3: Little or No Direction Given. The results of these t-tests will also be reported within the results.

The results show that while approximately 96% of the superintendents who responded to the survey have an evaluation performed at least annually, it is clear that there is not a uniform process (see Table 1). The practice of how often superintendents were evaluated was consistent with their preference. 60% of respondents were evaluated only once per year, while 30% were evaluated semi-annually. None of the superintendents were evaluated at time of contract renewal.

Communicating expectations of performance to the superintendent is a critical component of establishing the evaluation process between the board and superintendent. Only 5% of superintendents were given explicit guidelines for performance when they were hired even though 26% of them would have preferred it (see Table 2). Fifty-nine percent were given general guidance while 74% of those surveyed would have preferred to receive general guidance. Of the respondents, 36% were given no guidance when they were hired although not one of them indicated that they would have preferred no guidance. Since this difference, along with many other items within the survey appeared to have a statistically significant difference between practice and preference, the researcher was interested in confirming this observation. After the responses were analyzed, the researcher used a paired-samples t-test on items that appeared to have a statistically significant difference.

Table 1
How Often Does Your Evaluation Occur?

	Total Sample	
	Practice	Preference
Annually	60%	61.40%
Semi-Annually	29.80%	28%
At Contract Renewal	0%	1.75%
Other	7.02%	7.02%
Never	3.51%	1.75%
Total Number	57	57

Table 2
How Did the Board Express Its Expectations of You at the Time of Your Hiring?

	<u>Practice</u>	<u>Preference</u>
Explicit Guidelines	5.36%	26.32%
General Guidance Provided	58.93%	73.68%
Little or No Direction	35.71%	0
Total Number	56	57

The first question that showed a statistically significant difference between practice and preference was whether or not the board expressed its expectations of the superintendent at the time of hiring (see Tables 3 and 4). There was a statistically significant difference in the scores for current practice (m=1.69, SD=.56) and preference (m=2.26, SD=.44) responses; $t(55) = -8.56$, $p = .000$.

Table 3
Paired Samples Statistic

		Mean	N	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Practice of Board Expectations	1.69	56	.56	.07
	Preference of Board Expectations	2.26	56	.44	.06

Table 4
Paired Samples Test

Paired Differences								
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference								
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 Practice of Board Expectations- Preference of Board Expectations	-.57	.50	.06	-.70	-.43	-8.5	55	.000

The data indicated that 73% of boards and superintendents determined evaluation criteria jointly even though almost all superintendents prefer this practice (see Table 5). Currently, about 21% of school boards solely determine the criteria. Three and a half percent of superintendents indicated that there were no criteria established.

Table 5
Who Decides the Criterial for Your Evaluation?

	<u>Practice</u>	<u>Preference</u>
School Board Alone	21.43	3.51
Supt Alone	1.79	1.75
Board and Supt	73.21	94.74
Other	0	0
No Criteria Established	3.57	0
Total Number	56	57

Much of the literature review of superintendent evaluation practices reveals a dissatisfaction with the level of objectivity practiced, noting that often times personality conflicts have a large influence on the success of the superintendent's evaluation (Glass, et al., 2000; Weiss,

Templeton, Thompson, & Tremont, 2014). The data collected during this current study revealed that only 21% of all school boards were completely objective for evaluation purposes as opposed to half of all superintendents who preferred complete objectivity (see Table 6). According to the responses, 41% of school boards remained mostly objective, 30% remained somewhat objective while 7% of the evaluations were considered not at all objective. Additionally, a paired samples t-test was run to determine whether there was a significant difference between the means of practice and preference for level of objectivity exercised during the evaluation. There was a statistically significant difference in the scores for current practice ($m=2.7$, $SD=.87$) and preference ($m=3.5$, $SD=.54$) responses; $t(55) = -9.5$ $p=.000$, (see Tables 7 and 8).

One of the ongoing challenges with school board directors evaluating superintendents is the lack of training in effective evaluation practices. Typically, it is the superintendent who provides the overview and support needed to evaluate him/herself (DiPaola, 2010). When asked what percentage of school board members have the training and knowledge to evaluate objectively, 43% of the superintendents reported that only one-fourth of their respective school board members have the needed skills and knowledge to evaluate objectively (see Table 9). Twenty-one percent of superintendents indicated that more than half of their respective board members have the skills and knowledge to evaluate objectively.

Table 6

What Is Your Greatest Opinion about the Level of Objectivity Exercised with Your Evaluation?

	<u>Practice</u>	<u>Preference</u>
Objective	21.43%	49.12%
Mostly Objective	41.07%	47.37%
Somewhat Objective	30.36%	3.51%
Not at all Objective	7.14%	0.00%
Total Number	56	57

Table 7

Paired Samples Statistic

		Mean	N	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Practice of level of objectivity	2.7	56	.87	.11
	Preference of level of objectivity	3.5	56	.54	.07

Table 8
Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Practice of level of objectivity- Preference of level of objectivity	-.71	.56	.07	-.86	-.56	-9.5	.55	.000

Table 9
In Your Opinion, What Percentage of Your Current Board Members Have the Training and Knowledge in Evaluation Procedures to Assess You Objectively?

	<u>Practice</u>	<u>Preference</u>
Less than 25%	43.64%	0.00%
25-49%	20.00%	1.79%
50-74%	14.55%	7.14%
75-100%	21.82%	91.07%
Total Number	55	56

When asked to rank what superintendents perceived as the top prioritized criteria for evaluation purposes, 50% indicated that it was “General Effectiveness of Performance.” “Budget Development and Implementation” ranked second at 53% while “Board/Supt Relationship” ranked third at 43% (see Table 10).

Criteria for judging performance typically falls into three categories: personality traits, process skills or results (Mayo & McCartney, 2004). Superintendents chose which of the three receives the most consideration during their evaluation. The results in Table 11 show 42% of respondents indicated that “Process Skills” were most highly considered, with 21% of the respondents indicating “Personality Traits” as most important. However, when asked to indicate which of the three criteria they would like to have emphasized, 61% of respondents chose “Results” while less than 2% indicated “Personality Traits” as most important.

Table 10
Comparison of Current Practice and Preference for Total Sample based on Percentage of Participants Marking Consideration as High

	Current		Practice		Preferred			
	High	Mod- erate	Little/N- one	Don't Know	High	Modera- te	Little/Non- e	Don't Know
General Effectiveness of Performance	50.94% (27)	37.7 4% (20)	11.32% (6)	0	79.25% (42)	18.87% (10)	1.89% (1)	0
Degree to Which Performance Obj- Were Achieved	25% (13)	61.5 4% (32)	13.46% (7)	0	57.69% (30)	40.38% (21)	1.92% (1)	0
Leadership of Instructional Program	31.37% (16)	47.0 6% (24)	21.57% (11)	0	64% (32)	36% (18)	0	0
Knowledge of Trends in the Field of Education	15.69% (8)	39.2 2% (20)	45.10% (23)	0	40% (20)	42% (21)	16% (8)	2% (1)
Student Achievement Results	13.73% (7)	54.9 % (28)	31.37% (16)	0	39.22% (20)	56.86% (29)	1.96% (1)	0
Level of Agreement Between Board/Su- pt Priorities	31.37% (16)	37.2 5% (19)	29.41% (15)	1.96% (1)	52.94% (27)	41.18% (21)	5.88% (3)	0
Board/Su- pt Relationship	43.14% (22)	39.2 2% (20)	17.65% (9)	0	62% (31)	28% (14)	8% (4)	2% (1)

Staff/Sup t Relations hip	24% (12)	52% (26)	22% (11)	2% (1)	39.22% (20)	56.86% (29)	3.92% (2)	0
Student/S upt Relations hip	3.92% (2)	35.2 9% (18)	54.9% (28)	5.88% (3)	19.61% (10)	52.94% (27)	21.57% (11)	5.88% (3)
Parent and Commun ity-Supt Relations hips	26% (13)	60% (30)	14% (7)	0	40% (20)	52% (26)	8% (4)	0
Personal Character istics	25.49% (13)	60.7 3% (31)	9.8% (5)	3.92% (2)	29.41% (15)	56.86% (29)	9.8% (5)	3.92% (2)
Recruitm ent, Employ ment, and Supt of Personnel	27.45% (14)	45.1 0% (23)	27.45% (14)	0	47.06% (24)	50.98% (26)	1.96% (1)	0
Budget Develop ment and Impleme ntation	53.06% (26)	26.5 3% (13)	20.41% (10)	0	58.82% (30)	41.18% (21)	0	0
News Media Coverage	5.88% (3)	37.2 5% (19)	54.9% (28)	1.96% (1)	11.76% (6)	54.90% (28)	31.37% (16)	1.96% (1)

Table 11

Generally, Criteria Used for Judging Your Performance Fall into the Three Categories Listed Below. Which One of the Three Receives the Most Consideration?

	<u>Practice</u>	<u>Preference</u>
Personality Traits	21.43%	1.75%
Process Skills	42.86%	36.84%
Results	35.71%	61.40%
Number of Responses	56	57

Discussion

The superintendent position is the only contract that is solely negotiated between her/himself and the school board of directors. What often comes with this is a negotiation, or at the very least, discussion about how the superintendent will be evaluated. This is unique and an exception to most or all other positions within the district. Educators typically do not have the opportunity to discuss their preferences for how they wish to be evaluated nor given much leeway in this process. While there may be policy adopted at the local or state level, often times it is up to the discretion of the board as to the process for evaluation and what tools, criteria and sources of information will be used. Understanding what superintendents prefer in their evaluation process is integral to their ongoing success and to support ongoing and proactive communication between the board and the superintendent.

The move towards a standards-based approach for superintendent evaluation that many boards are adopting, brings with it a need to address whether this has improved the inconsistencies and general dissatisfaction with traditional evaluation practices. In other words, is the standards-based approach meeting the needs or preferences of superintendents? Are boards even utilizing a standards-based approach or, even with this trend, do boards and superintendents remain stagnant in their evaluation practices? Given the multi-faceted and political nature of the superintendent role, it is important to seek out information on the nature of how superintendents are currently being evaluated.

The primary purpose of this study was: 1) to further investigate the current landscape of the nature of superintendent evaluation in Washington State and 2) to seek out cases in which the practice of superintendent evaluation is significantly different than the preferred methods.

Research Question 1: What is the current landscape of superintendent evaluation processes in Washington State?

Research Question 2: In what cases is practice statistically different than preference?

Research Question 3: What are implications for improving evaluation practices given this current landscape?

The only consistent standard for the evaluation practices across Washington State was that approximately 96% of all superintendents were indeed evaluated in some way and at least once per year. One other area that was somewhat consistent was how the evaluation was reported with 82% of superintendents saying they received both oral and written feedback on their performance. This was also consistent with their preference in that almost 88% preferred their feedback to be both oral and in writing. However, this is where the consistencies amongst evaluation practices end.

Only 59% of school boards expressed general expectations for the superintendent at the time of their hiring, while 36% were given little to no direction. That leaves only 5% that were given explicit guidelines or expectations of their responsibilities at the time of hiring. Additionally, only 58% of superintendents felt that the feedback for improvement was somewhat helpful with only 14% stating it was very helpful. A startling 28% of superintendents indicated that the quality of suggestions for improvement was of little to no help. In fact, there was a differing of opinion as to what the primary purpose of evaluation even was. About 36% of superintendents believed it was for periodic and systematic accountability. This was the highest category, with three other categories as a secondary purpose. These categories included: 1) Identify areas needing improvement, 2) Assess present performance, and 3) Comply with board policy were the second most common reasons. When the superintendents were asked what they perceive as top criteria for

evaluation, 50% indicated it was to determine general effectiveness of performance, with budget development and board/superintendent relationships following. It is quite disconcerting to find that boards and superintendents across the state even hold disparate expectations, purposes and priorities for evaluation.

Another interesting theme that appeared was the inconsistent level of objectivity exercised in the evaluation process. Sixty-two percent of respondents claimed that their evaluation was either mostly objective or fully objective which leaves 40% of respondents claiming that their evaluation was only somewhat or not at all objective. This result relates to the question of whether the evaluation is supported with measurable data. Only 34% claimed that their evaluation was supported by data while 65% claimed it was either sometimes or not supported by data.

It is evident from this study that the evaluation practices across Washington State are not uniform, and in many areas, inconsistent with the preferences of superintendents for how they would like to be evaluated. Specific areas the researcher found to be statistically significant in terms of differences between practice and preference include: 1) differing board expectations at the time of hiring, 2) whether demographics and student achievement are considered in evaluation practices, 3) the level of objectivity in the evaluation process, 4) whether the evaluation is supported with measurable data and 5) the level of objectivity of the evaluation process also differed significantly in terms of practice and preference. Furthermore, only 65% of boards provided either specific or general expectations of responsibilities at the time of being hired, while 100% of superintendents prefer either specific or general expectations communicated to them.

Limitations

The survey was administered in the summer that may account for the low response rate of 22%. However, when comparing the size of the districts of superintendents who took the survey against the entire state, the sample is generally representative. For example, 25% of the superintendents who took the survey were from districts with student populations fewer than 300. The state has about 25% of all districts with student population fewer than 300 as well. Approximately 7% of superintendents who took the survey were from districts with student population from 2,500-2,900 and the same for populations of 5,000-9,999. State percentages for these two groups come out to about 9%. Even though the response rate is less than desirable, the researcher still believes, based on the comparison data that the population of participants reflects that of the state when comparing size. An additional limitation worth noting is that potential bias may occur with a volunteer sample (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

Another limitation is that not all of the tables could be calculated for determining significance between practice and preference due to the categorical nature of some of the items, therefore there may be rich data that has not been brought to light in this current study.

Finally, since the design of this current study was somewhat replicating an original study from 2004, the validity of the survey ought to be considered. Perhaps as the researcher scales up this study to a larger population, a confirmatory factor analysis may need to be conducted. The original survey was conducted throughout the United States while this current study solicited participants from Washington State only. Therefore, a comparison between the original study to this one was not included as part of the results or discussion, even though this would be very insightful.

Implications for Research and Practice

According to the results of this study, superintendent evaluation processes and practices differ widely across the state. Furthermore, there is a disparity between current practices and how superintendents prefer their evaluation to occur. This includes the criteria for evaluation and level of objectivity. Superintendents prefer their evaluations to be mostly objective, supported with measurable data, including student achievement data. They prefer their evaluations to be measured against specific criteria with clear expectations and guidance of performance. However, this ideal may be difficult to obtain with the current landscape of evaluation revealing so many differing and often conflicting methods. This is further complicated by the lower levels of objectivity reported and compounded with a general lack of perceived training and knowledge in evaluation procedures to be able to assess the superintendent effectively. With 43% of superintendents reporting that less than 25% of his/her board members and 20% claim that less than half of his/her board members have the training and knowledge to evaluate objectively is alarming. Eadie (2008) provided several recommendations for effective evaluation processes which start with planning, developing and executing a well-designed process for evaluation. Some recommendations include meeting outside of a regular board meeting, developing criteria for evaluation that includes goal-setting, having face-to-face dialogue and creating this process ahead of time for the upcoming year (Weiss, 2014). Henrikson (2018), adds to this set of recommendations by encouraging boards to utilize a standards-based framework to allow for establishing clear criteria ahead of time as well as providing regular opportunities for ongoing data-collection in an authentic and objective way.

Further research ought to be aimed at scaling up this current project. In the original study, the superintendents from across the United States were surveyed whereas this project sought the feedback only from one state. It would be interesting to not only compare the current evaluation practices across the state to the sample from this study, but to also gain a wider perspective of challenges from across the nation. Furthermore, it is imperative to also gain insight from the school board directors themselves, compare results to the results of the superintendent sample in order to better understand the existing challenges from a variety of perspectives.

Conclusion

The need to balance strong accountability with the recognition of each district's unique demographics to create an effective and consistent evaluation process is critical. With the move towards stronger accountability at all levels as well as a tightening up of evaluation processes for K-12 it is time to continue this trend to district level personnel. As noted in the original study by Mayo and McCartney in 2004, it is well overdue to insist on requiring more rigorous and ongoing board training and preparation to develop effective evaluation processes. Given the need for strong communication practices between the board and superintendent, the current subjective nature of evaluation is ineffective. It is imperative for school boards and policy makers to recognize the political and dynamic nature of the superintendency and to work systematically to establish equitable and consistent practices.

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Pre-Service Administrators' Experiences with Effective Research-Based Learning Strategies for English Language Learners

Juanita Reyes

Tarleton State University

James Gentry

Tarleton State University

Due to the increase of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the State of Texas, it is essential that educators are equipped with research-based strategies to ensure students' academic and linguistic growth. The objective of the study was to evaluate pre-service administrators' knowledge of the latest research-based learning strategies and educational approaches to teaching ELLs. Pre-service administrators were asked to complete a pre- and post- open-ended narrative response survey during a blackboard module lesson related to research-based learning strategies. Through textual analysis, researchers counted the number of items that were deemed critical content knowledge needed for quality ELL instruction. Identified ELL content were labeled ELL content units (CUs). CUs were then totaled per pre-service administrator for both pre- and post-survey narrative responses. A parametric t-test was utilized to compare pre-service administrators' ELL CUs between pre- and post-survey narrative responses. The researchers discovered significant growth of ELL CUs with a large effect size between the pre-service administrators' pre- and post-survey narrative responses. The growth in ELL CUs occurred as a result of the direct class instruction using ELL research-based best practices.

Keywords: accountability, English Language Learners (ELL), research based learning strategies, content knowledge, principal preparation, educational administration

English Language Learners (ELLs) struggle in school if certain learning strategies and practices are not implemented in the classroom to help increase their English language development, as well as helping them acquire the content knowledge. In addition to the added pressure of acquiring a second language and learning the content material, these students are the most tested sub-population group in the current public education system. In Texas schools, students are required to be tested as they enter school to determine the level of English proficiency in order to determine program placement. ELL students are also expected to be assessed in the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) in the acquisition of the English language proficiency level in various stages beginning in kindergarten through 12th grade to meet the mandates of the federal government. At the same time, they are tested on the content objective standards in order to meet the state requirements of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) assessment. It is imperative that current educators are well-equipped with effective strategies so ELLs can be successful in their academic development with the major requirements they must attain.

Research Foundation and Background

In November 2012, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) reported that there were 838,494 ELL students enrolled in Texas Public Schools, which was an increase of about 570,000 in the year 2000. Galicia and Vasquez (TEA, 2012) reported that there were over 120 languages spoken in the State of Texas and 90% were Spanish speakers. Other languages spoken in Texas public schools included Vietnamese, Arabic, Urdu, Korean, and Burmese (TEA, 2012). Since the ELL population is growing at a fast rate in Texas, it is important that educators are familiar with effective instructional approaches and strategies to help the students succeed academically.

Educational System Challenges in Providing ELLs with the Required Knowledge of Achievement

The United States Department of Education requires that states meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based upon increased percentages for all sub-population groups. TEA also requires an increase in standardized score percentages; therefore, if school districts do not meet the accountability measure, then dire consequences of losing title funding is implemented along with the accompanying negative publicity of placing districts under TEA improvement monitoring plans. As a result, schools districts are pressured to increase their test scores, and all students are pressured to perform well on tests.

According to Pandya (2011), those accountability pressures can lead to educators providing non-research based instruction and assessments to students with the following three main consequences: “(1) Test-oriented teaching; (2) The normalization of testing as learning in the classroom; and (3) Too many test scores but not enough information to help guide instruction and planning for ELL students” (p. 27). Panyda (2011) opined that educators and lawmakers should consider the “realities of testing, of learning English, and of teaching language arts all at the same time in order to understand the full range of pressure on teachers and students alike as a full set of complications that require attention” (p. 30).

According to Wolf, Herman, and Dietal (2010), the ELL population has doubled in 23 states; however, the ELL achievement remains among the lowest compared to all students. For

example, “on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 72% of 8th grade ELL students scored below basic in mathematics compared to 26% of non-ELL students” (Wolfe et al., 2010, p. 1). As a result, the University of California in Los Angeles’ (UCLA) National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CREST) has developed a list of recommendations for ELL education from a three-year research study funded by the United States Department of Education (Wolf et al., 2010). According to Wolf et al. (2010), one of the CREST recommendations included in the study mentioned that “pre-service teacher education and post-service professional development should expand and integrate ELL assessment and accommodations knowledge and strategies” (pp. 1-5). States will need to make some major adjustments to their educational approach to ELL instruction in order to close the achievement gap among the ELL student population in American schools, as well as “preparing teachers in the areas of knowledge of pedagogy, linguistics, and cultural and linguistic diversity” to avoid the hindrance of language acquisition from ELL students” (Pandya, 2011, p. 91).

Pre-Service Educators Instructional Strategies Preparation

According to Calderon, Slavin, and Sanchez (2011), there continues to be a lack of knowledge and training of effective research-based learning strategies for ELLs among educators in order to successfully address the students’ educational needs. The lack of preparation for ELLs could result in “misconceptions” regarding the learning needs of second language learners (Goodwin & Hein, 2016). Baecher, Knoll, and Patti (2016) contended higher education leadership preparation programs had challenges focusing on special populations, like ELL, “due to the structural limitations of courses and departments in higher education and the requirements of state credentialing bodies” (p. 201). In a report indicating criteria for successful ELL second language learning, Samson and Collins (2012) discovered that preparation programs should integrate the ideas of “attending to oral language development, supporting academic language and encouraging teachers’ cultural sensitivity to the background of their students” (p. 2). The authors contended that these areas should be incorporated and integrated into pre-service preparation programs, certification, evaluation, and in the development of all teachers in general (Samson & Collins, 2012). In a review of the teacher certification examinations from five states (California, Florida, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas), only California and Texas mentioned “content relevant to ELLs in their teacher requirements” (Samson & Collins, 2012, p. 13). According to the authors, there was specific mention of the oral language and cultural diversity of ELLs and some mention of the academic language learning (Samson & Collins, 2012).

Pandya (2011) stated that there were many research-based approaches that programs could use to help prepare ELLs academically, socially, and linguistically; however, from a survey result, this researcher discovered “only one-sixth of the responding programs required preparation for mainstream teachers about the teaching of English language learners” (p. 91). It was also discovered that many of the states did not require linguistic knowledge for their teaching programs; therefore, the overview of teaching language learners resulted in “course material about ELLs and multiculturalism in the broad strokes of survey courses” (Pandya, 2011, p. 91). The lack of in-depth knowledge could explain why many educators are having difficulty motivating and teaching research-based strategies to ELL students. ELL pedagogy is directed to the instructional needs of all students and should not be limited to social justice and multiculturalism curriculum found in most pre-service educators’ preparation programs (Baecher, Knoll, & Patti, 2016).

Waxman and Tellez (2002) stated that it was “a critical need to develop a solid knowledge base of effective teaching, leadership, and policy for ELLs that focuses on alterable practices that improve students’ academic achievement” (p. 5). The authors also contended that teacher preparation programs should be developed “with appropriate knowledge and training of effective instructional strategies” and that “school administrators should similarly recognize the dangers of existing instructional practices and encourage teachers to change (Waxman & Tellez, 2002, p. 28). At the annual Conference for Professors of Instructional Supervision, one discussant communicated that “supervisors should model best practice teaching to help develop teachers for instructional improvement” (L. Goldsberry, Educational Leadership panel lecture, October 19, 2018).

Research-Based Models of Instruction Tools Utilized for Lesson Delivery

Sheltered Instruction is an approach utilized to teaching ELLs that “delivers language-rich, grade-level content area instruction in English in a manner that is comprehensible to the learners” (Markos & Himmel, 2016, p. 1). There are several models of sheltered instruction; however, according to Seidlitz, Base, Lara, and Rodriguez (2014), the research-based Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model is the approach most commonly used in Texas to teach ELLs.

SIOP was “developed by Deborah Short and Jana Echevarria in 1999 in order to measure the quality of instructional delivery of sheltered practices in elementary and secondary classrooms” (Seidlitz et al., 2014, p. 86). SIOP is a “research-based and validated instructional model that has proven effective in addressing the needs of ELLs throughout the United States” (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2013, p. 1). The center claims that “research shows when teachers fully implement the SIOP model, ELLs academic performance improves” (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2013, p. 1). The SIOP model consists of eight interrelated components: lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice/application, lesson delivery, and review assessment (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2013). Each component is briefly described as follows (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2013):

Lesson Preparation. Content and language objectives must be clearly stated, displayed, and reviewed with students. Meaningful activities are integrated in lesson concepts with language practice opportunities.

Building Background. Concepts are explicitly linked to students’ background experiences and teachers provide explicit links between past learning and new concepts being learned.

Comprehensible Input. Key vocabulary is emphasized and presented in a multisensory learning experience mode (see, say, write, act), and the speech used is appropriate for students’ proficiency levels while providing clear explanations of academic tasks in simple language.

Strategies. Sheltered Instruction includes strategies such as cooperative learning, explicit targeted vocabulary development, slower speech with clear enunciation and fewer idiomatic expressions, text adaptations (such as graphic organizers, outlines, leveled study guides, highlighted texts, homework adaptations, taped texts, jigsaw text reading, marginal notes, and texts in students’ first language) and supplementary materials (such as manipulatives, pictures, visuals, multimedia, and demonstrations).

Interaction. Discussion and interaction are practiced by using games, communication through technology, performing, acting, pair dialogue/pair-share opportunities, show and tell, and cooperative learning structures.

Practice/Application. Hands-on materials and manipulatives are used to practice the learning using the new content in context while providing activities that allow students to apply content and language together.

Lesson Delivery. Language skills and content objectives must be clearly supported by the lesson delivery consistently using scaffolding techniques to assist and support student understanding and retention through the use of paraphrasing, think-alouds, reinforce contextual definitions, providing correct pronunciation by repeating student responses, slowing down speech, increase pauses and speak in phrases.

Review Assessment. Wait time for student responses is provided and questions for students should promote higher order thinking skills (HOTS).

Research-Based Learning Strategies and Educational Approaches for Teaching ELL Students

Curriculum planning and the educational approaches to teaching ELLs must include identifying an orderly, logical approach to help emphasize the college readiness standards and supporting standards that are going to be tested, while at the same time, developing students' language and critical thinking skills.

Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) identified nine research-based strategies for increasing student achievement in their book entitled, *Classroom Instruction that Works*. The book presents and exemplifies instructional strategies that the authors extracted from a body of work conducted by researchers at Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). The following nine strategies are based on effective best-practices for all learners as presented by Marzano et al. (2001):

Identifying similarities and differences. Students analyze and solve complex problems while comparing the similar and non-similar characteristics of specific items. ELL students can benefit from comparing, classifying, and creating metaphors and analogies in the form of Venn diagrams or charts to help develop the English language.

Summarizing and note-taking. Students identify the essential main ideas from reading material to help build comprehension by using a "set of rules for creating a summary" (Marzano et al., 2001, p. 32). Educators can have ELL students use this strategy to help them question unclear ideas and use predictions to help them identify future ideas and events in the text.

Reinforcing effort and providing recognition. Students are recognized for their effort in achievement and becoming aware of the importance in their effort to succeed. Educators can have ELL students maintain a weekly log to record their efforts and achievements in order to help shape their attitudes and beliefs in learning. Teachers personalize recognition and present awards for individual accomplishments to help build student motivation in learning.

Homework and practice. Research shows that students should be given the opportunity to practice their learning; however, the amount should vary by grade level and a purpose for the homework should be established. Speed and accuracy is also a key factor; therefore, educators could give students timed quizzes for homework and have students report on their speed and accuracy on related concepts being learned.

Nonlinguistic representations. Research shows that knowledge is stored in linguistic and visual forms. The "more educators use both systems of representation - linguistic and non-linguistic - the better students are able to think and recall knowledge" (Marzano et al., 2001, p. 73). Educators can give students the opportunity to use both forms in the classroom by

incorporating words and images using symbols to represent relationships and using physical models and physical movement to represent information.

Cooperative learning. Students are organized in cooperative groups to create a positive effect on the overall learning. ELL students can use their prior knowledge to help contribute learned skills within a group and help them achieve ‘learning-positive interdependence, group processing, appropriate social skills, face-to-face interaction, and individual/group accountability’ (Marzano et al., 2001, p. 85), which are the core components of cooperative learning.

Setting objectives and providing feedback. Students are provided with a direction for their learning, and they are provided with feedback regarding their learning. Educators can provide opportunities for ELL students to dictate what they know, what they would like to learn, what they have learned in the process. Formative and summative assessments can help guide student learning and provide teaching adjustments during the student learning process as needed for mastery (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2012).

Generating and testing hypotheses. Research shows that using a general rule to make a prediction or using a deductive approach can help students generate questions and hypotheses about what may happen regarding various learning scenarios and projects. It can also help students build higher order thinking skills when they are asked to develop something using limited resources, or when they are asked to make predictions about a familiar system change using their personal background knowledge.

Cues, questions, and advanced organizers. Students can be exposed to information they are getting ready to learn by using cues, questions, and advanced organizers. These tools can help enhance the new learning by helping expose students to the new learning material.

Dong (2013) contended that educators can build on “using an ELLs student’s native language and bridging ELLs prior knowledge with new learning tasks and actively engage students to create a rich learning environment” (p. 56).

Purpose of the Study and the Research Question

Administrators are instructional leaders at their respective campuses; therefore, it is important for administrators who are serving as instructional leaders to understand ELL needs and research-based teaching practices. Researchers sought to discover if using interactive online discussions concerning course content impacted new learning of the ELL content. One research question guided this study: To what extent does an online course focused on effective research-based learning strategies positively impact pre-service administrator’s knowledge concerning instruction and management of English Language Learners?

Methods

Participants and ELL Content Knowledge

The participants in this study consisted of 23 educational leadership graduate students enrolled in an educational leadership online course at a central Texas university. The data were collected by the use of a pre- and post- narrative response survey (see Appendix A). A quantitative coding methodology system was developed and utilized for both pre- and post- narrative survey responses respectively in order to count the amount of content learned, or understood. The content unit (CU)

counting method provided the number of content units (CUs) per pre-service administrator's narrative response for pre- and post- surveys and is displayed as follows:

- Content Gain Score (+1) represented accurate knowledge as identified in the narrative response = 1 + CU.
- Content Loss Score (-1) represented inaccurate or false knowledge presented in narrative response = 1 – CU.
- Repeated Content Units (0 only counts once) produced the same correct information that was repeated in both pre- and post- narrative response surveys = 0 CU.
- Gain-loss content unit scores (+ and -) provided the difference between the sum of content gain scores and the sum of content loss scores.

This coding methodology allowed researchers to count the ELL content knowledge CUs prior to and after the class intervention experience. These frequency counts provided sum totals and represented the total ELL content knowledge presented from the pre- and post- narrative survey responses, respectively, by pre-service administrators.

Pre-Service Administrators ELL Online Content Learning Intervention Procedure

The instructor modeled the use of research-based strategies and its implementation in the classroom or school setting. For example, the instructor modeled formative assessment using pre-service administrators' responses on the pre-narrative survey concerning ELL content. Online class discussions regarding ELL content provided a means to communicate learning goals for the class with participants. The summative assessment for the online class was focused on the post-survey responses; thus, the instructor compared progress from pre- to post- narrative responses, a research-based best practice. This experience alone provided a model for pre-service administrators to follow when modeling research-based best practices with their future teachers.

The pre-service administrators were asked to review the ELL content, interact with the web links, and preview examples of various ELL strategy implementations relayed by a field expert, Mrs. Christy Burton (personal video communication, October 20, 2016), who is a Trainer of Trainers for SIOP and has also completed a Level I Audit Training through the Curriculum Management Improvement Model. The pre-service administrators summarized one ELL strategy and activity they had not used before from both the SIOP model and from the *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (Marzano et al., 2001) text. Participants shared implementation ideas for the ELL content and strategy selected. The focus of their writings described incorporation of the ELL content and ELL strategy in the classroom or school setting.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were utilized which included ELL knowledge CU frequency counts and percentages gathered before and after pre-service administrators experience with the ELL, best practices content discussions and simulations. A paired *t-test* comparison was reported using pre- and post- CU means with related standard deviations. Normality was assessed for the pre- and post- CU score distributions by Shapiro-Wilk's testing. Researchers reviewed narratives and agreed on the content gain or loss score selections with 100% agreement before any data analyses.

Sample statements representing CU gains and losses were provided. Specific strategies identified from pre-service administrators' narrative responses were presented.

Results

CU Analysis of Pre-service Administrators' Narrative Responses

Pre-service administrators' prior knowledge narrative responses on the pre-survey of ELL knowledge provided a range from -2 to 26 ELL CUs while their post-survey narrative responses produced a range from 12 to 50 ELL CUs. The pre-service administrators gained 719 CUs from pre- (total = 198 or 27.5% CUs) and post- (total = 521 or 72.5% CUs) narrative response surveys, which represented a 45% (323 CUs) gain in ELL CUs from pre- to post- narrative responses (see Table 1).

Table 1
Content Units (CUs) of Pre- and Post-Surveys by Pre-Service Administrators (N=23)

Pre-Service Administrator	Pre-ELL Knowledge CUs	Post-ELL Knowledge CUs	CUs Difference (Post-Pre)	Total CUs (Pre+Post)
1	2	23	21	25
2	3	15	12	18
3	14	50	36	64
5	16	28	12	44
6	2	16	14	18
7	26	27	1	53
8	0	14	14	14
9	4	19	15	23
10	1	30	29	31
11	4	19	15	23
12	12	19	7	31
13	2	45	43	47
14	10	13	3	23
15	15	28	13	43
16	12	17	5	29
17	6	18	12	24

18	7	39	32	46
19	4	22	18	26
20	-2	13	15	11
21	17	12	-5	29
22	21	15	-6	36
23	14	22	8	36
24	8	17	9	25

Note. ELL = English Language Learners, CUs = Content Units. Pre-Service Administrator 4 was omitted due to non-participation.

Content Unit pre- and post- scores were normally distributed for pre-service administrators, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's testing ($p > .05$) (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965). Pre-service administrators' narrative responses produced lower ELL knowledge CUs on the pre-survey narrative ($M = 8.609$, $SD = 7.341$) as opposed to the post-survey narrative ($M = 22.65$, $SD = 10.24$) with a statistically significant mean increase of 14.04, (95% CI, 8.831 to 19.256, $t(22) = 5.587$, $p = .001$) which produced a large effect size $d = 1.165$ (Field, 2009; Rosenthal, 1994). The significant mean differences were noted with a notable large effect size (Winter, 2013) (see Table 2).

Table 2
Results of Pre- and Post-CUs ELL Knowledge Narrative Surveys from Pre-Service Administrators

<i>Narrative</i>	Before (pre)		After (post)		95% CI for Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
<i>CUs</i>	8.61	7.2	22.65	10.7	8.831, 19.256	5.587**	22	1.165

** $p < .001$.

Note. $N = 23$, $M = \text{mean}$, $SD = \text{standard deviation}$, $t = t\text{-test statistic}$, $df = \text{degrees of freedom}$, $d = \text{Cohen's } d \text{ effect size}$.

Statements and the Research-based Strategies Identified from Pre-Service Administrators' Narrative Responses

The following example represents a misunderstanding (CU loss) of ELL content and/or ELL research-based strategy. The Pre-service Administrator 20's pre-survey statement: "*Imagine that it (SIOP) is based on the researcher observing classrooms/student and analyzing the data.*" Sheltered Instruction is an instructional model for teaching ELLs language acquisition. It is not a tool to observe and analyze classroom, instructional data.

The next statement is an example that represents understanding (CU gains) of ELL content and/or research-based strategy. The Pre-service Administrator 20's post-survey statement: "*The model is used to help students with the English language that includes lesson preparation,*

interaction, building background, practice and application, comprehensible input, lesson delivery, strategies and review and assessment.”

This graduate class introduced many research-based best practices. From online discussions and online multimedia content presentations, future administrators were able to investigate and discuss ELL strategies, the application of these strategies, and ultimately the possible impact of the strategies on ELL students learning outcomes. Pre-service administrators’ narrative responses provided researchers the means to determine pre-service administrators ELL content and ELL strategy utilization knowledge. The strategies identified and cited most by pre-service administrators after their online class experiences are listed below (see Table 3).

Table 3
Most Cited ELL Content and/or Research-Based Strategies from Post-Narrative Surveys by Pre-Service Administrators

<u>Favored ELL research-based practices or content</u>	<u>Resource</u>
Note-taking and summarizing	Students identify the essential main ideas from reading material to help build comprehension by using a “set of rules for creating a summary” (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 32; Echeverria et al., 2000)
3-2-1 Strategy	Evidence of Learning: Students summarize learning and think more deeply about the content by writing 3 things they learned, 2 examples that apply to the learning, and 1 question about the learning (Lead4ward, 2018)
Gradual Release Model	A modeling “I do it, you watch” technique where the teacher models and the students watch the demonstrated task working toward independent mastery (Zemelman et al., 2012).
Cooperative Learning: Think/Pair/Share	Strategies that “allow ELLs to talk with a peer, a small group, or the teacher as they participate in lessons and demonstrate their understanding of the concepts” (Markos & Himmel, 2016, p. 11); Echeverria et al., 2000).
SQP2RS	A strategy that assists students in reading expository text: Survey (Preview the text); Question (1 to 3 questions to answer using text); Predict (state 3 things that will be learned); Read (read the text);

GIST

Respond (try to answer questions) and Summarize (summarize at the end of the text) (SIOP Model Resource Library, 2018; Rowlands, 2007; Echeverria et al., 2000).

Students interact with Generating Interactions between Schemata and Text strategy by reading and summarizing a section of a nonfiction text and underlining at least ten to fifteen words that appear to be important in the selected text. Students then generate a summary of the text by using the underlined words and repeat the strategy. The summary seeks to answer “who or what is it about?” and “What is most important about the who or what?” (Cecil, Gipe, & Merrill, 2017; Echeverria et al., 2000).

Objectives and Providing Feedback

Students are provided with a direction for their learning, and they are provided with feedback regarding their learning (Marzano et al., 2001; Echeverria et al., 2000).

Cooperative Learning: Think/Pair/Share/Write

Strategies provide students the ability to conceptualize topics and questions that guide their notes and idea representations to peers or group partners (Marrero-Colon, 2014; Echeverria et al., 2000).

Formative and Summative Assessments

Formative and summative assessments can help guide student learning and provide teaching adjustments during the student learning process as needed for mastery (Zemelman et al., 2012; Echeverria et al., 2000).

Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition

Students are recognized for their effort in achievement and become aware of the importance in their effort to succeed (Marzano et al., 2001; Echeverria et al., 2000).

Scaffolding

Academic scaffolding can be used “to activate kids’ background knowledge to

Sheltered Instruction

make explicit connections between new content and prior knowledge by repeating, reviewing, supporting and summarizing” (Zemelman et al., 2012, p. 158; Echeverria et al., 2000).

Content Objectives

Sheltered Instruction is an approach utilized to teaching ELLs that “delivers language-rich, grade-level content area instruction in English in a manner that is comprehensible to the learners” (Markos & Himmel, 2016, p. 1).

State content standards that state “the cognitive skills or knowledge that students are expected to acquire during a lesson and specify how students will demonstrate what they have learned” (Markos & Himmel, 2016, p. 3; Echeverria et al., 2000).

Language Objectives

Language Objectives ‘articulates for learners the academic language functions and skills they need to master in a lesson in order to meet the grade-level content standards’ (Echeverria, Short, & Vogt, 2012; Markos & Himmel, 2016, p. 4; Echeverria et al., 2000).

Note. The resources listed were used to discuss research-based strategies for engaging ELL students with content and learning.

After the pre-service administrators were provided with the strategy content material, many communicated these strategies could be utilized with non-ELLs that struggled with academic and language/vocabulary development because they are considered research-based best instructional practices. Some pre-service administrators also communicated ways in which they could use the best practice strategies in their professional development presentations as a way to model the strategies to the teachers.

Implications

Administrators are the curriculum leaders of their schools. Increasingly, ELL curriculum and its implementation are important factors in meeting the needs of students with limited English skills and experience. Administrators’ awareness of ELL curriculum also aligns with research-based instructional practices that educators are encouraged to apply in increasingly diverse teaching settings. Pre-service administrators’ knowledge and use of ELL curricular content are imperative educational components for professionals seeking administration careers with public schools.

Administrators need to understand the language, terminology, and critical research-based strategies to have meaningful discussions with their future teachers who work with ELLs.

The results of this study demonstrated that the educators were provided with methods and research-based strategies needed to assist ELL students with successful second language learning experiences. In addition, these methods and strategies serve as instruments to build success with high-stakes testing and motivation in learning as we know it. At the same time, these methods and strategies can be used with all learners who have a tendency to struggle in school due to a lack of educational opportunity as a result of their low socio-economic status and/or lack of educational background.

Conclusions

Pre-service administrators significantly improved the number of ELL knowledge CUs gained, an average gain of 14.04 CUs. As a result, pre-service administrators' participation in this online course proved advantageous for gaining new ELL content knowledge and research-based strategies for ELL student learning. Most pre-service administrators come to class with some ELL content prior-knowledge, but the direct experience with ELL content is needed to gain new, critical ELL content knowledge and skills. In conclusion, it was consistently observed that direct online-instruction utilizing ELL content increased the pre-service administrators' knowledge and understanding of the ELL content. Direct experience is central to the meaningful learning of new content and skills (Zemelman et al., 2012). University instructors modeling of research-based best practices provided the pre-service administrators in this study the experience they will subsequently provide their future teachers. Administrators' content knowledge regarding the learning and instructional needs of ELLs is an imperative prerequisite for providing teachers with examples and resources to encourage research-based ELL teaching practices. Policies governing administrator preparation programs in education may need to include a renewed emphasis on ELL curriculum. After all, K-12 administrators are the instructional leaders on their respective campuses, and they set the examples by modeling high quality teaching for their respective teachers (Crave, Elliott, Russell, & Swan, 2018).

Limitations and Future Research

This study only represented a small number of pre-service administrators enrolled in one online graduate class from a university in north central Texas. Future studies could include additional classes and/or professional development that focus on serving the instructional needs of ELLs. Longitudinal studies following administrators who have participated in higher education course work or professional development regarding ELLs instructional needs could be initiated to determine the impact of higher educational course work.

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Appendix A

Pre- and Post- Survey Questionnaire

Study I.D. # _____

Where did you receive your undergraduate degree? _____

1. What is Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP) and on what research findings is it based?
2. What are some Sheltered Instruction learning strategies?
3. What are the SIOP components or features?
4. What are the essential SIOP lesson plan components?
5. Identify some research-based learning strategies that can be implemented that help develop English Language Learners language development and academic achievement.

Online Learning for School Administrators Regarding Physical Education: A Systematic Review

Scott McNamara

University of Northern Iowa

Suzanna Dillon

Texas Women's University

Nicole Fulton

Texas Women's University

Online learning may be an effective mode to deliver information about specially designed physical education (PE) to school administrators. The purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic review of the literature to evaluate the use of online learning to increase knowledge on PE for school administrators. The investigators identified two articles that met the full inclusion criteria. From the findings of this systematic review, it appears that more rigorous research is needed to better understand the benefits and challenges of online learning for school administrators.

School administrators are unique in that they need to understand the variety of curricula and accommodations needed within students with disabilities' school day (Gary, 2016; Thompson & O'Brien, 2007). School administrators, in particular special education administrators, are especially pertinent to effective physical education services for students with disabilities, which is commonly referred to as adapted physical education, as they directly oversee special education services. Adapted physical education programs have the same overall objectives as general physical education programs; however, adapted physical education programs specialize in making accommodations and modifications to personalize the programs to meet students with disabilities' individual needs (Dunn & Leitschuh, 2014). Although adapted physical education has numerous benefits (e.g., improved fitness, increased on-task behaviors, cognitive benefits, etc.) and is identified within the definition of special education, the Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2010) found that schools throughout the United States face various challenges concerning students with disabilities receiving quality physical education. The GAO also suggested that school administrators need additional training to be better prepared to supervise and monitor adapted physical education services.

One of the primary barriers that disrupts and prevents adapted physical educators from effectively delivering services to students with disabilities is school administrators' lack of support and knowledge with regard to adapted physical education (Bittner, McNamara, Katz, & Silliman-French, in press; Hodge & Akuffo, 2007; GAO, 2010; Gray, 2016; McNamara, Silliman-French, Morgan, & Stephens-Pisecco, in press; Stephens, Silliman-French, French, & Kinnison, 2011). For example, Gray (2016) investigated various school professionals' (i.e., school administrators, special educators, general and adapted physical educators, general educators, and para-educators) knowledge and perceptions of physical education services for students with disabilities. It was found that all these school professionals had a significantly lower perceptions of the importance of physical education compared to general and adapted physical educators. In addition, all of these school professionals (excluding general and adapted physical educators) generally lacked an understanding of fundamental components of adapted physical education, such as the special education laws that mandate access to physical education for students with disabilities.

Online learning focused on specially designed physical education that may assist with facilitating quality physical education services to students with disabilities. Online settings are becoming an increasingly popular format for learning and professional development, which has the ability to overcome accessibility and cost barriers (Elliot, 2017; Fidalgo, & Thormann, 2017). There is a growing amount of research which has demonstrated the effectiveness of online learning for a variety of teachers (e.g., special educators, physical educators) (Erickson, Noonan, & McCall, 2012; Healy, Block, & Kelly, 2019). Educators who have engaged in online learning have generally increased their knowledge in their subject area and their instructional practices (Erickson et al., 2012; Healy et al., 2019). However, there is a lack of research focused on the effectiveness of online learning for school administrators (Bizzell, 2011; Crockett, J. B., Becker, M. K., & Quinn, 2009; Leithwood & Levin, 2008). With the limited research currently available, school administrators tend to view online learning favorably as they allow convenience to connect, collaborate, and exchange information with others in similar professional circumstances across geographical distances. Furthermore, online learning for school administrators has shown to contribute to significant increases in their knowledge, as it offers resources that administrators may find helpful (Dempsey & Stephens, 2011).

The use of online learning for school administrators may be particularly advantageous, as this population has a severe lack of time due to their extensive job duties (Camburn et al., 2016).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic review of the literature to evaluate the use of online learning (e.g., online modules) to increase knowledge on physical education for school administrators. In addition, the Adapted Physical Activity Taxonomy (APAT; Carano, 2014) was used to evaluate the quality of the articles identified. The following research questions guided this systematic review:

- a) What research has been conducted on the use of online learning to increase school administrators' knowledge of physical education?
- (b) What is the quality of research that has been conducted on online learning used to increase school administrators' knowledge of physical education?

Method

Initial Search Procedure

Potential articles, published in the past 10 years (between 2007 and 2017), were initially located via online indexing system searches. The reference lists of the articles found through the online search were also manually searched for potential articles. The reviewers conducted an initial search of the literature using the following indexing systems/research platforms: SPORTDiscus, ProQuest Nursing and Allied Health Database, ERIC, Academic Search Complete, Education Administrator Abstracts, Professional Development Collection, and PsychINFO. Keywords used for the searches were used in all possible combinations from three separate groups: (a) educational leadership, (b) physical education, and (c) adult learning. Within each group, a set of keywords were used to combine with keywords from other groups. The group educational leadership used the keywords "school administration", "educational leadership", and "special education administration". The online learning group used the following keywords, "adult learning", "online learning", "professional development", "podcast", and "andragogy". The last group, labeled physical education group used the keywords "physical education" and "adapted physical education".

Criteria for Inclusion

The following six inclusion criteria were selected by the authors and required that articles be (a) published between January 2007 and June 2017, (b) published in English language journals, (c) located in periodical publications (i.e., books, unpublished papers, conference proceedings and book chapters were excluded), (d) involved implementation of an online intervention consistent with the adopted operational definition for online learning, (e) provided a clear description of the participants as individuals who worked in some capacity as school administrators or were in an educational leadership graduate school setting, (f) utilized an experimental/quasi experimental, correlation, single-subject, or qualitative research design (i.e., systematic reviews and meta-analyses were excluded). Only articles that met these criteria were eligible for evaluation. Prior to conducting the literature search, the reviewers unanimously agreed to the operational definition for online learning as a web-based, educational delivery system 'that is characterized by a structured learning environment, to enhance and expand educational opportunities, providing instruction that is teacher-led, and may be synchronous or asynchronous, and can be accessed from multiple settings' (Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2011, p.10).

Article Review

Articles that were identified through the initial search procedure were evaluated using a three-step process. First, the two primary investigators conducted a title and abstract review on the potential studies identified to confirm studies met the inclusion criteria. Articles identified as reviews of literature were excluded but the reference lists from these articles were examined for additional potential articles. In the second step, articles that met abstract and title review were then read by both investigators to ensure they met all of the inclusion criteria. Throughout the article review process, the two reviewers independently assessed the articles to determine whether the studies met the inclusion criteria. In instances of disagreement, articles were reassessed by the reviewers until there was 100% consensus. In the third and final step, the articles that were found to meet all of the inclusion criteria were independently evaluated by one of the investigators using the quality indicators from the APAT.

Instrumentation

The APAT was developed using the CEC indicators (Carano, 2014). The APAT was used as the decision-making tool to rate the quality of each individual study and the strength of the recommendations for each of the identified articles. The APAT was designed to address four types of research designs (i.e., experimental/quasi experimental, single-subject, correlation, qualitative), and contains five evaluation domains (i.e., Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, Other) with quality indicators delineated within each domain. These domains guide the evaluation of the article and provide an APAT Quality of the Study rating (i.e., Level 1 = strong; Level 2 = moderate; Level 3 = weak). The two reviewers independently assessed each of the articles identified to determine the APAT quality. In instances of disagreement, articles were reassessed and discussed by the reviewers until there was 100% consensus.

Categorization of Themes

Using the constant-comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), data from the articles that met all of the inclusion criteria were individually reviewed and coded. Coding allowed the researchers to highlight and classify important areas that emerged from the data. Analysis for the coding and themes that appeared in this study consisted of open coding and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After all data sources were coded and compared with one another, the two investigators organized categories based on findings to determine keywords and themes found within the systematic review.

Results

In the initial search process, 197 articles were identified using the combination of keywords. From the abstract and title review, the investigators identified 28 articles that met the preliminary inclusion criteria. The articles were broken down by their research design and then read through by both investigators. After each article was reviewed using the inclusion criteria to guide the investigators, only two articles were found to have met all the inclusion criteria. The two articles were then independently evaluated by both of the investigators using the quality indicators from the APAT. See Figure 1 for an overview of the article review process.

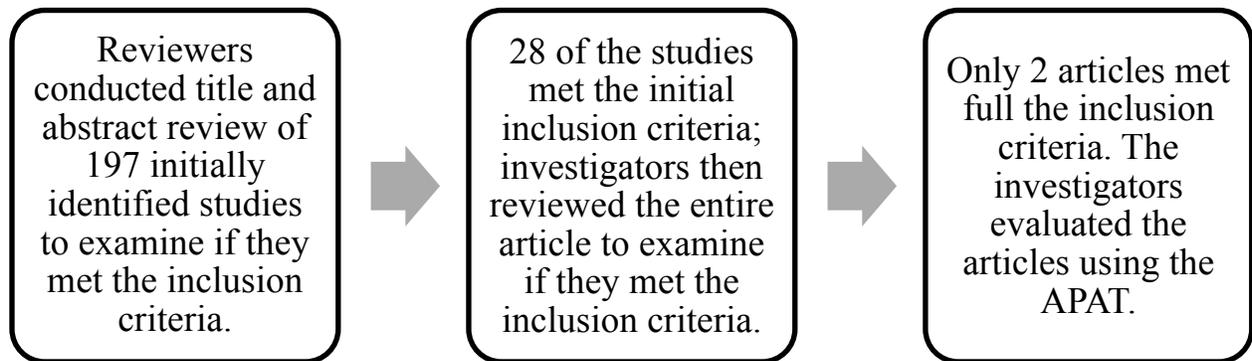


Figure 1. Overview of the article review process.

The two articles that were identified were: (a) ‘From Online Dialogue towards Critical Practice: Beginning School Administrators’ Reflections’ (Duncan, 2011); and (b) ‘Developing Educational Leaders: Using MBTI Form M in an Online Graduate Program’ (Flumerfelt, 2007). Both of the identified articles were given a Quality Rating of three. All of the articles that met the inclusion criteria were found using only a combination of the keyword groups ‘educational leadership’ and ‘adult learning’; there were no articles that met the inclusion criteria that were identified from the ‘physical education’ keyword group. Table 1 provides a summary of the quality indicators for each section of the APAT.

Table 1
Summary of the Adapted Physical Activity Taxonomy Evaluation

Author	Introduction	Method	Results	Discussion	Other	Overall Quality
Duncan (2011)	I	III	III	II	I	III
Flumerfelt (2007)	I	III	I	III	I	III

Note. I = Level 1/strong; II = Level 2/moderate, III = Level 3/weak (Carano, 2014).

Study One

Duncan’s (2011) article ‘From online dialogue towards critical practice: Beginning school administrators’ reflections’ used a qualitative case-study design. This study occurred over a three-month period. Data was collected from the participants ($n = 13$) through e-mails, online journals, online discussion boards, and an hour-long interview at the completion of the intervention. This study specifically used instructor-led discussion boards as a means to induce meaningful conversations between practicing school administrators ($n = 9$) and preservice administrators ($n = 4$). More specifically, the dialogues within the discussion boards were used to uncover the participants’ assumptions and values within the educational setting and within their professional lives. The author of this article found that through the online dialogues, the participants walked away with a deeper understanding on their own learning preferences and how their assumptions impact their leadership styles and professional lives. Table 2 displays an overview of the purpose, data collection methods, and key findings from this article.

Table 2
Overview of article one

Purpose	Data Collection	Key Results
To explore through a dialogical process how new and aspiring school leaders challenged their assumptions about learning and teaching and came to new understandings of self and the students they teach	Qualitative analysis conducted over three months. Data collection included e-mail correspondences with students and instructor, online journals, online discussion boards, and an hour long interview at the completion of the intervention	-Instructor-led discussion boards create meaningful conversation -Participants gained a deeper understanding of their personal learning preferences and how their assumptions about education impact their actions

Study Two

Flumberfelt's (2007) article, 'Developing educational leaders: Using MBTI form M in an online graduate program', utilized a qualitative design with 13 educational leadership graduate students ($n = 9$ practicing administrators; $n = 4$ preservice administrators). This study was guided by the research question, 'Can an online administration and debriefing course produce holistic student leadership learning outcomes?' (Flumberfelt, p. 105). Participants completed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator survey prior to the beginning of the intervention; the results were used throughout the online course. The participants viewed presentations in an online format and were then given various discussion board exercises. The discussion board exercises focused on topics related to learning preferences, time management, and decision-making. Within the discussion board exercises, the participants were assigned to specific groups depending on their survey results. Participants used their survey results to answer questions and find contrasts with other participants' discussion board posts. Throughout the duration of the course, the participants interacted with one another and their instructor through an online forum, emails, and online journals. The author of this study concluded that one of the keys to their success within an online setting was high quality online instruction, and regular feedback and reflection. Table 3 displays an overview of the purpose, data collection methods, and key findings from this article.

Table 3

Overview of article two

Purpose	Data Collection Method	Key Results
To determine if quality learning experiences occurred for graduate leadership students when using online techniques for the administration and interpretation of the MBTI Self-Scoring Form M instrument.	Qualitative analysis of online presentations on the MTBI instrument and follow-up discussion board exercises.	-Online materials were used effectively to generate discussion board activity -Participants interacted positively within groups of their peers with similar MTBI results -A key to success was the high quality of online instruction, regular feedback and reflection

Note. MBTI = Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

Themes

Several themes emerged in relation to the two articles' research design, data collection tools, and findings. Major characteristics that emerged with regard to methodology included: (a) a lack of an in-depth explanation of the online learning within each study, (b) a lack of research specifically on special education administrators, (c) a lack of experimental research, (d) a lack of well-defined frameworks guiding the online learning, and (e) similar tools and strategies used to implement the intervention (e.g., discussion boards, e-journals). In addition, both of these articles focused on preferences and interactions rather than on content knowledge outcomes. With regard to these studies' findings, one theme that emerged was that the participants consistently reported enjoying the use of online learning. A second theme that appeared was that the use of online discussions boards and online journals deepened the participants' understanding of the content and promoted interaction between the participants and the instructor.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic review of the recent literature to evaluate the use of online learning to disseminate information to school administrators using the APAT to evaluate the quality of the articles. Although numerous articles were initially identified with the keywords, only two articles met the full inclusion criteria, which were deemed to be of low quality according to the APAT criteria. Furthermore, none of the studies specifically focused on learning experiences associated with physical education; neither did they focus on special education administrators, which is the population that most typically oversees adapted physical education programs. Thus, there is a great need for future researchers to examine online learning programs that focus on physical education, and in particular adapted physical education, for school administrators.

The findings from the articles that met the inclusion criteria suggest that although there is some research that shows that school administrators may perceive online learning environments as beneficial (Duncan, 2011; Flumberfelt, 2007), there is a severe lack of rigorous research in the area of online learning and school administrators, especially with regard to experimental research.

As researchers design and conduct research to further establish trends and practices with relation to school administrators and online learning, they need to be mindful of the need for high quality research. Furthermore, researchers conducting online learning research with school administrators need to adequately report information critical to their research design and findings, such as the quality indicators outlined in the APAT (discussion section, results section) (Carano et al., 2014), in order to improve the quality of the study. Without a number of high quality research articles, agencies that develop online learning experiences for school administrators (e.g., educational leadership graduate programs) will continue to lack a foundation of knowledge on which to build and develop these experiences, thus leading to lower quality online learning programming for this unique population. If we are able to develop and disseminate more rigorous research with greater attention to the factors involved in a particular intervention within specific settings, we will be able to develop a number of evidence-based strategies that can be used within different settings (e.g., online settings versus face-to-face settings). Future researchers examining online learning for school administrators should consider using a taxonomy tool such as the APAT when designing and publishing research as to ensure that all of the components of high quality research are addressed.

Although high attrition rates are common within all experimental research, they are especially common when conducting research with school administrators (Camburn et al., 2016), which may be a contributing factor to the limited research that has been conducted regarding online learning for school administrators. School administrators are a particularly difficult group when conducting experimental designs, as this group is constrained by a lack of time, lack of interest, and varying levels of encouragement from their district staff. School administrators are autonomous leaders of complex organizations and are considered to be uniquely busy when compared to other education professionals. Although the research that has found it difficult to conduct empirical research with school administrators was conducted using traditional face-to-face methods (e.g., Camburn et al., 2016), it can be hypothesized that some of the same barriers found may be applied to research that is delivered fully online. For instance, Sener and Hawkins (2007) evaluated 16 studies that focused on online learning for university faculty members and found that one of the primary reasons for participants dropping out was a lack of time, which has also been a previously cited barrier when conducting experimental research with school administrators (Camburn et al., 2016). This may suggest that even when school administrators are given an easily accessible opportunity to participate in professional development, this population still has low participation rates, which leads to a lack of research regarding school administrators and online learning. Future researchers should examine how to motivate and retain school administrators who participate in online learning experiences and experimental research.

The apparent absence of any research that investigates school administrators' use of online learning in relation to physical education is concerning, as online learning may be one solution to school administrators' negative perceptions towards physical education and low levels of understanding of physical education (Bittner et al., in press; Gray, 2016; McNamara, 2018). For example, McNamara (2018) recently found that a majority of special education administrators ($n = 29$) scored less than 50% on a validated adapted physical education knowledge test, showing that there is a severe need for additional learning opportunities for special education administrators. When taking into account the challenges to conducting research with school administrators (e.g., lack of time) (Camburn et al., 2016) and the benefits of online learning (e.g., increased accessibility) (Elliot, 2017; Fidalgo, & Thormann, 2017), implies that online learning

may a viable solution to address the knowledge gap for school administrators with regard to physical education services for students with disabilities.

According to the findings from this study, a great deal of research in the area of online learning for school administrators is needed. Future researchers should examine the impact and feasibility of specific and well-defined types of online learning tools (e.g., webinars, podcasts, and social media) with specific populations within school administration (e.g., educational leadership graduate students, special education administrators). In addition, researchers in this area should describe in detail the online interventions that are employed. Refining the interventions and the population within research studies will give researchers more precise findings and allow for wider generalizations to the field of school administration and online learning. Future researchers should also examine school administrators' use of online learning tools to learn about specific areas within the education profession. This may be particularly important when addressing a field such as physical education for students with disabilities, which has been historically overlooked by school administrators (Bittner et al., in press; GAO, 2010; Gray, 2016; McNamara et al., in press; Stephens et al., 2011). Finally, researchers should also aim to identify the underlying reasons and motivation school administrators may want to use online learning for their professional learning. Although it has been found that school administrators have positive perceptions towards online learning (Duncan, 2011; Flumberfelt, 2007) and that online learning has cost and accessibility benefits (Elliot, 2017; Fidalgo, & Thormann, 2017), further research on this topic is needed to identify best practices to disseminate essential content through an online learning medium to school administrators.

Limitations

The limitations of this investigation should be acknowledged. The first limitation is that the APAT (Carano, 2014) is taxonomy that has not been published in a peer-review scholarly journal. Although the taxonomy is useful and has well-established validity, this taxonomy has not gone through the rigorous peer review process associated with most scholarly journals. The second limitation is that the use of a limited amount of databases (7) and keywords (10) may have resulted in excluding relevant articles. Future researchers should conduct larger systematic reviews that incorporate a greater number of databases and keywords to identify additional relevant articles on the topic of online learning for school administrators.

Conclusion

School administrators have a general lack of knowledge with regard to physical education and a negative perception towards physical education (GAO, 2010; Gray, 2016; McNamara, 2018). Although online mediums for learning may seemingly be a beneficial delivery method to inform school administrators about the field of physical education, there is limited research on the area of online learning and school administrators. Thus, the investigators conducted a systematic review of the literature to evaluate the use of online learning (e.g., online modules) as a means to increase knowledge on physical education for school administrators, using the APAT (Carano et al., 2014). Although the identified research showed that school administrators have positive views of online learning, more rigorous research is needed to identify best practices for school administrators engaged in an online learning environment. This is especially important to consider with regard to content areas, such as adapted physical education, that have been shown

to be historically overlooked by school administrators and educational leadership programs (Hodge & Akuffo, 2007; GAO; Gray, 2016; McNamara et al., in press; Stephens et al., 2011).

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Exemplary Superintendents' Experiences with Trust

Frank D. Davidson
Northern Arizona University

Thomas R. Hughes
Northern Arizona University

Trust is essential to success at both the school and district levels. While its presence provides no guarantee of organizational success, its absence reliably predicts failure. Trust in institutions including the government, the church, and the media has declined in recent years. This is certainly true of public schools as well. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the lived experiences of exemplary superintendents in developing trust and credibility. Participants included 12 current or former school superintendents who had received statewide recognition from their peers for ethical and capable leadership. The findings suggest that board-superintendent relationships and superintendent-principal relationships can have a substantial effect on trust in the organization. The findings also point to the importance of networking, supporting employees, and valuing dissent. Furthermore, insights are provided regarding the restoration of trust once it has been broken.

This study sought to contribute to the understanding of the important role trust plays in leadership by focusing on the lived experiences of recognized educational leaders in developing the trust and credibility that has been established with peers, colleagues, and elected officials. Participants included school superintendents who have received statewide recognition from their peers for ethical and capable leadership.

Already approaching 20 years into the 21st Century, it is clear that distrust abounds. Distrust in institutions including the government, the church, the media, and schools has significantly increased in recent years. Worldwide surveys regarding trust in various institutions reveal that the U.S. has experienced the steepest decline in trust ever documented during the nearly 20 years that these surveys have been administered (Friedman, 2018).

It should come as no surprise that school leaders are all too familiar with the struggles involved with earning the public's trust. Public schools, facing growing and complex challenges (Hughes, 2014), are perhaps as experienced as any institution in contending with the causes and effects of distrust. Strier and Katz note that "There is general agreement among researchers that public trust in schools has decreased significantly in the last decades" (2016, p. 367). It is reasonable to conclude that rising distrust has led to the multitude of state and federal government accountability measures implemented in recent years that are never far from the minds of school leaders:

Today's principals and superintendents function in a context shaped by the rise of not only high-stakes testing as a means of holding schools accountable, but also one that is heavily influenced by a number of free market accountability approaches, generally focused on competition for students. Widespread school choice and school privatization plans have proliferated across the states and at the federal level, reflecting a belief that schools will improve only when market forces compel them to do so (Papa, English, Davidson, Culver, & Brown, 2013, p. 50).

The complex work of leading schools requires leaders who understand that meaningfully improving outcomes for students requires investing in people-development, at all levels of the organization. As will be conveyed in the words of the superintendents who are the focus of this study, the work of earning trust, of building organizational capacity, and developing people is a daily, never-ending endeavor.

Conceptual Framework

In our view, at the level of the superintendency, the phenomena of trust-building and trust-restoring are rooted in the well-established five facets discussed below (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 1997, 2000, 2014, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1997). However, it is important to note that trust in a superintendent's competence, reliability, benevolence, honesty, and openness occurs in a context that is substantially different from that of a principal. As a result, while establishing and maintaining trust is no less important than for principals, superintendents face distinctive challenges in earning and restoring trust.

Much of the research on trust in schools focuses on relational trust involving the principal, in particular on collegial trust between and among the principal and faculty members. In their study of teacher trust in district administration, Adams and Miskell note that "research on trust in district administration is scarce" (2016, p. 677). When the role of the superintendent is discussed, it is generally in the context of the collegial trust relationship between superintendents and

principals (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1997). Such collegial relationships are of critical importance, but they represent just a portion of the relationships that affect trust in a superintendent. There are two important elements of trust in the superintendent that merit consideration: first, that trust in the superintendent is judged by a much more diverse constituency than is the case with principals, and second, it is inevitable that superintendents will face, at some time, the challenge of recovering from broken trust involving one constituency or another.

Because of the highly public nature of their role, superintendents answer to a wide variety of constituencies including parents, faculty, support staff, students, principals, district-level administrators, employee organizations, board members and other elected officials, taxpayer groups, civic and service organizations, faith-based groups, organizations affiliated with political parties, advocacy groups, neighborhood associations, and major corporate employers. Many constituencies tend to have long memories, and do not easily overcome suspicions or forgive transgressions.

Many long-established constituencies also have memories that predate their current superintendent, and their perceptions of how the job is supposed to be carried out often differ from perceptions concerning best practices today. Inevitably, superintendents are bound to experience an ebb and flow in the measure of trust and credibility in the view of such diverse groups, many of which pursue competing interests. Earning trust at all times and with all constituencies is an impossibly high standard. We see it as a fact of professional life that every superintendent will at some time face the challenge of recovering from broken trust.

Given such varied groups to which a superintendent must answer, a superintendent's competence is often not necessarily attributable to one's expertise or training as an educator, but instead to one's acumen in actions such as correctly judging public sentiment, understanding and reconciling competing sources of power, managing conflict, engaging in symbolic actions of importance to stakeholders, or wielding political influence. Similarly, views of the superintendent's competence may be entirely based on a combination of the other traits associated with trust – benevolence, integrity, openness, and reliability – along with views of the superintendent's humility.

Literature Review

Trust is critical to success at both the school and district levels. While its presence provides no guarantee of organizational success, its absence is likely to produce a host of problems. Chief among these is often a resistance to change initiatives, which can be seen in visible manifestations of suspicions of a leader's motives.

Megan Tschannen-Moran is widely recognized as a leading researcher on the subject of trust in relationships between stakeholders in the school community. She has described trust as involving five facets: benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence, reflecting “a willingness to make oneself vulnerable to someone else in the belief that your interests or something that you care about will not be harmed” (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, p. 68). She notes that, “If trust breaks down among any constituency, distrust can spread like a cancer, undermining academic performance and, ultimately, the tenure of instructional leaders” (2014, p. 251).

Scholarly work related to the phenomenon of trust in schools has been taking place for some time. In the early 2000s, Bryk and Schneider carried out an extensive study of Chicago

elementary schools. This research provided significant insights about the relationship between schools' academic performance and the levels of trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Schools that reported high levels of trust in 1994 were three times as likely to make improvements in reading and mathematics than those reporting trust low levels of trust.

Cosner (2009) conducted research involving 11 high school principals recognized by peers for their capabilities in building organizational capacity. This research identified specific strategies in which principals engage to strengthen interaction and interdependence among faculty and to increase collegial trust.

In research on trust in school leaders serving in high- and low-trust schools, (Handford, 2011; Handford & Leithwood, 2013), a measure of trust reflecting the construct developed by Bryk and Schneider (2002) was employed. In this research, principal competence was judged to be a critical factor, though other qualities, including leader integrity, were judged to distinguish high-trust settings from those low in trust.

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) found significant relationships among faculty trust and both collegial and instructional leadership, as well as in factors related to school climate. This study demonstrated that, absent a sufficient level of trust, the likely outcome will be leader ineffectiveness and an inability to achieve learning outcomes. To earn such a level of trust requires "more than good intentions; it takes a strong set of ethical principles and core values as well as the skills and knowledge to enact those values" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, p. 85).

The level of trust in a district's administration can hinder or help efforts to build capacity in an organization. Adams and Miskell (2016) sought to develop a measure of teacher trust in district administration and to examine the relationship between such trust and the organization's capacity to improve over time. Not only did this study yield evidence of such a relationship, but it also provided some indications that teacher trust in district administration may be at least as important as teacher trust in principals. Their research also provided support for the conclusion that district administrators can build trust through actions perceived by teachers as evidence of benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence.

Change is an unavoidable fact of life for school superintendents, and a significant level of interdependence exists between an organization's capacity to successfully negotiate change and the degree of trust in the leader (Davidson & Hughes, Forthcoming, 2020). Often the challenges associated with managing change lead to conflict that not only limits progress but potentially also affects perceptions connected with purpose, process, and personal relationships. Even when addressed directly, reform initiatives originating from both within and outside the organization can dominate the time and attention of leaders, and such initiatives can leave school faculty feeling as if they are constantly being asked to undo or revise measures with which they have just gained some degree of proficiency. Those leaders who have gained recognition from their peers for exemplary leadership may be expected to provide helpful insights into their experiences regarding the formation of relational trust that could be instructive in designing learning experiences for practicing and aspiring superintendents.

Methodology

Research Questions

This study sought to address the following questions:

1. What roles in a school district are considered to be significant agents of trust?

2. How do superintendents describe their career experiences involving trust? What themes emerge from these experiences?
3. To what experiences do superintendents refer in explaining where they learned lessons having to do with trust?
4. Do superintendents express a responsibility to explicitly address the topic of trust in their communication with others?

Research Design

This was a qualitative study involving a purposive sample of superintendents from a single state in the southwest U.S. Following the receipt of approval from the Institutional Review Board to conduct this research, participants were recruited from a pool of 22 superintendents who had received one of two statewide awards for ethical and effective leadership over a 17-year period of time. Upon receipt of written consent to participate, interviews were scheduled with the 12 individuals who could be reached and from whom consent was received. The researchers were unsuccessful in making contact with the remaining candidates for the study.

The study was conducted by carrying out phenomenological telephone interviews with participants. Participants were asked to take part in one interview of between 30-60 minutes. The structured interviews were designed to gain insights into leaders' lived experiences related to trust. Efforts to probe participants' responses sought to avoid theories or explanations of the phenomena of trust, but instead attempted to unearth the personal, lived experience of the phenomena recalled by each participant.

In addition to being university faculty, both investigators are experienced school superintendents, with thirty-four years of combined experience in this role (involving three districts in two states, set in small, medium, and large school districts). Given that these experiences have demonstrated the importance of trust in schools, topics related to trust comprise a primary focus of our research. As a result of our training, experiences, and ongoing research, part of the process of understanding the phenomenology of relational trust as experienced by the educational leaders who participated in this study involved acknowledging the lens through which we make meaning of such experiences. While it can be argued that "bracketing," i.e., setting one's own views aside, is not entirely feasible, we endeavored to be transparent and open to the participants' own interpretations of the phenomenon being studied.

Creswell describes phenomenological research as an approach "in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (2014, p. 14). Hein and Austin (2001) argued that there is no single best way to conduct a phenomenological study. The background and the goals that a researcher brings to any qualitative research are of critical importance. Moustakas (1994) wrote that, "Each research project holds its own integrity and establishes its own methods and procedures to facilitate the flow of the investigation and the collection of data" (p. 104).

Description of the study participants

In keeping with the methodology employed in this study, the findings will come largely from the words of the participants themselves. The superintendents in this study were selected specifically because they had received statewide recognition from their peers across the state for ethical and effective leadership. Two-thirds of the participants had retired from the superintendency at the time the interviews were conducted. The sample included six female and six male participants.

Seven of the participants were in suburban districts at the time they received statewide recognition, four were in urban districts, and one was in a rural district. The enrollment of the districts represented ranged from 1,500 to over 60,000. All of the participants had spent at least three decades as educators. Even those who were still serving as superintendents were either eligible for retirement under the state's retirement system, or soon would be. Having reached this station in life, participants had reason to, and tended to look back on their careers with pride and a sense of fulfillment.

Interview protocol

Both investigators conducted interviews with participants using a structured interview protocol. The interview questions were influenced by the researchers' own experiences in building trust and recovering from episodes of fractured trust, but they were designed to limit the amount of interviewer talk and to maximize the participants' comfort in sharing memories of lived experiences. Once drafted, the interview questions were field-tested with individuals who were not participants in the study.

After discussing background information on each participant, participants were informed that the focus would be on individual experiences of trust. The core of the interview included these prompts:

- Within a school district, whom do you view as the most critical agents of trust?
- Are there any particular experiences involving trust from your role as a superintendent that come to mind? What in particular stands out from this experience?
- Can you identify where you learned your most valuable lessons having to do with trust?
- Have you explicitly worked to help others whom you have supervised understand the importance of trust?

Coding and Analysis

Following transcription of the audio files, the transcripts were formatted so as to be imported in a uniform manner into Microsoft Excel employing a methodology described by Ose (2016) to systematically and manually code all of the content (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Saldana, 2015). Each transcript was coded separately, and a code list was constructed consecutively through analysis of each transcript. After an initial review of all transcripts, the transcripts were again reviewed to verify the codes that were assigned. New codes were added as content was analyzed, with some codes ultimately being combined into a single code. Upon the completion of coding, all transcripts were combined into one worksheet, and this worksheet was exported to Microsoft Word, with data sorted by participant, the specific code, and the sequence in which the content was documented in the interview. A process of content analysis was then applied in order to logically organize and interpret the data.

Findings

Agents of trust

Board-superintendent relationships. When asked to identify the agents of trust within a school district, several participants spoke to the importance of the relationship between the superintendent and the governing board. As an example, Participant 18 asserted that,

One of the biggest challenges that I think we have is building, establishing, and growing that trust with the board. Boards, by the nature of our society... are sometimes very distrustful. They come in with preconceived ideas about the bureaucracy and the leadership and are very critical of everyday actions.

Maintaining effective working relationships with the board can be a daunting task, particularly when board members believe that they have been elected specifically for the purpose of being in an adversarial role with the superintendent and administration. Participant 17 recalled such an experience when a majority of the board saw their role in this light, and noted feeling compelled to inform the board up front that they would likely disagree on many issues. The superintendent described efforts to build trust with adversarial board members, including frequent communication and periodic lunch meetings.

Participant 3 also spoke of the importance of frequent Board-Superintendent communication:

When it comes to superintendents and their boards, that is a different level of trust, in that at that point it's more about attempting to make sure that the board knows that you are keeping them informed, that you're not hiding things from them, that you're doing your best to address issues in a consistent and effective manner.

Participant 3 spoke to the importance of tailoring communication strategies to the needs of each Board member:

We need to treat board members equitably, not necessarily equally. By that I mean that we look at the individual board member and differentiate based on their need. We always communicate the same information, but, with one board member, they may want information in hard copy, and another wants a phone call.

As another example of this same point about the need for awareness of the needs of all board members, Participant 5 recalled,

With one board member, if any vehicle with any siren or light flashing shows up at one of the schools, she needed to be the first to know, and she was one of these that even before texting and social media, she would manage to find out. Another board member who didn't have that need to know would kind of be put off if you gave him that kind of detail. But that was up to me to know who needed what.

Participant 3 stressed how important it is to issue responses to questions from individual board members to the entire board, and to make sure that Board members understand that this would be the process used with each request for information. This superintendent sees this approach as a way to build and sustain trust with the board, noting that it is important that board members feel they are receiving the information they need.

Participant 18 noted that a common misunderstanding on the part of new superintendents is the failure to realize that board development is a primary responsibility of the superintendent, and not just something that will happen on its own. Participant 18 noted that new superintendents often

look at teacher development and principal development and those kinds of things, and they don't often think of the fact that one of the primary needs is to develop and grow your board.

With respect to the challenge of superintendent-board communication, Participant 18 went on to assert that

Board management is difficult, because as boards change, and, you know, if you have one new board member, the whole dynamic changes.

When considering the agents of trust in a district, participants often spoke about the damage that can be done to a district's reputation should an individual as prominent as a board member engage in questionable behavior in public. Participant 7 commented that,

We can cite examples of board members whose behavior made the news and reflected poorly on the district. Individual board members have the potential to do a lot of damage if they are not trustworthy.

The tone established by the superintendent. Repeatedly, participants remarked on the critical role that superintendents play in creating trust in the organization. When the superintendent is trustworthy, and the superintendent sets the expectation that principals and other administrators must earn trust from teachers, parents, and students, trust in itself becomes a means to build organizational capacity. Participant 4 spoke of the importance of listening and exercising patience in order to build trust. Participant 5 spoke of the importance of having the power of reflection to learn from one's mistakes in creating an atmosphere of trust. Speaking of the importance of respectful relationships with staff, Participant 6 stated that trust is strengthened when

You let people know that you care about and you honor what they have to say. Participant 11 said that

Superintendents must walk the talk so that the superintendent is trusted by all the stakeholders.

Participant 3 noted that

The superintendent is the individual that guides that trust, guides the culture of the organization.

Trust increases when staff members believe that their voices count. Participant 3 described an approach taken to negotiations over compensation and benefits that is uncommon, particularly for larger districts – that of having the superintendent directly involved in negotiations with faculty and support staff.

When in the midst of implementing change initiatives, faculty members are more likely to be willing to risk failure if they have trust in leaders (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Participant 17 remarked that,

If your leadership is not seen as trustworthy, there will be questions about the direction that we are moving.

It is common for superintendents to experience resistance to change initiatives from staff or parents, particularly if they feel their voices have gone unheard. Participant 20 related an experience when a major district-wide change initiative had been explored, with the final decision being dependent on a vote by parents. Many parents voiced their concern that the decision had already been made, and were skeptical that their objections would be taken into consideration. In the end, there was scant support for the proposed change, and the plans were scrapped. Parents who had expressed disbelief that their voices counted subsequently communicated to the superintendent that they did not realize “that you meant what you said.” Participant 20 referred to this as a lesson that

It is important that you do what you say you are going to do. You might win over some people who weren't in your court.

Many participants also spoke to the importance of superintendents being open, visible, and available. Anyone who has ever served in this or a similar role understands the numerous and varied demands in a position of this nature, and that there are only so many hours in the day to attend to such demands. Finding the proper balance between competing demands, while still attending to the trust-building work of being visible and available, is a constant struggle. Superintendent 17 spoke of the value of

being accessible to one's cabinet and principals, and being open and prepared to meet their needs.

Participants spoke of the particular importance of integrity when superintendents face adversity. One example that came to mind for Participant 17 had to do with dismissing principals. Participant 17 remarked that,

You always want to preserve their dignity and their integrity, and be very factual about why you are not going to be recommending them to the board.

Similarly, Participant 11 stated that, when it was necessary to terminate an individual's employment,

It was done with dignity, respect and lots and lots of communication.

Participants argued that empathy and respect can go a long way in the face of adversity. Speaking in the third person, Participant 4 stated,

[The superintendent] can chew you up one side and down the other in such a nice way you thank [the superintendent] when you leave. You don't even know you've been scolded.

Participant 18 stated,

I can tell you that the relationships that you build over time with people are important. If you gain trust, when you ultimately have to do some difficult things with different staff - you know you either have to reassign or ultimately have to dismiss - I can tell you that without exception the trusting relationships that I had developed with those individuals over time made those conversations and the ultimate outcome achievable. I was able to do that because even in a bad situation they trusted in that relationship of trust that had been nurtured over time.

One of the more damaging conflicts that many superintendents face is that of closing a school, as this can lead to a level of distrust that may never be overcome. Participant 20 spoke directly of the difficulties of maintaining or regaining trust in this circumstance, noting that, once the decision was made, there was not much to be done. The superintendent's approach was summarized as,

I met with lots of people and listened, and said I would be upset too.

As noted above, when leaders consistently act in a manner that reduces uncertainty for others, they are generally seen as being more reliable and dependable (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015). Speaking of the negative consequences of being seen as unreliable, Participant 18 stated that

Inconsistency can be a huge challenge for leaders. Sometimes leaders get sidetracked, just constantly bouncing from one thing to another.

Many educators have witnessed evidence of staff slow-walking a new initiative until they see if the leader is genuinely committed to it, or if a newer, better initiative will be announced at the next faculty meeting. Effective leaders maintain a disciplined focus (Davidson, 2015), finding a balance between the sometimes competing facets of openness and reliability.

Participants spoke of the unique challenges of large and small districts, along with the challenges of being new to a district vs. being a long-time veteran in a district. Participant 18 spoke of the importance of effective communication to enable stakeholders to understand the interrelationships in a large organization. Participant 7 noted that, coming from a large district,

I have always said that If I know your name, you're either really good or really bad.

Participants noted that visibility can be much more easily achieved in a smaller district. Participant 2 asserted that, in a relatively smaller district, it is easier for the superintendent to develop familiarity and trusting relationships. Participant 7 recalled,

I have prided myself on getting into at least 500 classrooms a year.

It is certainly feasible for superintendents to visit 500 classrooms in a year; in a large district with upwards of 5,000 classrooms, such a level of visibility would be unattainable. In smaller districts, Participant 3 stated that

The smaller you are, the more intimate it becomes, and now you have staff members who are oftentimes fellow high school graduates with your board members or engaged with your board members socially, so it becomes much more granular, and there are many more areas where trust has to be maintained and where the trust bond has to be considered because of the fact that in a smaller setting, people know so much more about the individual.

Participant 7 remarked that,

In a large district, the superintendent's trustworthiness is going to come through their interactions with others and through their communication in print. In a large district, it is highly unlikely that most residents or employees will have any kind of relationship with the superintendent. Most people would probably not know the superintendent if they were in line with them in the grocery store.

The critical role of the principal. In districts large and small, participants viewed the role of the principal as a critical one in developing and maintaining trust in the broader organization. Several also mentioned their work to develop in principals those competencies and traits that would “establish a culture of trust and ethical behavior” (quoting Participant 3). The most important step in developing such competencies and traits, as stated by Participants 6 and 22, involves modeling them.

The influence that principals have is attributable to their direct contact with the school community. Participant 18 said,

[Principals] are the key because they're the messengers everyday. They have to be aware of community values and thoughts and strategic initiatives. They are the keepers of the trust with students and with the parents and teachers and with their school communities. They provide that link between the building principal and the superintendent; this has to be very strong and it is based on trust.

The duties of a superintendent are such that their work often needs to be conducted behind closed doors and, on any given day, may involve contact with a relatively small number of individuals. In contrast, as a public figure in a very public place, a principal's demeanor is regularly on display. As a result, their competence (or lack of it) may be subject to the daily judgement of students, teachers, support staff, and parents. Speaking of the principalship, Participant 18 stated,

Trust and credibility depend on competence in leadership. You have to understand teaching and learning, and you have to be able to understand strategic planning and change. Through principals, districts can leverage opportunities across the community.

Developing an open, honest, sincere communication style is essential. People need to see their principal as honest and reliable.

Participant 7 stated,

Principals are critical in perpetuating the district's culture and in building trust in the organization.

Where trust is learned and earned. Parental modeling. Participants were asked to respond to the question, "Where do you think you learned or how did you learn about trust?" The following are examples of responses that pointed directly to parents and family:

I learned from my parents teaching about being genuine. (Participant 20)

You learn your most valuable lessons having to do with trust from your family. My core values are deeply rooted in my upbringing, my parents, and my faith. (Participant 22)

I think it probably started back in my family. (Superintendent 4)

They were building trust and teaching you how to behave and treat people with respect and dignity. (Participant 5)

My mom was a single parent most of my childhood. My mom and two of her sisters lived in close proximity to one another. From them, I learned the importance of being purposeful, loyal, dedicated to family, supportive of one another, and willing to help others less fortunate. (Participant 7)

My mom always told me you need to do the best that you can and you need to give over 100 percent in everything you do. Trust came from my Mom and I have carried that through my life. (Participant 17)

Life lessons related to trust. In addition to the influence of family, participants cited professional experiences that shaped their views regarding trust. In some cases, participants pointed to their experiences of the culture of the organization, or to

a leader whose benevolence helped me to learn even more about trust (Participant 22).

Participant 11 cited

the teams of people I have worked with around me as a source of inspiration and accountability, as well as professional relationships which were based on treating people as they would want to be treated.

Participant 18 spoke of the lessons taught by students during the early years of teaching:

They can recognize whether your conduct is lip service or if you're truly genuine.

Professional networks were also cited as sources of learning about the value of trust.

Participant 18 spoke of the value of

interfacing with remarkable leaders across the state.

Participant 11 said that,

Where I really learned was while becoming involved with the professional association, and by networking with people who were not necessarily in my district.

Other participants spoke of the value of mentors in shaping their attitudes regarding trust.

Participant 18 recalled an influential mentor who spoke about the importance of leadership and the responsibility that came with it. Participant 5 recalled a principal who served as a mentor. The principal needed an assistant, but, absent the funding for the position,

He decided he was going to get one himself, and I started having a mentor pretty early in my career.

Some professional experiences were less positive, but nonetheless shaped views regarding trust. Participant 3 recalled an earlier time when duplicitous behavior was observed in other district administrators. In their interactions with the superintendent, they signaled compliance and

support, but otherwise undermined or derided the superintendent's decisions. Participant 3 attributed this duplicity to the superintendent's lack of openness to other points of view, and Participant 3 vowed to not make the same mistake.

In some cases, participants recalled mistakes they had made as the source of valuable learning about relational trust. Participant 11 recalled being asked by a principal to alter a report, then having the superintendent discover that this had occurred. Participant 11 said,

I thought to myself I will never ever, ever do that for someone again. I need to take the high road. When you own your mistake and learn from it, you show you are human and it's ok to fail forward as long as you own it and move forward with it.

Participant 3 recalled learning, as a young administrator, that staff members could not necessarily always be trusted to follow through on actions to which they had agreed. This learning led to a realization that, while a nondirective approach might be warranted in some circumstances, other situations require a more directive approach. Tschannen-Moran writes, "There are dangers in both trusting too little and trusting too much" (2017, p. 16). Participant 7 observed that,

Seasoning and experience help us to develop some perspective and appreciate that we're all human.

Supporting/Protecting employees. Some participants recalled instances when trust was built through measures that were undertaken to support or protect employees who had made mistakes or who were subject to unjustified criticism. Speaking of a time when building administrators were under fire for the manner in which a situation had been addressed, Participant 7 described the steps that were taken to shield the individuals from unwarranted criticism and retribution. Participant 7 noted,

You sometimes stick your neck out when you need to. It builds trust when employees know you'll stand up for them.

Examples were also provided of casual, daily, respectful interactions that increased trust in the leader. Participant 6 spoke of the importance of equanimity in relationships with individuals in more and less prestigious positions, noting that all stakeholders are deserving of respect.

Valuing dissent. Participants pointed out the value of creating a culture where the expression of thoughtful dissent is an expected norm. Leaders who fail to foster such a norm inevitably create an unhealthy atmosphere in which disagreement is not eliminated, but is discouraged from being subject to honest consideration. Participant 18 observed, "At times you know, there are leaders - and we've all seen them - that lead in ways that are kind of an iron fist type of leadership and that cause people to distrust." Participant 3 approached this issue as follows:

I think that trust goes back to the fact that you are an open listener as a leader. You are willing to take the criticism that will ultimately get to a better decision. We need to be willing to listen to criticism, to dissension, because ultimately if we don't, then we run the risk of losing trust. When stifled, dissension doesn't go away. It goes underground.

Participant 2 spoke of the importance of maintaining a constructive relationship with the teacher's association:

If we didn't agree on every issue, which we didn't, we were always able to sit down and talk and explain to each other and feel that "this is a person that I can trust as well"

The issue of loyalty was also raised. Loyalty is a powerful and complex variable in leadership. There are variations of loyalty that can forge and strengthen trust, and competing loyalties can sometimes irreparably damage an otherwise effective working relationship. An expectation of blind loyalty can stifle disagreement and produce intellectual dishonesty.

Participants noted that, while it is reasonable to expect loyalty to the organization, insistence on loyalty to oneself inevitably discourages dissent and breeds distrust. Noted Participant 22,

One of the leaders for which I worked viewed loyalty as a synonym for trust, and I don't necessarily agree with that view. I don't see loyalty and trust as the same thing.

Loyalty to the organization can also mean being willing to voice unpleasant facts. Participant 5 spoke of a time when a serious health issue temporarily reduced this superintendent's inhibitions about using profanity in an administrative meeting; fortunately, an employee who was loyal to the organization as well as to the superintendent pulled the superintendent aside and advised that it was probably too soon to return to work. It was. Participant 5 recalled,

That was the right thing, but we had that level of trust. No hard feelings. He was right. I was wrong.

Trust, easily broken, sometimes restored. Trust is fragile and difficult to restore once broken. The restoration of trust “is an arduous process that requires effort and humility and may extend over a long period of time (Tschannen-Moran, 2017, p. 18). Every participant could recall a circumstance that involved overcoming distrust. All acknowledged that, given the varied roles that a superintendent must fulfill, and the diverse constituencies in a school district, there are many areas of potential vulnerability. Participant 4, with a long record of service in a large district, credited the ability to weather a period of seemingly unending community controversy to the deep well of trust that had been created over decades:

I don't know how many could have survived that kind of hit if there hadn't been a foundation of trust and a record of success.

Trust, said Participant 18,

could fall apart in a second, so it's something that as a leader you have to hold on to.

Participant 6's perspective was poetic:

Trust is like trying to pick up water and hold it in your hand.

Participant 20 remarked that,

It doesn't take much to lose trust but it takes a lot to gain trust.

Noting the value of taking responsibility and demonstrating humility, Participant 3 stated,

I think that the question of whether trust can be rebuilt depends upon the particular situation. When people see you are honest and you are willing to take a hit to make sure that you reestablish that relationship, I think that starts to help.

The optimal level of trust that is warranted comes into play when trust is broken. Notes Tschannen-Moran, “Trust needs to be tempered by a willingness to confront and punish exploitive behavior” (2017, p. 16). Participants spoke of their approach of placing trust in building administrators to do the right thing until it was demonstrated that such trust was unwarranted. Participant 11 recalled the frustration of repeatedly working with the same administrators to ensure their compliance with student discipline policies to the point where the administrators were asked in exasperation, “What do you not understand?” Participant 11 observed,

You want to trust them, but sometimes you get to where they are insubordinate or where maybe they don't get it or who knows, and you realize this is not changing. I have to be able to trust you that you are going to do the right thing.

Participant 3 stated,

Throughout my career, I have had situations where there are individuals that you believe you could trust, but then you would start to see them taking actions that would throw you under the bus, where they would tell you one thing, then ultimately go out and do another.

Standing up for one's principles can erode trust with some, while increasing it with others. Participant 2 recalled a loss of trust when disciplinary action had to be taken involving an administrator. While the trust with that individual might never be restored, the superintendent's moral authority and level of trust increased because others saw the superintendent follow through on a difficult decision. When it comes to broken trust in such circumstances, said Participant 2,

Sometimes you just have to ride it out.

Participants also described instances in which the level of trust was damaged beyond repair, so that the only available option was to move on. Participant 22 described a circumstance when it was evident that a board member could not be trusted. Similarly, Participant 7 stated,

When board members ask you to look the other way on student conduct with their child, when they ask you to hire their friend, I don't think it's a culture that I want to remain in.

Participant 22 concluded,

It's important to understand what leaders go through when trust is broken. I'm worried, candidly, about superintendents. It was really difficult for me because it's hard to recover from the loss of trust. It's very difficult to share your reasons for moving on when you can no longer trust critical people in your organization.

Discussion

The superintendents in this study described a wide variety of experiences related to trust that reveal that trust can indeed be earned through actions that are perceived as exhibiting benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence. In many cases, the presence of these facets of trust, expressed in an attitude of sincere humility, provided a path forward in those instances when trust in the organization or the individual had been broken. For the participants, trust that had been earned over a long period of time helped them to weather the storms that many ultimately faced. Their practical examples could serve as rich conversation-starters for those involved with mentoring or preparing new leaders at any level.

New superintendents are sometimes unaware of the importance of relationship-building with the board. Since superintendents' careers have usually taken them from the classroom to the principalship to the superintendency, their familiarity with these roles may lead them to be more attentive to communication and relationship-building with internal constituents. Communicating effectively and building relationships with teachers and principals is essential to district leadership; however, as noted by the participants in this study, the development of relationships with the board is of critical importance. Perceptions of board-superintendent relationships by stakeholders inside and outside the organization can have a significant effect on trust in the organization as a whole.

The leaders who were the focus of this study were at the pinnacle of their careers at a time of deepening distrust in public schools. This distrust helped to produce accountability policies and free market reforms that, in many ways, provided validation of the public's distrust. It requires the work of exceptional teachers and leaders to reframe an unflattering label as a catalyst for positive change, to gain the trust of staff and parents, and to create a culture with essential norms including "persistence in the face of challenges, hard work to achieve desired ends, and honest performance appraisals" (Davidson, 2015, p. 402). The lessons from the leaders in this study can serve to illustrate how to navigate such challenges.

Effective school district leadership requires taking risks which may result in failure that can damage views of a superintendent's competence. One of the authors recalls a particular bond election to fund renovation of older schools. Despite having received voter support for several

measures prior to this effort, and despite following the same formula that had previously led to voter support, the measure failed after a local taxpayer group posted signs across the school district proclaiming, “It’s not for the kids.” This strategy, combined with published attacks on the superintendent’s character and motives, served to arouse distrust in the individual and the organization. Five years later, a ballot measure proposed by the same superintendent and for twice the amount of the previous election earned unanimous support from both major local political parties, and passed by a 2:1 margin. While not all leaders enjoy the gift of time to recover from a loss of trust, the acknowledgement of missteps, gestures of openness to those with opposing views, and the passage of time appear to be essential for recovering from the loss of trust, as is acceptance of the fact that all five traits will never be in evidence at all times for all stakeholders.

In addition to facing vulnerability on many sides on account of the wide array of constituencies to which they must answer, trust in the superintendent can also be tenuous due to constant exposure to risk through the many functions of a school district’s operations where mistakes may result in grave consequences. What of the kindergarten child who fell asleep at the back of the bus? Was the fact that the child was overlooked by the driver attributable to neglect on the part of the driver, who did not comply with existing protocol, or was it due to the superintendent’s failure to ensure the existence of such a protocol in the first place? What of the student found with a gun at the middle school? Was there a failure of leadership in taking appropriate steps to implement safety measures?

There is reason to believe that future research involving the reflections and lived experiences of superintendents could yield additional information that would be helpful in furthering the development of leaders in this and similar roles. In the present study, we intentionally sought out award-winning superintendents who had been recognized by peers for ethical and effective leadership. Participants in this study had generally spent long periods of time in a single school district, which meant that many had seen their careers develop in stable and healthy organizations. Most had retired from the superintendency at the time of this study. Few spoke of ever having to deal with pressure to leave their positions. We believe that there would be great value in discussion of their insights in leadership-preparation coursework.

It is reasonable to assume that a cross-section of superintendents in varied circumstances might provide different insights into the challenges of earning and keeping trust, particularly with respect to efforts to repair broken trust. Moreover, similar research involving early-career superintendents could provide a better understanding of pre-service training and on-the-job support that would be of benefit. Research involving the relationship between trust in the superintendent and other variables such as student achievement, trust in principals, faculty retention, and conflict resolution would help to strengthen understanding of the influence of trust in the superintendent.

Several helpful instruments for investigating trust in the school setting have been developed (Tschannen-Moran, n.d.). A worthwhile endeavor would involve the development of a tool for district self-reflection on issues of trust that could be used for self-study and strategic planning. Such a tool could bring the discussion of trust into the open and facilitate honest appraisals of actions that foster and diminish trust. Given the importance of the board-superintendent relationship, the field would also benefit from modifications to existing board self-evaluation instruments or development of a stand-alone tool for aiding the board in annually reflecting on actions that promote or erode trust in the organization.

Conclusions

Our research adds insights to the existing body of scholarly work on trust in school leaders. Through this work, exemplary leaders give voice to how they define trust, life lessons related to trust, factors in their careers that have increased or diminished trust, and the critical role that trust plays in relationships throughout the organization.

Our system of public education faces challenges like never before, and trust in school officials will play a central role in determining how successfully schools meet those challenges. We expect our school leaders to anticipate future trends, improve student achievement, focus the collective will of stakeholders, manage change, resolve conflict, and keep students and staff safe, while doing so with resources that are not always up to the task. Leaders that will fare well in meeting these challenges will do so through approaches that build a shared sense of purpose (Fullan, 2008; Hughes & Davidson, Forthcoming, 2020; Marks & Louis, 1999; Papa et al., 2013; Wagner, 2001).

Organizations which have developed the resiliency to withstand the inevitable shocks and setbacks faced by all public institutions are able to do so in large part through confidence that is instilled through the credibility of key personnel. Participants in this study often referred to the benefits of being able to draw upon a reservoir of trust that had developed over a long period of time and with diverse constituencies. When adversities large and small arise, as is bound to happen, the degree of trust in the institution and its leaders will substantially affect the course taken as conflict unfolds.

Whatever words the participants in this study used to describe the ideal, they indicated that trust is a critical component of leadership, and that building trust should be the first order of business for a leader. Leaders who instill trust do so largely through creating respectful and open relationships that go well beyond an organization's hierarchy, through taking responsibility for errors, and through demonstrating humility in their interactions.

One of the authors recalls stepping into a special education leadership role where team members – against their objections – had previously been told that they were to conduct future IEP and other decision making meetings alone, based on an argument that this would be a more streamlined and efficient approach which would free up additional time for staff. Knowing the importance of openness and respect in helping this team to serve most capably, this leader listened to the concerns of staff, and never carried out the plan to have team members work in independent silos. Although this apparently simple decision was but a small step, it yielded great benefits in the team's capacity and in the level of perceived trust. Recognition of the fact that staff would do the right thing rather than take the easy path also served as affirmation of their professionalism. Trust is built (or lost) through countless decisions, large and small, that leaders make on a daily basis.

On any given day, superintendents carry out tasks that are both routine and out of the ordinary. While every leader would benefit from a "to do" list to ensure that critical tasks are attended to, the participants in this study did not appear to start and end their days with the word "trust" written on the palms of their hands as a reminder. Based on respect that was earned over long careers, and based on their reflections, these individuals had been invested for some time in the personal qualities and actions that lead to trust. Trust, in their experiences, was less about the things that they did, and more about the way that they did them.

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Balancing the Role of the Principalship: Creating and Sustaining Equity and Excellence

Jennifer K. Clayton

The George Washington University

Arronza LaBatt

Montgomery County, MD Schools

This study examined the interrelationships between principal beliefs and expectations on the principal's capacity to create the conditions for equity and excellence that result in increased student achievement. The study population consisted of three elementary school principals with demonstrated success in increasing student achievement for all students in the selected schools. Data included semi-structured interviews, participant shadowing, and artifacts observed or collected during the study period. Using the portraiture methodology, collected data informed the development of portraits of the participants to answer the research question "How do personal beliefs, organizational structures, and decision-making processes influence principal practice in leading for equity?" The study found that these three principals demonstrated democratic ethical leadership practices influenced by their personal and professional experiences. The research concluded with the construction of parallels between principal beliefs and the organizational structures and processes they employ to support equity and excellence for all students.

Every school has a story orchestrated through the decision-making processes, behaviors, and actions of its leader. The story of each school is unique and visualized through the images of its cast of characters, setting, and the forces at play that create the storyline. Creating the climate, structures, and practices for academic success of all students in an increasingly diverse student population is a challenge faced by school principals (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Howard, 2010; USDOE, 2010). To address increasing disparities in student achievement, educational policymakers have contributed to a climate where school leaders are faced with the critical task of achieving equity-based educational excellence and balancing instruction that prepares all students for state criterion and achievement tests (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Shapiro, 2009; Valencia, 2010).

By focusing so heavily on standardized testing as a metric for accountability, and by attaching high-stakes consequences to the results of these tests, educational policy has created a narrow definition of educational success focused on summative achievement data, without consideration for other educational academic, social, and emotional goals (Bogotch, 2002; Leithwood, 2001; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Shapiro, 2009). The unintended consequence of the increased accountability and narrowed curricula has been decreased student engagement and alienation for all students and racial disparities in academic achievement and discipline (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Leithwood, 2001; NCES, 2001). To meet these accountability demands, principals must engage in leadership practices that develop culturally responsive school environments that have a high commitment to improving achievement for all students. Thus, an effective study of leadership for equitable and excellent schools must include an analysis of the characteristics and intentional practices and processes deployed by principals that explicitly create an equitable and excellence school context, while balancing the factors that influence or affect the context of the school (i.e. political and social construction of schools; accountability policies, structures, and processes).

We used portraiture methodology to examine the connections between principals' beliefs and expectations and their social justice leadership practices that align with equitable and excellent schools. The study focused on addressing the following research questions:

1. What are principals' beliefs and decision-making processes, and the school structures that support equity and excellence for all students?
2. How do elementary principals balance the role and responsibilities of school leadership and negotiate the school context (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability measures) to support equity and excellence for all students?

Theoretical Framework

We utilized critical inquiry theory as the epistemological philosophy along with a constructivist and interpretive research design for data collection and analysis. Critical theory provides a framework for analyzing many sides of issues related to inequities associated with class, race, and gender (Habermas 1973;1987). Habermas (1987) provided a basis for examining the relationship between technical and practical knowledge. His work influenced that of Freire (1970), Giroux (1981), and McLaren (1985) which examined elements that contribute to the social construction of schools that maintain the marginalization of students, as well as serve as barriers to creating and sustaining equitable and excellent schools. Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theory of social reproduction focused on the replication of societal disadvantages and inequalities in school structures that perpetuate barriers that create inequitable experiences for students. Therefore, according to the theory of social reproduction, schools can create a culture for success or failure of students. As this study focused on the decision-making processes of leaders successful in

creating equitable and excellent schools, the analysis of the context of the school contributed to telling the story of the success.

The conceptual framework included factors that contribute to how principals define their roles and engage in leadership practices that result in educational equity and excellence for all students. Leadership practice is a dynamic and responsive relationship. The first factor, supported in research on social justice leaders and equitable and excellent schools, is personal beliefs (Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Shapiro, 2009; Theoharis, 2004, 2010). The second factor, based on federal and state educational policy and national reports on student achievement related to race and ethnicity, is accountability measures (Bogotch, 2002; Schott Foundation, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2010, 2014). The third and fourth factors, democratic leadership, and ethical-decision making are interrelated and form the basis for the structures and processes that contribute to the organizational culture for equity-based educational excellence and high academic achievement for all students (Apple & Beane, 2007; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Purpel & Shapiro, 1995; Shapiro & Gross, 2013). While democratic theory addresses participation, critical theory sets expectations for true and honest communication responsive to public needs and established a framework for analyzing the dynamic interplay between leadership practice and the organizational structure in an equitable and excellent school.

The conceptual model presented in Figure 1 describes the research foundation that guided this study. The primary goal of this study was to elevate the intersectionality of principal beliefs and values with intentional structures and processes of principal practice that contribute to an organizational context of educational equity for all students. By examining principal practice, interviewing principals about their beliefs about instruction related to their leadership practices for social justice and educational equity and excellence, and analyzing the findings, school leaders will develop knowledge and skills to identify strategic planning, and implementation processes to support social justice, equity, and excellence for all students.

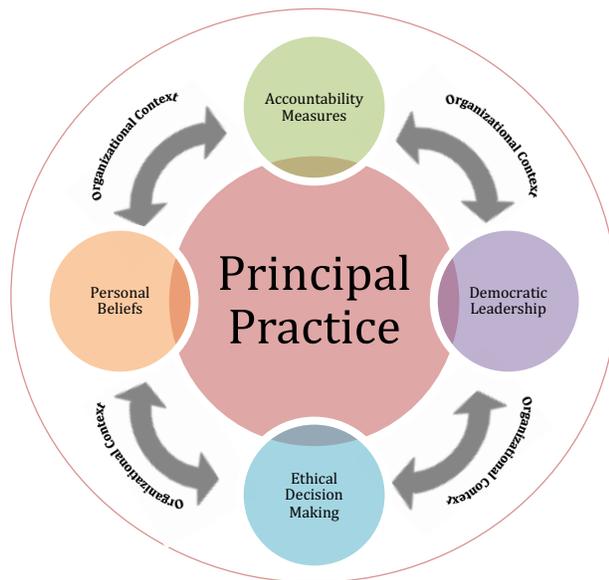


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Leaders for Equitable and Excellent Schools

Background

Historically, the primary focus of schools was to establish social order and mainstream vast numbers of immigrant children into a common school setting to produce economically competent, democratic, and moral citizens (Dewey, 1916). These ideas reinforced the role of education as a study in control and power, constructed on relationships that emphasize structures that weed out undesirables (Dewey, 1916; Johnson, 1972; Spring, 1989). However, the landscape of schools has changed since 1945 when the central goal of American schooling emphasized was to ensure economic power (Spring, 1989). Along with the diverse shifts in political, societal, and economic values that accompany increased cultural diversity, significant changes in educational legislation have increased accountability on state and local levels to close the achievement gap, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. To balance the challenging crisis of meeting high academic accountability standards for all students, principals must be able to lead for equity and excellence.

In the 21st century, educational theorists and practitioners have embarked on a re-conception of schools through the lens of social justice (Apple & Beane, 2007; Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Giroux & McLaren, 1992; Marshall & Oliva, 2009; Theoharis, 2008). The working definition of social justice considered in this study is the promotion of behaviors and distribution of resources that eliminates inequalities and advances the rights and education for all children (Griffiths, 1998; Theoharis, 2008). A concern among advocates for social justice is that principals are not adequately prepared to promote equity and excellence for all students in the face of increasing accountability pressures (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009). As the instructional leader, the principal must advocate on behalf of all students and create a school climate and culture that ensures all students achieve at the highest levels, without oppressing or neglecting others (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fullan, 2005; Normore, 2004; Purpel & Shapiro, 1995; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). The importance of principals in this role beyond the impact of policy or centralized practices is critical and highly personal (Arar, 2015; Arar, Beycioglu, & Oplatka, 2017). These studies also showed the social justice efforts of centralized education offices as primarily in word, not action.

Educational equity and excellence and the concept of social justice sometimes intertwine as they refer to an ideal state in which academic performance is not predictable by race or ethnicity (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Valencia, 2010). However, the reality is that the lived experiences of students often differ from these ideals of educational equity and excellence. To meet diverse student needs, educators need to rethink leadership practices and commit to ethically transformative leadership and strategies for social justice to create equitable outcomes for all students (Brown, 2004; Marshall & Oliva, 2009, Marzano, 2003; Orr, 2006; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012). Studies indicated the variance in the knowledge, skills, and beliefs of teachers and administrators for equitable instruction and providing rigorous instruction and curriculum for all students impedes principals' ability to foster conditions for social justice (Blair, 2002; Childress, 2009; Collins, 2001; Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994; Lopez, Magdaleno & Reis, 2006; Norte, 1999; Sather, 1999; Theoharis, 2004, 2010; Walker & Dimmock, 2005). The enactment of federal legislation has increased accountability measures for principals to address the disproportionality in achievement, regardless of a student's race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (De Abreu & Elbers, 2005; Gardiner and Enomoto, 2006; Lee & Wong, 2004; Taylor & Singh, 2005; Walker, 2003).

A social justice perspective allows the leader to discern and negotiate inequitable power structures that exist in the organization, understand the leader's position and role in disrupting the unequal power, and act upon that understanding to foster culturally relevant pedagogy, anti-racist pedagogy, and intercultural teaching among others (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Teel & Obidah, 2008). Principals who lead for social justice must have the knowledge and skills to engage in strategic management and instructional leadership by assessing the needs of their school and deploying resources in such a way to attain racial and socioeconomic equity (Johnson, 2007; Norte, 1999; Orr, 2006; Theoharis, 2004, 2010).

Effective schools have: strong leadership, a positive learning environment, high expectations for achievement, order, structured teaching, and positive relationships with students and with parents and communities (Blair, 2002; Childress, 2009; Linton, 2011; Lopez et al., 2006; Norte, 1999; Sather, 1999; Theoharis, 2010; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012; Wang, 2016). These effective schools espouse the attitude that learning is for all and that the school's organizational structure and form contribute to student achievement (Lezotte, 2009). In the increasingly diverse populations of today's schools, a uniform, "one-size-fits-all" approach does not meet the needs of all learners.

The expectation for schools has shifted from providing a basic education to students to designing learning environments that accommodate diverse student needs, mediate and manage conflict, and result in high academic achievement for all students (De Abreu & Elbers, 2005; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Riehl, 2000; Walker & Dimmock, 2005). Principals must recognize and value cultural differences to ensure effective teaching and learning (Blair, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Howard, 2010; Norte, 1999). They must also foster a culture where all students, staff, and community members have the same expectation that all students can learn and succeed, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or existence of a disability (Blair, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Howard, 2010; Sather, 1999; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2010). Thus, as principals foster new meanings of diversity and engage in democratic discourse within the school community, the path to a more inclusive school environment is paved.

The principal is essential to creating and sustaining inclusive environments and may be the most critical factor in addressing the challenges of a diverse population of students. Principals must become equipped with the discursive knowledge of institutional barriers presented by traditional school cultures. Principals who embody the characteristics of high expectations for all students, the vision, and courage to engage in change, and a commitment to developing and sustaining culturally responsive learning environments create the conditions for all students to attain academic achievement.

Methodology

To investigate how principals negotiate the complex organizational context of schools, a specific type of narrative methodology, portraiture, was used (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This research methodology focuses on gathering collections of stories, and reporting individual experiences. Portraiture produces a written description of an individual dealing with challenges to capture the essence of the experience by "portraying the individual in the job they do, the challenges they face, and how they are tackling them" (Bottrey, Ping, Wright, & Ngai, 2009, p. 84).

This narrative approach allows for the contextualization of the school and allows the interviewee reflect on how they negotiate the organizational culture of schools. The use of artifacts

and observations provided data that was analyzed using a coding process to identify patterns of behavior that facilitate an understanding of how each principal enacted their role within the school context to cultivate an equitable and excellent school environment for all students.

Schools identified in this study were from a large, urban, Mid-Atlantic public school district and have reduced disproportionality in student achievement and shared commonalities across demographics to provide a context for analyzing principal practice that contributed to equitable outcomes. Each of the three principals were purposefully selected because of: (a) longevity in their current schools, (b) the demographic similarity of the school's student population to that of the district, (c) four year trend data that reflected a reduced disproportionality in student performance data in math and literacy in each school, and (4) willingness to interviewed and shadowed at least twice during the school year.

Data Sources

Consistent with the portraiture methodology, data from interviews, field notes from the shadowing experiences, and other artifacts were used to establish the context, voice, relationships with the participants, and patterns and themes to shape the story to be told about each of the principals involved in the study. The conceptual framework used in this study helped to frame the interview questions. The three semi-structured interviews with each participant consisted of questions designed to understand the principal's views and beliefs about school leadership and in a broader sense, views of the interrelationship between the principal's behaviors and leadership for equity and excellence; how each principal defined and acted upon roles and responsibilities as a school leader; and how each leader prioritized school issues, concerns, or needs to create equitable outcomes for all students. Principals also discussed the extent to which accountability measures and organizational structures influenced practices, behaviors, and the level of involvement in decision-making.

We also observed the principals engaged in their daily interactions and school leadership practices. Transcripts and observations from participant shadowing, which occurred weekly over four months, along with document and artifact analysis, including school climate surveys and administrative memos, contributed to the descriptions and the interdependency of their actions and decision-making on the school structure and processes that led to student outcomes. The design focused on gaining insight on how these principals influence school culture, structures, and processes, and balance managerial and instructional leadership roles, to attain high levels of academic achievement.

Data were analyzed across data sources both across and within cases. First, we reviewed the entire body of field notes, interviews, and documents, chronologically to understand the perspective of the participant. Soon after reviewing notes, we conducted member checks to summarize and clarify events and actions, prior to beginning the coding process (Creswell, 2012). Next, we highlighted any key words, phrases, behaviors, or topics that presented themselves. As themes emerged from the data, they were coded by the action and context demonstrated. This process was iterative throughout the study to identify emerging themes and patterns.

During the follow-up interviews with principals, the dialogue between the researchers and principals was used to reflect on participant actions and the rationale for those actions. In creating the portrait, data analysis followed an iterative process that assisted the researcher in providing a detailed description of the physical and historical context, the voices, and relationships observed during the study and contribute to identification of emerging themes in

the data. The patterns and themes that emerge in each individual portrait were used to generalize and craft a composite portrait that recognized and incorporated the individual and collective narratives. Participant summary information is included in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Summary Information

Name:	Hope	Cadence	Ivy
School data	Enrollment: 306 Pre-K – grade 5 Autism Prekindergarten Language Class Resource	Enrollment: 466 Pre-K – grade 5 Autism Preschool Education Program Resource	Enrollment: 313 Pre-K – grade 5 Preschool Education Program Comprehensive Resource School/Community- Based
Administrative Team	Single Administrator	Principal Assistant Principal	Single Administrator
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Race	White	African American	African American
Years of Exp. as a principal	20	13	17
Years in Current School	6	10	13

Findings

Each portrait is a snapshot of the beliefs, expectations, and practices of the participants as school leaders. Although none of the participants identified themselves as social justice leaders or leaders of equity, their stories created a picture of who they are as leaders, their triumphs and struggles, and how these perceptions informed their school context, including practices, structures, and decision-making processes to contribute to equity and excellence for all students.

The actions and strategies observed or noted in interview transcripts, shadowing experiences, and document and artifact analysis revealed these principals enacted principles of social justice leadership and democratic-ethical leadership, coupled with high expectations of students. Each participant’s portrait began with a brief introduction establishing the setting and context. Organization of each narrative centered on the four topics elevated in the interview questions: beliefs and views on leadership, leadership and student achievement, influence of leadership on school context, and leadership and decision-making and concluded with emerging themes based on the interviews and shadowing experiences. At the conclusion of the study, each principal read and reflected on their completed portrait. The reflective conversations provided more context behind principal actions and additional insight into their beliefs and values and were included in an epilogue.

Findings-Individual Portraits

Hope. Hope's beliefs and decision-making processes and school structures that support equity and excellence included a focus on the social and emotional needs of students and modeling expectations. Hope set clear and high expectations in a warm and embracing manner. She modeled the positive behavior she wished to see and emphasized the use of data to inform practices and processes. During the participant shadowing experience, Hope reviewed and analyzed data, clarified expectations for staff professional learning, and modeled expectations consistent with those shared during the interview. During grade level team meetings, where staff reviewed reading, math, and behavior goals for their students, Hope tapped into the leadership of the team leader and allowed the team to collaborate and brainstorm practices to support struggling students.

Hope articulated her beliefs and views on leadership as follows: "Leaders model the behavior they wish to see...they have to be visible." Hope recollected a parent conference in which the school nurse stated the student, with significant disabilities, could not attend the school because she was not changing diapers. Prior to moving quickly forward with the meeting, Hope replied, "Oh, that's the only reason? Then I can do that." Hope recalled that about two weeks later, another staff member shared with her that others in the building were still talking about how her actions changed the tone of the meeting. Other views about leadership surfaced during subsequent interviews and observations, which included consistency of expectations. Hope reflected that staff notes the things the leader attends to and assigns importance to those actions and expectations. A repeated phrase Hope used was, "it's the little things" that make a difference. She also stressed the importance of hiring the right people.

One of the things about leadership, I really believe this, is taking the time to hire the right people. You can change people's behaviors. I do not know that you can change their values and their beliefs. Therefore, if you already have people that are sharing your beliefs of the bigger picture, what we want for kids, that just takes all the drama out of it.

Cadence. Cadence implemented school structures based on her beliefs that leadership practice is an art, informed by professional learning and the leader's capacity to model and communicate expectations. She emulated flexibility and adaptive approaches to creating inclusive environments emphasized in the literature related to attaining equity. Cadence is also data driven, and models and implements practices and structures for accountability towards excellence. During my visits with Cadence, she attended special education IEP meetings, visited classrooms, conducted formal and informal observations, provided feedback to staff, and met with small teams and individual teachers.

Cadence emphasized that in addition to a committed belief to do what is needed for students to achieve, it is important for staff to have sound knowledge and practice to support students. Her expectation was that staff examines student data and monitor progress across the continuum of student needs, including struggling and advanced students, and beyond testing to see the individual students and their social and emotional needs. Cadence espoused that it is important to align her school's structures and processes to those of the district.

My role is looking at those strategic frameworks from the system...we have to make sure that whatever our vision is, it is directly aligned with what the system vision is because you know...everything overlaps and plays into each other very nicely...as principals we are closest to the work.

Ivy. Ivy's routines included instructional observations, leading professional learning, and building positive relationships with parents, staff, and students. In exchanges with students, staff, and parents, Ivy focused on instruction and developing positive relationships for increased student engagement and achievement. As she visited classrooms, her focus was on teacher and student interactions. She frequently checked in with students to ask what they were doing and how it connected to the learning outcomes posted in the classroom. Through the hallways, in classrooms, at lunch and recess, it was notable that Ivy was highly visible and connected with adults and students in her school and community. These practices aligned to her expressed beliefs that leadership sets the stage for the learning environment and her role in ensuring the necessary structures are in place to optimize student achievement. It was evident that she paid attention to the details and was monitoring implementation and impact on student learning and achievement as she went through her day. These behaviors parallel those cited for leaders for equity that expand leadership practice beyond the academics to develop social and cultural competency.

According to Ivy, her upbringing and the positive and negative interactions she experienced from her own teachers served as a "springboard for wanting the best for every child and parent." As a school leader, she strives to serve as a role model for instruction, a coach, and a problem-solver. "Leadership matters and everything that happens in a school building" is tied to the leader. She shared that instruction, relationships in the building, and the work staff collectively engage in are instrumental to creating a comfortable, engaging environment for learning. These beliefs were also reflected in the school's school improvement plan that listed that leadership would use a variety of measures to monitor progress toward goals, collaborate to problem solve, strengthen relationships and provide a productive learning environment, and utilize a variety of media to communicate the school's mission, expectations and instructional practices to parents, students, and various stakeholder groups. When these factors do not come together, Ivy suggested that such dissonance is a challenge leaders must address.

The work that we do, all those things that must come together in order to have a building where people are comfortable coming to work, where the learning is focused and engaging, and realizing that it's not always so, and when it's not, what we have to do in order to get it there. That is definitely a challenge of leadership. But also, I see that school leadership is training other people to be leaders.

Findings: Cross-Portrait Analysis

While we placed importance on developing individual portraits, we also examined through a cross-portrait analysis, whether themes existed across our three principals. Interviews and principal shadowing elevated key elements of principal practice that contributed to equity and excellence for all students. The patterns and themes that emerged through the portraits elevated the interrelationship between principal's beliefs and behaviors and provided insight into how principals transition beliefs and expectations from theory into practice. Specifically, four themes emerged: personal and professional beliefs of the principal; shared leadership and common expectations; balancing achievement and accountability through critical examination of data and instruction; and an emphasis on developing people through careful hiring and ongoing professional learning.

Personal and professional beliefs of the principal. When asked what shaped their views about leadership, the principal responses provided insight on their leadership practices. The first key finding was that personal and professional experiences influenced the principals' beliefs and

expectations as educational leaders. Each principal cited examples of experiences from their youth or early professional career that influenced them. Among the experiences mentioned were family values, engagement in volunteerism and civic oriented organizations, and continued professional development.

One principal revealed her parents and the relationships she experienced growing up exerted a strong influence on her practice. The other two indicated professional and personal experiences and educational research were dominant factors in their leadership practice. These principals valued relationships and felt responsibility to develop a school culture that held high expectations for adults and students. The portraits revealed the principals led through the lens of their beliefs to establish school contexts, structures, and processes that supported equity and excellence.

Shared leadership and common expectations. The second theme was that the participants employed institutional practices that valued diverse perspectives in school-wide decision-making and the critical nature of developing common values and expectations modeled by the leader. The lived experiences of each principal provided examples of processes and structures that served to engage staff, students, families, and communities in defining the organizational context of the school.

Leadership practice is dynamic and responsive to an ever-changing landscape. Sergiovanni (1990) described moral leadership as the basis for transforming schools into communities through intertwining the heart, values, and beliefs; the head, mindset of how the world works; and the hand, shows one's decision, actions, and behaviors. These principals created conditions that enabled the active engagement of adults and students in decision-making processes aligned to school priorities. All of the principals described structures that fostered collaboration and input from parents and community members in academic and social events and practices that contribute to the culture and climate of the school. In addition, professional learning and collegiality were encouraged through collaborative team meetings, conferencing around professional development plans and expectations for staff and students to establish goals and monitor learning and growth.

It was also clear that the participants shared common core values about their role as principals and these were transparent to their school communities. Participant perceptions of their role as principals included modeling expectations, personal and professional authenticity, respectful interactions, collaborative practices, and equity. These principals were committed to signaling clear and consistent messages about priorities to ensure coherence and alignment of structures, practices, and processes.

Throughout the portraits, all three indicated that visibility and modeling expectations helped to set the context for their beliefs. According to one principal, staff knew areas of priority by the items she personally addressed. Two others mentioned they communicated areas of priority during team meetings, staff meetings, and memorandum. All three maintained it was important to model the expectations they have for students and staff through their actions. Further, when staff and students know your intentions and that you support them, they will follow your lead and trust you as a leader through the most challenging tasks.

Balancing achievement and accountability through critical examination of data. Accountability to standards of professionalism and achievement were evident in all three portraits. Through data monitoring, professional development plans, and student goal setting, these principals were clear about high expectations. When faced with academic, instructional, or behavioral issues, these principals aligned their responses with established expectations to provide consistent and clear messages to adults and students. According to the examples provided in the

interviews and observed when shadowing, these principals provided specific feedback and used data to drive conversations about adult practice to support equity and excellence for all students. The principals at each school had established protocols for staff to discuss data, set goals, and engage in reflective practice. The intentional structures that contributed to the organizational context established by each principal exemplified the importance principals placed on knowledge and competency of staff, utilization of data to inform instruction, collaboration, constructive feedback, and ongoing professional learning.

Among the school structures shared by the principals were the use of classroom, school, and district data. Each school utilized specific documents and templates for collecting and analyzing student data as well as instructional practice. The leaders engaged in data analysis with staff, often sharing the facilitation of data conversations with teacher leaders. They used processes to engage diverse perspectives and to validate the expertise of students, staff, and community members. Moreover, these principals mentioned that there was a shared expectation for all stakeholders to support the development of a positive learning environment for all students. All the principals utilized structures for data monitoring and accountability, as well as clear expectations for professional growth, and relationship building between and among students and adults. Throughout the portraits, it became clear that these principals focused on creating school contexts that would result in higher achievement and value the diverse needs of their students, staff, and community.

Emphasis on developing people through careful hiring and ongoing professional learning. The most common phrase used by all three participants to describe the principal practice that most influenced the organizational context to achieve equity and excellence for all students was “hiring the right staff.” The principals stated that key to their success was having staff with high expectations and beliefs that all students can achieve at high levels. In addition, each principal expressed beliefs or demonstrated actions that promoted professional learning and collegiality as integral to developing staff capacity. Where one principal stated that she could not believe she could change the beliefs of others, she firmly believed there was power and possibility in changing actions and behaviors to support equity and excellence.

The portraits of these principals revealed that their focus on hiring the right staff went beyond the professional pedagogy of teaching to expand to the importance of having staff that connected with students and had the mindset and belief that all students could achieve. One principal indicated specific practices (i.e. staff and parent survey data, interview questions to surface beliefs and values, observation of instruction, student performance data) aimed to identify potential staff that held these high expectations for students.

The principals shared and demonstrated through actions that it was important to keep a “pulse” on the school climate and staff readiness to engage in new work. For all three principals, it was important that as building leaders, they assess and align new mandates to existing structures. In addition, these principals considered it their responsibility to provide opportunities for professional learning and capacity building during the initial phase of implementation of any initiatives. When faced with new initiatives or mandates, all three shared they weigh the needs of their students and staff against the possibly disruptive mandates to determine optimal entry points. To do so entailed that these principals are highly visible in their schools, engage in daily classroom visits with structured foci, and debrief and consult with others their observations.

Implications and Recommendations

The individual portraits and cross-portrait analysis provided a narrative of how three principals created high expectations for students that improved academic achievement, while also maintaining a focus on social justice and equity. The literature around democratic ethical leadership emphasized the importance of leaders implementing and monitoring institutional practices that disrupt the status quo (Briscoe, 1991; DeAbreu & Elbers, 2005; Canfield-Davis et al, 2009). To do so, leaders must engage in ethical and moral decision-making and create opportunities for teachers and members of the community to build and sustain positive relationships based on shared knowledge and vision. Across the three portraits, these principals implemented school structures and practices aligned to their beliefs that also created a platform for encouraging others to engage in authentic change for equitable and excellent school cultures.

The results from this study support the findings from the current literature that place principal practice as the driving force in establishing the organizational context of schools. This study assumed that the participants led from a social justice perspective although they did not identify as such. The selection criteria used in the methodology allowed for the selection of principals and schools that had demonstrated the characteristics of social justice leadership and equitable and excellent schools described in the literature. None of the principals described their leadership style as democratic and ethical, yet through their beliefs and views about leadership expressed in the interview, principal shadowing, and artifacts, all three demonstrated aspects of democratic ethical leadership in establishing their organizational context. The data support that democratic and ethical leadership contribute to the principal's capacity to implement institutional practices that value diverse perspectives, facilitate climates of high expectations and beliefs for all students and adults, and develop the cultural proficiency of all adults in their organizational context.

The principals also shared a common belief that their role was to minimize distractions and create optimal conditions to meet the individual diverse needs of students. The study found all three principals to be strong, confident, and strategic. They each demonstrated the characteristics of personal and professional authenticity in their daily interactions. All three engaged in collaborative practices and served as advocates for underserved students in their schools.

The use of portraiture allowed for the exploration of the alignment between principal beliefs about leadership and the day-to-day interactions and practices they implemented to support students. Linton (2011) stressed that to achieve equity; there must be attention and a balance to the culture, practice, and leadership within the organizational context. The four main themes which emerged from the cross-portrait analysis as it relates to principal practice included: personal and professional beliefs of the principal; shared leadership and common expectations; balancing achievement and accountability through critical examination of data and instruction; and an emphasis on developing people through careful hiring and ongoing professional learning

The main contribution of this research is in understanding the intersectionality between the principal's beliefs and their actions that contribute to equity and excellence. In looking at the conceptual framework and the overarching questions for the study — what are principals' beliefs, decision-making processes, and the school structures that support equity and excellence for all students; and how do elementary principals balance the role and responsibilities of school leadership and negotiate the school context (i.e. political and social construction of schools, accountability measures) to support equity and excellence for all students— we were able to make connections between beliefs and specific practices that leaders noted that contributed to culture, practice, and leadership within their organizational context. Table 2 Cross Portrait Alignment of

Beliefs and Principal Practices for Equity and Excellence, reflects the interpretation of the portraits as they related to democratic ethical leadership.

Table 2

Cross Portrait Alignment of Beliefs and Principal Practices for Equity and Excellence

Personal beliefs	Structures/processes for equity	Structures/processes for excellence	Principles of Democratic Ethical Leadership
Influenced by parents/ family values	Communicate and model vision and values	Consistent messages to students, staff, and parents about what is important	Strong ethical stance that connects to their beliefs and drives their actions
Personal and professional authenticity			
Responsibility to develop school culture	Hire staff with high expectations Focus on academic, social, and cultural needs	Hire staff with pedagogical knowledge and skills Prioritize initiatives	
Professional learning transforms practice	Monitor transformation of adult practices Specific protocols for discussing academic, social, and cultural needs	Monitor student data Model expectations	Balance ethical responsibilities to members of the community with democratic responsibilities and standardized accountability
Shared ownership for the success of students	Set goals for social/behavioral expectations Collective data monitoring	Set goals for academic expectations Collective data monitoring	
Develop positive relationships	Know individual stories Engage Diverse Perspectives	Establish partnerships with parents and communities Communicate academic and behavioral expectations	Connect individuality of racial and cultural self to have a sensitivity to the personal narratives and experiences of others

Within the narratives were implications for staffing practices, leadership style, and structures and processes that contribute to the organizational context. All three principals stressed the importance of hiring practices and developing the capacity of staff to be culturally responsive. Hearing the principal’s perceptions of the importance of hiring practices and professional learning on student achievement may help other school leaders think strategically about current hiring practices and strategies in their schools for professional learning and collegiality. Additionally, all three principals considered themselves collaborative leaders and established school structures that were welcoming and inviting for students, staff, and community. Developing positive, trusting relationships was instrumental to these principals having the ability to balance current practices and expectations with increasingly more rigorous demands and new initiatives. The three principals utilized specific structures to engage others in decision-making processes, including on an individual and group basis.

The aforementioned implications for practice also illuminate clear additional research opportunities and questions. Two of the three participants in this study were single administrators having more influence on consistency of messages and expectations in the building than when there are multiple administrators. Expanding the study to gather information through a comparative study of single administrators versus administrative teams could contribute to a deeper understanding of the degree of influence of organizational context a principal has when there are other administrative leaders in the building. Based on the selection criteria for the study sites, all three principals involved in the study were female, two African American and one White. Another extension of this study would be a comparative study on the influence of gender or race in the ability of the leader to lead for equity and excellence. Finally, the criteria of the study limited selection to schools with similar student demographics to the school district. Conducting this study in schools with higher disproportional numbers of students by race or other special populations would contribute to the body of knowledge of systemic and strategic change.

Conclusion

Several themes emerged that aligned to the research on democratic-ethical leadership and personal beliefs as they relate to principal practice in equitable and excellent schools. Although none of the principals identified themselves as social justice leaders, or specifically labeled themselves as leaders for equity, the actions and strategies observed or noted in interview transcripts and other documents revealed these principals enacted principles of social justice leadership noted in the literature.

This study gives insight into how principals transition beliefs and expectations from theory into practice. The research indicates the following: (1) personal and professional experiences influenced the principal's beliefs and expectations as educational leaders; (2) participants shared common core values about their role as principals; (3) participants demonstrated democratic ethical leadership in their daily interactions; (4) participants found staffing to be a critical aspect of their job that influenced the organizational context and student outcomes; (5) participants shared common expectations for professional practices in their school context; and (6) participants employed institutional practices that valued diverse perspectives in school-wide decision making. This research examined and provided insight into the relationships between beliefs and practices of three elementary school principals in schools that have demonstrated elements of equitable and excellent schools.

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How School Principals Enable Instructional Coaches: Evidence from New Jersey

David B. Reid
Seton Hall University

In recent years, schools across the United States (U.S.) have allocated large amounts of state and federal level money towards instructional coaching with the hope that instructional coaching will lead to teacher improvement and ultimately increased student learning. This qualitative case study examined how the principal at one New Jersey public high school supported and enabled the work of the school's instructional coaches. An analysis of interview, observation, and document data reveal the principal enabled instructional coaches in three ways. First, the principal at this school enabled the instructional coaches by clearly defining the roles, purposes, and responsibilities of everyone involved in the instructional coaching program. Second, the principal enabled the school's instructional coaches by providing teachers and coaches adequate time to meet, typically, although not exclusively, during school hours. Finally, the principal enabled the instructional coaches by working with the coaches to develop trust between the administration, coaches, and the teachers with whom the coaches worked. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

Keywords: school leaders, principals, instructional coaching, teacher development

In recent years, schools across the United States (U.S.) have allocated large amounts of state and federal level money towards instructional coaching. Policymakers and practitioners alike believe instructional coaching has the potential to lead to improvements in teacher instruction, policy and reform implementation efforts, and increased student learning (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; New Jersey Department of Education, 2017; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). Research examining the impacts of instructional coaching supports these beliefs showing instructional coaching supports teacher development and has the potential to lead to increased student learning (Camburn, 2010; Kraft, Blazer & Hogan, 2018). However, despite these optimistic beliefs and promising research findings, little research exists that examines the tasks in which instructional coaches engage and how instructional coaches are enabled to go about their daily work. The research that does exist suggests instructional coaches' roles are seldom defined and vary greatly (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017; Woulfin, 2018). For example, district and school leaders often use instructional coaches as data analysts, behavior specialists or as support for school leadership (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Each of these activities may be beneficial for schools, but are tangential to the primary goals of instructional coaching – supporting teacher instruction (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017; Woulfin, 2018).

What instructional coaches do and who enables them to do it is important to understand for several reasons. First, if given opportunities to engage with teachers, instructional coaches can support teachers in learning new curriculum and instructional strategies, ultimately leading to teacher instructional improvement and increased student learning (Bean, 2004; Spillane, Reiser, Reimer, 2002; Kraft et al., 2018). Second, instructional coaches can help teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice and policy implementation (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). Instructional coaches are uniquely positioned to support teacher development and student learning, but must be enabled to engage in this work. Therefore, I argue how instructional coaches are enabled to undertake their work is imperative to better understanding the true impact instructional coaches have in schools.

One factor that directly influences the daily work of instructional coaches is the school principal. School principals act as a primary enabler of coaching actions, tasks, and performance (Huguet, Marsh, & Farrell, 2014; Matsumura et al., 2009; Nicolaidou, Karagiorgi, & Petridou, 2018). For example, how principals assign tasks to coaches, motivate teachers to work with coaches, and structure opportunities for coaches to enact instructional reforms, all influence the impact of an instructional coach (Matsumura et al., 2009; Huguet, Marsh, & Farrell, 2014). Due in part to the important role principals play in the work of instructional coaches, more research is needed examining how school principals enable instructional coaching. To address this phenomenon I ask the following: In what ways do school principals enable instructional coaches to engage with teachers?

Contextual Framework

Like many states across the U.S., the state of New Jersey has invested heavily in instructional coaching as a way to support teacher improvement and student learning. In 2015 New Jersey implemented a state-funded grant program called the Achievement Coaches Program (ACP). This program aimed to use highly effective teachers' expertise and skills to support novice and struggling teachers. In the first year of the program 19 school districts throughout the state selected 158 Achievement Coaches to participate in the program. To date, the ACP has impacted more than 12,000 educators in more than 100 different Local Education Agencies (LEAs) throughout New

Jersey (New Jersey Department of Education, 2017). The ACP has been well-received and in New Jersey's 2016 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) application, the state doubled-down on this program, requesting to expand the ACP to include principals, principal supervisors, and teacher leaders (NJDOE, 2017). The New Jersey Department of Education believes expanding the ACP will help ensure more educators throughout the state receive strong pedagogical and instructional strategies which will lead to increased instructional effectiveness and ultimately impact student learning (NJDOE, 2017).

The six participants in this study worked in one of the 19 schools that were originally selected for the ACP program. This school participated in the ACP for the first two years of the program and although they no longer participate directly with the ACP, the school continues to use instructional coaches, based on their training and experiences with the ACP. In this study, the participants include: the principal, the assistant principal, two current instructional coaches, and two former instructional coaches (both currently teaching at the school - see Table 1 for complete participant information). The goal of this study was to examine how one public high school principal worked with and enabled instructional coaches during (and after) the Achievement Coaches Program.

Literature Review

Instructional Coaches

Much like the roles and responsibilities of instructional coaches, the definition of an instructional coach varies across context. For the purpose of this work, I use the definition from Gallucci et al. (2010) and define an instructional coach as an individual working with teachers who does not have authority over the teacher, but instead works with the teacher in a non-supervisory, support role (Gallucci et al., 2010). This support role takes on many forms, including, but not limited to, supporting teacher instructional practices, managing student discipline, supporting district, state, and federal policy and reform implementation, and conferencing with teachers. Importantly, coaches have the potential to support teachers by providing feedback and professional development in a low-stakes environment (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). In addition to these specific supports, instructional coaches generally possess strong communication and relationship skills (Knight, 2006) and balance supporting teachers and critiquing their instruction and performance (Knight, 2006; 2004).

Instructional coaches engage not only with teachers, but with school and district-level administrators and may play political roles in their organization (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Woulfin, 2018). For example, although often times the stated role of a coach is to provide in-class support to teachers (Day, 2015) coaches are also tasked with convincing teachers to adopt and try new curriculum, policies, or reforms. Additionally, instructional coaches are tasked with working with teachers in cultivating a shared school vision and acting as a mediator between the district leadership, school leadership, and teaching staff (Bean, 2004; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). The coaches in this study meet these aforementioned definitions.

Impacts of Instructional Coaching

Policymakers and school districts increasingly use instructional coaches in attempts to positively influence student outcomes (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). For example,

districts and schools have turned to instructional coaches to assist teachers in learning new curriculum and expanding teacher instructional strategies and expertise (Lockwood, McCombs, & Marsh, 2010; Matsumura, Garnier, & Spybrook, 2013). Additionally, instructional coaches can help teachers set goals, enact professional development, and model effective instructional strategies, while providing teachers real-time and sustained feedback and support (Aguilar, 2013; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). For example, research by Bean (2004) and Coburn and Woulfin (2012) found coaches' can positively influence teacher instruction by assisting teachers in the designing of instructional lessons. As data analysts, coaches can support teachers by better understanding how to make "data-driven decisions" and adjust their teaching accordingly (Marsh et al., 2009; Woulfin, 2018). All of these impacts have the potential to lead to more desirable student outcomes, such as increased achievement, attendance and graduation rates (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Woulfin, 2018). In short, the existing research on the impacts of instructional coaches is generally positive, particularly when compared to more traditional forms of teacher professional development.

Gap in the Literature

Although literature exists documenting the impact of instructional coaching on teacher improvement and student learning, less research examines specifically how principals enable instructional coaches to go about this important work. The research that does exist shows that in practice often times coaches are not afforded adequate opportunities to work towards their stated goals, such as working with teachers to support instructional development (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Instead, coaches often take on tangential responsibilities, such as filling in for teachers or monitoring the school cafeteria or playground. Given the potential positive impacts of instructional coaching highlighted above, additional research is needed investigating how coaches are able to do this work. For example, do principals support and encourage coaches to engage in these aforementioned "best" practices, or do principals use coaches in other capacities, less related to these practices? In an effort to address this lack of research on how principals enable instructional coaching, I collected interview, observation, and document data on an instructional coaching program in one public high school in New Jersey.

Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine how, if at all, school principals enable instructional coaches to engage with teachers. To answer my research question I used a case study design to examine how one school principal enabled instructional coaching and instructional coaches. Due to the empirical nature of this study, I used a grounded theory approach to my data collection and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As grounded theory is an inductive research approach, this type of research design allowed me to collect empirical evidence and begin to develop hypotheses and theory about what is occurring in practice (specifically how principals enable instructional coaches to engage with teachers) (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The goal of case study research is to collect comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest (Patton, 2014) and grounded theory is particularly well-suited when collecting observation, interview, and documentary data (Turner, 1983).

A case study approach allowed me to view my phenomenon of study through a variety of lenses and perspectives, allowing multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Yin, 2013). Specifically, I was able to collect data from the school administration (the principal and assistant principal) and current and former instructional coaches, thus gathering multiple perspectives involving the same phenomenon (how school principals enable instructional coaching). According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), a case study is a phenomenon bounded in a specific context. This case is bounded by time and place, time and sensitivity, and by definition and context. Specifically, the participants in this study and their context bound this case study, as does the time of data collection (during the 2017-18 school year). Principals' actions enabling instructional coaching is the primary unit of analysis of this work.

Table 1

Participant Information

Participant	Current Role	Years as Coach at Current School	Years as Teacher at Current School	Years as Admin at Current School
Ms. Hansen	Principal	N/A	N/A	4
Mr. Burton	Assistant Principal	N/A	N/A	4
Mr. Brent	Current Coach	1	4	N/A
Ms. Warner	Current Coach	3	10	N/A
Ms. Jacobs	Former Coach	2	10	N/A
Ms. Gaines	Former Coach	2	5	N/A

**Note: All names are pseudonyms*

Data Collection and Analysis

I used grounded theory when collecting and analyzing my data. Grounded theory was best suited to assist in the collection and analysis of my data as in grounded theory data collection and analysis is interrelated (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Additionally, I collected solely empirical data in an effort to begin theory building based on what was actually happening in the context of this study. Specifically, I relied on three sources of data. First, I conducted six semi-structured interviews. I interviewed the school principal once, the assistant principal once, and each instructional coach once. The interviews each lasted approximately 30 minutes and I conducted the interviews in a one-on-one format. I audio-recorded and transcribed all of the interviews. During the interviews I asked the participants about their experiences with instructional coaching/coaches, their interaction with various stakeholders involved in instructional coaching, and how their school's specific instructional coaching program was adopted, communicated, and ultimately enacted.

Second, I observed two coach-led professional development opportunities offered to teachers. Each observation lasted approximately one hour and as I observed, I took field notes. The purpose of these observations was to better understand how instructional coaches were enabled to go about their daily work and to document how coaches interacted with teachers. These observations occurred during traditional school hours and consisted of instructional coaches leading a group of teachers through a workshop on how to use student data to drive instruction. The observations (and field-notes which I analyzed) provided me a window into the daily work of

the instructional coaches and more specifically, how these coaches were enabled to engage with teachers.

Finally, I collected district- and school-based coaching documents as provided by the participants. These documents included district-wide and/or school specific training policies and teacher-coach interaction protocols. The purpose of collecting these documents was to examine, in writing, the official roles, responsibilities, and expectations of principals and coaches at this school. I used these three data sources as a form of data triangulation, so I could compare what principals and coaches told me (interviews), to what I observed in practice (observations), to what I found in the official documents/policies related to coaching (documents).

Using Dedoose qualitative software I open coded all interviews, observations, and documents once I had collected all of the data. I began coding by generating specific codes based on the language of the participants (Miles et al., 2014). I developed the codes inductively and as themes emerge from the coding process I grouped together by theme (Miles et al., 2014; Strauss, 1990). I coded all of the data three times and after I completed the coding process, I compared quotations, field-notes, and excerpts from the documents to their original text, making sure these data were taken in context and accurately represented what the participants attempted to articulate (Miles et al., 2014). The initial codes that emerged were: responsibilities, transparency, organization, specificity, communication, support, time, resources, adaptability, listening, relationships, trust, expertise, benefits, and meaningful. From these themes I developed a larger codebook (see Table 2 for my complete coding process).

Table 2
Coding Process (adapted from Saldana, 2013)

Initial Codes	Categories	Themes/ Concepts	Theory
Responsibilities Transparency Organization Specificity Communication	Clarity Communication	Clearly defined roles	Principals enable instructional coaches by clearly defining roles within the coaching program
Support Time Resources Adaptability Listening	Support Listening/taking action	Support (financial/ physical)	Principals enable instructional coaches by providing coaches support to engage in the coaching process
Relationships Trust Expertise Benefits Meaningful	Trust/Letting coaches take the lead	Trusting relationships	Principals enable instructional coaches by cultivating trusting relationships with the coaches

From these initial codes I developed three main theories that serve as the outline of my findings: (1) Principals enable instructional coaches by clearly defining roles within the coaching

program; (2) Principals enable instructional coaches by providing coaches support to engage in the coaching process; and (3) Principals enable instructional coaches by cultivating trusting relationships with the coaches.

In an effort to establish credibility for all interview and observation data I left room to ask participants about any comments they made, making sure I clarified their statements before drawing any conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, I contacted participants to clarify any questions that arose during the transcribing and coding of the data. I also solicited critical feedback from colleagues throughout the data collection and writing process.

Findings

In this study I asked: In what ways do school principals enable instructional coaches to engage with teachers? My analysis of these data reveal three prominent themes. First, Ms. Hansen, the principal at Farmington High School (pseudonym), enabled her instructional coaches by clearly defining the roles, purposes, and responsibilities of everyone involved in the coaching program. Second, Ms. Hansen enabled the instructional coaches by providing teachers and coaches with adequate time to meet, typically, although not exclusively, during school hours. Finally, Ms. Hansen enabled the instructional coaches at Farmington High School by developing trust between herself, the coaches, and teachers with whom the coaches worked.

Clearly Defined Roles

One way the principal at Farmington High School (Ms. Hansen) enabled her instructional coaches to engage with teachers was by clearly defining the roles of those involved in Farmington High School's coaching program. Ms. Hansen explained that she, the instructional coaches, and the teachers with whom the coaches worked spent a lot of time upfront clearly outlining the roles of everyone involved in the coaching program. Ms. Hansen believed having a clear separation between coaching and the school leadership was key in developing a coaching system that allowed authentic coach-teacher engagement. Specifically, Ms. Hansen said her role (and to a lesser extent the role of the assistant principal, Mr. Burton), was to support her school's coaching program and stated she was not directly involved with the ins and outs of the program. Ms. Hansen believed if she operated in a support role, trust would develop and the coaching program would be more impactful than if there was confusion about the roles of the leadership at the school, coaches and teachers. The roles of the instructional coaches were clearly defined as well. The instructional coaches at Farmington High School were in charge of coach-teacher interactions and the types of coaching that occurred (such as classroom observations of teacher instruction or professional development session on select topics, such as analyzing student data). Importantly, the leadership team, coaches, and teachers involved in the instructional coaching program at Farmington High School all knew the clear division of the roles and responsibilities of everyone affiliated with the coaching program. Mr. Burton (the assistant principal) highlighted this idea and said, "We make sure everyone – from coaches to teachers to the administration – is on the same page. We communicate this (everyone's specific roles) during our interactions." Mr. Burton explained that Ms. Hansen made clearly defining these roles a priority from the onset of the coaching program in an effort to make the coaching program "transparent for all those involved".

Although Ms. Hansen was involved in the coaching program and would meet with the coaches to learn about their work, discuss school and district goals, and learn about student and

teacher progress, she was intentionally one step removed from the actual coaching that went on between coaches and teachers. Ms. Hansen and the instructional coaches I interviewed communicated this during the interviews and a review coaching program documents indicated a clear separation between Ms. Hansen and the instructional coaches. Although Ms. Hansen oversaw the coaching program, the logistics and specifics of coaching interactions between coaches and teachers remained between the coaches and teachers. Ms. Hansen said,

You cannot have a good school or any kind of learning institution without building leadership capacity. When you think about it, you cannot be so narrow minded to think that just your administrative team is going to do everything they need to do. As a principal, I always thought I needed to know everything. I can't possibly know everything and that is why I rely on the expertise of others and that includes our instructional coaches.

Ms. Hansen went on to articulate that when an issue occurred that needed her input, she would get involved, but she mostly played a hands-off role as she believed her role was to monitor and support the coaching program, not get involved in actual coaching. Ms. Hansen believed this allowed for an open relationship between her coaches and teachers, which would ultimately lead to a more successful coach-teacher partnership.

All of the instructional coaches at Farmington High School noted the clarity and transparency of the roles of those involved in the coaching program. For example, Mr. Brent said, "It (the presence of the coaches) doesn't come off the same as the presence of the administration. We know and teachers know that coaching happens here absent of the administration." Mr. Brent explained that because the teachers knew the role of the administration (e.g. the administration would not be involved in the actual coaching process), they were more willing to engage in the coaching process, as they did not fear the coaches reporting back to the administration. Mr. Burton said, "Some teachers were worried (at the beginning of the coaching program) that the coaches were a spy for the administration. We quickly made sure everyone knew the specific purpose of the coaches and the role the administration played in supporting the coaches." During the two coach-teacher observations I conducted I did not see Ms. Hansen. In subsequent interviews with the instructional coaches, all told me that although Ms. Hansen had a schedule of times when coaches and teachers would meet during the school day, she never attended these sessions. All those involved in the instructional coaching program, including the leadership team, instructional coaches, and teachers knew their specific roles and responsibilities within the coaching program and this was made possible in large part due to Ms. Hansen's initial effort. In this way, Ms. Hansen enabled the instructional coaches at her school to engage with teachers by removing the threat of interference from the administration at Farmington High School.

Time to Engage in the Coaching Process

The second finding that emerged after an analysis of the data is the principal at Farmington High School enabled her instructional coaches by providing time and space for coaches to meet with teachers, often, although not exclusively, during the school day. One of the instructional coaches, Ms. Warner, explained that originally Ms. Hansen (based on suggestions from the coaches) provided the coaches and teachers a space to meet after school. However, because of a modest turnout at these meetings, the coaches and teachers asked if it was possible for Ms. Hansen to find a way for these meetings to occur during school hours. Ms. Warner said,

One of the challenges was when we were going to meet. You know we are contracted until 3 o'clock. So, initially we had our meetings after that or sometimes before school started.

She (Ms. Hansen) gave us time and coverage to meet with teachers during school, which increased teacher attendance.

Together with her coaches, Ms. Hansen created a system that allowed coaches to hold bi-weekly meetings with teachers during school hours. The principal and assistant principal arranged coverage for teachers' classrooms and scheduled times and spaces for the teachers and coaches to meet based on what worked best for the teacher. Many of the teacher-coach interactions still occurred after school hours and these were attended by some teachers. However, for teachers who could not (or did not want to) stay after contract hours to engage with the instructional coaches, the during school hour meeting option led to increased teacher-coach engagement. Ms. Hansen explained that this decision was easy (although at times the scheduling was not) because the most important thing she could do is provide teachers and coaches adequate time and space to meet.

The two observations I conducted of instructional coach-teacher meetings took place during the school day. Various teachers attended each meeting and appeared genuinely engaged in the topic of discussion. Of course given the challenging logistics of creating a high school schedule not every teacher was able to attend each instructional coach meeting, even if he or she wanted to attend. However, to address this barrier to coach-teacher interactions, the coaches (again with the support and approval of Ms. Hansen) varied their meeting times during the school day, in the hopes they would be able to create a system where all teachers would be able to attend at least some of their offered meetings. In this way, Ms. Hansen enabled the instructional coaches at Farmington High School to engage with a variety of teachers.

Trusting Relationships

The final finding that emerged after the analysis of the data is the principal at Farmington High School enabled her coaches to engage with teachers by developing trusting relationships between the coaches, teachers, and the administration. Ms. Hansen explained, "Relationships are everything, so one of the best ways to develop those relationship is to show trust in the people you give responsibility." Ms. Hansen said that her leadership philosophy begins with establishing trusting relationships with her colleagues and this influenced the way in which she led the coaching program. She said,

You have to set them (coaches) free. Validate them. They don't get validated enough. Be grateful and express that not just to them but to everyone. I think celebrating them too. Honesty and being candid. We have come as far as quickly as we have because we have those conversations. You have to have a genuine relationship with them. Make it clear your trust what they are doing.

Trust also emerged as a theme from the coaches' perspective. The instructional coaches constantly referred back to the trust they had in Ms. Hansen and that Ms. Hansen truly was looking out for the best interest of the coaches and teachers with whom they worked. This trust also helped the instructional coaches establish trust with teachers. Because the instructional coaches had trust in Ms. Hansen, they were able to sell this trust to the teachers with whom they worked. Ms. Warner said,

We tell them we are just like you. We are not a company, we have been in the classroom. This idea was developed by current or former teachers and the PD was given by current and former teachers. There is a science to it (coaching), but there is also an art to it. You have to know how to work with people and you have to have an opportunity to do it. You have to be able to reach people by showing them you are just like they are.

The theme of trust connects back the first two findings: clarity of roles/responsibilities and time and space to engage in the coaching process. For example, Ms. Hansen established trust with her coaches (and teachers) by playing a hands-off role during teacher-coach interactions. Ms. Hansen did not know what specific teachers attended these meetings, nor the specifics of these teacher-coach meetings/interactions. Of course Ms. Hansen had some idea of these interactions as she debriefed with the coaches regarding the status of the coaching program. However, because Ms. Hansen did not micromanage the coaching process, she developed trust and teachers felt free to engage with the coaches. The instructional coaches at Farmington High School felt free to engage in their work due to the trust they had in Ms. Hansen. Ms. Warner said, “The trust with the teachers is important. For them (teachers) to ask me for help and know that I will not go to their supervisor, the principal, that is trust. I think that trust in the role is very important and that is what we all really take pride in.”

Discussion

This study adds to the existing literature on how school leaders successfully enable and support organizational systems. Specifically, through the lens of how one school principal enabled her instructional coaches, the case of Ms. Hansen adds to the literature showing how organizational (and specifically educational) leaders build successful systems and programs. The underlying foundation of the instructional coaching program at Farmington High School was trust. The findings of this case study fall in line with previous work indicating a promising way to support organizational growth and successful initiatives, reforms, and programs is through honest communication and transparency (Fullan, 2008; Klein, 2012; Koyama & Kania, 2016; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). Ms. Hansen constantly stressed the importance of transparency and communication with the coaches at her school and as a result, she created a seemingly thriving instructional coaching system.

Another connection to the organizational literature showing trust is a crucial element of program success, is successful systems are not reliant on one leader, but instead many leaders (Bellibas & Lui, 2018; Fullan, 2008; Huggins et al., 2017). Ms. Hansen embodied this belief, empowering her coaches to act as leaders as they worked with teachers in the coaching program. Ms. Hansen gave the instructional coaches at Farmington High School freedom to engage in teacher coaching and validated their knowledge and expertise. The trust Ms. Hansen exhibited in her instructional coaches strengthened the relationships between the school leaders, coaches, and teachers at Farmington High School and allowed the instructional coaching program to operate in concert with improving teaching and student learning (Byrk & Schneider, 2002; Day, 2015; Fullan, 2006).

Finally, the findings from this case study fall in line with Fullan’s (2008) idea of connecting peers with a purpose. Ms. Hansen encouraged collaboration between coaches and teachers, but did not make these interactions mandatory, instead the principal “provided direction” and “created conditions” for purposeful interactions to take place (Fullan, 2008). Specifically, Ms. Hansen provided physical space for the coaches and teachers to meet as well as allowed these meetings to take place during the school day by providing coverage for teachers to meet with coaches during contract hours. Due in part to this connection, the coaches and teachers felt supported and enabled to engage in meaningful coach-teacher interactions. Beyond Fullan, these findings add to previous work that shows principals who strategically create conditions for peers to collaborate and interact

yield positive benefits, including greater buy-in to change and general employee improvement (Odden, 2011; Spillane, Hopkins & Sweet, 2017).

In short, Ms. Hansen enabled the instructional coaches at Farmington High School to engage with teachers by: (1) ensuring herself, the instructional coaches and the teachers all had clearly defined roles within the instructional coaching system; (2) creating conditions for success by providing time, space, and resources to help coaches and teachers engage in the coach-teacher experience; and (3) by building trust between herself and the coaches. The findings from this study add to the literature showing successful organizations build systems based largely on trust.

Implications

These findings have implications for policy and practice. First, policymakers should consider the findings of this work when allotting school day time to specific content/activities. The participants in this study indicated having a set time to meet during the school was key to the success of their instructional coaching program. Therefore, policymakers and state lawmakers should consider building in time during the school day where teachers and coaches can collaborate. For example, many countries provide their teachers more planning time during the school day compared to the U.S. context (OECD, 2014). Policymakers should consider increasing the amount of time during the school day that teachers can meet to improve their practice. Ms. Hansen made an intentional decision to prioritize the coaching program, by organizing the school schedule to allow for teacher-coach interactions to occur during the school day, allowing the coaching program to have a positive impact at Farmington High School (according to the participants in this study).

For practitioners, district and school leaders, should, as possible build in time during the school day for teachers and coaches to meet and collaborate (as discussed above). Second, principals should explicitly state and define principals' and instructional coaches' roles and responsibilities within an instructional coaching program. By providing clear roles and responsibilities of all involved in a coaching program, teachers might be more willing to engage in the coaching process, as was the case at Farmington High School. Thirdly, school principals should provide coaches time to engage in tasks essential to teacher instructional support. Although certainly must be supportive of the school as a whole, whenever possible school principals must use coaches in ways which are most beneficial for teacher support and improvement.

Conclusions and Future Research

Before concluding, it is important to note the limitations of this study. First, this study is limited by the small number of participants. The participants in this study were not randomly selected and focusing on the experiences and participants in one specific school does not allow me to make generalizable statements how all principals enable instructional coaching. Although generalizability is not the goal of a qualitative/grounded theory study, the results of this work could be atypical. If I collected data from other participants these participants could have provided different insights and thoughts, resulting in a different interpretation or analysis of the data. In this way, the participants in this study shape the findings by their experiences, thoughts, and beliefs. The second limitation is, although the participants were observed in their natural environment engaging in coaching, I did not observe all participants multiple times, with a variety of teachers, or during every interaction. In this way, my presence as a researcher during data collection may not have captured exactly how principals, teachers, and coaches interacted when I was not present. However, despite the aforementioned limitations, the data collected in this study provide insights

as to how the principal in this study works towards enabling instructional coaches to engage with teachers in a specific context. Although not generalizable to the entire principal/coaching /teacher community, the results and analysis of this work have the potential to serve as hypothesis building and testing in future research.

Future researchers should investigate these findings on a larger scale. For example, are these findings unique to this school/context or do these findings play out in various contexts across New Jersey and beyond? Additionally, future research could examine what school leadership characteristics influence how principals enable instructional coaching. For example, do more experienced school principals think about and enable coaching differently than their less experienced peers? Do principals who work in certain contexts (e.g. urban, rural, suburban) think about and enable coaching in different and/or similar ways? Understanding these nuanced differences will help lead to a more complete understanding of the influence school principals have on instructional coaches and instructional coaching.

This study adds to the limited research on how school leaders enable instructional coaches and instructional coaching in schools. These findings depict a successful instructional coaching program at Farmington High School due in part to the clearly defined roles and responsibilities provided by the principal to her coaches and teachers, the time the principal allowed the coaches and teachers to interact, and the trusting relationships the principals worked towards building throughout the coaching program.

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School Principal Interns’ Perceived Level of Preparedness for Technology Leadership

Daryl Ann Borel

Lamar University

J. Kenneth Young

Lamar University

Gary E. Martin

Lamar University

Robert E. Nicks

Lamar University

Diane D. Mason

Lamar University

Tilisa N. Thibodeaux

Lamar University

The purpose of this study was to explore differences in perceived level of technology leadership preparation for students of three different online graduate level leadership preparation programs offered at a regional university in southeast Texas. Four hundred seventy-one students responded to the Principal Technology Leadership Assessment (PTLA) survey and three open-response questions asking students which activities they found beneficial, what they would change, and what they would add to program content related to understanding the International Society for Technology (ISTE) Education Standards for Administrators – Visionary Leadership, Digital Age Learning Culture, Excellence in Professional Practice, Systemic Improvement, and Digital Citizenship (ISTE, 2014, 2018). Study findings indicated there was no statistically significant relationship between the items in each domain and the type of program in which respondents participated. Additionally, there was no statistically significant difference between programs and their performance in two of the five domains: Preparedness to Create a Digital Learning Culture and Digital Citizenship. Additionally, student responses to the three open-response type questions indicated suggestions that may be of interest to Educational Preparation Programs (EPP) concerned with meeting current technology instructional practices as part of an administrative degree or certificate program.

Technology has become ubiquitous in today's world. The use of technology in society and education is becoming more prevalent and impacts all aspects of individual lives (Hakansson Lindqvist, 2019). Without question, technology has a pivotal role in the teaching and learning of today's youth and in their future careers, as well as school reform. But, as technology use has become more prevalent in our nation's schools, many principals and university principal preparation programs find themselves in an uncomfortable dilemma. Principals face leadership pressures about what digital learning approaches to take and colleges of education are challenged with preparing future principals to embrace the potential of technology in teaching and learning. With the many roles of a principal, it is crucial that they are prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to be technology leaders (Brockmeier, Sermon, & Hope, 2015).

The actions of school principals can be powerful multipliers of effective teaching and leadership (Manna, 2015; Richardson, Flora, & Bathon, 2013) and the principal's leadership is second only to the classroom teacher among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). As a result, the focus on technology leadership for current and future leaders is of great importance. This study is aimed at graduate candidates' perceived level of leadership preparedness of teaching, learning, and leading with technology. Only when these three aspects of schooling are considered simultaneously will educational technology impact the pedagogy (teaching), achievement (learning), and policy (leading) in schools (Grissom, Matani, & Woo, 2018).

A plethora of empirical studies have been conducted on the use of technology in education. There are examples of technologies used to enhance education and many examples of technology assisting teachers in advancing teaching and learning through higher-order thinking, and not regurgitation (Delgado, Wardlow, McKnight, & O'Malley, 2015; McKnight et al., 2016). Additionally, Evers, Van der Heijden, and Kreijns (2016) suggested that technology professional development should be further examined. But, in the midst of all the advancements and research, there is a shortage of conceptualization and empirical evidence around the perceptions of principal interns' preparedness of teaching, learning, and leading with technology (Schrum, Galizio, & Ledesma, 2011). And, school leaders face multiple challenges as they educate children in an increasingly technology-focused world (Kurtz, 2018).

Framework

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards for Administrators (2009) is the framework for this study. The ISTE standards are considered the *gold standard* framework for technology competencies for administrators (Arafeh, 2015). The purpose of the standards was to define what school leaders should know and be able to do to use technology effectively in teaching and learning. The standards also establish the benchmark for evaluating skills and knowledge school administrators and leaders need to support digital age learning, implement technology, and transform the instructional landscape (ISTE, 2018).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore differences in perceived level of technology leadership preparation graduates of three different online graduate level leadership preparation programs offered at a regional university in Southeast Texas based on the five ISTE 2014 Standards for

Administrators – Visionary Leadership, Digital Age Learning Culture, Excellence in Professional Practice, Systemic Improvement, and Digital Citizenship (ISTE, 2014). The three programs were Master of Educational Administration, Master of Educational Technology Leadership, and a Principal Certification-only program. The 2014 ISTE Standards for Administrators were used in this study instead of the 2018 ISTE Standards for Education Leaders because the 2014 standards were the most current ISTE standards available when the participants began their programs of study.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the perceived technology leadership preparedness level according to graduates from three different online graduate level leadership preparation programs offered at a regional university in Southeast Texas?
2. How do the types of programs differ in perceived technology leadership preparedness for graduates from three different online graduate level leadership preparation programs offered at a regional university in Southeast Texas?
3. What aspects of preparation programs were perceived to be most important for technology leadership preparedness according to graduates from three different online graduate level leadership preparation programs offered at a regional university in Southeast Texas?

Review of the Literature

McLeod and Richardson (2011) suggested that schools should have leaders who are prepared to lead as technology leaders. Researchers found that principals are the key to effective learning outcomes from the use of technology in schools (Anderson & Dexter, 2015; Brockmeier, Sermon, & Hope, 2015). Technology administrators have to be knowledgeable and responsive to rapidly changing technology and instructional needs (Hughes, 2018; Richardson et al., 2013). The review of the literature discusses educational technology standards and principals as digital leaders.

Technology Standards

General leadership standards define the expectations, provide specificity of key behaviors, and competencies of a successful school leader (NELP, 2018). Additionally, leadership standards are viable when districts actually use them to shape how they select, hire, train, and evaluate school leaders (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013). In 2001, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) convened a group of stakeholders, including the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NSSA), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), America Association of School Administrators (AASA), National School Board Association (NSBA), North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, state departments of education, and university faculty, among other interested parties (Schrum et al., 2011). Led by ISTE, this team decided there was a need to promote “the idea that knowledge, practice, and specific skills were needed for administrators to be ready to support the appropriate use of technology in a school” (Schrum et al., 2011, p. 242). The technology standards were first published in 2002 as ISTE National Educational Technology Standards for Administrators (NETS-A).

In 2009, ISTE updated the NETS-A to the ISTE Standards for Administrators to take into account the widespread function of technology within the work-place and the necessity for

administrators to create learning environments. The ISTE Standards for Administrators consist of five technology leadership standards and 21 indicators that give more specific descriptions of the overall standard, thus providing administrators with a guide to achieving the standard.

The operational definitions for the five technology leadership standards are as follows:

Visionary leadership. ISTE (2014) Standard 1-Visionary Leadership focused on ways educational administrators inspire and lead the development and implementation of a shared vision for comprehensive integration of technology to promote excellence and support transformation throughout the organization. This includes collaboration with stakeholders to inspire and facilitate a shared vision of purposeful change maximizing the use of digital-age resources to meet and exceed learning goals; support effective instructional practice; and maximize performance of district and school leaders. Furthermore, visionary leaders must engage in an ongoing process to develop, implement, and communicate technology-infused strategic plans aligned with a shared vision. This includes advocacy on local, state and national levels for policies, programs, and funding to support implementation of a technology-infused vision and strategic plan (ISTE, 2014).

Digital age learning culture. ISTE (2014) Standard 2 – Digital Age Learning Culture emphasized the need for educational administrators to create, promote, and sustain a dynamic, digital-age learning culture providing a rigorous, relevant, and engaging education for all students. The impetus is to ensure implementation of instructional innovation using technology that is focused on continuous improvement of digital-age learning. The standard outlines expectations for administrators to model and promote frequent and effective use of technology for learning; provide learner-centered environments equipped with technology and learning resources to meet the individual, diverse needs of all learners; and ensure effective practice in the study of technology and its infusion across the curriculum (ISTE, 2014). To extend this concept, administrators are expected to promote and participate in local, national, and global learning communities that stimulate innovation, creativity, and digital age collaboration.

Excellence in professional practice. ISTE Standard 3 – Excellence in Professional Practice established the responsibility of Educational Administrators to promote an environment of professional learning and innovation that empowers educators to enhance student learning through the infusion of contemporary technologies and digital resources to allocate time, resources, and access to ensure ongoing professional growth in technology fluency and integration. This is accomplished through facilitation and participation in learning communities that stimulate, nurture and support administrators, faculty, and staff in the study and use of technology. Administrators should promote and model effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders by using digital age tools; stay abreast of educational research and emerging trends regarding effective use of technology; and encourage evaluation of new technologies for their potential to improve student learning (ISTE, 2014).

Systemic improvement. ISTE (2014) Standard 4 – Systemic Improvement described the need for educational administrators to provide digital age leadership and management to continuously improve the organization. To do this, the effective use of information and technology resources to lead purposeful change and maximize the achievement of learning goals through the appropriate use of technology and media-rich resources is necessary. Specifically, administrators should collaborate to establish metrics, collect and analyze data, interpret results, and share findings to improve staff performance and student learning. With these core concepts in mind, administrators must recruit and retain highly competent personnel who use technology creatively and proficiently to advance academic and operational goals; establish and leverage strategic

partnerships to support systemic improvement; and establish and maintain a robust infrastructure for technology including integrated, interoperable technology systems to support management, operations, teaching, and learning (ISTE, 2014).

Digital citizenship. ISTE (2014) Standard 5 – Digital Citizenship charged educational administrators to model and facilitate understanding of social, ethical and legal issues, and responsibilities related to an evolving digital culture to ensure equitable access to appropriate digital tools and resources to meet the needs of all learners. Leaders are directed to promote, model, and establish policies for safe, legal, and ethical use of digital information and technology; promote and model responsible social interactions related to the use of technology and information; and model and facilitate the development of a shared cultural understanding and involvement in global issues through the use of contemporary communication and collaboration tools (ISTE, 2014).

In 2018, ISTE released new standards for educational leaders highlighting key areas of impact. The current standards target the competencies and mindset required for leaders to leverage technology to transform learning, teaching and leading. The characteristics of effective technology leaders, which includes a focus on equity, digital citizenship, and visionary planning, are defined in the ISTE (2018) standards. The expected outcomes are meant to empower leaders to support teachers' use of technology in innovative ways to enrich teaching and learning. The educational leader is viewed as a system designer possessing the capacity to build teams and systems to implement, sustain and continually improve the use of technology to support learning. Further, strong technology leaders are connected learners modeling and promoting continuous professional learning for themselves and others.

Principals as Digital Leaders

For the country's over 90,000 public schools, principals play a pivotal role in determining how well technology is used in schools. With society becoming more and more reliant on technology, it is incumbent upon leaders to stay up-to-date with the latest technologies, respond to technology problems, decide what technology to buy, decide how digital tools can be used for teaching and learning, navigate pressures from technology companies and vendors – while managing the other responsibilities of a campus principal in order to create school cultures that are transparent, relevant, meaningful, engaging, and inspiring (Herold, 2018). Grady (2011) described the principal's role as a technology leader by providing a list of technology leadership tasks. These tasks include:

- Establish the vision and goals for technology.
- Carry the technology banner.
- Model the use of technology.
- Support technology use in the school.
- Engage in professional development opportunities that emphasize the use of technology and integration of technology in student learning.
- Provide professional development opportunities for teachers and staff that emphasize the use of technology and integration of technology in student learning.
- Secure resources to support technology use and integration in the school.
- Advocate for technology use that supports student learning.
- Be knowledgeable and supportive of national technology standards and promote attainment of the standards in the school.

- Communicate the uses and importance of technology in enhancing student learning experiences to the school's stakeholders.

Grady further emphasized the importance that principals model effective technology use. In addition, Grady added that leaders of technology encourage the use of technology in classroom instruction.

Sheninger (2019) identified Seven Pillars of Digital Leadership—specific areas embedded in the culture of schools that can be improved or enhanced through the use of technology. The pillars present a framework from which any leader can begin to harness the power of technology to change professional practice and initiate sustainable change. The Seven Pillars of Digital Leadership include: (a) student engagement, learning, and outcomes; (b) learning environment and spaces; (c) professional growth and learning; (d) communications; (e) public relations; (f) brandings; and (g) opportunity. Context for leaders to lead in different ways, necessary because of societal shifts and the increased demand on technological fluency, is described in the Pillars of Digital Leadership. The Pillars are also aligned to the ISTE Standards for Education Leaders (ISTE, 2018) and frameworks for school improvement in the twenty-first century.

Today, the world is a student's classroom because of the connectedness and ubiquitous nature of mobile devices. With this in mind, it behooves principal preparation programs to assess student perceptions of technology leadership preparation. Preparing principal candidates to lead digital technology implementation supports instructional shifts from traditional to new pedagogies which enables student-created content to be shared outside the traditional classroom and supports creation of engaging learning environments (Hakansson Lindqvist, 2019). It is critical school leaders are prepared to lead the development of engaged learning environments using digital tools and resources to create deeper learning experiences for professionals and students (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Methodology

A cross sectional survey method was used to investigate student perceptions of technology leadership preparation from two different master's and one certificate program offered online from a regional university in Southeast Texas. The university offers three online programs leading to principal certification. A 30-hour Master of School Administration degree with certification, a 36-hour Master of Educational Technology Leadership degree with certification and a non-degree, 18-hour Certification-only program. All students complete the same introductory course, four core courses, and a final capstone course. The school administration students take four additional administration courses and the educational technology leadership students take six additional educational technology courses. Students from all three programs follow the same 260-hour internship requirements.

Population and Participants

The defined population for this study were online graduate students enrolled in their capstone course, EDLD 5398 Internship for Principals between July and December 2018 at a regional, doctoral granting university in Southeast Texas. The students enrolled in this course were pursuing a Master of School Administration degree, Master of Educational Technology Leadership degree or enrolled in the Principal Certification-only program. The enrollment of the university is approximately 14,700. The research population targeted for this study was 811 online graduate

students who were enrolled in the capstone course during the second summer and three Fall semesters. The students were surveyed in the last week of the final capstone course of their respective program. Of the 811 students, 471 students completed the survey for a response rate of 58% - Master of School Administration ($n = 285$), Master of Educational Technology Leadership students ($n = 27$), Principal Certification-only students ($n = 156$). Three respondents did not provide gender information; only one respondent did not provide remaining demographic information. Data displayed in Table 1 indicate the participants demographic information by program type.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Information

	Program Type			Total <i>n</i> (%)
	PC <i>n</i> (%)	EA <i>n</i> (%)	ET <i>n</i> (%)	
Gender				
<i>Male</i>	23(4.7)	82(28.8)	9(33.3)	114(24.4)
<i>Female</i>	133(85.3)	203(71.2)	18(66.7)	354(75.6)
Age				
<i>Twenties</i>	7(4.5)	46(16.1)	7(25.9)	60(12.8)
<i>Thirties</i>	66(42.0)	129(45.3)	11(40.7)	206(43.9)
<i>Forties</i>	53(33.8)	93(32.6)	5(18.5)	151(32.2)
<i>Fifty+</i>	31(19.7)	17(6.0)	4(14.8)	52(11.1)
Ethnicity				
<i>White</i>	83(52.9)	198(69.5)	12(44.4)	293(62.5)
<i>Black/AA</i>	37(23.6)	35(12.3)	4(14.8)	76(16.2)
<i>Hispanic</i>	30(19.1)	43(15.1)	10(37.0)	83(17.7)
<i>Asian</i>	1(0.6)	2(0.7)	0(0.0)	3(0.6)
<i>American Indian or Alaska Native</i>	2(1.3)	1(0.4)	0(0.0)	3(0.6)
<i>Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders</i>	0(0.0)	1(0.4)	0(0.0)	3(0.6)
<i>Two or more</i>	4(2.5)	5(1.8)	1(3.7)	10(2.1)
Level/Location				
<i>Elementary</i>	54(34.4)	112(39.2)	9(33.3)	175(37.2)
<i>Middle</i>	31(19.7)	60(21.0)	7(25.9)	98(20.9)
<i>HS</i>	41(26.1)	91(31.8)	6(22.2)	138(29.4)
<i>K-12 (All Inclusive)</i>	7(4.5)	10(3.5)	1(3.7)	18(3.8)
<i>Central Office</i>	22(14.0)	12(4.2)	3(11.1)	37(7.9)
<i>Other</i>	2(1.3)	1(0.3)	1(3.7)	4(0.9)
School Location				
<i>Urban</i>	54(34.4)	75(26.2)	9(33.3)	138(29.4)
<i>Suburban</i>	75(47.8)	137(47.9)	11(40.7)	223(47.4)
<i>Rural</i>	28(17.8)	74(25.9)	7(25.9)	109(23.2)
Current role on your campus				
<i>Teacher</i>	59(37.8)	137(47.9)	15(55.6)	211(45.0)
<i>Teacher Leader</i>	30(19.2)	86(30.1)	5(18.5)	121(25.8)
<i>Counselor</i>	5(3.2)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	5(1.1)
<i>Curriculum Director/Coordinator</i>	27(17.3)	24(8.4)	3(11.1)	54(11.5)
<i>Campus Administrator</i>	6(3.8)	21(7.3)	1(3.7)	28(6.0)

<i>Campus Technology Coordinator/Specialist</i>	2(1.3)	2(0.7)	2(7.4)	6(1.3)
<i>Central Office Administrator</i>	5(3.2)	3(1.0)	0(0.0)	8(1.7)
<i>District Technology Director/Coordinator</i>	0(0.0)	1(0.3)	1(3.7)	2(0.4)
<i>Other</i>	22(14.1)	12(4.2)	0(0.0)	34(7.2)

Level you would rate technology integration at your location

<i>Very Low</i>	2(1.3)	2(0.7)	2(7.4)	6(1.3)
<i>Low</i>	16(10.2)	17(5.9)	4(14.8)	37(7.9)
<i>Medium</i>	64(40.8)	139(48.6)	11(40.7)	214(45.5)
<i>High</i>	52(33.1)	109(38.1)	9(33.3)	170(36.2)
<i>Very High</i>	23(14.6)	19(6.6)	1(3.7)	43(9.1)

Instrument

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of a regional university in southeast Texas. All participants consented to be a part of this study by agreeing to participate. A three-part structured questionnaire was used to collect the following: a) demographic information and a question regarding technology integration at the location where the respondent worked; b) the Principal Technology Leadership Assessment (PTLA); and c) open-response questions regarding specific strengths and recommendations in meeting the ISTE standards.

The Principal Technology Leadership Assessment (PTLA) is a freely available survey developed and psychometrically validated by the American Institutes for Research as part of a grant CASTLE received from the U. S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). The current PTLA survey is aligned to the ISTE Standards for Administrators. The original 2002 PTLA was modified to align with the ISTE Standards for Administrators. The PTLA consists of 21 questions with a five-point Likert scale from “Not at all” to “Fully.” The survey consists of five constructs – Visionary Leadership (Questions 1-3), Digital Age Learning Culture (Questions 4-8), Excellence in Professional Practice (Questions 9-12), Systemic Learning (13-17), Digital Citizenship (18-21).

Reliability analyses for the instrument suggested that both the subscales and overall instrument functioned reliably with high scores of internal consistency. The subscales had Cronbach’s *Alpha* levels ranging from .87 (Visionary Leadership scale) to .93 (Digital Age Learning Culture scale) and overall the instrument had a Cronbach’s *Alpha* of .97.

Analysis and Findings

The item responses from the PTLA were analyzed using crosstabulation tables and chi-squares for individual items in each of the five areas assessed. Additionally, a MANOVA was conducted to test if there were differences in responses for each subscale by program type. Open-response questions used to investigate the specific strengths and recommendations in meeting the ISTE standards, experiences that were not of assistance, and new experiences that should be added to the preparation program were reviewed and analyzed for themes.

Perceived Technology Preparedness by Type of Program

To investigate the perceived technology leadership preparedness level by graduates from the three different programs, an item-level analysis was conducted with crosstabs and chi-square in SPSS.

The crosstabs allowed researchers to see response patterns for each item and chi-square tested if there was an association between the responses and type of program from which the participants graduated. Based on the chi-squares, there was no statistically significant relationship between the items in each domain and the type of program in which respondents participated. Tables 2-6 show the number and percentage of respondents from each program and how they answered each item for each domain.

Table 2
Item Responses by Program Type for Visionary Leadership
 N=471

Item	Program Type		
	PC	EA	ET
	(N= 158) n(%)	(N=286) n(%)	(N=27) n(%)
1. Facilitate a change that maximizes learning goals using digital resources.			
<i>Not at All</i>	--	1(0.7)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	11(7.0)	21(7.3)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	61(38.6)	95(33.2)	5(18.5)
<i>Significantly</i>	68(43.0)	140(49)	18(66.7)
<i>Fully</i>	18(11.4)	29(10.1)	4(14.8)
2. Engage in an ongoing process to develop, implement, and communicate technology-infused strategic plans.			
<i>Not at All</i>	--	3(1.0)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	8(5.1)	19(6.6)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	55(34.8)	101(35.3)	7(25.9)
<i>Significantly</i>	75(47.5)	130(45.5)	15(55.6)
<i>Fully</i>	20(12.7)	33(11.5)	5(18.5)
3. Promote programs and funding to support implementation of technology-infused plans.			
<i>Not at All</i>	2(1.3)	5(1.7)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	18(11.4)	28(9.8)	2(7.4)
<i>Somewhat</i>	50(30.6)	98(34.3)	9(33.3)
<i>Significantly</i>	67(42.4)	124(43.4)	13(48.1)
<i>Fully</i>	21(13.3)	31(10.8)	3(11.1)

Table 3
Item Responses by Program Type for Digital Age Learning Culture
 N=471

Item	Program Type		
	PC	EA	ET
	(N= 158) n(%)	(N=286) n(%)	(N=27) n(%)
4. Ensure instructional innovation focused on continuous improvement of digital learning.			
<i>Not at All</i>	--	2(0.7)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	10(6.3)	19(6.6)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	54(34.2)	91(31.8)	4(14.8)
<i>Significantly</i>	75(47.5)	139(48.6)	17(63.0)

	<i>Fully</i>	19(12.0)	35(12.2)	6(22.2)
5.	Model and promote the frequent and effective use of technology for learning.			
	<i>Not at All</i>	2(1.3)	3(1.0)	--
	<i>Minimally</i>	8(5.1)	10(3.5)	--
	<i>Somewhat</i>	41(25.9)	79(27.6)	3(11.1)
	<i>Significantly</i>	83(52.5)	135(47.2)	17(63.0)
	<i>Fully</i>	24(15.2)	59(20.6)	7(25.9)
6.	Provide learning environments with technology and learning resources to meet the diverse needs of all learners.			
	<i>Not at All</i>	1(0.6)	1(0.3)	--
	<i>Minimally</i>	10(6.3)	15(5.2)	--
	<i>Somewhat</i>	40(25.3)	75(26.2)	6(22.2)
	<i>Significantly</i>	83(52.5)	147(51.4)	15(55.6)
	<i>Fully</i>	24(15.2)	48(16.8)	6(22.2)
7.	Ensure effective practice in the study of technology and its infusion across the curriculum			
	<i>Not at All</i>	3(1.9)	4(1.4)	--
	<i>Minimally</i>	10(6.3)	20(7.0)	--
	<i>Somewhat</i>	52(32.9)	92(32.2)	7(25.9)
	<i>Significantly</i>	73(46.2)	132(46.2)	15(55.6)
	<i>Fully</i>	20(12.7)	38(13.3)	5(18.5)
8.	Promote and participate in learning communities that stimulate innovation, creativity, and digital collaboration			
	<i>Not at All</i>	1(0.6)	4(1.4)	--
	<i>Minimally</i>	9(5.7)	15(5.2)	1(3.7)
	<i>Somewhat</i>	34(21.5)	75(26.2)	1(3.7)
	<i>Significantly</i>	80(50.6)	135(47.2)	13(48.1)
	<i>Fully</i>	34(21.5)	57(19.9)	12(44.4)

Table 4
Item Responses by Program Type for Excellence in Professional Practice
N=471

Item	Program Type		
	PC (<i>N</i> = 158) <i>n</i> (%)	EA (<i>N</i> =286) <i>n</i> (%)	ET (<i>N</i> =27) <i>n</i> (%)
9. Allocate time, resources, and access to ensure ongoing professional growth in technology fluency and integration.			
	2(1.3)	1(0.3)	--
	9(5.7)	22(7.7)	1(3.7)
	54(34.2)	92(32.2)	7(25.9)
	65(41.1)	125(43.7)	14(51.9)
	28(17.7)	46(16.1)	5(18.5)
10. Facilitate and participate in learning communities that stimulate and support faculty in the study and use of technology.			
	1(0.6)	2(0.7)	--

<i>Minimally</i>	9(5.7)	19(6.6)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	45(28.5)	81(28.3)	6(22.2)
<i>Significantly</i>	75(47.5)	132(46.2)	14(51.9)
<i>Fully</i>	28(17.7))	52(18.2)	7(25.9)
11. Promote and model effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders using digital-age tools.			
<i>Not at All</i>	1(0.6)	1(0.3)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	7(4.4)	12(4.2)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	43(27.2)	71(24.8)	7(25.9)
<i>Significantly</i>	69(43.7)	142(49.7)	12(44.4)
<i>Fully</i>	38(24.1)	60(21.0)	8(29.6)
12. Prepared to stay up-to-date on educational research and emerging trends of effective use of technology and encourage new technologies for potential to improve student learning.			
<i>Not at All</i>	1(0.6)	3(1.0)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	10(6.3)	21(7.3)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	49(31.0)	78(27.3)	4(14.8)
<i>Significantly</i>	72(45.6)	134(46.9)	14(51.9)
<i>Fully</i>	26(16.5)	50(17.5)	9(33.3)

Table 5
Item Responses by Program Type for Systematic Improvement
N=471

Item	Program Type		
	PC (<i>N</i> = 158) <i>n</i> (%)	EA (<i>N</i> =286) <i>n</i> (%)	ET (<i>N</i> =27) <i>n</i> (%)
13. Lead purposeful change to reach learning goals through the use of technology and media-rich resources.			
<i>Not at All</i>	--	3(1.0)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	6(3.8)	18(6.3)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	59(37.3)	95(33.2)	7(12.9)
<i>Significantly</i>	74(46.8)	138(48.3)	15(55.6)
<i>Fully</i>	19(12.0)	32(11.2)	5(18.5)
14. Collaborate to establish metrics, collect and analyze data, and share findings and results to improve staff performance and student learning.			
<i>Not at All</i>	4(2.5)	2(0.7)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	11(7.0)	18(6.3)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	39(24.7)	65(22.7)	8(29.6)
<i>Significantly</i>	83(52.5)	147(51.4)	14(51.9)
<i>Fully</i>	21(13.3)	54(18.9)	5(18.5)
15. Recruit highly competent personnel who use technology to advance academic and operation goals.			
<i>Not at All</i>	5(3.2)	11(3.8)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	10(6.3)	27(9.4)	1(3.7)
<i>Somewhat</i>	51(32.3)	84(29.4)	8(29.6)
<i>Significantly</i>	66(41.8)	116(40.6)	12(44.4)

<i>Fully</i>	26(16.5)	48(16.8)	6(22.2)
16. Establish and leverage strategic partnerships to support systemic improvement.			
<i>Not at All</i>	5(3.2)	5(1.7)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	14(8.9)	22(7.7)	3(11.1)
<i>Somewhat</i>	59(37.3)	99(34.6)	9(33.3)
<i>Significantly</i>	64(40.5)	121(42.3)	9(33.3)
<i>Fully</i>	20(12.7)	39(13.6)	6(22.2)
17. Establish and maintain a robust infrastructure for technology to support management, operations, teaching, and learning.			
<i>Not at All</i>	5(3.2)	5(1.7)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	17(10.8)	24(8.4)	3(11.1)
<i>Somewhat</i>	60(38.0)	103(36.0)	5(18.5)
<i>Significantly</i>	60(38.0)	121(42.3)	16(59.3)
<i>Fully</i>	16(10.1)	33(11.5)	3(11.1)

Table 6
Item Responses by Program Type for Digital Citizenship
N=471

Item	Program Type		
	PC (<i>N</i> = 158) <i>n</i> (%)	EA (<i>N</i> =286) <i>n</i> (%)	ET (<i>N</i> =27) <i>n</i> (%)
18. Ensure access to appropriate digital tools and resources to meet the needs of all learners.			
<i>Not at All</i>	1(0.6)	3(1.0)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	3(1.9)	12(4.2)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	55(34.8)	70(24.5)	3(11.1)
<i>Significantly</i>	68(43.0)	141(49.3)	16(59.3)
<i>Fully</i>	31(19.6)	60(21.0)	8(29.6)
19. Promote, model, and establish policies for safe, legal, and ethical use of digital information and technology.			
<i>Not at All</i>	--	2(0.7)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	3(1.9)	7(2.4)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	44(27.8)	55(19.2)	3(11.1)
<i>Significantly</i>	73(46.2)	145(50.7)	14(51.9)
<i>Fully</i>	38(24.1)	77(26.9)	10(37.0)
20. Promote and model responsible social interactions related to the use of technology and information.			
<i>Not at All</i>	1(0.6)	1(0.3)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	7(4.4)	12(4.2)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	43(27.2)	71(24.8)	7(25.9)
<i>Significantly</i>	69(43.7)	142(49.7)	12(44.4)
<i>Fully</i>	38(24.1)	60(21.0)	8(29.6)
21. Model and facilitate the development of a shared cultural understanding and involvement of global issues through communication and collaboration tools.			

<i>Not at All</i>	--	1(0.3)	--
<i>Minimally</i>	2(1.3)	8(2.8)	--
<i>Somewhat</i>	37(23.4)	54(18.9)	2(7.4)
<i>Significantly</i>	76(48.1)	135(47.2)	13(48.1)
<i>Fully</i>	43(27.2)	88(30.8)	12(44.4)

Although there were no meaningful relationships based upon the findings from the chi-squares, an interesting observation from the crosstabulations was that very few graduates from the educational technology program responded with *Not at All* or *Minimally* for the majority of items. An exception was for the Systematic Improvement domain, in which graduates from all programs had respondents indicating a minimal demonstration of behaviors measured.

Differences in Preparation by Program

Another question guiding the study was whether or not there was a difference between the types of programs and participants perceived preparedness for technology leadership. To answer this question, grand means were calculated for each of the five domains measured to create the dependent variable, and a MANOVA was used to test for programmatic differences.

Based upon the analysis, there was a statistically significant difference between programs and their performance in two of the five domains: *Preparedness to Create a Digital Learning Culture* and *Digital Citizenship*. For the statistically significant difference between program types and preparation to create a digital learning culture [$F(2, 471) = 3.16, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .01$], a Bonferroni post hoc analysis showed statistically significant differences between the preparedness of the Ed Tech program ($N = 27, M = 3.10, SD = .52$) and both the Principal Certification program ($N = 158, M = 2.73, SD = .72$) and Ed Admin program ($N = 286, M = 2.74, SD = .75$). For the statistically significant difference between program types and preparation to create digital citizens [$F(2, 471) = 3.41, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .01$], once again a Bonferroni post hoc analysis showed statistically significant differences between the preparedness of the Ed Tech program ($N = 27, M = 3.23, SD = .57$) and the Principal Certification program ($N = 158, M = 2.88, SD = .71$). Despite the statistically significant differences, it should be noted that the magnitude of the effect for programmatic differences, as measured by the partial eta squared, was quite small.

Of greater practical significance was that the Ed Tech program was the only program to have grand means greater than or equal to 3 (i.e., *Significantly Prepared*) in any of the domains measured. Participants in the Ed Tech program had grand means greater than or equal to 3 in *Preparedness to Create a Digital Learning Culture* ($N = 27, M = 3.10, SD = .52$), *Excellence in Professional Practice* ($N = 27, M = 3.03, SD = .58$), and *Digital Citizenship* ($N = 27, M = 3.23, SD = .57$). Participants in the Principal Certification and Educational Administration programs had averages that ranged between 2.6 to 2.8. The two domains that had the lowest grand means for all the programs were preparedness for *Visionary Leadership* and *Systematic Improvement*.

Most Important Aspects of Preparation Programs for Technology Leadership

In order to determine what aspects of the preparation programs were perceived to be the most meaningful in preparing candidates for technology leadership, three open-response questions were asked in which participants could reflect upon their entire program of study. Respondents were also asked to list experiences throughout their program that assisted in progress toward meeting

the ISTE technology standards, experiences that were not of assistance, and new experiences that should be added to the preparation program. The review and analysis of the open-response questions resulted in four major themes. In order to be included as a major theme, the concept, key idea, or observation represented by the major theme had to be expressed in some depth by multiple participants to the extent that it appeared to be a common assumption.

Responses indicated that a comprehensive understanding of the standards for technology leadership (ISTE) was essential to help guide choices of readings, research, and internship activities. Standards not only gave students the ‘bigger picture’ but also the underlying meaning of course assignments and internship activities.

A second theme that emerged was students found that researching, observing, and interviewing experienced practitioners and experts in technology integration was essential to their understanding and ability to apply concepts and tools for instruction and administration. Most often cited beneficial experiences included:

- Interviewing/shadowing district and school technology directors/specialists.
- Observing/interviewing competent classroom teachers integrating technology.
- Observing/interviewing students skilled in the use of new technologies.
- Following technology experts on Twitter.
- Viewing TED Talks lectures.

The third theme found was that students not only wanted to know about technology but to use new and different programs and tools in coursework and intern activities. Responses indicated the appreciation for freedom and flexibility in presenting course assignments and interacting with peers. Most often cited beneficial experiences included:

- Use of online chats and discussion boards.
- Video messaging.
- Web Conferences.
- Google Drive for group case studies.
- Video, PowerPoint, spreadsheets.
- Animoto, Prezi, Flipgrid, Facebook, etc.

The final theme found indicated the crucial need for new entry-level administrators to understand and have the ability to take a leadership role in technology. Most often cited beneficial experiences included:

- Review and critique school/district technology policy, plans, and budgets.
- Steps principals take to select and purchase technology and attain buy-in for integration.
- Survey teachers for what technology applications are effective, what is lacking, and what is needed.
- Lead a professional learning community or book study on technology integration.
- Design a technology integration professional development activity for faculty.
- Share responsibility for the school website and social media plan.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

When educational leadership faculty recognize the importance of technology preparation and foster technology integration in their principal preparation programs, it is time to assess what the programs have achieved in preparing future educational leaders. The overall findings of this study indicated that regardless of the type of educational leadership preparation program (30-hour

Master of School Administration, 36-hour Master of Educational Technology Leadership or 18-hour Principal Certification-Only program) there was no statistically significant relationships between the items in each domain and the type of program in which respondents participated. The two ISTE domains with the lowest means were preparation of *Visionary Leadership* and *Systematic Improvement*. However, there was a statistically significant difference between programs and their performance in two of the five ISTE Standard domains: *Preparedness to Create a Digital Learning Culture* and *Digital Citizenship*. There was a statistically significant difference between the preparedness of the Educational Technology Leadership program and the Education Administration program in the *Preparedness to Create a Digital Learning Culture* and *Digital Citizenship*. Also, there was a statistically significant difference between the preparedness of the Ed Tech program and the Principal Certification program in the *Preparedness to Create a Digital Learning Culture* and *Digital Citizenship*. It should be noted that the differences may be due to the different course completions and overall, the magnitude of differences was quite small. More important was that for all programs, the two domains that had the lowest means were preparedness for *Visionary Leadership* and *Systematic Improvement*. Program developers need to recognize the program alignment to technology standards and continue to update courses in these areas for the benefit of the candidates. Also, a review of the four themes identified in this study provide useful information to individuals charged with designing educational preparation program content.

The implications for principal preparation programs are to find ways to address each of the standards. It is recommended that programs adhere to the new ISTE standards (ISTE, 2018) or standards from other national or state organizations. Program goals should be established, and plans developed to challenge aspiring administrators to higher standards. Regardless of the respected standards used, students desire a framework of expectations for technology and a basis for understanding the purpose of assigned course and intern activities. Preparation programs are advised to find ways to stay abreast of new technology innovations. This can be from faculty involvement in professional technology organizations, technology consultants, guest speakers, or the use of practitioner advisory groups made up of school district technology directors or specialists. Program and course reviews involving technology preparation must occur every semester for any standards adopted.

Implications for future school principals include the need for them to excel in professional practice and stay up-to-date with emerging trends of technology. Future principals must become visionary leaders and promote an environment that empowers educators to enhance student learning through digital resources (Anderson & Dexter, 2015; ISTE, 2014).

Based on student comments, it is highly recommended that preparation programs consider greater use of activities anchored in real-life practice. For example, allow students to submit assignments in multiple formats and allow for a certain degree of freedom in the use of technology tools, given the wide range of student experience and expertise. Additionally, programs should utilize a variety of student-to-student and professor-to-student communication tools and programs. This would allow for traditional preparation program courses (e.g., law, finance, etc.) to also be a source of experiential learning in technology.

The National Educational Technology Plan (U.S. Department of Education, 2017) is written to reflect that “technology is a powerful tool for transforming learning” (p. 3) and describes that successful implementation relies on strong leadership capable of creating a shared vision. A final implication of this study is that regardless of having a technology specialist or director, the principal is ultimately responsible for many aspects of technology integration. It is imperative to prepare candidates for the role of the principal in collaborative leadership, personalized student

learning, technology infrastructure, technology staff development, budgeting, purchasing, evaluation, and modeling the appropriate and effective use of technology. The larger takeaway from this study is that if educational leadership programs want to develop visionary educational leaders who can lead technology-infused schools, then principal preparation programs cannot ignore aligning coursework with the technology standards.

The study has several limitations: student respondents participated in three different graduate programs at one university, responses were based on their perceptions and likely influenced by their participation in an existing program, students in the Educational Technology Leadership program take technology focused courses in their program, and ISTE Standards for Administrators were used as these were current standards when students surveyed began their program.

Although this study was conducted in one educational leadership program in Southeast Texas, results of the study have broader implications. Other educational leadership programs nation wide could perform a similar study and the results of those studies compared to similar studies. Future research should be conducted by university educational preparation programs in other states and geographical areas of the country in order to compare study findings. As this study was a quantitative, non-experimental study, it is recommended that future studies include an experimental approach in examining similar data at another university. Future research should examine leadership preparation of online graduate students based upon the most current ISTE Standards applicable to students throughout their program course of study. Finally, while focus is placed on preparing educational administrators to be technology leaders, attention needs to focus on technology readiness of faculty members who participate in delivering the preparation programs as well.

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A Review of Research Methods Trends in Educational Leadership Journals

Karen Moran Jackson
Soka University of America

The aim of this exploratory study was to document aspects of research methodology for articles published in three educational leadership journals that are directed at emerging school leaders and the academic community that supports them. For articles published between 2013 and 2017, the research review surveyed types of studies, forms of data collection, participant characteristics, and method references cited. Qualitative work was more common than quantitative and mixed methods, with interviews and surveys as the most common data sources. While some articles included no methodological references, the majority of articles included recent citations, dominated by methods textbooks. Administrators and administrators in training were the most common groups of participants, but other demographic details on participants were irregularly included. Overall, the qualitative research showed greater variability in data collection than the quantitative research, with details on methodological design choices and practitioner-scholarship unevenly framed within the journals.

Keywords: research methods; research review; educational leadership

As educational decision makers are increasingly asked to respond to and incorporate research-based practice in their work, professors of educational leaders and new scholars in the discipline need to remain mindful of the variety of methods that are under the umbrella of academic research. The aim of this exploratory study is to document the types of methods found in articles published from 2013 to 2017 in educational leadership journals aimed at emerging school leaders and the academic community that supports them. The research goal of the present study is to explore the method choices made by researchers publishing in journals that focus on the teaching of educational leadership to gain an understanding of the state of the field regarding research methods. By gaining a precise view of the variety of methods present in these journals and how methods are discussed, academics and new scholars can recognize potential gaps in the literature and determine areas of methodological opportunity for their future research programs.

Literature Review

Hallinger (2013) noted that reviews of research methods can serve many roles for the academic community including: synthesizing knowledge, identifying gaps in the literature, and advocating for policy-making decisions. Yet Hallinger also stated that very few reviews of research in the educational leadership literature exist considering the number of overall published studies. His examination identified only 35 review articles in total over a 52-year period from nine selected peer-reviewed journals (2014), although the number of review articles appeared to be increasing as the field became more established. Concentrating on the most recent educational leadership specific studies, the following sections note what previous reviews have discovered about the types of studies and data collection methods used, the demographics of sample participants engaged, and the variety of method references cited.

Types of Studies

Hallinger and colleagues have examined the research literature on educational leadership and management across the globe. These reviews have found that across Africa (Hallinger, 2018), Latin America (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018), and Asia (Hallinger & Bryan, 2013) over 70% of articles published were empirical, as opposed to theoretical or commentary. In Africa, quantitative methods were used most commonly, while the majority of studies in Latin America and Asia used qualitative means. In all regions, mixed methods studies were the smallest group. Hallinger and Bryant (2013) also observed that at least in Asia, quantitative work was becoming more popular over time.

Examining three North American and three U.K. based educational leadership journals, Thomson (2017) offered a holistic, critical review of research methods in educational leadership, management, and administration. Based on fundamental questions of what methods are used and how (if) methodological decisions are discussed, Thomson found that about a quarter of articles included quantitative data collection, with the remainder using qualitative methods and some variation among journals. Few articles of any type, however, included a discussion of method choices, rendering silent debates in the field about how content knowledge is generated.

Looking at more U.S. centered literature, Gumus, Bellibas, Esen, and Gumus (2018) reviewed educational research that specifically focused on models of leadership. They found that over a 24-year time period (1990 to 2014) the number of qualitative studies, while numerically the most popular, showed a decrease, along with a decrease in the number of theoretical, non-empirical

works. Conversely, the number of quantitative and mixed methods studies on the topic of leadership models in education increased, similar to that observed in the general educational leadership research in Asia by Hallinger and Bryant (2013). The growth in quantitative work observed by these two studies matched with research by Tian, Risku, and Collin (2016) that focused specifically on the concept of distributed leadership in primary and secondary education across eight journals from 2002 to 2013. Tian et al. found that empirical studies dominated the reviewed articles, with a relatively even mix between qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches, as opposed to an earlier review on the same topic that found a preponderance of qualitative case studies.

While the reviews above concentrated on either a specific geographic region or a specific topic, Murphy, Vriesenga, and Storey (2007) investigated 25 years of articles in a specific journal, the *Educational Administration Quarterly (EAQ)*. They found that slightly over half the articles published in *EAQ* were empirical, as opposed to conceptual or theoretical, with a slight upturn in that percentage in more recent years. Qualitative work overall remained the most common with between 45% and 58% per publication year, while quantitative works fluctuated between 35% and 42% and mixed methods works made up the remaining. These proportions are similar to the ones found by Papa and English (2010) in their examination of educational leadership dissertations published in ProQuest.

Data Collection Methods

In terms of data collection methods, surveys and interviews dominate across the globe. In Latin America, surveys were the most popular data collection method, while interviews, direct observation, and document analysis were also used (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018). For the quantitative and mixed methods studies observed in Latin America, over half of the studies used correlational and multivariate statistics in their analysis. In Africa, the quantitative work again used mostly surveys, with about half relying on descriptive statistics and another half using inferential tests (Hallinger, 2018). No details were provided about the types of qualitative or mixed data collection methods used in the studies. Tian et al. (2016) found data collection methods in their observed articles to include interviews, observations, and case studies for qualitative work, while quantitative work again was dominated by surveys. Thomson (2017) found that interviews, surveys, and case studies were especially popular, but few quantitative papers employed advanced statistical techniques such as model testing and few qualitative papers employed critical analytic techniques, using instead more constructivist approaches. Murphy et al.'s review of work in *EAQ* (2007) found that quantitative data were collected mostly by surveys. However, they also found that secondary data analysis was employed by about a quarter of the studies and a small number used experimental or quasi-experimental means. For qualitative work in *EAQ*, the most popular framework was content analysis, followed by inductive analysis, but with many types of additional frameworks, such as narrative analysis and phenomenological analysis, also represented.

Participant Characteristics

Few of the papers reviewed discussed the demographics of participants that were included in the empirical work. This is in-line with other social sciences that reviews have found to be inconsistent in the reporting of demographics such as organizational psychology (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood, & Lambert, 2007). Gumas et al. (2018) did find that of the empirical papers with a

distinct sample group, most of the studies focused on principals, with an increase in work on leadership models with teachers and other educational workers over the period of review.

References Cited in the Methods Section

The only review that discussed method reference citations specifically was Murphy et al.'s work (2007). They found that references on research methods cited most frequently included the *Handbook of Research on Teaching* by Wittrock, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* by Glaser, *Qualitative Data Analysis* by Miles, *Research in Organizational Behavior* by Shaw, and *Naturalistic Inquiry* by Lincoln. These were mostly textbooks that focused on research methods in general or on qualitative work.

Overall, recent reviews of the educational leadership literature document a pluralistic methodological landscape in many ways. While mixed methods are not particularly prevalent, qualitative and quantitative methods are both very common, with the advantage going to one or the other depending on the topic and region included in the review. In terms of data collection methods, quantitative work everywhere is dominated by surveys, with qualitative work showing more variety. There is little information on data collection types for mixed methods studies. There were also few reviews that provided demographic information on the people who participated in the studies, an important concern in terms of designing a study that can address potential gaps in the literature. Additionally, there is little information on what methodological references have been consulted by previous researchers and would be considered seminal in the field. The current study aims to address some of the information gaps highlighted here for a variety of empirical studies and document these details, including data collection types, references cited, and participants included. Finally, the work serves as evidence of possible gaps in the literature for those designing studies and who seek to publish in these outlets.

Methods

Following the terminology for research reviews advocated for by Hallinger (2013; 2014), this study has a methodological thematic focus and is largely exploratory, as I sought to document and describe the existing method choices of the focal articles. The current study could also be classified as a *topographic review* (Hallinger, 2013, 2018) in that it looks for trends in the literature, rather than engaging in deep content analysis and comparisons. Using the terminology of Thomson (2017), the review could also be considered a *snapshot* of research methods, as the researcher acts as a photographer in limiting and choosing what data are included and emphasized.

The current analysis summarizes the methods section of articles published in a five-year span, from 2013 to 2017, for three journals: *Education Leadership Review (ELR)*, *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation (IJELP)*, and *The Journal of Research on Leadership Education (JRLE)*. These three educational leadership journals were chosen because they have an explicit aim to engage with educational leaders and academic professionals who teach educational leadership. To the author's knowledge, they also have not been included in previous research reviews.

The framework guiding data collection for the study was the *research methods typology* used by scholars across the social sciences that divide research methods into quantitative (largely numerical and measurement based), qualitative (largely non-numerical such as text, visual, or audio), and mixed methods (a combination of both numerical and non-numerical; Tashakkori &

Teddle, 2003; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These broad levels of distinctions between methods based on the type of data collected are well-known and referenced in previous reviews of research cited above, as well as in basic research methods textbooks.

To create the database for this study, the researcher downloaded or accessed online all articles through the open access websites provided by the journals or through the researcher’s academic library. Data notes were collected in a specially created Google Form that was converted to a spreadsheet, allowing for data cleaning and data analysis preliminarily in Excel and later in Stata (StataCorp, 2017), a specialized statistical software program with extended graphics capabilities. Aspects of data collected included the journal number and date, article title, authors, methods and types of data collection materials, citations given in the text that described the methods, and description of any sample participants, including occupation (teacher, administrator, etc.), race/ethnicity, and gender. The researcher made a determination of the type of method used (qualitative, quantitative, mixed method, non-empirical) based primarily on how the study was described by the authors in the text, and, if a description was not explicitly provided, by the researcher’s own assessment using the framework of Creswell and Creswell (2018). Articles appearing in separate sections in the journals for non-empirical work or clearly labeled as editorials or book reviews by the journal were excluded from the final sample of 200 articles.

Results

This results section is divided into four subsections. The first two subsections contain descriptions of the types of studies and the types of data collection used in articles from the three focal journals over the five years of data. The third subsection includes an overview of the demographics of sample participants. The final subsection contains descriptions of the references cited in the methods section of the texts.

Types of Studies

In all 200 articles fitting the inclusion criteria described above were published by the three journals over the five-year period from 2013 to 2017, with 59 from *ELR*, 85 from *IJELP*, and 56 from *JRLE*. Of these, 91 (45.5%) were qualitative, 43 (21.5%) were quantitative, 40 (20%) were non-empirical, and 26 (13%) were mixed or multi-methods. The journals displayed a relatively similar distribution of studies (see Table 1). While a chi-square test showed a statistically significant difference in the distribution, the real effect was small, as seen in the small size of the adjusted residuals in Table 1. The difference was largely due to fewer quantitative studies published in *JRLE* over the time period than expected, as well as more non-empirical articles, while *ELR* had fewer non-empirical articles. Readers should note, however, that *JRLE* also provided separate sections in their pages for non-empirical articles, such as editorials and book reviews, and these were not included in the analyzed sample.

Table 1

Distribution of common method types used in articles published in three educational leadership journals between 2013 and 2017.

Journal		Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed methods	Non-empirical
<i>ELR</i>	Observed frequency	26.00	17.00	10.00	6.00
	Expected frequency	26.85	12.69	7.67	11.80
	Adjusted residual	-0.26	1.63	1.07	-2.25

<i>IJELP</i>	Observed frequency	34.00	22.00	12.00	17.00
	Expected frequency	38.68	18.28	11.05	17.00
	Adjusted residual	-1.34	1.30	0.40	0.00
<i>JRLE</i>	Observed frequency	31.00	4.00	4.00	17.00
	Expected frequency	25.48	12.04	7.28	11.20
	Adjusted residual	1.75	-3.08	-1.54	2.28

Note: Pearson $\chi^2(6) = 17.51, p = 0.008$; likelihood-ratio $\chi^2(6) = 19.60, p = 0.003$. The journals are *Education Leadership Review (ELR)*, *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation (IJELP)*, and *The Journal of Research on Leadership Education (JRLE)*.

A similar analysis, but by year rather than journal title, showed no apparent trend in the publication patterns of methods over the five-year period (see Table 2). The most common method used in studies every year was qualitative, with both quantitative and non-empirical articles published at roughly the same rate, and mixed methods research as the most infrequent.

Table 2

Observed counts of common method types by year published, from 2013 to 2017, for three educational leadership journals.

Year		Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed methods	Non-empirical
2013	Observed frequency	27.00	11.00	8.00	10.00
	Expected frequency	25.48	12.04	7.28	11.20
	Adjusted residual	0.48	-0.40	0.34	-0.47
2014	Observed frequency	17.00	8.00	8.00	8.00
	Expected frequency	18.66	8.82	5.33	8.20
	Adjusted residual	-0.58	-0.35	1.39	-0.09
2015	Observed frequency	14.00	9.00	2.00	5.00
	Expected frequency	13.65	6.45	3.90	6.00
	Adjusted residual	0.14	1.23	-1.12	-0.50
2016	Observed frequency	21.00	12.00	4.00	10.00
	Expected frequency	21.39	10.11	6.11	9.40
	Adjusted residual	-0.13	0.77	-1.05	0.25
2017	Observed frequency	12.00	3.00	4.00	7.00
	Expected frequency	11.83	5.59	3.38	5.20
	Adjusted residual	0.07	-1.33	0.39	0.95

Note: Pearson $\chi^2(12) = 7.12, p = 0.849$; likelihood-ratio $\chi^2(12) = 7.31, p = 0.836$

Data Collection Methods

Many studies used more than one form of data collection. For the 91 qualitative studies, the most common data collection method was interviews (n=48), with content analysis of artifacts and/or documents as a popular secondary method (n=44). Other relatively common data collection methods included field notes (n=11), observations (n=14), open-ended discussions (n=8), focus groups (n=7), and secondary analysis of existing data (n=7). Other qualitative data collection methods, such as video recordings, mapping, and discussion threads, were only used in one or two studies apiece.

Of the 43 quantitative studies, the majority of data came from surveys (n=33). Secondary data use was the next most common format (n=9), with the use of assessment data, the third most common (n=4). The least common was the use of data from alternative sources, such as GIS (n=1) and documents (n=2), and testing of an existing survey (n=1).

The 26 mixed methods studies used a smaller cross-section of typical qualitative and quantitative data sources. Data sources overall included surveys (n=21), interviews (n=11), open-ended discussions (n=11), artifacts and documents (n=6), focus groups (n=5), secondary data (n=4), assessment data (n=1), and testing/validation of existing surveys (n=2). The most common combination of mixed methods studies (n=6) was to use a survey that included both closed- and open-ended questions. Five additional studies used these methods as well as an additional qualitative data source, such as interviews (n=3), focus groups (n=1), and artifacts (n=1). Four studies combined interviews with quantitative survey data only, with three additional studies using these two sources along with various other methods.

Participant Characteristics

Of the 160 empirical articles reviewed, 30 did not include specific sample participants, as the research used alternative data sources, such as documents, or was not based on individual level data, such as district level assessment data. Of the 130 articles that collected data directly from participants, the most common participants were school or district based administrators (n=57), followed by principal and administrator candidates (n=39) and K-12 teachers (n=30). Less frequent sample participants included college or university professors (n=17), students (n=11), and other persons (n=15), such as community members, school board members, and school staff. Data from more than one group were collected in 36 of the studies, with eight studies gathering data from administrators and teachers as a pair and four additional studies gathering data from administrators, teachers, and at least one other group. The next most popular combination were data from administrators and administrator candidates (n=5).

Race and gender of participants were unevenly revealed in the articles. Of the 130 relevant empirical articles, 60 (46%) did not report any information on participant gender. Of those that did report, 52 (40%) reported a majority female sample, 14 (11%) a majority male sample, with the remainder reporting either an even distribution or a mixed sample, with no further information. Regarding information on the race and/or ethnicity of participants, 95 (73%) did not report information. Of the 35 studies that did report, 20 reported a majority White sample, 7 reported no racial or ethnic group majority among sample participants, 6 reported a majority Black sample, and 1 study each reported a Latino majority and a Native American majority sample.

While 63 of the empirical articles reported information on both gender and race of participants, 58 did not report either participant demographic information, 37 reported gender without information on participant race, and 2 reported information on race, but not gender. There was some variation in demographic reporting by research method type. Quantitative and qualitative projects were just as likely to note participant gender (63% and 67%, respectively) and participant race and/or ethnicity (42% and 44%), while the small number of mixed methods projects were less likely to do so (46% for gender and 27% for race).

References Cited in the Methods Section

Of the 160 empirical papers examined, 42 cited no references in the methods section. The most cited individual reference was the second edition of Miles and Huberman's *Qualitative Data Analysis* which was cited 17 times, while the third edition, with a new co-writer, Johnny Saldaña, was cited three times, for a total of 20 citations. This was the most popular reference overall. Twelve other works were cited at least five times (see Table 3), although it should be noted that different editions of books were individually counted. For example, Patton's work entitled *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* is on the list two times; once for the third edition, published in 2002, and once for the second edition, published in 1990, as well as two citations for the fourth edition, published in 2015 (not featured in the table). Taken together, this work was cited 17 times in the articles reviewed, making it the second most popular reference.

Table 3

Top cited references in the methods sections of reviewed empirical articles published between 2013 and 2017. Different editions of the same book are counted separately.

Citation	Title	Number of citations
Miles & Huberman, 1994	<i>Qualitative Data Analysis</i> (2nd ed.)	17
Merriam, 2009	<i>Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design & Implementation</i> (2nd ed.)	12
Patton, 2002	<i>Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods</i> (3rd ed.)	12
Saldaña, 2009	<i>The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers</i> (1st ed.)	7
Strauss & Corbin, 1998	<i>Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques & Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory</i> (2nd ed.)	6
Creswell, 2003	<i>Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, & Mixed Methods Approaches</i> (2nd ed.)	6
Creswell, 2007	<i>Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches</i> (2nd ed.)	5
Creswell, 2013	<i>Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches</i> (3rd ed.)	5
Marshall & Rossman, 2011	<i>Designing Qualitative Research</i> (5th ed.)	5
Patton, 1990	<i>Qualitative Evaluation & Research Methods</i> (2nd ed.)	5
Stake, 1995	<i>The Art of Case Study Research</i>	5
Strauss & Corbin, 1990	<i>Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures & Techniques</i> (1st ed.)	5
Yin, 2009	<i>Case Study Research: Design & Methods</i> (4th ed.)	5

John Creswell was the most cited single researcher in the methods sections of these articles. His work was cited 35 times, represented either by research methods textbooks as noted above or in collaboration with others in journal articles. The next most frequently cited author was Anselm Strauss at 25 times, with both Miles and Huberman cited 24 times. The frequency of author name citations in the methods sections is illustrated in Figure 1 for the top 16 authors.

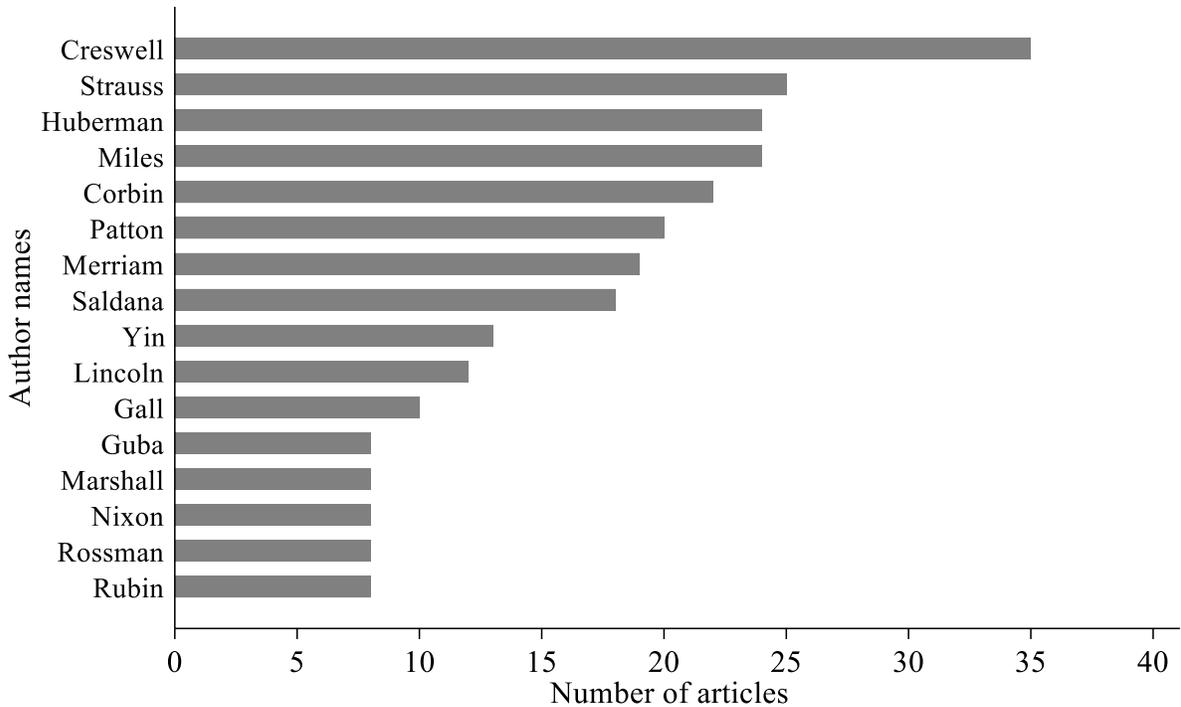


Figure 1. Frequency of author name citations in the methods sections of empirical articles published between 2013 and 2017. Creswell was the most cited author while 15 additional authors were cited at least eight times within the 160 reviewed empirical articles.

In general, the references cited were relatively recent publications, with the inclusion of some seminal, older works. See Figure 2 for a display of the frequency of publication year for cited references, excluding three references from 1933, 1951, and 1963 for ease of viewing. The earliest work cited more than once is Glaser and Strauss's *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) which was cited four times. The year with publications most cited was 2009, largely due to the three books published that year by Merriam, Saldaña, and Yin noted in Table 2. The large spike in 1994 is largely due to the publication of the second edition of Miles and Huberman's *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Source Book*, the most cited book overall, and Moustakas' *Phenomenological Research Methods*, cited four times. The large number of publications from 2007, 2008, and 2011, however, are almost entirely due to citations for individual articles published in that year, rather than popular textbooks.



Figure 2. Frequency of references cited by year in methods sections of empirical articles. The majority of references cited were published recently. Older years with high numbers of citations correspond with publication dates of commonly referenced textbooks.

The number of references cited showed minor variations among research method types (see Figure 3). For all types of articles, citing no methods references or just one was relatively common with 26 out of 43 quantitative articles, 33 out of 91 qualitative articles, and 10 out of 26 mixed methods articles doing so. Qualitative articles cited slightly more references on average than the quantitative articles ($M = 3.60$, 95% CI [2.98, 4.21]; $M = 1.88$, 95% CI [.99, 2.78]; $t = 3.10$, $p = .007$), although neither was statistically different from the number of references cited by mixed methods articles ($M = 2.19$, 95% CI [1.04, 3.35]).

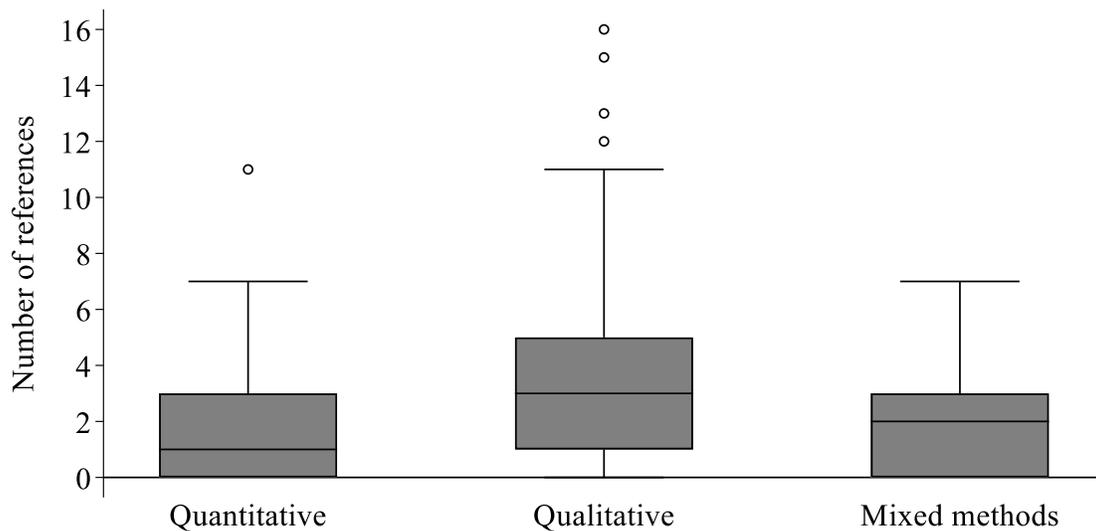


Figure 3. Box plot of the number of methods references cited in empirical articles by type of methods. For each article type, the box outlines the middle 50% of counts and the line within the box shows the median, while the circles represent outliers. Qualitative articles typically included the most methods citations, but there was significant overlap between all three article types.

Discussion

This study examined the methods employed in articles published in three educational leadership academic professional journals between 2013 and 2017. Overall, empirical articles made up the bulk of the articles published. Within these articles, while qualitative work dominated, both quantitative and mixed methods work were well-represented. The qualitative work showed greater variety in data collection sources, while single-time surveys dominated quantitative data collection. The majority of articles included recent method reference citations, with citations dominated by textbooks, particularly on qualitative methods, and a significant number of articles without methodological references at all. Not surprisingly for the field, administrators and administrators in training were the most common groups of participants. However, information on the gender and race of participants was irregularly included.

Some trends were also noted that might offer opportunities for further discussion on methods and methods discourse within the educational leadership field. First, while the qualitative research showed greater variety than the quantitative research, both showed little use of alternative data sources. Quantitative research is undergoing an explosion in new methods as big data and social media data have become more ubiquitous, yet the current literature in the field shows a reliance on one-shot surveys, often done with convenience sampling. Qualitative and mixed methods research, likewise, have also been impacted by technology, with alternative data sources such as video blogs, social media postings, and photos available online, worldwide. The lack of longitudinal studies as well as methodological variety, especially for quantitative work, is aligned with results found by Thomson (2017) and Hallinger (2018) in their reviews of research methods. Thomson (2017) in particular noted *conservatism* in method choices, with common data collection techniques of surveys and interviews used almost exclusively as was found here. One of the limitations of this study is that the author was unable to shed light on why articles display this imbalance in method choices. There are several possible reasons including: a lack of alternative research methods being taught in graduate classes and subsequently used in the field; a file drawer problem when insignificant results from alternative methods are not submitted for publication and the research remains unpublished; or a submission bias by researchers “playing the journal game” and choosing to send papers with these methods to journals not reviewed here (Thomson, 2017, p. 218).

A second noted trend was that details on methodological design choices were unevenly documented. For example, some studies that obtained documents for analysis clearly stated the methods of document data collection and modes of analysis, including a description of search terms employed and of coding choices. Other studies, also using documents as data sources, did not provide information on how documents were ultimately selected for inclusion in the study nor how coding, theming, or other analysis proceeded. This surprising lack of information about the methods used even with clear, empirical papers matches an observation made by Hallinger (2014) that even reviews of research do not always explain their own methods. As documented here, limited methodological descriptions were found not only in the procedures and analysis steps but also in discussions of sample participants and references.

The lack of methods information can make it more difficult for other scholars to replicate the studies, make conclusions about generalizability of results to a different context or population, or assess rigor and trustworthiness. For young researchers as well, without this information, building on a study of interest is made harder by this lack of transparency. While researchers often display a great deal of creativity in the creation of a project, they do not develop methods in a vacuum. Citing other works that served as methodological examples or inspiration can help younger researchers in the design of their own work as well and would not take up much in the way of valuable text space.

Finally, this review documented a variety of ways that practitioner-scholarship was framed within the journals. For example, within the qualitative articles, some authors presented research on their own teaching and clearly framed their papers as a type of empirical research by using a specific methodological description, such as autoethnography or action research. Yet others, with similar research on their own teaching, did not frame their papers as such and did not include explicit language about methods, despite the work containing elements of action research (Osterman, Furman, & Sernak, 2014), scholarship of teaching research (Cross & Steadman, 1996), or pragmatic practitioner research (Gordon, 2016). The definition for whether these articles would be considered *empirical* research was not always clear; using the descriptions provided by the authors sometimes resulted in placing two similar articles in separate categories. As such, the inclusion of papers in the sampling frame was impacted by how the authors wrote about their practitioner-scholarship research, how they chose to frame their own study and the inclusion of methods-related details in the article, rather than a substantial difference in methods employed. A discussion about how the field defines and promotes the scholarship of teaching might help practitioner-scholars engage further with this type of research as a methodology and discuss how to frame this important type of work so that it retains its value for educational leaders and professors of educational leadership.

There are several limitations to the current study that should be noted. First, as the study itself took a quantitative approach, choices were made that artificially constricted the data. The use of specific coding categories obscured a great deal of variation in both the articles and their methods as discussed above. A second limitation is the geographic boundaries of the included journals and articles. All three journals are associated with U.S.-based organizations and there were few international studies included in the sample. Thomson (2017), who reviewed both North American and United Kingdom journals, found that North American journals tended to have more empirical pieces, fewer reviews of literature, and greater use of secondary data, so the data reported here should be assessed with these limitations in mind.

While some may argue that the field of educational leadership needs more advanced quantitative studies because of this method's ability to support causal statements (Hallinger, 2018), the ability to tell stories of innovative interventions and move policy through rich descriptive case studies should not be lost, nor should theoretical discussions and philosophical debates be subordinated in the literature (Kowalski, 2009; Thomson, 2017). The need for methodological richness, of course, places a burden on those who teach educational leadership to remain current on emerging research methods and techniques of analysis (Bowers, 2017). Including explicit discussions in the methods sections about methodological decisions would also allow the field to debate how knowledge is generated, pointing out to young scholars that there are no absolutes in research, even for the methods section.

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An Exploratory Examination of What Types of Administrative Support Matter for Rural Teacher Talent Management: The Rural Educator Perspective

Henry Tran

University of South Carolina

Jingtong Dou

University of South Carolina

Administrative support has been frequently identified as the most important factor influencing teachers' employment decisions (Burkhauser, 2017; Ladd, 2011). While many rural schools operate in hard-to-staff contexts that suffer from severe teacher shortages, it is unknown if rural teachers require rural context specific administrative support. This study was designed to shed light on this issue by first confirming with a sample of South Carolina rural educators (n=28) through an open-ended survey that administrative support is the most important factor to advertise for teacher recruitment. The study then obtains the perspectives of a subsample of the educators (n=12), via in-depth interviews, to provide more details concerning the types of administrative supports that matter for rural teacher retention and whether the supports should differ for new vs. more seasoned teachers. Several important themes emerged from the interview findings including verification of the necessity of rural specific administrative support due to adequate rural teaching preparation, building relational trust (from open communication), providing mentorship, offering financial incentives, advertising the community, maintaining administrative consistency/stability, and providing teachers with a positive, collaborative and open work culture. Results and implications for leadership development are discussed.

Keywords: teacher talent management, rural schools, teacher retention, teacher recruitment, rural teachers, administrative support

Teacher shortages are problematic for many reasons, not the least of which is that school staffing problems have been found to be negatively associated with student learning (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Because teachers can influence students' long-term financial outcomes (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2013), that negative association can have life-altering effects. While there is some debate concerning whether a national teacher shortage exists (Taie & Goldring, 2017), the fact that the teacher supply is inequitably distributed is less controversial.

High-needs schools, which serve higher proportions of minority and low-achieving students from low-income households, are often located in economically impoverished rural and urban contexts that experience greater staffing problems and student performance challenges than their counterparts (Balu, Beteille, & Loeb, 2009; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2007). Teacher staffing research has primarily focused on recruitment and retention in urban teacher labor markets (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002), often to the exclusion of the same issues in rural contexts (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005). Due to their remote locations, lack of amenities, and low salary offerings, poor rural schools often face extreme challenges with hiring and retaining qualified teachers (Jimerson, 2003; Maranto & Schuls, 2012; Schaefer, Mattingly, & Johnson, 2016). In a national study of teacher labor markets spanning across nearly 15 years, Player (2015) found that rural schools were much more likely to report challenges with hiring English Language Learners and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) teachers than their urban counterparts. Indeed, when it comes to the *rural school problem*, many have suggested the problem is rooted in challenges associated with rural teacher recruitment and retention (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Miller, 2008a). Consequently, in response to the U.S. Department of Education's report on rural education, the University Council for Educational Administration's (UCEA) top recommendation was to stabilize the rural educator workforce (UCEA, 2018).

Literature Review

The strategies that have been implemented to address teacher shortages have primarily been financial in nature. The following section reviews the research that has examined the potential efficacy of various financial teacher staffing strategies. Given the dearth of research specifically targeting rural teacher staffing, the literature of both rural and non-rural teacher staffing strategies are reviewed, emphasizing the rural focus when appropriate.

Base Salaries and Bonuses

Arguably one of the most researched teacher staffing strategies is the proposal to increase teacher salaries. The focus on salary is understandable given its cited salience by both potential (Tran & Smith, 2019a) and current (Horn, 2009) teachers and some evidence suggesting its potential utility. For example, Hendricks (2014) found that increasing base pay reduces turnover, especially for newer teachers. Ondrich, Pas, and Yinger (2008) likewise found teachers with higher relative salaries than non-teachers in the same county are less likely to leave.

Targeted bonuses, which are limited term financial incentives, also have been a widely implemented teacher recruitment strategy. Cowan and Goldhaber (2018) found that bonuses for National Board Certified Teachers helped recruit and retain high quality teachers in low social-economic settings. Similarly, Glazerman, Protik, Teh, Bruch, and Max (2013) conducted a randomized experiment of 10 districts in 7 states and found a targeted bonus program to be

effective in recruiting and short-term retention of high-quality teacher transfers. Clotfelter, Glennie, Ladd, and Vigdor (2008) found that a bonus program reduced mean turnover rates of the targeted teachers by 17%, but there was widespread misunderstanding of retention incentives. Regardless of their short-term effectiveness, the question concerning whether the teachers will stay after the bonus is paid out has been a criticism of this strategy.

Scholarships and Loan Forgiveness

Policymakers also often utilize service scholarships and loan forgiveness programs to improve teacher staffing. For example, Feng and Sass (2018) found a loan forgiveness program reduced attrition rates for middle and high school math and science teachers by 10.4 and 8.9%, respectively, and special education teachers by 12.3%. Liou and Lawrenz (2011) found that scholarships with high-needs school service requirements were not viewed by recipients as highly influential to stimulate them to enter the teaching profession but somewhat influential in the decision to teach in a high-needs school. Likewise, Steele, Murname, and Willett (2010) found a student loan forgiveness program with a 4-year service requirement in a low-performing school increased recipients probability of teaching in such schools by 28%. However, 75% persisted in teaching in low-performing schools into their fourth year, representing a higher risk of departure than teachers who did not receive the incentives.

While the use of financial incentives shows some promise to address teacher staffing, one major limitation related to the use of financial incentives such as salary increases and loan forgiveness concerns the sustainability of such strategies and the resources needed to employ them (Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005). This is especially the case for poor rural school districts that are often located in areas with low property values. Therefore, the residents are not able to pay sufficient property tax to employ the aforementioned financial incentives. While financial strategies should be employed because of their effectiveness, they require unpopular actions, like property tax demands, to ensure that rural schools are adequately staffed in a sustainable manner. Moreover, there may be an even more important factor for rural teacher employment that has largely escaped policy attention: administrative support.

Improved Administrative Support and Leadership

School administrative support has been reported to be the most important factor for pre-service and current teachers when considering employment in a district (Horng, 2009; Robinson, 2012; Tran & Smith, 2019b). Boyd et al. (2011) defined administrative support as,

the extent to which principals and other school leaders make teachers' work easier and help them to improve their teaching. Administrative support can assume a variety of forms—ranging from providing teachers with professional development opportunities to protecting them from district office mandates. (p. 305)

Past studies have found that the greatest influence of teacher retention are teachers' perceptions of school administration (Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2017; Ladd, 2011), and that administrative mentorship support is especially critical for keeping beginning teachers in high poverty schools (Haynes, 2014). This importance has been found (Horng, 2009; Robinson, 2012) to eclipse even that of student characteristics such as low-income status, performance, and ethnic minority background, which have been found to be associated with turnover in the literature (Hanushek, et al., 2004; Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007). Sutchter et al. (2016) argued that,

Although money can help, teachers are primarily attracted by principals who are good instructional leaders, by like-minded colleagues who are committed to the same goals, by having the teaching conditions and instructional materials they need readily available, and by having learning supports that enable them to be effective. (p. 66)

With particular relevance to the rural context, Preston and Barnes (2017) reviewed 40 research studies from 2005 to 2015 and identified the importance of people-centered leadership for successful rural school administration, including building trust, promoting collaborations, soliciting staff input, encouraging a culture where teachers are empowered to take risks with new ideas, and providing administrative support in general.

Tran and Smith (2019b) conducted a mixed-method analysis to understand the relative importance of different working characteristics for college students at a regional university. Culled from the teacher recruitment literature, these included factors that range from pecuniary factors (e.g., medical benefits, base salary, annual raises, forgivable college loans) to non-pecuniary factors (e.g., class size, administrative support, input on school decisions, amicable colleagues, clean school facilities). Respondents cited administrative support as the most salient factor influencing their consideration to teach in a hard-to-staff rural school.

While there appears to be some consensus concerning the importance of administrative support for teacher employment, it is still unclear what differentiated types of support are necessary for different types of environments. Different geographic contexts are associated with different challenges, requiring different types of administrative support. For example, teachers may need support dealing with and navigating small town politics in a small rural school that may not be necessary in a large urban setting. While urban schools have primarily been the focus of research. In this study we focus on the rural context.

Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

We rely on the theory of contextual leadership (Noman, Awang Hashim, & Shaik Abdullah, 2018) to guide our work. The theory suggests that the type of support and leadership required from rural school principals to their teachers would differ from what is needed for principals from other contexts. Because rural students are no less important than their urban counterparts, it is imperative to confront the politics of recognition that regards rural schools to be less important than urban schools (Cuervo, 2016). One mechanism to improve this recognition justice is to acknowledge the need for differentiated school leadership support. This view would recognize different cultures and values of rural locales to enhance the dignity, self-esteem and self-respect of rural people. Consequently, we pose two questions for exploration:

1. *Which characteristics of working at their rural schools should rural schools advertise to recruit new teachers?*

Based on the literature that has consistently identified administrative support as the most important factor for teacher employment (Hornig, 2009; Tran & Smith, 2019b), we hypothesize that administrative support will be the highest ranked characteristic, especially within the rural context. This is because rural schools, by virtue of their size, have more flexibility and less bureaucracy (Ballou & Podgursky, 1995), which can be a catalyst for a more supportive school environment. If our hypothesis is supported, we follow-up with the question:

2. *What type of administrative support is necessary to retain teachers in rural schools?*

With the second question, we further differentiate between the type of support needed for teachers in their initial three years of teaching, and the support required for more seasoned teachers. The

former group is what Huberman (1989) referred to as beginning teachers, which he argues are in career entry or *survival* mode and therefore require different supports than non-beginning teachers. For example, early career teachers may require much more specificity concerning feedback and suggestions, whereas seasoned teachers require more room to expand and grow (including mentorship and leadership opportunities). By addressing both geographic context and teacher career stage for support, our research provides nuance to an understudied topic.

Context

U.S. News & World Report compiles a state ranking of Pre-K through 12th grade education that heavily weights college readiness, graduate rates, test scores, pre-K quality, and preschool enrollment. In the most recent rankings, South Carolina ranked 43rd of 50 states (*U.S. News & World Report*, 2018). Given that teacher quality impacts student achievement (Darling-Hammond & Ducommun, 2007; Harris & Sass, 2011), the increasing teacher supply problem in the state of South Carolina is likely a contributing factor to this low ranking. The ranking also highlights the inequity of educational opportunities provided to the state's students. Region specific issues (e.g., economic disparity; rural and urban attractiveness) in South Carolina may contribute to the state's well-documented severe teacher shortages (Garrett, 2017). Though South Carolina is a mostly rural state (Tran, 2018), rurality is not monolithic (Eppley, 2015). Therefore, we focus on a specific rural region, defined by counties that are located on the coastline of South Carolina, geographically known as the Lowcountry, to capture region specific nuanced findings.

Methods

This study is comprised of two phases of data collection. In the first phase, the full sample of participants completed a brief overview survey inquiring demographic information and their suggestions for characteristics of working at their rural school that should be advertised to recruit new teachers. In the second phase, a subsample of 12 participants (11 teachers and one principal) agreed to participate in semi-structured follow-up interviews (Glesne & Peshkin, 1991) to provide additional insight on the administrative support necessary for teacher employment in their rural, hard-to-staff context. The perspective of the principal was included in the qualitative interviews because her insight on the provision of administrative support in a rural context would be unique from the teachers, but also directly relevant as a complement to the teachers' perspective.

The primary goal of the study was to explore what types of administrative support matter for rural teachers recruitment. To accomplish this goal, we conducted a phenomenological qualitative research design. Phenomenology refers to research that studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thoughts, emotion, and social activities (Smith, 2006). Phenomenology is helpful in probing human behavior in educational administration and disciplinary practice, and serves as a useful tool to help scholars interpret their work (Van Manen, 2007).

We took several steps to enhance the validity of the findings. First, we conducted member checking with respondents to ensure that their responses were accurately captured. Second, we created graphs that provided a detailed descriptions of how we conducted the interviews, the measures we took to ensure the accuracy of interviews, observations, and the evidence from which the findings were grounded (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Finally, to improve reliability of the data analyses, two researchers independently conducted the coding of the

qualitative data and the convergent themes were identified as patterns. We also spent time reflecting and discussing the divergent themes to better understand and reconcile points of differentiation to highlight nuanced interpretation to our findings.

Sample

It is important to gain a better understanding of the specifics concerning respondents' familiarity with teaching in their rural contexts because different contexts require different types of support. To do this, we utilized a purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2015) to target only educators from South Carolina rural Lowcountry school districts. The 28 educators that we sampled (representing an 80% response rate) were from one of five Lowcountry school districts, which are located in economically challenged and underdeveloped rural communities from historically marginalized regions of the country. Within these districts, many of the schools are unsurprisingly struggling with limited resources and insufficient financial support, both from the state and the local governments, due to plant closures and declining tax bases (Tran, 2018).

The survey inquired about demographic information from respondents such as their gender, education level, whether they currently live in the Lowcountry, their distance of commute from home to work, as well as years working at their current district, school and in Lowcountry. In addition, we also inquired about their years teaching in rural (but non-Lowcountry areas) and in non-rural areas.

According to survey responses, the full sample of participants spent an average of 7.79 years teaching at their current schools, 9.74 years teaching in the rural Lowcountry and 4.6 years teaching in rural schools (outside of the Lowcountry) in general. In contrast, they spent an average of 2.85 years at a non-rural school; although, 66% of participants indicated that they had no teaching experiences in such locales, and about 17% indicated that they had less than 5 years of experience teaching in non-rural settings. As reflective of the general teaching population, the majority of participants identified as female (65.71%) and held a bachelor's degree (71.43%) as their highest educational attainment. Males represented 34.29% of participants, and those who held a master's degree and master's plus credit comprised 34.29% and 20% respectively. Associates, specialist, or doctoral degrees were held by approximately 2.86% of participants. The majority (59.75%) of participating education professionals were from elementary schools, although middle (11.38%) and high schools (14.22%) also were present. Figure 2 provides information about the five-year career plan for the sampled rural educators—including whether they intend to stay employed in their current position or geographic location. The majority intended to stay in their current roles.

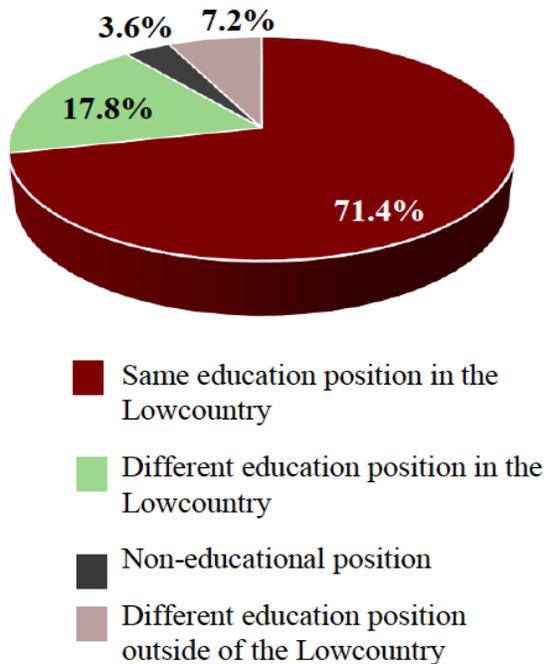


Figure 1. Five-Year Career Plan for Current Rural Educators

The survey also observed participant commutes and the circumstances of those commutes. Participants noted that they traveled an average of 18.23 miles one way in their work commute. While most (46.5%) indicated only having to travel 1-10 miles to work, there are a significant portion of participants (7.1%) that travel more than 60 miles to work daily. The latter distance was referenced by some respondents who were so satisfied with their current employment situation that they were willing to make the commute. Past researchers have suggested teachers prefer to work close to where they grew up (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005). This was supported by the fact that the majority of participants (56.3%) shared that they grew up in the Lowcountry; however, a substantial percentage (43.7%) of respondents did not.

Qualitative Interviews

We employed qualitative methods to obtain data from rural educators through semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009) with a subset (n=12) of the larger sample to understand what types of administrative support rural teachers perceive as critical for retention of new teachers and non-new teachers respectively. A \$100 incentive was provided for each interviewee.

The interviews were transcribed using Nivivo and REV. These interview transcripts used qualitative data analysis including both inductive and deductive coding (Glesne & Peshkin, 1991; Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Saldana, 2013). There were two rounds of coding. The first round focused on theming the data, which began with an open coding process in which the research team members examined interview transcripts individually and then as a team to identify the common themes within the transcripts. These themes appeared based on participants' perspective on what types of administrative support they thought were important for teacher retention. The second round of coding featured a deductive approach, utilizing codes from the literature (e.g., rural school leadership) to develop a set of themes for related codes with initial categorization and

subcategories (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Saldana, 2013). We analyzed the teacher interviews in relation to each research question.

Results

Survey Findings

In an open-ended response format, respondents were asked what characteristics of working at their rural school should be advertised to recruit new teachers to their schools. Respondents were not restricted to only identifying one working characteristic, so numerous participants listed more than one. For example, Teacher A might list “Technology” and “Family oriented culture,” whereas Teacher B might list “Administrative support” and “Family oriented culture.” Consistent with our hypothesis based on the literature, the most frequently mentioned category was administrative support. This and the ranking for the remaining top 9 categories can be seen in Table 1. As mentioned earlier, these characteristics were not mutually exclusive for teacher respondents, so they were able to identify more than one characteristic that they considered advantageous to advertise (this results in the overall percentage not equating to 100%).

Table 1.

Teacher identified rural working characteristics for advertisement to recruit new teachers

Identified Rural Advantages for Teacher Employment	Percent
Administrative support	48.15%
Family oriented culture	44.44%
Community willing to offer support (e.g., supplies, volunteer)	33.33%
Smaller class size	29.63%
Deeper Connection with Students (e.g., watching them grow up)	29.63%
Technology	25.93%
Friendly environment	18.52%
Autonomy in classroom	18.52%
Leadership opportunities	14.81%

Note. Percentages do not total 100 because participants were able to list more than one category.

Interview Findings

Interviews conducted with the rural educators showed several aspects of rural administrative support that are critical for teacher retention. The results reflect the necessity of rural specific administrative support due to adequate rural teaching preparation, building relational trust (built from open communication), providing mentorship, offering financial incentives, advertising the community, maintaining administrative consistency/stability, and providing teachers a positive, collaborative, and open work culture.

Lack of Adequate Rural Specific Teaching Preparation

Many interviewees were not originally from the Lowcountry area and most of the respondents indicated that they were not adequately prepared by their teacher preparation program to teach in

a rural context. This is especially true for those who did not conduct their practicum in a rural school. Succinctly put by one teacher, “The actual teacher preparation itself, I don’t think prepared me for a rural, small school district.” Several interviewees criticized their teacher preparation program’s over-emphasis on theory and suggested the need for more diversified field experience. One 20-year veteran recalled that she was better prepared for rural teaching through her substitute teaching experience with the district than her teacher preparation program. Even teachers that grew up in the local rural community agreed their formal teacher preparation did not prepare them to work with their students. Because many teachers did not receive adequate rural specific teacher pre-service preparation, this necessitated rural specific administrative support when they eventually ended up in the field.

Relational Trust (from Open Communication)

Open communication between principals and teachers was often cited as critical for the provision of adequate administrative support. One teacher explained that this entailed a space where teachers could “talk to [the principal] without any backlash...that [the principal] can express the way [he/she] feels, or [his/her] concerns without having any retaliation.” Because of the high teacher turnover experienced by many of the rural high poverty schools, there are concerns that administrative feedback to new teachers may be taken personally and result in the teacher leaving without an easy replacement. As one mid-career teacher explained,

The turnover rate ... has been high also...For new teachers coming into the workforce, this is the first job. This is their first boss that they have ever encountered, so her word is gold, or his word is gold. The way discipline or the way something needs to be improved in a classroom needs to be said in a manner that it's not a personal thing, and I don't know how to tell a first-year teacher it's not personal. It's hard. It really is.

For more seasoned teachers, they want to know that an “open-door policy” is there with administrators to voice “their concerns and problems...to have somebody sit there and listen,” especially if they want to “run” ideas by them.

Providing Mentorship

One of the elements that most teachers mentioned to improve retention rate is mentorship. As one teacher explained, “Whether it's a new teacher or as long as you're new to that school district, it is necessary that the school/school district to provide some amount of mentorship.” Another teacher who has been teaching 13 years in the Lowcountry shared that mid-career teachers could serve as mentors for beginning teachers, and veteran teachers could be a sounding board to discuss strategies with the mentor to help support and retain them.

While mentorship is important, the mere provision of a mentor for teachers is not sufficient. Principals must ensure that the mentors are providing the requisite support to teachers, otherwise the teachers may still turnover. This was exemplified in the experience one first-year teacher shared about her former beginning teacher colleague who was struggling with her students. The colleague explained that she was assigned a mentor, but “the mentor was also very busy, so she didn’t get...what she needed. So, she left and never came back.” The teacher explained that if the mentor had been a partner teacher, teaching the same class as her, they would have had more opportunities to talk about the students. Because rural educators often have to wear “multiple hats” given the small school structure, the suggestion of having teacher partners was meant to reduce

the additional work duties of the mentor. The logic is that if the mentor's mentorship role is a closely related extension of his/her current duties, this increases the likelihood the mentor would be able to adequately serve a support role for new teachers.

Financial Issues

Many teachers identified the need for more pay or funded professional development to increase rural teacher employment but were also aware of the economic challenges associated with offering those in an economically impoverished rural context (which often pay less than other school districts because of less revenue generated from the lower rural property values). Therefore, one beginning teacher suggested an alternative to more pay, such as flexible scheduling (working a four day a week schedule instead of five). Moreover, while financial incentives are important, one seasoned teacher cautioned that financial incentives may fill rural vacancies, but appropriate support is needed for teacher retention:

I don't know why they [new rural teachers] came here other than maybe there was incentive for them to be here, a monetary incentive, and that was the reason they came here. But I do know that the teachers that stick to teaching in a rural area, they need a lot of support.

According to her, this support included teaching and resource assistance, the latter of which is particularly relevant given that "a lot of our teachers put their own money into the classroom."

Selling the School and Introducing Teachers to the Students/Community

Many teachers noted the importance of being introduced to the community as a critical, rural-specific administrative support. Even a 30-year veteran teacher shared her need for this, "I came to a new district and I still have to learn even though I taught 30 years. I had not taught in [this rural] county. So, there is a difference coming from an affluent country to a more rural county." One sixth of the total sample participants were international teachers, so they had the complexities of having cultural differences and attitudes towards education from their homeland, which was compounded by their lack of familiarity with the rural communities. One teacher noted the importance of "Making them [rural teachers] feel more welcomed. Inviting them to take part of things in the community... invite them to church, invite them out to dinner."

Indeed Ulferts (2016) suggested that "rural communities need to make every effort to include teacher transplants into the social fabric of the community lessening the isolation many rural teachers experience. To lessen social and geographic isolation, rural leaders need to take action to develop a stronger community connection with rural teachers" (p. 20). This includes inclusion of new rural teachers to community gatherings, book clubs, etc., all in an effort to familiarize the community and rural teacher with each other. A 30-year veteran teacher remembered that her principal took her on the Gullah tour several years ago and showed her the neighborhood and how the students lived. During the tour, the principal not only provided background history of the students' families to the new teachers but also pointed out the issues that children living in the rural areas were facing and how those issues differed from children in more urban or suburban environments. This tour seemed to be highly educational for the new teachers and helped them better understand their students.

Personal relationships with rural residents, especially romantic ones, have been linked with teacher retention as well (Rooks, 2018). Supporting evidence from research in the past, participants from this study noted the importance of romantic connections for their recruitment and retention

and cited the “lack of available singles” as a deterrent for attracting teaching talent. Even though the rural community may not offer a variety of options for young adults looking for a partner, teachers receive other social benefits when they are plugged into the community and its activities. This is particularly salient for teachers because rural schools represent a hub for the local community (Eppley, 2015).

Maintaining Administrative Consistency/Stability

While administrative support is important, it may not always be there. Some respondents shared that their schools experienced high levels of teacher turnover that often was a result of lacking consistent support. In support of the literature (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Jacob, Goddard, Kim, Miller, & Goddard, 2015), respondents noted that lack of consistent administrative support often exists because of leadership turnover, which then promotes teacher turnover. One teacher explained how constant principal turnover sustained *uncertainty* for teachers, which was particularly damaging for new teachers who often were already in survival mode. Being a first-year teacher in a school with a first-year principal meant that both had a *learning curve*, so the requisite administrative support was not always there. Another teacher explained that superintendent turnover is just as problematic, having experienced eight superintendents, six principals and four assistant principals in the time span of ten years.

One teacher shared that her district was very clear that “we’re a training ground. They recruit the teachers from Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, those areas. Bring them down here, they work for three to five years, and then go back because they realize, at least [this] county, is challenging.” This set the tone that given the hardships associated with the local environment, the district has a reputation of being a temporary or transitional employer by many.

Providing a Positive, Collaborative and Open Work Culture

Unfortunately, multiple teacher respondents shared the sentiment that the district focus is often on recruitment while neglecting retention. Study participants expressed the importance of having a positive work culture. A first-year teacher said the teacher camaraderie in the Lowcountry is more close-knit and connected than that of the big cities. When she taught in Texas, she noticed they had a lot of funding and resources, but the teachers viewed the class as “always my class, my class, my class” whereas the rural teachers shared resources and supported each other. Another teacher stated that the close-knit connections in the school make the faculty like a “family” and the administrator supports that cohesion. She said the current administrator does a great job, facilitating support between teachers and allowing teachers to have their voices heard. Being loyal and professional means having the integrity to support teachers by enforcing policies, despite small town politics. The rural principal participant elaborated:

If someone has done something that is not right, that’s against policy, and you are following the code of conduct and policy. And this is your business partner’s child, you’re still going to be ethical, but causes a rift. I’ve been told ‘Do you not know who this is?’ You’re still going to do the right thing. Even threatened. ‘You don’t know who you’re messing with.’ You’re still going to do the right thing, but being in a small town, small rural town, that can be complicated as well. It has its pros and its cons.

Overall, the interview findings demonstrate that while some aspects of good administrative support for teacher retention may be universal, there are unique challenges in rural high poverty districts that require differentiated leadership support.

Conclusion

Survey data from our research supported the importance of administrative support for rural teacher employment. Qualitative data obtained from participant interviews were then used to ascertain the perspectives of rural teachers concerning what types of administrative support they felt were required to attract and sustain rural teacher employment. Our findings support researchers who have suggested that teacher preparation programs often do not adequately prepare teachers for rural placements, resulting in teachers either seeking non-rural positions upon graduation or leaving rural positions for non-rural ones shortly after employment (Moffa, 2018). This is problematic because teachers that lack rural teaching experience in their preparation program have been found to be less willing to teach in rural schools (Tran, Hogue, & Moon, 2015).

Furthermore, one notable difference between the new and experienced rural teachers was the type of support needed. For example, veteran teachers mentioned needing to have their voices be heard, while the new teachers expressed greater needs for mentorship. New teachers also require introduction and assistance with integration into the community (including experienced teachers who are new to the school). Contextual circumstances (e.g., principal turnover) associated with high poverty rural schools also exacerbated traditional support needs. These problems require nuanced rural-specific solutions.

Implications for Leadership Preparation and Development

Drawing on our findings, we suggest that leadership preparation and development should prepare administrators with knowledge concerning how to provide the rural specific support necessary for teachers to gain self-efficacy and develop/maintain the organizational commitment for their retention in the hard-to-staff context. In this study, we highlight several areas worth emphasizing in teacher staffing efforts. It suggests that one of the most effective rural teaching staffing strategies is “rooted within the community” (Hammer et al., 2005, p. 12). Given that rural communities offer stronger community relations and deeper camaraderie of teachers and students, schools can leverage this strength by integrating teachers into the community. Full integration into rural communities can serve to mitigate feelings of social isolation, a contributing factor to rural turnover (Anttilla & Vaananen, 2013). Personal relationships with long-time rural residents and the formation of dense social networks have been found to promote rural teacher retention (Rooks, 2018), which this study supports as well. Indeed, the human connections make the job hard to walk away from. Therefore, it is important that new teachers are welcomed and connected to the community (Hammer et al., 2005). In fact, socializing in the community has been found to be critical and related to teacher efficacy in other work (Adams & Wood, 2015). Through a rural school district’s continual onboarding process, teachers can be included in community activities and social activities through religious and civic organizations.

Another recommendation for rural school districts is to connect the teachers in rural schools to advanced education resources. Teachers from rural communities can take continuing education classes online or be a part of an online degree program. The rural teachers can focus on their

professional development by taking online classes so that they can learn about pedagogy and best practices without having to travel a long distance to attend graduate level classes.

Finally, rural principals can develop their strengths in many of the support areas to improve teacher retention. This can be done through professional development, which may also serve the needs of maintaining consistency of leadership stability. In their evaluation of a principal professional development program, Jacob et al. (2017) suggested that a key lever to retaining rural teachers is retaining rural principals. The program was found to be effective for improving principal and teacher retention, supporting the value of principal development for multiple outcomes.

Of course, this study, like all research, has its limitations. Because of the small sample size and purposive sampling methodology (Patton, 2015), there are limitations concerning the generalizability of the findings. While this study is not statistically representative of all rural teachers, the use of a focused qualitative study allows us “to glean insights from the data that would have broad significance” (Castro, Kelly & Shih, 2010, p. 624) by gaining in depth where breadth was not achieved. In particular, drawn through rural educator perspectives, the findings of this study illustrate the importance of the provision of talent centered education leadership (TCELI, 2019), especially in the areas of administrative support. Different supports such as building relational trust, provision of mentorship, connecting teachers with community, offering incentives, and providing respect, loyalty, and a voice are important strategies that matter for rural teacher talent management. Future research should empirically examine whether these types of support matter differently in other contexts (e.g., suburban, ~~suburban~~ and urban communities) to provide better understanding of how contextual leadership can be best leveraged to lead schools.

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Leadership Competencies for Global Education Leaders: A Delphi Study of UNESCO Delegates and Administrators

George Saltsman
Lamar University

Kaye Shelton
Lamar University

The rise of globalization has increased the need for globally prepared leaders in all sectors, including education. Despite clear calls within the literature for empirical research to support the development of globally prepared education leaders, little research has occurred and no prior peer-reviewed study regarding essential global leadership competencies in education was located. Due to this absence, a Delphi study, conducted in English, French, and Spanish, was conducted with an expert panel of official UNESCO delegates, national delegates of the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network, and senior-level UNESCO Education Sector executives to identify essential leadership competencies for global education leaders. After completing three successive survey rounds, the panel reached consensus on 70 essential competencies required for future global education leaders including an ordinal ranking of essentiality of global education leadership competencies. The findings of the expert panel conclude that when preparing leaders in global education, general leadership competencies still apply and that global leadership competencies overall were valued more highly than domestic leadership competencies or even managerial-focused education competencies. Additional analysis revealed alignment with broad twenty-first century skills and a balance between personality-based and situational leadership competencies.

Keywords: global education leadership, education leadership, leadership competencies, education leadership competencies

Globalization is profoundly changing our world. Over the last century, advances in transportation, telecommunications, and trade have resulted in an unprecedented interconnecting of global economies and cultures. These forces have also been a major disruptor to many industries (Dean, 2005; Litz, 2011), including education (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019; Christensen, Horn, Caldera, & Soares, 2011; Christensen, Johnson, Horn, 2008; Friedman, 2005; Litz, 2011). In fact, globalization is one of the most frequently documented challenges facing education leaders (Khan, 2018; Ong, 2012; Patrizio, & Stone-Johnson, 2016; Pierce & Pedersen, 1997; UNESCO, 1995).

Globalization also occurs in all aspects of education, including higher education. Over twenty years ago, Pierce and Pedersen (1997) identified globalization as one of the most significant disruptors college presidents face and expect it to continue to rise significantly in the future. Similarly, the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO, 1995) *Policy Paper for Change and Development in Higher Education* placed globalization as one of five major trends facing higher education. More recently, scholars are still recommending globalization should be considered as an impact on leadership development as well as competition within higher education (Altbach, 2015; Altbach et al., 2019; Cumberland, Ann Herd, Meera Alagaraja, & Kerrick, 2016; Ghemawat & Bastian, 2017). The literature further documents numerous international efforts to respond to globalization in primary and secondary education with the nations of Pakistan (Saeed, Zulfiqar, Ata, & Rathore, 2015), Turkey (Ilgar, 2011), and Malaysia (Chang-Da & Sirat, 2018) as just three examples of many.

The need to identify global leadership competencies for education leaders is clearly documented (ACE, 1998; Litz, 2011; Mendenhall, Weber, Arna Arnardottir, & Oddou, 2017; Reimers, 2009; Sullivan, 2011; Tichnor-Wagner & Manise, 2019). Consequently, many authors speculated while current training programs for education leadership may be acceptable for domestic leadership, they are not or may not be adequate for preparing global education leaders (Mendenhall et al., 2017; Tichnor-Wagner & Manise, 2019; Walker, 2018; Zhang, Bohley, & Wheeler, 2017). This lack of formal preparation has resulted in what has been described as a chronic deficiency of globally focused leaders in all levels of education (Goodman, 2012; Marquardt & Berger, 2000; Mendenhall et al., 2008; Smith, Caver, Saslow, & Thomas, 2009; Tichnor-Wagner & Manise, 2019; Winter, 2003).

Literature Review Summary

The global leadership literature suggests past research on leadership development is not sufficient when placed in a global environment (Black & Gregersen, 2000; Hollenbeck, 2001; Jenkins, 2012; Lewis, Boston, & Peterson, 2017; Morrison, 2000). Even when examining the efficacy of domestic leadership in global contexts, scholars urged the leadership practices and paradigms of the last century must be updated (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2008; Dugan, 2012). The literature also revealed competencies that are transferable between organizational cultures and international cultures should be prioritized in importance when creating global leadership competency models (Jokinen, 2005; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998; Walker, 2018).

Many authors cite a lack of global leadership preparation programs (Goodman, 2012; Kim & McLean, 2015; Marquardt & Berger, 2000; Mendenhall et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2009; Terrell, 2011; Walker, 2018; Winter, 2003). In fact, Gillis (2011) asserted a need “to address the gap between global leadership needs and the capacity shortage” (p. 117). Yet, due to the lack of empirical research, there is no common agreement on how to address the shortage of global leaders, the format development programs should take (Cseh et al., 2013), or what content these programs should include (Konyu-Fogel, 2011). In addition, the literature is clear on the need to develop leaders who possess strong competencies in global leadership (Davis, 2015; Jeong, Lim, & Park, 2017; Kim & McLean, 2015; Morrison, 2000; Park, Jeong, Jang, Yoon, & Lim, 2018; Patrizio, & Stone-Johnson, 2016; Suutari, 2002). Unfortunately, formal training programs are not keeping pace with that demand (Walker, 2018). Because of the time it takes to obtain the competencies required to become a proficient as a global leader (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2000), researchers have turned to identifying the essential competencies in the hopes that they can be delivered quickly and effectively (Terrell, 2011). Global leadership competencies for industries outside of education are numerous and domestic educational leadership competencies are well established (Cumberland et al., 2016). However, specific global leadership competencies for educational leadership have yet to be identified through empirical analysis.

Methodology

The purpose of this Delphi study was to gain consensus from a panel of experts in the global education community regarding the most essential competencies required for future global education leaders. This study sought to further evaluate the essentiality of those global education leadership competencies by providing an ordinal ranking. Specifically, the study explored the following research questions:

1. What are the essential competencies for global education leaders?
2. What is the ordinal ranking of essentiality of competencies for global education leaders?

The Delphi Method, developed by the RAND Corporation in the early 1950s (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963), employs a diverse panel of experts to gather and refine knowledge through a series of structured group interactions (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). In addition, Powell (2003) recommended the use of Delphi Method when judgments of individuals are needed to “address a lack of agreement or incomplete state of knowledge . . . [thus] the Delphi is particularly valued for its ability to structure and organize group communication” (p. 377). For this study, the literature review identified an incomplete state of knowledge regarding global education leadership competencies and establishing those competencies requires the input of a group of experts; therefore, the Delphi Method was determined to be an appropriate methodology.

This Delphi study, conducted with simultaneous translations available in English, French, and Spanish, surveyed three communities of experts in global education that consisted of: national delegates of UNESCO permanent and associate member states (typically holding the title of ambassador), national delegates from The UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (appointed individuals working for a national commission to UNESCO), and senior-level UNESCO Education Sector executives.

The Delphi Method develops consensus through iterative rounds that is considered to be a relevant and valid measure of accumulated opinions of experts (Baker, Lovell, & Harris, 2006;

Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000; Winzenried, 1997). The expert panelists in this study participated in three consensus-seeking rounds, an established norm for Delphi studies (Sizer et al., 2007; Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007; Turoff, 2002). The strength of the Delphi Method comes from the collective experience and expertise of panel (Adler & Ziglio, 1996; Linstone & Turoff, 2002; Rossman & Eldredge, 1982). For this study, each panelist had at least 10 years professional experience in education with the highest being 37 years; for the total panel, there was an average (arithmetic mean) of 16.7 years of professional experience in education. Furthermore, the participating panelists in this study were highly diverse and evenly distributed throughout the five United Nations Geopolitical Regional Groups (Table 1).

Table 1

List of United Nations Geopolitical Regional Groups with Participating Panelists

United Nations Geopolitical Regional Groups	Country Name
African Group (9 of 54 possible= 17% participation)	Burundi
	Ghana
	Lesotho
	Liberia
	Mali
	Nigeria
	Tunisia
	Zambia
	Zimbabwe
Asia-Pacific Group (12 of 53 possible= 23% participation)	Bangladesh
	India
	Indonesia
	Iraq
	Kuwait
	Mongolia
	Palau
	Papua New Guinea
	Philippines
	Thailand
	Uzbekistan
Yemen	
Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) (4 of 33 possible = 12% participation)	Dominican Republic
	Paraguay
	Suriname
	Trinidad and Tobago
Eastern European Group (EEG) (3 of 23 possible = 13% participation)	Bulgaria
	Lithuania
	Montenegro
Western European and Others Group (WEOG) (9 of 29 possible = 31% participation)	France
	Germany
	Greece
	Malta

Netherlands
 New Zealand
 Sweden
 United Kingdom
 United States of America

To prepare for the study, a meta-analysis examining 70 individual studies on global leadership was completed and revealed a total of 522 previously validated competences. Additionally, 239 validated competences were identified from an extensive meta-analysis on education leadership competences. Combining the meta-analyses of global leadership competencies and education leadership competencies resulted in 761 total competencies. Using a rigorous coding process, a fourth meta-analysis was conducted to remove duplicates and sort the 761 combined competencies into in 61 unique competency clusters.

Following their response to the literature-derived competencies, panelists were encouraged to suggest potential global leadership competencies not previously identified within the literature meta-analysis. The open-ended questions resulted in 51 additional competencies, of which 35 were determined to be unique after the coding process was employed. Between literature-derived and panelist–provided competencies, the expert panel examined a combined total of 96 potential global education competencies during this study. Using an online survey tool, these 61 literature-identified competency clusters and 35 panelist–provided competencies were presented to the panel using a bi-polar Likert scale instrument to gauge essentiality.

Summary of Findings

Through three rounds of consensus finding, the expert panelists reached consensus on 70 essential competencies for global educational leadership out of the combined pool of 96 presented competencies. Table 2 presents the competencies that reached consensus. Competencies that failed to reach consensus are presented in Table 3. Following the three consensus finding rounds, panel members then provided an ordinal ranking of the 10 most important validated competencies. Individual panelists responses were combined and tabulated with 10 points assigned for a first place ranking, 9 points assigned for a second place ranking and continuing to 1 point being assigned for a tenth place ranking. The ordinal ranking by frequency of selection is presented in Table 2 and includes the origin (literature-provided or panelist-provided) for each competency.

Table 2
Ordinal Ranking Ordinal Ranking of Consensus Competencies by Points Awarded

Competencies			
Ranking	Competency	Source	Points
1 (Tie)	Vision	Lit	35
1 (Tie)	Leadership (capacity to lead others, empowering others)	Lit	35

3	Integrity (honest, trustworthy, responsible, ethical)	Lit	29
4	Global mindset (understanding of other cultures, world perspective, the capacity to think globally)	Lit	24
5	Ability to cope with stress (balance tensions, life balance)	Lit	21
6 (Tie)	Creative thinking	Lit	20
6 (Tie)	Leadership by example	Panel	20
8	Open-mindedness	Lit	19
9	Motivation	Lit	18
10 (Tie)	Problem solving (assessment, analysis, analytical thinking)	Lit	17
10 (Tie)	Sincere/Honest/Truthful	Panel	17
10 (Tie)	Maturity	Lit	17
10 (Tie)	Social Adaptability (Able to feel the situation and people)	Panel	17
14 (Tie)	Personal style (the way one presents oneself)	Lit	16
14 (Tie)	Proactive	Panel	16
16	Decision making (judgment, decisiveness)	Lit	15
17 (Tie)	Patience	Lit	13
17 (Tie)	Confidence	Lit	13
19	Listening skills	Lit	12
20 (Tie)	Ethos	Panel	11
20 (Tie)	High standards (quality)	Lit	11
20 (Tie)	Empathy (concern for others, sensitivity)	Lit	11
20 (Tie)	Relationship building (building partnerships and alliances - external focus)	Lit	11

20 (Tie)	Advocacy for education (commitment to values of education)	Lit	11
25	Team building (building work teams and empowering teams - internal focus)	Lit	10
26 (Tie)	Curiosity	Lit	10
26 (Tie)	Content knowledge	Panel	10
28 (Tie)	Conflict management (diplomacy, negotiation)	Lit	9
28 (Tie)	Optimism	Lit	9
28 (Tie)	Tolerance for ambiguity (ability to manage uncertainty)	Lit	9
28 (Tie)	Flexibility	Lit	9
32	Collaboration (team member, sharing leadership)	Lit	8
33 (Tie)	Cross-cultural management (working across cultures, balancing of tension, intercultural competence)	Lit	8
33 (Tie)	Social awareness (emotional intelligence, sensitivity to others' needs)	Lit	8
33 (Tie)	General communication skills (written, oral, non-verbal)	Lit	8
36	Strategic thinking	Lit	8
37 (Tie)	Knowledge (intelligence)	Lit	7
37 (Tie)	Change agent (leads and facilitates the change process)	Lit	7
37 (Tie)	Appreciates proactive subordinates	Panel	7
40	Meaningfully derolling and engaging in professional discussions with subordinates	Panel	6
41	Personal energy (dynamic, energizing)	Lit	5
42 (Tie)	Self-control (to think before acting, control personal conduct)	Lit	5

42 (Tie)	Advocacy for students (commitment to student-centered learning and student satisfaction)	Lit	5
42 (Tie)	Work Ethic	Panel	5
42 (Tie)	Ability to understand research and data from a multi-disciplinary approach	Panel	5
46 (Tie)	Courage	Lit	4
46 (Tie)	Persuasion (influencing, inspiring, motivational)	Lit	4
46 (Tie)	Cross-cultural communication skills	Lit	4
46 (Tie)	Gumption (shrewd or spirited initiative and resourcefulness)	Panel	4
50 (Tie)	Result-oriented	Panel	3
50 (Tie)	Manage time effectively	Panel	3
50 (Tie)	Respect	Lit	3
53 (Tie)	Operational management (coordination, organization, administration, delegating)	Lit	2
53 (Tie)	Commitment/Perseverance	Panel	2
53 (Tie)	Professionalism	Panel	2
53 (Tie)	Holistic view of well-being	Panel	2
57	Cultural awareness (cultural intelligence, appreciation for diversity)	Lit	1
58 (Tie)	Hardiness (overcomes adversity, persistence, tenacity)	Lit	0
58 (Tie)	Self awareness (understanding one's self and role)	Lit	0
58 (Tie)	Commitment to personal professional development and learning	Lit	0
58 (Tie)	Personnel building (hiring, developing and empowering individuals - internal focus)	Lit	0
58 (Tie)	Commitment to safe work environments (balancing organizational tensions, global vs. local tensions)	Lit	0

58 (Tie)	Understanding of educational systems (college structure, student affairs, trends in education)	Lit	0
58 (Tie)	Understanding of organizational systems (global work structures)	Lit	0
58 (Tie)	Language Skills	Lit	0
58 (Tie)	Timely (punctual)	Lit	0
58 (Tie)	Fairness	Panel	0
58 (Tie)	Conceptual Thinking	Panel	0
58 (Tie)	Wisdom	Panel	0
58 (Tie)	Knowledge of the local context	Panel	0

Table 3

Competencies Not Achieving Consensus

Competency	
Academic administration (instructional leadership, academic success)	ICT (computer and technology) skills
Accomplished (cultivated, adept)	Legal awareness
Belief in God (religious)	Life skills
Budgeting and fiscal management	Long-term orientation (as opposed to temporary position abroad)
Business savvy (understanding of business systems)	Low neuroticism (not sensitive, obsessive, tense or anxious)
Capacity in evidence-based management	<i>Political philosophy</i>
Comprehensive	Protective
Deep knowledge of global educational agenda	Rigorous
Entrepreneurial (risk-taking)	Straightforward
Extroversion (outgoing personality)	Studious
Global capitalism (economic integration and profitability)	Ubuntu (A Nguni Bantu term for human kindness, humanity towards others)
Good Humor	Understanding of comparative education
Humility	Understanding and experience in ethics

Discussion

Overall, competencies from the literature connected to general leadership (e.g. *vision, leadership, and integrity*) were validated and ranked highest in the ordinal ranking procedure. As might be expected, competencies that were more specific to specialized areas of for-profit business leadership (e.g. *global capitalism, business savvy, and entrepreneurial*) did not reach consensus. Interestingly, the panel also showed less interest in managerial-focused competencies, even if they

were education specific (e.g. *deep knowledge of global educational agenda, academic administration, and understanding of comparative education*).

When examining the 62 competency clusters distilled from the meta-analysis of global leadership and education leadership literature, significant overlap is observed with the findings from this study. With domain specific competencies (*global capitalism, business savvy, and ICT skills*) and managerial-focused (*budgeting and fiscal management, and legal awareness*) excluded, only three global leadership competency clusters (*humility, entrepreneurial, and low neuroticism*) did not reach consensus by the panel. Furthermore, overlap with education leadership competencies was also observed with *humility* being the only literature-derived education leadership competency not validated once domain specific competencies (*academic administration, and budgeting and fiscal management*) were excluded. There were, however, 20 panelist-provided competencies not previously identified in the global leadership or educational leadership literature that were validated by this study. However, even though validated by panel consensus, only five competencies made it into the top 20 ranked competencies: *Leadership by example, Sincere/Honest/Truthful, Social Adaptability, Proactive, and Ethos*.

The global education leadership competencies that reached consensus were, however, significantly different from commonly listed domestic leadership competencies cited in the literature. Within this study, leadership skills related to the intercultural experience are far more apparent (e.g. *global mindset, social adaptability, tolerance for ambiguity, and social awareness*) and stand out as unique when compared to domestic leadership competencies. There is also an observed alignment of skills often referred to as twenty-first century skills (e.g. *creative thinking, problem solving, and adaptability*) that ranked higher than content-centric competencies (e.g. *content knowledge, knowledge, and commitment to personal professional development and learning*).

Lokkesmoe (2009) previously suggested the application of Fielder's contingency theory of 1967 would demonstrate a balance between a leader's personality traits and idiosyncratic competencies when performing a leadership competency analysis. Examining the competencies validated by the panel in this study, Lokkesmoe's assumption regarding Fielder's contingency theory appears to be supported. Analysis of the competencies that reached consensus demonstrates those that are personality-based (e.g. *optimism, maturity, patience, confidence, and courage*) in contrast to those that are more situational (*decision making, understanding of organizational systems, operational management, advocacy for students, and advocacy for education*).

In comparing literature-suggested and panelist-suggested competencies, competencies located from the literature had a higher percentage make it into the consensus stage. The panel approved 50 of the 61 (82%) of the literature-suggested competencies while only approving 20 of the 35 (57%) of the panelist-suggested competencies. Furthermore, of the panelists-suggested competencies, only *leadership by example* and *social adaptability* were in the top 20 ordinal ranked competencies. This study appears to provide an additional level of credence to the effectiveness of previous global leadership and educational leadership studies in identifying applicable competencies.

Of all the competencies presented, both from the literature and from panelists themselves, only the panelist-provided competency of *Belief in God* was negatively scored. All other competencies were positively scored, even if there was not enough agreement to pass the threshold level set for consensus in this study. Moreover, *Belief in God* was also the only competency that failed to receive a majority of panelists rank it with some level of essentiality.

This work provides a foundation for which the emerging field of global education leadership research can advance. For researchers and scholars, this work provides a foundational set of empirical findings that can be tested and further empirically validated (or invalidated). In addition to the competencies located from the global leadership literature and education leadership literature, the panel added specific global education leadership competencies not found previously in either body of work.

Within the literature, it has been suggested there is little difference between leadership skills for domestic leadership versus global leadership (Adler & Bartholomew, 1992). Vloeberghs and Macfarlane (2007) proposed that perhaps previous research has failed to adequately define global leadership competencies due to confusion between global and domestic leadership needs. Examining previous competencies derived from the literature on domestic leadership and the competencies generated in this study on global leadership competencies, distinct differences emerged. For example, social skills related to the intercultural experience are far more apparent (e.g. *global mindset*, *social adaptability*, *tolerance for ambiguity*, and *social awareness*) and stand out as unique.

Mintzberg (2004) observed the number of competencies in the literature and warned including too many competencies into a leadership development program could lead to a disorganized and incomplete preparation. Other scholars (Conger & Ready, 2004; Intagliata, Ulrich, & Smallwood, 2000; Munoz, 2007) agreed with Mintzberg, stressing the importance of selecting a small list of competencies that best fit the position, organization, or industry. This study successfully reduced the number of possible global leadership competencies by over 90% by starting with 761 competencies located in the existing literature and reducing to 70 competencies upon which the panel reached consensus.

Within the competency-based leadership literature, the complexity of the competencies is also a considering factor for the efficiency of implementation. Conger and Ready (2004) and Intagliata et al. (2000) urged the creation of competencies that are simple enough to be comprehensible and actionable. Munoz (2007) agreed, asserting leadership competencies must be kept simple for implementation. There is, however, also a risk that competencies become too minimalistic. Kuchinke and Han (2005) established the need to appreciate the depth and complexity of the leadership context within competency selection. They warned that many competency frameworks are not fully able to account for the variability and situational circumstances the real world will present. Conger and Benjamin (1999) also noted this by commenting on the rigidity of competencies and the inability to shape into the leadership context of the individuality of a leader's personality.

Implications for Practice

Because globalization has led to profound changes throughout the world, these initial findings of global education leadership competencies offer implications for both practitioners and scholars. The identification of specific global leadership competencies for education is a foundational component for formal training and development programs to prepare global education leaders. Universities and leadership development programs for education may utilize the findings to expand existing education leadership degrees to become more globally focused or to create new offerings focused exclusively on global education. Additionally, organizations focused on the advancement of education across the globe (e.g. World Bank, UNESCO, and numerous public and private foundations) now have metrics to develop and assess the effectiveness of their investments

in global education leadership, as well as their assessment of selecting their own internal global education staff. Beyond training programs, these competencies also provide insight into recruiting, succession planning, career development, talent management, coaching, assessment, and personal reflection of global education leaders.

Moreover, this study validates the appropriateness of the existing literature in the global leadership and education leadership domains as a basis for the study of global education leadership. These existing bodies of work could provide a foundation for building a global education leadership development program until a more robust collection of literature in global education leadership is established. However, the existing global education leadership literature does not overlap with domestic education leadership literature within this context.

As an apparent initial study in global education leadership competencies, this work provides a foundation for which the emerging field of global education leadership research can advance. For researchers and scholars, this work provides an initial set of empirical findings that can be tested and further empirically validated (or invalidated) through more direct research. Such foundational works are required for future research, and the field of global education leadership now has at least one study from which to build upon.

Recommendations for Future Research

As an initial study on global education leadership competencies, this work did not consider possible sub-categorizations of primary, secondary, and tertiary education. The literature clearly differentiates between leadership competencies for pre-tertiary and post-secondary, yet the methodology of this study made no attempt to subcategorize competencies by school classification. Furthermore, this study also used only the three most common of the six official UN languages. Future studies should replicate this study with homogeneous panels of experts in each of the UN Geopolitical and linguistic clusters. Expanding the study outside the UNESCO umbrella would add additional insight and perspective as well. Finally, these findings represent the opinions of experts in global education leadership and have not been validated in actual practice. Further research should be conducted to validate the competencies in actual application.

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Increasing Equity, Access, and Inclusion through Organizational Change: A Study of Implementation and Experiences Surrounding a School District's Journey Towards Culturally Proficient Educational Practice

Jaime E. Welborn
Saint Louis University

This qualitative case study investigated the implementation and experiences of access and equity work in a suburban, public K-12 school district in the Midwest United States. While the literature regarding educational leadership, student educational gaps, and school change is prolific, inequities in policy and practice perpetuate predictable failure for some of our nation's youth. Using the lens of the Cultural Proficiency Framework, this study aimed to address the research questions by examining (1) the educational leader's role in school change; (2) policies and practices used in the school district; (3) the ways in which implementation of the Cultural Proficiency Framework influenced change; and (4) challenges educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency. The findings of the study revealed consistency among three emergent themes for successful culturally proficient practice and policy implementation including outcomes from professional learning communities, diverse family and community involvement, and continuous school improvement towards student achievement. Implications of this study suggest application of the Four Tools of Cultural Proficiency with contextual usage of the emergent themes for leading organizational change towards increased equity, access, and inclusion.

Keywords: educational leadership, equity, cultural proficiency, organizational change, family and community engagement, professional learning communities, school improvement

For decades, educational leadership has served as a catalyst for reform efforts across education (Fullan, 2016; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Murphy & Datnow, 2003; Tucker, 2019). Since the *Coleman Report* (1966) was published, access, opportunity, and achievement gaps between and among students of diverse racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds, have been the focus of research and goals of educational reform efforts across the United States (Apple & Beane, 1995; Fullan, 2000; Jencks, 1972; Sarason, 1996). While the roles of educational leaders have undergone fundamental change with increased focus on instruction and learning (Cotton, 2003; Glatthorn, 2000; Smith and Andrews, 1989), it is important to note that culturally proficient educational leaders have led the way through transformative leadership in standing firm against oppressive educational systems by fighting for those students who have historically been underserved due to their racial and ethnic identity and/or social class (Terrell, Terrell, Lindsey, & Lindsey, 2018). The increasing concern regarding inequitable student outcomes, that presage predictable failure for these students, have led educational leaders across the country and those responsible for leadership preparation programs to seek knowledge and skills related to developing equitable policies and practices within their districts, schools, and classrooms.

Research related to evidence-based practice is necessary for our society to disrupt access and educational gap trends and empower leaders to implement and sustain equity work into the everyday practices of their districts and schools. Many, like Eaveston School District leaders, are implementing the equity framework of *Cultural Proficiency* to address inequities found in their service to diverse populations, improve school effectiveness, and fulfill the moral imperative of education (Fullan, 2003; Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrell, & Lindsey, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

Miles and Huberman (1994) described a conceptual framework as a tool for explaining the main concepts studied in research including key factors, constructs, and variables. The conceptual framework used in this qualitative case study sought to describe the relationship between cultural diversity, economics, power, policy, pedagogy, school improvement, and student achievement outcomes. The research analysis integrates these constructs with the equity framework of Cultural Proficiency (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Issacs, 1989).

The *Cultural Proficiency Framework* is an interrelated set of four tools that assist educational leaders in performing tasks such as developing and implementing school board policies, allocating resources, using assessment data, delivering curriculum and instruction, interacting with parents and community members, and planning and delivering professional development (Lindsey et al., 2019). One tool, *the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency*, leads educators to understand how to overcome resistance to change in schools. Another tool, *the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency*, guides the development and implication of positive personal values and organizational practices and policies to counter the systemic nature of the barriers. *The Cultural Proficiency Continuum* is a third tool comprised of six points, three negative and three positive, that depict the range of unhealthy to healthy practices and policies. In using the Continuum and the fourth tool, *the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency*, educators identify practices and policies that produce equitable outcomes and those in areas of needed improvement. Ethical decisions and intentional actions lead to organizational change (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2019).

As educational leaders consider systemic, transformative organizational change to improve outcomes and create effective schools (Lezotte & Synder, 2011; Sergiovanni, 1989), increase equity, and serve all, they must keep constant vigilance of self in their roles as change agents (Gay, 2000; Howard 2006; Nelson & Guerra, 2014). The starting point for long-term, systemic change does not begin with changing the system or others around us. It is commenced by change within ourselves (Dilts, 1990; Fullan, 1997; Gardner, 2004; Lindsey et al., 2019).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation and experiences of cultural proficiency work in a suburban, public K-12 school district in the Midwest United States. The following research questions were used as a guide to fulfill the objectives of this study:

1. How do educational leaders report/describe their role in school change for culturally proficient practice?
2. What policies and practices are used in the school district related to culturally proficient practice?
3. In what ways do the school district's implementation and experiences influence changes regarding culturally proficient practice to serve all students?
4. What challenges do educational leaders face during the work of cultural proficiency?

Review of Related Literature

The foundations of education are rooted in a belief that educated children become better citizens. Although diversity holds great importance in democracy, too many schools in this country continue with systems, policies, and practices that largely reflect the values, behaviors, and aspirations of the most powerful groups (Apple & Beane, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Ravitch, 1985; Sarason, 1990). Systemic oppression, policy impacts on marginalized students, and privilege and entitlement limit educational outcomes and the reality of access and equity for all (Lindsey, Karns, & Myatt, 2010). The continuous oppression of students of diverse race, ethnicity, and social class has perpetuated inequities and educational performance deficits (Banks & Banks, 1995; Friere, 1970; Hammond, 2015; Howard, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008).

Recently, scholars indicated culturally proficient educational leaders are advocates for learning with the intent to meet the needs of all students using an inside-out process. With the moral imperative, knowledge, and skills, effective educators examine their values, behaviors, and beliefs, as well as their organization's policies and practices (Lindsey et al., 2019). Thus, professional learning focusing on Cultural Proficiency is essential for educational leaders dedicated to serving all students.

The Importance of Educational Leadership in Student Achievement

Research presents a correlation between school leadership and student achievement (Byrk & Schneider, 2002; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Fullan (2003) posited the moral imperative of educational leadership is for leaders to introduce new elements into the setting, intended to influence behavior for the better, all while

managing different interests, economic situations, cultural origins, religions, ethnicities, and races. Leaders are responsible for fostering social unity in our society of increasingly diverse students, families, and educators. Concurrently, leaders must maintain focus on educational reform through continuous improvement efforts so all children of our nation are afforded the intended outcomes of public school. The correlates of effective school research (Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978) identified the primary aim of public schools to reach the intended outcomes as teaching and learning (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). Educational leaders' focus on teaching and learning is essential.

The moral imperative requires collective efficacy; combined efforts for making a difference in the lives of students, building relationships, and monitoring one's responsibility and contributions in closing educational gaps. Research findings suggest collective efficacy has strong correlative effects on student achievement (Donahoo, 2016; Eells, 2011; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004; Hattie, 2012). Defined by Bandura (1997) as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment," (p. 477) collective efficacy influences the personal culture, how one thinks and behaves, and the school culture, which indirectly impacts student achievement (Donahoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2018). Educational leaders play an integral role in building the collective efficacy. Fullan suggested, the moral imperative involves leading cultural change that activates passions and commitments of stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, to improve the learning of all students, including closing the achievement gap (2001; 2003).

Building relationships is another critical factor in student achievement and school success (Milner IV, 2013). Educational leaders are expected to take risks toward change by assessing cultural knowledge and learning from each other, thus becoming more aware of the personal lives and interests of teachers, staff, students, and their families (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Wagner & Kegan, 2006). In a meta-analysis, Marzano et al. (2005) identified relationships as a part of school leadership impacting the effectiveness of many other tasks and responsibilities completed at the school. The study identified behaviors and characteristics applicable to relationships between administrators, teachers, and their students and families, all of which influence school effectiveness and student achievement.

Because of the strong correlation between educational leadership and student achievement, educators who monitor their own responsibility and contributions in closing the educational gaps are essential. While the research on the effect size of school and environmental factors, as they relate to student achievement is ongoing, it is greatly debated because there is not a definitive answer for closing the educational gaps. Barton and Coley (2009) and Murphy (2009) have written extensively about educational gaps and declared the solution is complex and cannot be managed by one focused effort. However, school leaders can contribute by ensuring teaching is disproportionately advantaging students on the lower end of the educational gaps. Race and socioeconomic status are critical issues, and equitable learning outcomes can be actualized as leaders accept responsibility for performance and development of themselves, teachers' performance, and students' achievement and growth (Murphy, 2009). Overall, school leaders are responsible for promoting a collaborative culture and monitoring the collective impact of teaching on student achievement (Donahoo et al., 2018; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011).

Educational Leaders and Organizational Change towards Continuous Improvement

The educational system must change in one way or another, backwards to intellectual and moral standards of pre-scientific age, or forward to the development of the possibilities of growing and expanding experience (Dewey, 1938). Educational leaders acknowledge change is inevitable and necessary for improvement in any school system. Each year school leaders complete school improvement plans, providing a roadmap with goals of increasing student achievement; thus, changing the organization. While well-planned initiatives are paramount, the process of involving stakeholders at the district and building levels, as well as families and community members, is equally valuable in developing a shared meaning in the continuous improvement process (Epstein, 2019; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Marks & Pinty, 2003). Fullan (2016) further described stakeholder involvement in the change process as the shaping and reshaping of good ideas, while building capacity and ownership among participants.

Moreover, Dilt's model of *nested levels of learning* provides further awareness of the importance of professional learning and collaboration necessary for organizational change and gains in student achievement. The five levels of organizational change identified by Dilt (1990) are: (a) identity, b) belief system, (c) capabilities, (d) behaviors, and (e) environment. It is vital educational leaders understand change begins with identity, the individual's and/or group's sense of self, and one's own lived experiences, as Dewey noted.

Educational Leaders and Culture, Race, and Poverty in Student Achievement

Research on the topic of culture presents ideas and concepts related to race, ethnicity, social class, language, ability, gender, age, and religion. In fact, culture has broadly been defined by a person's identity constructed of the above mentioned concepts, as well as one's beliefs, norms, customs, traditions, values, and behaviors (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fraise & Brooks, 2015). Culture plays an integral part in our society, thus impacting interactions between school leaders, teachers, students, and family members, and consequently, student achievement in all educational settings. Stakeholders in an organization enter into a setting with their individual and shared history, beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior. These differences give rise to cultural-based conflicts in which the educators of the institution respond based upon their experiences, beliefs, and values. Often times, those responses are inadequate in that they unknowingly and unwittingly perpetuate a predictable failure for students who are culturally different from the dominant group (Lindsey et al., 2019). As Murphy (2009) suggested, educational leaders focused on increasing student achievement and closing educational gaps are attentive to racial and socioeconomic status identities of the students the organization serves.

Race. Educational opportunity has been inequitable throughout the history of the United States. For the past century and a quarter, our country's courts and legislators, at all levels, have wrestled with educational equity issues in decisions such as *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Mendez vs. Westminster*, and *Brown v. Board of Education*. While the 1960's and decades since have brought integration movements and federal government-led reform efforts such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the educational inequities and racial segregation in schools persist (Howard, 2010; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Poverty. Socioeconomic status is a distinct demographic group that intersects with other cultural identifications such as race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. Often students living in poverty have different experiences in the world related to limited

access to experiences and opportunities afforded to many of their school-age peers. Kimberle Crenshaw (2016) coined the term *Intersectionality* by the way in which individuals see where power comes, collides, interlocks, and intersects. While Crenshaw directly discerned interlocking social identifiers of race and gender, it is important to note how interlocking systems of power impact historically marginalized groups and focus on the ideology of social identifiers, namely race and social class. Deficit thinking surrounding poverty can give way to asset-based thinking and action when educators examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors, focus on relationships, and model resilience and promotion of self in the context of society (Lindsey, Karns & Myatt, 2010).

The aforementioned literature review provided a summary of comprehensive consideration of the literature relative to the object of study. Three themes were included within the review of literature: (a) educational leadership and student achievement, (b) educational leadership and organizational change towards continuous improvement, and (c) educational leadership and culture, race, and social class in student achievement. The purpose of this study and research questions were designed to fill the gaps in literature around outcomes related to implementation and experiences surrounding a school district's journey towards culturally proficient educational practice and student achievement. While extensive literature exists regarding educational leadership, student achievement, and organizational change for school reform, there is little evidence of practical application for utilizing an equity framework at the school district level, namely the Cultural Proficiency Framework, to create organizational change and increase student achievement.

Research Methodology and Design

A descriptive case study was employed in order to investigate the implementation and experiences of Cultural Proficiency work in a suburban, public K-12 school district in the Midwest United States. Merriam (2001) described case study as a design “employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (p.19). The qualitative study included data collection and analysis of interviews with district stakeholders, who hold leadership roles, and are involved in the work of Cultural Proficiency, observations of meetings and professional learning events related to Cultural Proficiency, and associated district documents. Themes and insights emerging from case study data collection and analysis can directly influence policy, practice, and future research for school organizations.

Case Description

With the intent to investigate the implementation and experiences of cultural proficiency work, Eaveston School District, pseudonymous for a suburban, public K-12 school district in the Midwest United States, was selected according to the methodology of the study. Merriam (2001) differentiated case studies from other types of qualitative research in that they present rich descriptions and analyses of a single, bounded system. The rationale for selecting this unique, bounded system to address the research questions includes (a) the school district's history of change among student demographics in regards to race and social class, and its increase in student achievement over the last two decades; (b) the school district's implementation of professional learning using the Cultural Proficiency Framework at the district and building levels; (c) the school district's high level of cultural, racial/ethnic, and social class diversity; and (d) its proximity to a

metropolitan city with racial and social class implications on governmental, political, and educational contexts.

Eaveston School District, established in 1879, is “A Place to Live, Learn, and Grow.” With almost 6,000 students, Eaveston School District has one high school, two middle schools, one traditional school (PreK-8), 5 elementary schools, as well as preschool and alternative education settings (6-12). Situated in a metropolitan county of more than one million people, Eaveston School District encompasses 27 square miles and stands among many businesses, factories, casinos, and an international airport, receiving approximately 90% of funds from local sources. With 46% white, 34% African-American/black, 11% Hispanic, 5% multi-racial, and 4% Asian, the student population represents 78 different countries, 48 languages, and is rated the most diverse school district in the state. With intersectionality at the heart of the access, opportunity, and achievement gaps, it is important to note 49% of Eaveston School District’s students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, hence, living at or below the United States defined poverty line.

The mission statement, “That all will learn to become responsible citizens in a nurturing environment where diversity means strength, knowledge means freedom, and commitment means success,” has proven successful despite the rise of challenges from major geographical and economic changes to the school district in the last two decades. Increased diversity in culture, race, social class, and mobility provided context for challenges, but through adaptive, transformational, and culturally proficient leadership, the district has defined diversity as a contribution to the values and assets of the school district. Gains in the district’s performance standards and indicators including state achievement tests, college entry exams (i.e. ACT, SAT), completion of advanced courses, college placement, graduation rates, attendance rates, and subgroup achievement, have led to Eaveston School District being recognized as the No. 6 best school district in the state and by *U.S. News and World Report* as a *Best High School in the U.S.*

Population and Sample

The population for this case study research consisted of two groups. The primary population included 55 stakeholders in Eaveston School District, who serve as members on the district Cultural Proficiency Committee. The term *leader*, used throughout this study, refers to district stakeholders who serve in any traditional or non-traditional leadership role. The population and sampling of these leaders do not solely include administrators, but rather stakeholders that are leading the efforts in the work of Cultural Proficiency. These stakeholders, including but not limited to teachers, building and district administrators, staff, parents, and community members, participated in quarterly, full-day professional learning events during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. The second population included 70 middle school teachers and administrators, who engaged in bi-monthly professional learning events related to Cultural Proficiency in the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years.

The sampling of this study was from the population, a total of 72 participants. In qualitative studies, a researcher uses purposeful sampling to investigate with the intent of maximizing findings and learning (Merriam, 2009). The researcher conducted interviews with 14 participants who volunteered. The participants included representatives from the population groups: building and district office administrators, teachers at all school levels, and parents with diversity among race/ethnicity and gender.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed three instruments and utilized them to collect data in this study: (a) an interview protocol; (b) an observation guide; and (c) a document retrieval form. An interview protocol, with 10 questions, was developed and used to ask questions and record answers during the qualitative interviews (Creswell, 2014). The researcher audiotaped the interviews for transcribing, coding, and analysis. Additionally, the researcher developed an observation guide to collect data during cultural proficiency professional learning events at the district and building levels. The observation guide included a single page with a dividing line down the middle to separate descriptive notes from reflective notes (Merriam, 2009). Similar to the observation guide, the third instrument used during the case study included a document retrieval form to mine data from various documents such as policies, handbooks, online materials, and brochures.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection in qualitative research is a complex research process that includes various steps to ensure reliability, validity, and ethical considerations. It includes gaining permissions, having a reliable sampling strategy, developing means of recording information, and storing the data (Creswell, 2013). The data collection phase of this case study was conducted as a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering information to answer the research questions. According to Merriam (2009), data collection in case study research usually involves three strategies: interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents. During a one-year data collection process, the researcher's purposeful selection of data led to rich, descriptive findings around the conceptual framework, purpose, and research questions of the case study. Data was stored electronically, organized, and protected.

The final step in completing this case study was to analyze and interpret the collected data to answer the research questions and draw conclusions. Creswell (2014) described analysis as preparing and organizing the data, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes. An abundance of data and correlative themes were produced from the case study, thus requiring a triangulation of the data to validate the findings. The researcher triangulated the themes from the three sources of data to develop validity in the conclusions and implications for the field.

Findings and Analysis

The findings of this qualitative study are organized by research question. Table 1 summarizes the themes that emerged from vivo coding and triangulation of the three data sources. The themes are presented in detail throughout the analysis. Educational leaders and educational leadership professors can utilize the concepts presented through these themes to promote equity, access, and inclusion work in their schools, organizations, and institutions by utilizing the Cultural Proficiency Framework.

Table 1

Research Questions' Relationship to Themes

Research Questions	Themes
(1) How do educational leaders report/describe their role in school change for culturally proficient practice?	Involvement, Collaboration, Interaction, Communication, Inquiry, Self-Focus, Role Model, Vision and Mission, Growth and Improvement
(2) What policies and practices are used in the school district related to culturally proficient practice?	Professional Learning, Innovative Strategies, Programs, Communication, Family/Community Involvement, Continuous Improvement, Diversity, Student Achievement
(3) In what ways do the school district's implementation and experiences influence changes regarding culturally proficient practice to serve all students?	Professional Learning Communities, Action, Student Achievement, Excellence, Individual Students, High Expectations, Professional Development, Family/Community Involvement, Decision Making
(4) What challenges do educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency?	Barriers (Resistance, Unawareness), Time and Resources, Building Site-Specific Capacity

Research Question 1

The first research question explored educational leaders' perceptions of their own roles in school change related to culturally proficient educational practice. The emergent themes include: (a) being present and involved in the work; (b) collaborating, interacting, and communicating; (c) serving as a role model by helping and supporting others on the journey; and (d) focusing on the vision and mission of the school for continuous growth and improvement.

Being present and involved in the work. Educational leaders can have a vision of a culturally proficient school or district, but without intentional actions to ensure a presence and involvement in the work, there is little change or measurable progress. In the case of Eaveston School District, leaders have taken a stance on the importance of being present and involved in equity work using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency for building an organization of equity and excellence for its diverse student population. The Assistant Superintendent for Learning and Teaching, who has been involved extensively with the Cultural Proficiency Committee, described her role:

It's my job to work collaboratively with various components that we have in the teaching and learning department to find out what is it we can do to support administrators and teachers who ultimately support all of our learners. I always feel like it's important for me to be as involved as I can in learning, growing, and developing myself because if I can't talk the talk and understand the equity work using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency, then how can I support it? It's important that I'm there with them learning, especially on topics that maybe I'm not as proficient in myself.

Eaveston School District takes pride in its family involvement. Valuing diversity is essential to the Cultural Proficiency Committee's desired equity outcomes and goals in guiding Eaveston to achieve its vision and mission. One school's PTO President commented about his involvement regarding the vision of serving all students.

My role is being as active in the work as possible: from the PTO, to my children's academic and extracurricular activities, to the Cultural Proficiency Committee. My general practice in helping any cultural diversity situation is to be present because I feel people lack experience. This is what helps to build really true cross-cultural proficiency. It's an academic process of understanding history, but personal interaction, and actually, presence, is probably where people become most proficient. Being an ethnic minority, I have life experience that isn't necessarily understood by the majority culture, so just being present and being active is a way I feel I can participate.

Those who are present and involved in the work in Eaveston embody the personal nature of the inside-out approach of transformative change. By focusing on core values, they are better able to identify personal and institutional barriers to access and achievement that have perpetuated the inequitable outcomes for many students of color and those living in poverty.

Collaborating, interacting, and communicating. Eaveston School District educators approach the work of Cultural Proficiency with a mentality of "We're in this together." Cultural Proficiency Committee members rely on the Essential Elements for continuous planning and growth towards organizational change for the district. Collaboration and communication are key for interactions that work to promote equitable outcomes for all students of Eaveston. District leaders, including the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and executive directors have noted the collaborative relationships and progress with the Cultural Proficiency Committee. An executive director commented:

I am very impressed regarding the facilitation of the Cultural Proficiency training. I have observed people's willingness to open up and share their experiences and be willing to have some tough conversations. The district is moving forward with having those tough conversations and wanting to find ways to take that work and expand it to all.

District administrators acknowledge there is a need to move forward with the collaborations and involve all educators and employees in the district; while at the same time, they are trying to balance the varying perspectives and points along individuals' cultural proficiency journeys, which are embodied by the faculty and staff at Eaveston School District. Cultural Proficiency Committee members agree this work be done with urgency and by all employees of the district, but they also acknowledge the challenges present in planning for and sustaining the work in the upcoming years. An executive director reflected, "We have to respect the balance of inviting people in and not forcing it on people all at the same time, which could actually deteriorate the work being done by people who are passionate about it."

One special education teacher, who serves on the district's Cultural Proficiency Committee, relies on collaboration and communication to increase her awareness and understanding of individuals with differing cultures from her own:

I try to do an even better job of communication in my own work: trying to observe more; trying to learn more; trying to have more conversations with people about difficult issues for me. Some topics are not easy to talk about, and I've had to educate myself on some aspects of culture, thus assessing cultural knowledge. Leaders need to be aware of the fact that what something means in one culture, might not mean the same thing in another culture. Really, we just need to talk with people in a way that we can start to see into somebody else's experience and perspective a little better.

The Board of Education and district officials in Eaveston are committed to providing resources to ensure educators in all departments and across buildings are provided opportunities to collaborate around the equity work. These collaboration efforts are focused on communication through

reflection and dialogue, which allow stakeholders to assess their cultural knowledge and move towards transformative change in practice.

Serving as a role model by helping and supporting others on the journey. Change leadership and learning requires modeling. Administrators and teachers in Eaveston School District, who are most involved in the equity and access work, realize their role in modeling culturally proficient educational behaviors and practices, while supporting others on the journey. An elementary principal described her role:

I want to be a role model in the Cultural Proficiency work, I want to be that individual that is walking the talk, and my staff, students, families, and community members are able to see that we don't just go around saying, 'Diversity is our strength.' Honestly, I believe I want to show growth towards cultural proficiency in everything I do, in everything I say, every single day. A teacher at Eaveston believes she has to model continuous learning around culture, diversity, equity, and access:

I just try to keep learning and talk with people in a way that we can start to see into others' experiences and perspectives a little better. One of the most difficult challenges in this work is the realization that everyone is on a journey of Cultural Proficiency, some much further along on the Continuum than others. I serve as a role model by being a reminder to all that we are all at different points on the Continuum of Cultural Proficiency. My responsibility is to be calm and effective in conversations with others. Serving as a role model and supporting others on their journeys is vital for building the critical mass in Eaveston School District. We need to be cognizant that some staff members are not as comfortable with certain conversations related to culture as others. We have to find a way to try to make them feel comfortable. This work is urgent.

Educational leaders in Eaveston have a defined sense of self, others, and the ability to be supportive by relieving others from being forced to change by modeling behaviors that breakdown the barriers for underserved populations. They model strategies for managing the dynamics of difference and resolving conflict by listening, learning, and changing the way things are done.

Focusing on vision and mission for continuous growth and improvement. Historically, Eaveston School District stakeholders have experienced what many tend to find true about continuous improvement efforts for closing access and achievement gaps. Frustration and anger have followed some sluggish, slow, delayed, and disjointed efforts; however, the Cultural Proficiency Committee keeps the vision and mission at the forefront of goal setting and action planning. Being in the top 1% of diverse school districts in the state, Eaveston School District administrators and teachers focus efforts on valuing diversity through the mission. A teacher, who serves on the district's Cultural Proficiency Committee, discussed the urgency of relying on the mission of the school district:

What do we do next? We can take something (cultural proficiency training) that has been challenging and insightful and make it work without being overly simplistic or reductionist, or doctrinaire to the point of alienating people instead of inviting them to reconsider some of their assumptions. We go back to our mission and our sense of really trying to understand students as they intersect and collaborate with others of differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds and identities.

While it is difficult to find a school district who doesn't express value towards "educating all," educators in Eaveston, deeply committed to removing barriers for children of color and/or those living with socioeconomic disparities, have focused on one question: *Do the behaviors of*

individuals and the policies and procedures implemented, executed, or enforced reflect the values and mission of Eaveston School District?

Research Question 2

The second research question was used to explore the practices and policies used in the school district related to culturally proficient educational practice. In service of answering this research question, the emergent themes have been divided into policy and practice. The findings under policy cover themes related to student achievement, diversity, high expectations, continuous improvement and needs-based programming. Similarly, the findings under practice are divided into three themes related to innovative strategies and programs, professional learning, and communication and collective family and community involvement.

School board policies to support cultural proficiency. Eaveston School District, like many public school districts, is guided by policies written by school district stakeholders and adopted, reviewed, and rewritten by the local elected school boards. The board policies are typically adopted or revised according to state guidelines or mandates, state and federal legislative decisions, and sometimes when the district experiences a convergence of differences that requires clear written language for governing the school district. School board members who rely on the Guiding Principles and Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency set up procedures for reviewing policies to address the needs of all demographic groups of students. The school board policy for developing school board policies is written to include language addressed in core values - the Guiding Principles, and action - the Essential Elements. The text has been italicized to point out the related language:

The Board of Education shall determine the policies to *serve as a basis for the administration of the school district*. The formulation, development, adoption and revision of written policies is a Board function, and adopted policies are among the Board's governing documents.

The district's *policies shall be consistent with the philosophy, goals and objectives of the district*. In the event of a discrepancy between written materials in the district, Board policy will take precedence.

The Board will *review its policies on a continual basis in an effort to ensure that they are current* and in compliance with the most recent federal and state regulations, statutes and court decisions.

Lindsey, Karns, & Myatt (2010) described culturally proficient policy development with two components for school leaders to consider. First, educational leaders should consider supporting values and policies by deeply considering the Guiding Principles and Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. By examining personal and organizational values in this process, stakeholders have improved language in some of their policies to address barriers that may be obstructing the lived mission of the school district. Secondly, school leaders in Eaveston intentionally engage in reflection and dialogue around policies to ensure the language written is to promote action, monitoring, and continuous improvement.

Throughout the cultural proficiency work in the district, educators, families, and community members regularly come to the table to discuss the status and outcomes of policy and measurable plans of action. The creation of goals and action steps is important for ensuring all students in Eaveston learn in a safe and productive environment without barriers to each child realizing their potential and experiencing high levels of achievement and success during their time

in the district. Overall, school board members and school leaders in Eaveston School district are committed to prioritizing efforts that focus on the big picture through the comprehensive school improvement plan. As written on the school board's webpage:

The Eaveston School District Board of Education is committed to providing exemplary educational opportunities for ALL children. In order to accomplish this goal, partnerships with parents, business leaders, and district patrons must continue to be actively developed in order to engage the entire community as the district strives for educational excellence.

Practices to support culturally proficient educational practice. The researcher encountered an abundance of practices in Eaveston School District related to cultural proficiency throughout the study. The following themes emerged among the practices: (a) innovative strategies and programs; (b) professional learning; and (c) communication and collective family and community involvement. School leaders in Eaveston are cognizant of opportunities and experiences afforded to the children that attend their schools. They have an understanding that challenges, caused by differences in social class and other demographic groups, require a mindset to treat each child individually, accurately assess needs, and develop programs accordingly. One elementary principal, who leads in a building that piloted a competency-based learning model for the district, described the mental model his staff holds about individual students:

The staff I have has a mental model that they're lucky that they get to work with the kids here. Our motto is 'think different, learn different, and teach different.' They go to where the individual child is instead of an old school, traditional model of fitting a kid into a program that already exists. We need to adapt differently to the product coming into our schools from a public school standpoint. Every child is different and everybody has their own story. We take that and build from that to make our community better.

Additionally, the district has taken the competency-based learning model and expanded it into a personalized learning initiative. In 2018, the district took the comprehensive school improvement plan and updated it to include the following task, "Design a competency-based, personalized learning environment in preschool through 12th grades that leads students to be ready for high school course content and, ultimately, success after graduation." In order to do so, the district outlined innovative strategies and programs in the school improvement plan to meet all students' needs such as a five-year personalized learning plan.

Another theme related to culturally proficient educational practice is the professional learning opportunities that are available to administration, faculty, and staff. There are frequent opportunities for professional learning related to student achievement, trauma-informed responsiveness, restorative practices, social-emotional learning, and equity. For the past two years, the district has made professional learning related to equity a priority by allocating time and resources to build capacity and embed the work of cultural proficiency in all aspects of the district. Specifically, school leaders at all levels, are working to increase learning and skills in utilizing the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to increase the effectiveness of the school district. Professional learning related to cultural proficiency occurs regularly among the district's Cultural Proficiency Committee, in individual schools among groups of administrators, teachers, staff, and parents, in new teacher trainings, and in integrated, district-hosted events such as the Fall Professional Development Day and Spring Rally, where edcamp-style professional development is available to all employees of the school district. Although the process has varied in each of these settings, the district's Cultural Proficiency Committee committed to learning the Tools of Cultural Proficiency and created an action plan with three targets: (a) impact disparities in

discipline; (b) promote and support further Cultural Proficiency training; and (c) support and grow staff diversity. The focus of this culturally proficient educational practice is to continue the work, build capacity and the ‘critical mass,’ and focus on accountability and sustainability of the work.

The third emergent theme of practices examined in this study is communication and involvement with families and community members. Educational leaders in Eaveston recognize the importance of having families, students, and community members participate as much as possible on committees that impact student learning. Stakeholders from across these categories are regularly invited to participate on committees such as the Strategic Planning Committee and the Cultural Proficiency Committee. While involvement does not look the same for all families in Eaveston, school leaders are attentive to the needs of families and try to get to know them so they can forge towards greater understanding and better partnerships.

Research Question 3

The third research question was used to investigate the ways in which educational leaders have implemented and experienced the work of cultural proficiency to influence change and serve all students. In reviewing the participants’ responses, observing meetings and professional learning events, and mining documents for data for changes in policies and practices, two themes emerged from the data. The themes include: (1) professional development through professional learning communities (PLC) with sub themes of high expectations, individual students, student achievement and excellence; and (2) dialogue and action with family and community involvement.

Professional development through PLC. Educational leaders in Eaveston are focused on increasing equity, inclusion, and access for its students in the district by providing opportunities to all staff members and encouraging collaboration through professional learning communities. From interviews, observations, and documents, there are many opportunities for staff members to collaborate with others in the district around topics such as restorative practices, trauma-informed care, social-emotional learning, personalized learning, and Cultural Proficiency. While some trainings are required, Eaveston grants autonomy in working towards cultural proficiency through choice in professional learning and topics of discussion in professional learning communities. New teachers and staff to Eaveston engage in reflection and dialogue in an introductory session related to the Tools of Cultural Proficiency. There are opportunities presented through the year in which they attempt to build capacity to use the framework through introductory sessions for those who have not been able to be apart of the district’s Cultural Proficiency Committee or in buildings where it is being implemented. One middle school teacher reflected on her professional learning at Eaveston:

We engage in professional development on students of trauma, understanding cultural proficiency, and how that affects your discipline and how it affects how you

communicate with students. We have professional development on making sure that what’s present in our literature and books is reflective of a variety of cultures.

We get cultural proficiency training from a lot of different angles. We have speakers and small groups. We have someone come in and talk to us about it, and we’ve tried to have staff members talk to staff members about it. We’ve had it district-wide and building-wide.

We have it every year, and multiple times it's offered.

Additionally, district administrators have realized the importance of being involved in the district level professional learning events and utilizing the tools in their discussions with the Board, families, and community members.

Dialogue and action planning with family and community involvement. Reflection and dialogue are key components of equity work. Eaveston School District has experienced change in the organization through reflection and dialogue in using the Four Tools of Cultural Proficiency. Members of the district's Cultural Proficiency Committee utilized the Continuum of Cultural Proficiency to address areas of needed improvement in the district that are most urgent. The key to success in working towards achieving the goals of the committee is involving families and community members in these discussions and work. An example of utilizing the community includes bringing in experts to facilitate conversations about restorative practices and strategies for managing students facing trauma. These are two ways the district is making gains in one of the goals related to discipline disparities. A middle school assistant principal reflected:

We have identified our black students, particularly our black boys, being disciplined at a greater number than any other race and gender. I take a lot of pride in our staff for learning how to change with our students. Just the other day, we had a situation where lots of things were going wrong with behavior and discipline. All of a sudden, I had four students in my office. Each one of the four sat down with the teacher(s) and talked with them; it was a one-on-one conversation using restorative practices, where there was respect coming from both parties. What could have turned into this teacher writing four referrals, turned into repairing relationships and everyone walking away happy and ready to start again the next day in class.

As for promoting and supporting further cultural proficiency training, the district is making plans to build capacity among the district's committee by increasing opportunity for reflection and dialogue so that all school buildings in the district gain support in implementing the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to promote equity, access, and inclusion.

Research Question 4

The final research question of this qualitative study focused on the challenges educational leaders face during their work of cultural proficiency. Participants throughout the district discussed three themes, and observational data illuminated similar contexts within meetings and professional learning events. The themes include: (a) barriers to cultural proficiency; (b) availability of time and resources; and (c) building site-specific capacity to implement and sustain the equity work across the district.

Barriers to cultural proficiency. Educational leaders and stakeholders in Eaveston School District acknowledged the barriers to becoming culturally proficient. Participants discussed four barriers they encountered including the unawareness of the need to adapt, resistance to change, historical mistrust formed from a previous social justice training, and historical, social, and racial segregation contexts in Eaveston's metropolitan area. By relying on the guiding principles and core values, district leaders have built trust and empowerment of all voices on the Cultural Proficiency Committee through reflection, dialogue, and action.

Availability of time and resources. Time and resources are always a factor in society, education, and organizational change. Some participants interviewed felt time and resources have been a challenge for implementing this work in a way that would lead to the most impactful changes. The district committee utilized four, full-day professional learning experiences during each of the last two years, which required approximately 30 substitute teachers in classrooms each session. Consequently, individual schools were also left shorthanded by administrators being gone during these days. The school-site committees utilized grade level time twice a month for

professional learning and dialogue related to equity, access, inclusion, and student achievement. The reality has set in for many of the educators that this work is challenging, and it is a journey. With the right people in leadership positions, the priority will remain in utilizing time and resources to build capacity and embed the work in all aspects of Eaveston School District. Leaders want to ensure that there is an understanding that this work is here to stay, and cultural proficiency is not going to be a place in which the district arrives, but the journey of educating Eaveston's youth.

Building site-specific capacity to implement and sustain the equity work across the district. Research (Lambert, 1998; Reeves, 2009; Stringer, 2013) claims building capacity among those in a system is vital in implementing change and sustaining the work for continuous improvement. Participants in the study discussed the challenge of balancing the urgency of spreading the equity work beyond the district's Cultural Proficiency Committee and throughout the district. We know many decisions of schools are made at the site level, which means different cultures, people, practices, values, and beliefs, and behaviors. The district's progress is challenged by implementing professional learning with urgency, but not in a way that causes an increase in resistance, protest, and unrest within the larger system. Participants held views that a "top-down" or a "one size fits all" decision on the logistics of implementation would lead to no progress, and maybe even destruction of the progress gained over the last two years.

Conclusions

The findings of this study are important to the field of education because of the long standing opportunity, access, and achievement gaps that have been perpetuated by inequitable policies and practices in our systems, the increase in student diversity, barriers to equity and access such as systemic oppression and resistance to change, and the need for the continuation and strengthening fight for social justice. This study investigated (a) the educational leader's role in school change; (b) policies and practices used in the school district; (c) the ways in which implementation of the Cultural Proficiency Framework influenced change; and (d) challenges educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency. The analysis of data from interviews, observations, and documents provided explanations that can be insightful to educational leaders and educational leadership professors preparing educators to lead change for increasing equity, access, and inclusion.

The main ideas and explanations of the findings, which are related to factors and emergent themes of the study include professional learning communities, family and community involvement, and continuous school improvement towards student achievement. These explanations are discussed in four conclusions corresponding to the research study's conceptual framework: (a) Overcoming the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency; (b) Relying on core values using the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency for organizational change; (c) Telling our stories and changing the conversation with the Continuum of Cultural Proficiency; and (d) Committing to standards of change through improvement and growth through the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. Figure 1 represents the emerging themes discussed in the conclusions drawn from the case study findings in Eaveston School District.

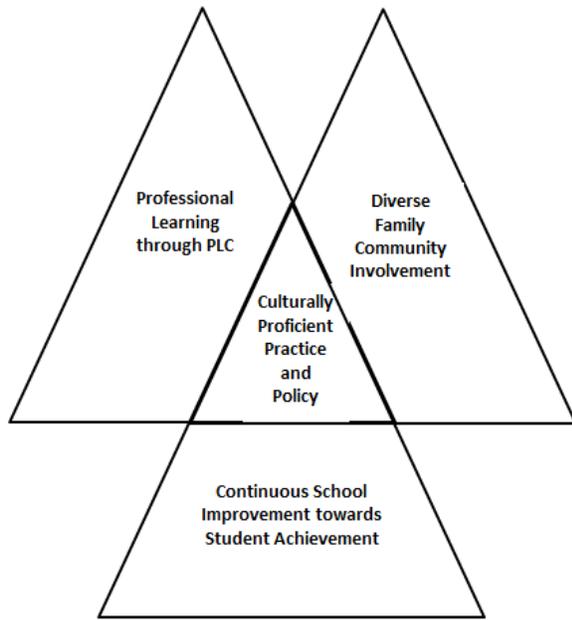


Figure 1. Triangulated diagram representing the power of emergent themes from the data collection and analysis.

The conclusions drawn from the case study that investigated implementation and experiences surrounding a school district’s journey towards culturally proficient educational practice and organizational change included emphasis on professional learning through professional learning communities, diverse family and community involvement, and continuous school improvement towards student achievement. School leaders’ focused on these areas of emphasis while utilizing the Cultural Proficiency Framework are able to experience effective organizational change towards increasing culturally proficient practices and policies.

The first conclusion regarding successful implementation and experiences of cultural proficiency work is acknowledgment of systemic barriers and challenges. Resistance to change, unawareness of the need to adapt, a sense of privilege and entitlement, and systems of oppression are the identified barriers to cultural proficiency. These Barriers push against the historic ideals in most school districts across the country and lead to denied access for some students through inequitable policies and practices (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2019).

Educational leaders’ success in implementing the work of cultural proficiency, and creating organizational change that provides equitable outcomes, depends on honoring individual stories through continued learning in varied professional learning communities. A collaborative culture and sense of collective responsibility in professional learning communities (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016) can support school leaders in effective dialogue and reflection of their own behaviors and practices that may be perpetuating unintended outcomes. Culturally proficient learning communities deepen commitment and provide clarity through intentionality in acknowledging systemic barriers and challenges (Lindsey, Jungwirth, Jarvis, & Lindsey, 2009). Furthermore, educational leaders encourage family and community partnerships in professional learning and decision making (Epstein, 2019; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011) to ensure a diverse group of stakeholders are present and involved in the work. Valuing diversity brings in varying perspectives for decision making purposes, thus increasing the ability to engage in dialogue that

may acknowledge the Barriers to culturally proficient practice and policy. Embedding the work in all aspects of the district and building capacity for continuous school improvement through a collaborative culture focused on student achievement allows educational leaders to overcome the Barriers and increase equitable outcomes (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Lindsey et al., 2019).

Another conclusion of implementing and experiencing the work of cultural proficiency is to rely on the core values of the organization and use the guiding principles of cultural proficiency to promote transformational changes to the organization (Arriaga & Lindsey, 2016; Lindsey et al., 2019). The vision, mission, core values, and comprehensive school improvement plan are integral parts in the implementation of the work of cultural proficiency. It is imperative that all involved, including family and community members, know the mission and core values of the district and are able to offer diverse ideas and reactions towards setting goals and changing policies and practices that will increase student outcomes and improve their schools (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Epstein et al., 2019).

Diversity, knowledge, commitment, care, learning, freedom, and success are overt core values of Eaveston School district, but more important than stating them, is creating accountability measures around them for continuous improvement through the mission and vision (Allen 2001; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). Culturally proficient educational leaders committed to building knowledge around the diversity of its students, rely on the Guiding Principles to promote equitable and inclusive practices and policies to increase learning outcomes (Lindsey et al., 2019). As educators lead efforts to examine the current policies and practices through professional learning communities, comprised of school and community partners, the Guiding Principles can aid in the actualization of the deep work necessary to promote changes to policies and practices that make educational outcomes more equitable, accessible, and inclusionary.

The third suggested conclusion in effective implementation of the work of cultural proficiency is continuous improvement efforts towards increasingly culturally proficient educational practices and policy development using the continuum. The focus for educational leaders should be to create opportunities where all have a voice, the ability to tell their personal stories or lived experiences, come to new understandings, and change the conversation. The Continuum of Cultural Proficiency is a way for all stakeholders to have a voice in what is most needed for all students to learn and achieve at high levels (Lindsey et al., 2019). Those practices, policies, behaviors, values, and beliefs that appear on the left side of the continuum and are identified by stakeholders as destructive, blind, and incapacitating can lead educators to further their reflection and dialogue to produce goals for continuous improvement (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2019). Once goals are established using this data along the continuum, educational leaders have the ability to form actionable steps aimed at achieving the goals and increasing student outcomes through learning in various professional learning communities and through parent and community partnerships.

Lastly, a suggested conclusion based upon the findings of this study is that successful implementation of the work of cultural proficiency requires an understanding of the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency and a commitment to standards of change through improvement and growth. The Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency include assessing cultural knowledge, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2019). It is important educational leaders know these actions are not necessarily linear, but cyclical because the work of cultural proficiency is never over, and student and staff diversity is constantly evolving. To truly achieve the moral imperative of education in which all students achieve at high levels in our

society, it is critical we use these actions in our everyday practices (Lindsey et al., 2019). Professional learning opportunities and professional learning communities, with family and community involvement, bring together sources of knowledge, power, and experiences that can formulate and fulfill actions to help educate all students, especially those who have been historically underserved by our systems. DuFour et al. (2016) identified results orientation, a focus on student learning, and collaborative culture as key ideas that drive the work in professional learning communities. Educational leaders and professors preparing educational leaders are vital in sustaining the work through continuous improvement action plans, partnerships, and capacity building.

Implications for Educational Leaders and Preparation Programs

Based upon the findings and conclusions from this case study in Eaveston School District, the following are implications for educational leaders and educational leadership professors responsible for fulfilling the moral imperative of education. These implications suggest using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency can directly impact the ways in which students experience education. There should be an intentional alignment of the school district's strategic plan, professional learning design, and policy review. The use of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency should not be separate from the long-term planning for the district, nor the day-to-day operations. In order for educational leaders to build capacity in their districts and schools, there must be a common language around the Framework and use of data to drive the change. In building capacity, all must be invited to change the lives of students through academic, social, emotional, and physical development programs, practice, and policies, but most importantly, educational leaders and educational leadership professors must be active role models and change agents in using the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The creation of opportunities for faculty and staff to come together with families and community partners serves as the collective commitment to equity, access, and inclusion for all.

Superintendent and principal preparation programs should also embed formal training related to the understanding and utilization of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency throughout the program. Experience with reflection and dialogue with others in cross-cultural situations can only improve efforts to manage the dynamics of different cultures and increase efforts to achieve the moral imperative of education in that all students will learn. It is further suggested that preparation program faculty and staff reflect on their own cultures in preparing those who will lead efforts of adapting to diversity and institutionalizing that change in our schools. As our schools grow more diverse, the moral imperative for educational leaders is to change the context; change the mindset; and engage stakeholders in an embedded, continuous effort to change practices and policies that have historically underserved groups of students in the organization.

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Principal as Servant-Leader: An Embedded-Descriptive Single-Case Study of One Prekindergarten School's Efforts to Build Teacher Capacity in Foundational Skills

Molly J. Fuller

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Nathan R. Templeton

Texas A&M University-Commerce

The purpose of this embedded-descriptive single-case study was to provide insight into one prekindergarten school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. An embedded-descriptive single-case study was a suitable design for the study because the researcher could not manipulate the school's efforts; the setting was contemporary and involved real-world events. Servant Leadership Theory (SLT) was the theoretical underpinning of the study and the lens used to view the transition from the school's human capital resources to the implementation of methods, strategies, and activities to build teacher capacity. Montessori instruction served as the platform for teaching foundational skills.

Prekindergarten principals are instructional leaders charged with the responsibility of building teacher capacity (Principal Certificate, 2018) to ensure students leave prekindergarten ready for the rigor of kindergarten. Building teacher capacity in foundational skills is critical (Raver & Blair, 2014, 2016), and these skills lay the foundation for the acquisition of standards-based cognitive skills (Becker, Miao, Duncan, & McClelland, 2014; Cameron, Cottone, Murrah, & Grissmer, 2016; Nesbitt, Farran, & Fuhs, 2015). Foundational skills include executive function and fine motor skills. Executive function skills include inhibitory control, working memory, and attention to task (Becker et al., 2014; Prager, Sera, & Carlson, 2016). If children do not have well-developed inhibitory control, they often disrupt the classroom environment (Becker et al., 2014; Cameron, Brock, Hatfield, Cottone, Rubinstein, LoCasale-Crouch, & Grissmer, 2015). Children lacking cognitive working memory have difficulty following classroom instructions (Becker et al., 2014; Toll & Van Luit, 2014). Additionally, children having difficulty attending to task often display disruptive behavior and cannot complete assignments (Kim, Byers, Cameron, Brock, Cottone, & Grissmer, 2016). Prerequisite fine motor integration skills are necessary for writing, coloring, and cutting with scissors (Bhatia, Davis, & Shamas-Brandt, 2015; Kim, Murrah, Cameron, Brock, Cottone, & Grissmer, 2015).

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

Caught in limbo between building teacher capacity in foundational skills as well as standards-based achievement goals, the prekindergarten instructional leader contends with the verisimilitude of serving a vulnerable population. Current research indicated that the performance gap begins early, more evident among high-risk, disadvantaged children, and if below grade level in third grade, the children are unlikely to catch up with his or her peers (Coffman & Kauerz, 2012; Fiester, 2013). Melding a developmental approach to learning to foster foundational skills with the standards-based curriculum is a challenge for prekindergarten principals. There is an urgent call for well-trained leaders to build teacher capacity to address foundational skills of our nation's most high-risk and vulnerable population (National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2014; Phillips et al., 2017; Stipek, Clements, Coburn, Franke, & Farran, 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this embedded-descriptive single-case study was to provide insight into one school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills in an urban southeast Texas school district's Montessori prekindergarten Head Start program.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of Servant Leadership Theory (SLT; Greenleaf, 2002) was the theoretical underpinning of this study, and the lens used to view the transition from the school's human capital resources to the principal's efforts to implement methods, strategies, and activities to build teacher capacity. Montessori instruction served as the platform for teaching foundational skills. The researcher viewed the transition from the human capital resources of the principal and Head Start teachers to the activities and strategies through the servant-leader attributes (Table 1) identified by Spears (2010).

Table 1
Servant–Leader Attributes and Descriptions

Attribute	Description of Attribute
Listening	Intense desire to listen to others resulting in knowledge of the group’s desires and clarifying and operationalizing those desires.
Empathy	The ability of a leader to accept others and be a skilled, empathetic listener.
Healing	The ability of a leader to recognize the people they come in contact with may hurt emotionally and take the opportunity to minister to others and begin the healing process.
Awareness	An awareness involving ethics, power, and values that help one in understanding issues.
Persuasion	The art of persuasion and consensus-building.
Conceptualization	The ability to conceptualize the problem as well as operationalize the problem.
Foresight	The ability of a leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the consequences of a decision for the future.
Stewardship	The commitment to serving the needs of others.
Commitment to the Growth of People	Nurturing the personal and professional growth of people.
Building Community	The leader seeks to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution.

Servant–leader attributes were the principal’s motivation and impetus to provide the transition from the school’s human capital resources to the implementation of methods, strategies, and activities that built teacher capacity in foundational skills. The primary method used by the principal was the rigorous implementation of the weekly Montessori Professional Learning Community (PLC). During the weekly PLCs, teachers practiced the Montessori lessons for the next week. The PLCs also served as the arena for staff coaching, mentoring, and reflective practices. Through these activities, the principal demonstrated a servant–leader’s desire to listen to others. Through coaching, mentoring, and reflective practice, the principal valued the voice of the teacher, and through her stewardship, displayed a commitment to the professional growth of

teachers. One outcome of the PLC was the principal's decision for children to spend a longer time on practical life skills after Hurricane Harvey devastated the area. Extending the time spent on practical life skills was a monumental decision and demonstrated her ability to conceptualize and operationalize a problem and her commitment to serving the needs of the children. Foremost, one could view the decision to spend additional time on practical life skills as the ability of a foresightful leader to understand that if children did not master foundational skills, cognitive learning in prekindergarten would be difficult and impact future academic success.

The principal provided training opportunities from outside consultants, a book study, and a professional development library that validated the importance of Montessori instruction. Committed to the professional growth in Montessori instruction, the principal purposefully selected these opportunities to build a community of learners. The professional development opportunities served two purposes: to legitimize and validate the emotional feelings of the staff that resulted from Hurricane Harvey and to implement Montessori instruction with fidelity and integrity.

Meeting the diverse needs of a susceptible, vulnerable four-year-old population might be, according to Greenleaf (2002), the difference between leaders that first serve and then lead. Greenleaf asked leaders to consider the effect on the underprivileged. The goal of a prekindergarten principal is to ensure that high-risk students benefit or do not suffer further deprivation (Greenleaf, 2002) and narrow performance gaps due to the disparity between the wealthy and impoverished (Parris & Peachey, 2013). The theoretical proposition that the principal's efforts were responsible for building teacher capacity guided this study, and SLT was the lens used to confirm or contradict the premise that the school's principal exemplified the qualities of a servant-leader. The principal's efforts to build teacher capacity and servant-leader attributes guided the methods, strategies, activities, and the perception of the importance of foundational skills.

Literature Review

Researchers indicated that many impoverished children experience delays in executive function skills and fine motor integration skills (Bhatia et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Mathis & Bierman, 2015; Raver & Blair, 2016; Sasser, Bierman, & Heinrichs, 2015; Stosich, 2016). Struggling students who begin his or her school career in the nascent performance gap continue to spiral downward academically when faced with challenging cognitive demands (Nesbitt et al., 2015). Raver and Blair (2016) noted that as schools become more academically challenging, well-developed executive function skills are necessary for academic success. Executive function skills are the manifestation of higher-order cognitive processes that enable students to function successfully in a classroom environment. Empirical studies on executive function skills supported a positive relationship between executive function and academic success (Becker et al., 2014; Cameron et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2016; Prager et al., 2016).

Consequently, researchers agreed that very few prekindergarten programs teach non-cognitive skills that develop executive function skills (Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). Teachers seldom have the knowledge and skills to teach executive function skills in the context of the classroom environment (Moreno, Shwayder, & Friedman, 2017). However, research indicated that the Montessori curriculum purposefully teaches executive function skills (Fitzpatrick, McKinnon, Blair, & Willoughby, 2014) and fine motor integration skills (Bhatia et al., 2015). Without essential prerequisite foundational skills, children struggle in prekindergarten

and beyond (Lipsey, Nesbitt, Farran, Dong, Fuhs, & Wilson, 2017). Children's mastery of fine motor skills such as cutting paper with scissors, holding a crayon or pencil, and self-help skills are essential prekindergarten skills and seldom taught as part of the prekindergarten curriculum (Bhatia et al., 2015). These researchers validated that high-risk prekindergarten students benefited from a school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills.

Methodology

The theoretical proposition that the principal's efforts built teacher capacity in foundational skills was the basis for the review of the literature, the research questions, and the design of the study. Four research questions guided the study:

1. What is the prekindergarten principal's perception of the necessity or importance of building teacher capacity?
2. What method or strategies does a prekindergarten principal use to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?
3. How does on-going prekindergarten assessment data influence the prekindergarten principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?
4. How does the beginning of the year kindergarten readiness assessment data influence the prekindergarten principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?

Sample and Participant Selection

The researcher selected a Montessori Head Start prekindergarten center located in a large, urban, southeast Texas school district for this study. According to current research, many impoverished children experience delayed executive function skills (Mathis & Bierman, 2015; Raver & Blair, 2016; Sasser et al., 2015; Stosich, 2016) and fine motor skills (Bhatia et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2015). Consequently, it was essential for the researcher to gain an understanding of the prekindergarten principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills.

The researcher used purposeful criterion sampling to select the prekindergarten principal and Head Start teachers for this study. The inclusion criteria for the principal was a minimum of two years experience as a principal at the site and experience as a Montessori teacher. There were seven Head Start teachers at the site during the 2017–2018 school year, and the researcher recruited all seven Head Start teachers.

Evidence

The researcher gathered three types of evidence to support the findings of this embedded-descriptive single-case study: document review, interviews, and observations. Relevant to this study was the collection of participant demographic data. Demographic information for all participants included the number of years in current position, degrees held, additional certifications, years of experience in education, and work experience. The collection of demographic data ensured experienced, credentialed participants with the expertise to contribute in-depth knowledge and insights into the study. The researcher requested professional development calendars, training agendas, and PLC meeting agendas for document review.

The researcher used trend data from the 2017–2018 Frog Street® curriculum (Schiller, Ada, Campoy, & Mowry, 2017) prekindergarten assessment administered at the end of each nine-week

sessions. The researcher also considered the 2018 beginning of year (BOY) kindergarten assessment data for the students at the prekindergarten site during the 2017–2018 school year. The results of the assessments guided some of the interview questions and allowed the researcher to probe deeper into the school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills.

The second method of collecting data for this study was an interview with the school's principal, seven individual Head Start teacher interviews, and a Head Start teacher focus group interview. Yin (2018) recommended a conversational format for the interviews, and he made a distinction between the research questions and the actual interview questions. According to Yin, the interviews operate on two levels. On one level, the verbal line of inquiry is open-ended and non-threatening. Yin advised the researcher to word the open-ended interview questions so that the researcher appears naïve about the topic to allow the participants to provide new insights. The second level is the mental level, with the researcher being mindful of the research questions that guide the study. For example, the researcher was interested in the school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. By using open-ended questions, the researcher honored the participants' voices by allowing participants to speak freely.

The researcher used a third method of collecting data, direct classroom observations, to observe the practical classroom application of pedagogical teacher capacity building efforts from the previous year (Moreno et al., 2017). Yoshikawa et al. (2016) noted that one measure of program quality is the interaction between children and teachers and children with other children. Teacher capacity building operated on two levels, pedagogical knowledge and practical implementation of pedagogical knowledge in the classroom context (Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2002). The observations were two 15-minute classroom observations of each Head Start teacher. The classroom observations occurred during the first and second nine-week sessions. Consequently, two classroom observations of each teacher participant provided a valuable data source for the practical application of pedagogical knowledge.

The researcher aligned the observation indicators with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) instrument (Planta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Direct observation of children interacting with each other was also crucial because children use executive function and social skills when interacting with each other (Becker et al., 2014; Prager et al., 2016). As the teacher interacted with children and children interacted with other children, the researcher made notations of the interactions and conversations.

The researcher observed two of the weekly PLC meetings. The Head Start lead teacher conducted the PLC, and teachers reviewed the Montessori lessons taught the following week. The interaction during the PLC allowed for coaching and mentoring opportunities, reflective practice, and fidelity in the implementation of Montessori lessons.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher used data triangulation to analyze the three methods of data collection (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) described data triangulation as a convergence of numerous sources of data to create an in-depth, real-world understanding of the case study. Data triangulation strengthened construct validity (Yin, 2018). According to Yin, the researcher is responsible for ensuring fidelity when triangulating multiple sources of data. Fidelity occurs when the researcher makes a conscious effort to distinguish between evidence that converges and non-convergence of evidence (Yin, 2018). Data triangulation is an iterative process that results in a comprehensive, in-depth description of the single-case study.

Data collection and analysis of data coincided. The individual logic model (Yin, 2018) represented the researcher's theoretical proposition, research questions, and the progression of data analysis. The researcher examined how the contextual and environmental factors in the community affected the school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills as well as rival explanations identified before the study began. Consequently, the researcher viewed the school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills through a multi-faceted lens from the evidence gathered through document reviews, interviews, observations, contextual and environmental themes, and potential rival explanations. During the data collection phase, the researcher addressed construct validity by gathering multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). To ensure reliability, the researcher crosschecked the information collected for potential bias, a deeper understanding of the perspective, and checked for completeness of data collected (Yin, 2018).

The use of an analytic strategy and analytic technique enabled the researcher to make analytic generalizations from the findings of the case study (Yin, 2018). An analytic generalization enabled the findings to be generalized and applicable to other situations with similar theoretical propositions (Yin, 2018). The theoretical proposition that the principal's efforts built teacher capacity in foundational skills followed a progression of sequential events that began with the principal's perception of the importance of foundational skills (Research Question 1). If theoretically, the principal considered foundational skills necessary, the principal provided methods and strategies to build teacher capacity (Research Question 2). As the sequential events progressed, children with well-developed foundational skills achieved academic gains throughout the school year as measured by the beginning, middle, and end of year Frog Street[®] curriculum (Schiller et al., 2017) assessments and the assessment data influenced teacher capacity building efforts (Research Question 3). Theoretically, the outcome was that children are ready for kindergarten, as measured by the BOY kindergarten readiness assessment (Research Question 4). The individual logic model framework allowed the researcher to stipulate theoretically predicted events related to the research questions and then operationalize the series of events over time as triangulated evidence either confirmed or contradicted the model and research questions. The researcher examined the relevant real-world contextual influences and the rival explanations that might influence the case study. The individual logic model represented the initial proposition and research questions about the case study and provided a framework for analyzing the data gathered. The adaptation of Yin's (2018) individual logic model illustrates the framework used to analyze the data collected (Figure 1).

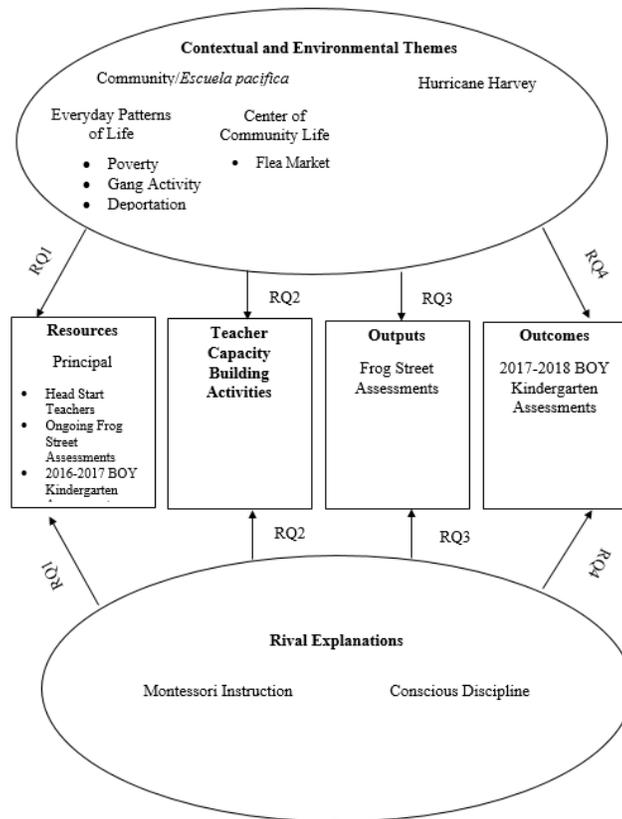


Figure 1. Individual logic model showing the progression from the resources to the outcomes.

The researcher examined two rival explanations to determine if they were plausible and credible explanations for teacher capacity building in foundational skills as opposed to the original proposition that teacher capacity building in foundational skills was a result of the principal's efforts. One plausible rival explanation was the implementation of the Montessori instructional method. A second rival explanation was the implementation of the social-emotional curriculum, Conscious Discipline® (Bailey, 2017).

Findings of the Study

The findings of this study provided insight into one prekindergarten principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills that included executive function and fine motor skills. According to Becker et al. (2014), Cameron et al., (2016), and Nesbitt et al. (2015), academic success in cognitive standards-based learning is challenging for a prekindergarten student without these skills. Some of the factors that impact children's delayed foundational skills are poverty (Mathis & Bierman, 2015; Raver & Blair, 2016; Sasser et al., 2015; Stosich, 2016), families at risk of deportation (Rojas-Flores, Clements, Koo, & London, 2017; Zayas, Aguilar-Gaxiola, Yoon, & Rey, 2015), and natural disasters such as hurricanes (Sprung & Harris, 2010, Wright & Ryan, 2014). The findings from this study indicated that the principal and Head Start teachers recognized that the contextual and environmental influences of the community could adversely affect learning.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 was, “What is the prekindergarten principal’s perception of the necessity or importance of building teacher capacity?” The principal understood the importance of building teacher capacity in foundational skills. Building teacher capacity was a priority of the principal, and she recognized that students might come to school with underdeveloped executive function and fine motor skills. Evidence gained from interviews indicated that during the 2017–2018 school year, the community experienced Hurricane Harvey, gang violence, poverty, and fear of deportation. The principal understood the importance of a caring, well-trained staff, and a calm school environment, and that these elements could mediate the effect of potentially traumatic events. The principal said:

One of the things we appreciated, even more than before [Hurricane Harvey], was the benefit of a calm environment. We all had to reframe the way we thought about what these families had gone through. I think as a school, we were always sensitive about the circumstances these children came from. Poverty, violence, gangs, parents deported, but with the hurricane, we had to really focus on what we could do to get these children back on track.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 was, “What method or strategies does a prekindergarten principal use to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?” The purpose of this research question was to determine the methods, strategies, and activities to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. The principal devoted herself to providing activities and strategies that implemented Montessori instruction with fidelity and integrity. The lead Head Start teacher stated that “the Montessori method teaches executive function and builds up the small hand muscles every time we do an activity.”

The principal used the weekly Montessori PLCs to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. Referring to the PLC, one Head Start teacher said, “it is so important to practice what you are going to do. Even after you have been teaching a while. At this school, we never lose sight of it’s the teacher that guides learning.” The PLC built teacher capacity by building a community of learners. The Head Start lead teacher reflected on the PLC, “At this school we have Montessori, but you also have our PLC, which is part of that Montessori idea of being in a community with each other.”

With intentionality, the principal refocused the teacher’s attention from Hurricane Harvey back to the reasons the school implemented Montessori instruction. Outside consultants built teacher capacity by focusing on Montessori instruction and the importance of addressing misbehavior and developing self-regulation skills in children. The principal established the professional development library with Montessori resources to build teacher capacity in this instructional method.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 was, “How does on-going prekindergarten assessment data influence the prekindergarten principal’s efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?” The purpose of this research question was to determine if the Frog Street assessment data influenced the principal’s efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. The teachers administered the

Frog Street[®] (Schiller et al., 2017) assessments mandated by the district with the knowledge that the students might not do well on the assessments until the end of the year. District personnel provided training on the Frog Street[®] Press curriculum (Schiller et al., 2017) materials at the beginning of the year and provided a timeline for administering the assessments. The principal submitted the assessment data to the district office. However, the Frog Street assessment data did not influence the principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 was, "How does the beginning of the year kindergarten readiness assessment data influence the prekindergarten principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?" The purpose of this research question was to determine if the kindergarten readiness assessment data influenced the principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. The school district assesses kindergarten students at the beginning of the kindergarten year. The principal did not receive the kindergarten readiness scores administered in the fall of 2017 or the kindergarten readiness scores administered in the fall of 2018. The data from the kindergarten readiness assessment did not influence the teacher capacity building activities.

Conclusions

This case study began with the premise that the principal is a servant-leader, and the leader is a servant first and foremost (Greenleaf, 2002; Spears, 2010). The researcher gathered evidence that would either confirm or contradict the premise that the principal exemplified the qualities of a servant-leader by her perception of the importance of foundational skills and her efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. The principal perceived that foundational skills were essential and necessary for student success in prekindergarten. The servant-leader attributes were the over-arching theoretical lens used by the researcher to view the transition from the school's human capital resources to the implementation of the methods, strategies, and activities to build teacher capacity.

The principal implemented methods, strategies, and activities that built teacher capacity in foundational skills. The efforts to build teacher capacity provided the opportunity for the principal to exhibit servant-leader attributes. For example, the PLCs became a way for the principal to build a community of dedicated teacher-leaders and to encourage professional growth. The PLCs provided the principal the opportunity for teacher coaching, mentoring, and reflective practice. The interactions at the PLC allowed the principal to conceptualize and operationalize the efforts needed to build teacher capacity. The principal's servant-leader attributes were the catalyst for these opportunities, and she understood the possible future outcomes because of the implementation of these strategies. The weekly Montessori PLCs were a powerful tool implemented by the principal that valued building teacher capacity in foundational skills. The PLC was the primary activity used by the principal to build teacher capacity and demonstrated the principal's commitment to implement a Montessori program with fidelity and strict adherence to the Montessori philosophy. Additional activities included consultants and a professional development library that focused on the importance of Montessori instruction as a method to build teacher capacity.

The interviews, document review, and observations indicated the school used Montessori instruction and materials. The principal and Head Start staff stated that the district trained the

prekindergarten teachers on the Frog Street® curriculum materials (Schiller et al., 2017) and Conscious Discipline® (Bailey, 2017); however, the staff did not implement the curriculum materials. The school followed the district guidelines and administered the Frog Street® (Schiller et al., 2017) assessments at the beginning, middle, and end of year. Evidence gained from the interviews indicated that scores were below the district expectations at the beginning and middle of the year and met district standards by the end of the year. The principal justified the lower assessment scores at the beginning and middle of the school year because of the different sequence of learning objectives:

Montessori teaches foundational skills. Because we start off teaching foundational skills, meeting children where they are. Frog Street® begins with letter recognition. We begin with letter sounds because children read with sounds, not calling out letters. But at the end of the day, we always come out scoring higher on the end of the year test than our counterparts. Because we've built that foundation and that's what it's all about.

The Frog Street® assessment scores did not influence teacher capacity building efforts at the school.

Another disconnect was the beginning of the year kindergarten readiness scores. Kindergarten students take the assessment at the beginning of the kindergarten year. The principal and Head Start teachers indicated that the district did not distribute the scores to the prekindergarten principals. According to the principal, there are six different feeder schools for the school. The principal stated that this made district distribution of the scores difficult. The schools with the kindergarten program received the scores; however, the district did not distribute the scores to the specific prekindergarten schools. Participants agreed that the results of the beginning of the year kindergarten readiness scores would not change the way the school taught the students. The lack of disaggregation and distribution of the kindergarten readiness assessment data to the prekindergarten principal was a finding of the study.

The researcher concluded from the evidence gathered during the interviews, the principal's and Head Start teachers' laissez-faire perspective on standards-based testing exemplified the chasm between a Montessori instructional program's unique educational approach and a school district's emphasis on high-stakes testing and data-driven instruction (Block, 2015). The Montessori instructional method is a child-centered classroom, and the teacher acts as a facilitator and "frees herself from all preconceived ideas concerning the levels at which children may be" (Montessori, 1995, p. 276). Teachers organize materials on shelves, and children work at different levels based on his or her needs. The environment, self-respect, and respect for others are essential social skills. The academic content is interconnected, interdisciplinary, and embedded in the Montessori hands-on activities (Lillard, 2012, 2013). Multiple levels of learning, individualized pacing, and specific Montessori learning materials create a challenge for educators to align the Montessori curriculum with the content and format of standards-based assessments.

Educational Significance and Implications

Informing instructional leaders of one prekindergarten principal's efforts, as a servant-leader, to build teacher capacity in foundational skills informs an instructional leader's vision and decisions to provide prekindergarten professional development that closes the achievement gap and provides an equitable education for all students. The significance of this study was essential to prekindergarten principals and teachers as the findings contribute valuable insight into one school's efforts to build teacher capacity to remediate foundational skills. Cognitive standards-based

learning is difficult if a child enters prekindergarten without well-developed executive function and fine motor integration skills (Becker et al., 2014; Cameron et al., 2016; Nesbitt et al., 2015). Specifically, the lack of these skills contribute to later academic achievement gaps if not addressed early (Mathis & Bierman, 2015).

Nationally, approximately one-fourth of students are entering kindergarten without the required readiness skills, regardless of whether or not they attended a public prekindergarten program, Head Start program, or no program at all (Becker et al., 2014). With intentionality, campus leadership must address building teacher capacity to target early intervention and subsequently narrow gaps in achievement between student groups. Such change in the professional dynamic of schools requires a fundamental shift in how schools are led, grow, and thrive. First, schools must move from inauthentic teacher evaluation systems to a mindset of continuous analysis of learning. The fundamental question then becomes, “Is what we are doing working?” Secondly, communication between leadership and the classroom must become authentic, as the goal of teacher self-empowerment invites mutual responsibility for teaching and learning (Marshall, 2013). And finally, school leadership must not only define the roadmap for rigor, they must also strengthen culture and instruction with hands-on professional training (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018). Learning thrives when learning is nurtured; therefore, creating a strong culture where learning can thrive requires high-impact practices—plan, roll out, execute and monitor.

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The Scholar-Practitioner: Problems of Practice Identified by Aspiring School Leaders

Jafeth E. Sanchez

University of Nevada, Reno

Shelley Kresyman

University of Nevada, Reno

Principal preparation programs must work to develop scholar-practitioners. This will help to ensure that school leaders are able to use research methodologies to examine problems of practice, make critical data-based decisions toward positive change, and effectively implement research-based practices to drive school improvement. With this in mind, we examined 44 aspiring school leaders' final projects within a master's-level research course in which they were asked to identify a problem of practice in education and write a research proposal that delineated how they could potentially study that problem of practice. Through a content analysis, five themes were identified: (a) Let's Collaborate, (b) Improve Student Achievement, (c) Create a Safe Learning Environment, (d) Use a Diversity Lens, and (e) Enhance Leadership Behavior. Within these themes, unique distinctions were evidenced between male and female aspiring school principals. A discussion of these findings and distinctions is provided, along with implications for principal preparation programs.

Keywords: aspiring school leader, scholar-practitioner, content analysis, principal preparation

In a recent call for improvement among principal preparation programs, the Wallace Foundation (2016) highlighted key aspects of high-quality programs. Among those key aspects, the creation of opportunities in which aspiring school leaders can make connections among their field experiences, research, theory, and practice “appears to better prepare principals to lead and impact change” (Campanotta, Simpson, Newton, 2018, p. 227). In particular, when principal preparation programs are able to develop scholar-practitioners, school leaders use core values of the community, democracy, social justice, caring, and equity to create change within their school settings (Schultz, 2010). However, programs of educational leadership and administration often focus on developing the scholar-practitioner only for those seeking doctoral degrees (Bowers, 2017), rather than for those who are seeking a master’s degree with the aim of becoming a school principal.

To serve as a school principal, a master’s degree is typically required for the role, and principals are increasingly tasked with leading and creating a continuous cycle of improvement with research-based practices. This cycle of improvement necessitates a deep understanding of the intersection between research and practice. Consequently, there is a need to better understand aspiring school leaders’ perspectives on current problems of practice and how they propose to study such problems through research. This strengthened understanding will support improvement among principal preparation programs in order to better develop school leaders who can serve as scholar-practitioners and enact educational change. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine aspiring school principals’ perspectives on current problems of practice and their proposed study for research.

The Scholar-Practitioner

According to Schultz (2010), “The call for educational leaders who utilize scholarship via inquiry of, in, and for practice brings us to the label of the *scholar-practitioner*” (p. 53). The author affirms that the scholar-practitioner within an educational leadership setting is able to use inquiry to guide efforts, generate knowledge, and impact current practice for more equitable outcomes. Hampton (2010) added that scholar-practitioners take action to create change, rather than just believing that a need for change exists, and challenge the status quo.

Given this focus on change, Bailey (2014) indicated that the scholar-practitioner is able to combine theory and practice to “create a powerful precept for action” (p. 48). The author recognized that this lens is essential in today’s school leadership in order to confront multiple challenges, such as local concerns or mandated requirements that urge for difficult reform processes. It is these types of demands within the principalship that have led to calls for improvements in school leadership preparation programs. For example, Malen (2017) discussed the integration of research apprenticeships in preparation programs and found improvements in candidate preparation while enhancing the capacity of school systems for improvement. Ultimately, a shift from the traditional scholar model to a one that develops scholar-practitioners within principal preparation programs can support the ongoing need for school change and potentially yield positive school outcomes (Mansfield & Stacy, 2017).

While messaging within principal preparation programs may often include aspects related to the need to adapt to and address educational change, programs also need to make necessary changes to support current expectations. Faculty and other leaders within principal preparation programs should be modeling effective practices of leadership, including the ability to function within a cycle of continuous improvement. To that end, improvement efforts should include

strategies by which to better prepare school principals for the demands of the role. One strategy may include a focus on the development of scholar-practitioners.

Background

The dynamic transformation of a principal preparation program, which stemmed from a university-district collaborative, was launched during the spring of 2017 at a land-grant university in the Western United States. The dynamic transformation included a focus on using a cycle of continuous improvement, while also aiming to develop scholar-practitioners. Key areas of the transformation and partnership included: the identification of foundational needs, strategic involvement of specific stakeholders, a complete course sequence redesign, the use of a student-cohort model, as well as an extensive course and syllabi revision process, implementation of a co-teaching model, a revised internship, and a newly implemented culminating experience (Blinded Authors, in press).

One particular course, Educational Leadership (EL) 747 Research Analysis and Development, was specifically implemented with the aim to develop scholar-practitioners within the principal preparation program. The course was co-taught by a university faculty member and two school principals. All aspects of the course took place as a mutually co-taught effort, meaning the individuals delivered instruction together within the same space (Cook & Friend, 1995), and all efforts related to the course planning, organization, delivery, and assessment were designed to blend university theory with school practices (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2008). Two cohorts of graduate students (i.e., aspiring school leaders) successfully completed the required program course during the summers of 2017 and 2018. Both cohorts of students were asked to complete a final project in which the aspiring school leaders were asked to identify a problem of practice in education and write a research proposal that delineated how they could potentially study that problem of practice. During course facilitation, the co-instructors believed in the power of modeling the scholar-practitioner lens and became increasingly interested in examining what problems of practice aspiring school leaders identified, as well as how individuals proposed to study those problems and whether other unique distinctions might exist among the aspiring school leaders. These areas of inquiry resulted in the current study.

Method

The purpose of this study was to examine aspiring school principals' perspectives on current problems of practice and their proposed study for research. The study was designed using the scholar-practitioner lens to gain a stronger understanding about how principal candidates' work (based on a final project) could reflect the application of this particular lens. Qualitative content analysis was used as a guide for this research study. The use of content analysis has been dated as far back as the 18th century (Rosengren, 1981), and is a method used to analyze text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Notably, Weber (1990) indicated that qualitative content analysis serves to classify large amounts of text into categories, with an extension beyond simply counting words. Therefore, the "interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" was used for the purpose of this study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). This analysis was conducted on 44 existing records from a principal preparation master's course, EL 747 Research Development and Analysis, that were obtained from the final project assignment submissions as Word documents. The research questions that guided

this study were: What problems of practice do aspiring principals identify? How are the problems of practice proposed to be studied? Do male and female aspiring principals' identified problems of practice differ? How do the identified problems reflect current issues in education?

Data Source

These final project assignment submissions in the form of Word documents served as the data source for this study. For the assignment, the aspiring school leaders were asked to keep their audience in mind and the ability to communicate their research effectively. They needed to include a clear description of their: (a) finalized problem of practice, (b) most relevant literature, (c) research methodology and methods, and (d) a cohesive conclusion that tied the document together. Upon gaining approval from the university's institutional review board to access the documents for research purposes, a third-party faculty member served as an independent individual who deidentified each document. The individual deidentified each document by removing the first name on the student's title page and replacing it with an "F" for female or "M" for male. Each original file was replaced as a new document labeled as Document 1, Document 2...Document 44. From the deidentified documents, the information that was recorded included the graduate students' gender label, the identified problem of practice, and the proposed methods used to study the identified problem of practice, all of which were used to inform the research questions for this study.

Data Analysis

After obtaining the deidentified data of the 44 existing document records, both researchers collaboratively reviewed Documents 1- 6 to calibrate and ensure consistency in entering data necessary for this study. During this first phase of analysis, the two researchers specifically focused on the accuracy of data entry into an Excel sheet for the gender label, potential identification of the problem of practice, grade level of focus for the research, and each document's listed method for studying the problem. Upon confirming consistent data entry needs, each researcher separately entered data for the remaining 38 documents (i.e., each recording information for 19 existing documents). After document review and data entry, the second phase of analysis focused on the use of template coding, or a priori coding. A priori coding was determined by establishing codes that represented relatively broad research themes that could reflect current topics of educational problems of practice (Blair, 2015). The identified codes included: instruction, student behavior, adult behavior, professional development, professional learning communities (PLCs), collaboration, achievement, and diversity to examine aspiring school leaders' identified problems of practice.

Additionally, a priori coding for the proposed methodology to study the problem included qualitative, quantitative, and action research, as well as the design or method, as directly noted in the final project's text. These three codes were determined because they constituted the majority of the content learned in the course. Mixed-methods was discussed in the course at an introductory level, so students were discouraged from pursuing that particular method in their final project, and therefore, excluded in the coding for this study.

The third phase of the content analysis focused on reflexivity. Because reflexivity is allowed in template coding (Blair, 2015), coding was reviewed individually (19 documents each that remained after calibration coding of 6 documents) and then holistically (across all 44

documents) together and engaged in reflexivity. This provided an opportunity for several revisions to be made to the initial coding. For example, the instruction code was determined to clearly be embedded within other codes depending on the focus of instruction. In an effort to ensure codes were mutually exclusive, that code was removed and data were redistributed across appropriately representative codes. Similarly, we determined that the codes of professional development and PLCs encompassed a focus on collaboration, so those two codes were transformed into one code for collaboration. Lastly, the code of adult behavior more accurately focused on behavior focused on the school leader, so that code was changed to leadership behavior. Ultimately, this final coding stage led to the identification of the study's themes.

Considerations

While additional cohorts have been selected under this new program model, this study is limited to the two cohorts of students who completed EL 747 within the last two years, which resulted in 44 final project documents used for analysis. Student background characteristics, demographics beyond gender, or other forms of student data were not used as part of the analysis, which could provide additional information about the identified problems of practice, patterns, and connections to current issues. The results of this study are not generalizable beyond the scope of this work, but they do provide a snapshot view into the potential ways by which ongoing principal program preparation needs may be enhanced. An additional limitation may be that specific work site, district initiatives, or administrator support may have influenced the aspiring school principals' selected problem of practice.

Findings

The content analysis of the final project assignment revealed unique findings in the aspiring school leaders' identified problems of practice. The themes identified were: (a) Collaborate Effectively, (b) Improve Student Achievement, (c) Create a Safe Learning Environment, (d) Use a Diversity Lens, and (e) Enhance Leadership Behavior. The themes were mutually exclusive, which supported our efforts to identify how many of the projects focused on each particular theme, as well as how these themes varied by aspiring school leaders' grade-level and gender demographics.

Collaborate Effectively

The theme, Collaborate Effectively, was identified as a problem of practice among 14 of the 44 final projects. A majority of the projects that focused on this theme uniquely emphasized PLCs as the primary problem of practice. Aspiring school leaders framed this as a problem by indicating that there tends to be a misunderstanding of effective PLCs, which contribute to a lack of cohesion among educators and impacts critical school needs for improvement. To illustrate, one aspiring school leader wrote, "There can be inconsistency in the development and implementation [of PLCs]. It's not a simple task to implement the PLC process but it is a valuable one." Other projects within this theme indicated that collaboration was a problem of practice because PLC ineffectiveness influences teacher burnout, stress, and, ultimately, impacts teacher retention. Several projects highlighted the responsibility of functioning as a PLC to successfully support professional learning practice, impact critical student growth, and enhance research-based

strategies. One project, in particular, framed the problem as requiring specific school leadership involvement to lead effective collaboration efforts.

Improve Student Achievement

The theme of Improve Student Achievement was identified as a concerning problem of practice among 11 of the 44 projects. Notably, while most projects discussed achievement as an end-result to positively changing a problem of practice, the projects within this theme focused on a specific component of student achievement. For example, one project focused on whether the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) could be used for English-only students to enhance literacy in similar ways that it can be used to address the needs of English learners. Another project, however, emphasized that high school students within career and technical education (CTE) pathways are difficult to retain within CTE programs and how the shortage of teachers who specialize in a particular CTE field may be contributing to the issue. In connecting the research to practice, this aspiring school leader wrote, “A thorough literature review revealed that research about student retention rates in CTE is severely lacking.” Other projects focused on areas such as grade inflation, homework policies, teacher accountability, employed students, and parent involvement as components that influence efforts to improve student achievement.

Create a Safe Learning Environment

The need to Create a Safe Learning Environment was just behind that of student achievement, with 10 of the 44 projects honing in on this area. Most of the projects within this theme focused on a particular aspect of student discipline. For example, one project focused on teacher duty schedules and the disproportionality it creates with student discipline issues; whereas, other projects focused in cell phone policies, tardiness, and absenteeism as aspects that hinder the creation of a safe learning environment for students. A few other projects highlighted essential strategies, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to examine the existing problem of practice, along with teacher-student relationships, or even exploring school start-time adjustments to remedy student discipline concerns and create a safe learning environment. For example, the aspiring school leader focused on start times indicated cited research and concluded that, “earlier start times may result in fewer hours of sleep, as students may not fully compensate for earlier rise times with earlier bedtimes. Activities such as sports and work, along with family and social schedules, may make it difficult for students to adjust the time they go to bed.”

Use a Diversity Lens

Several projects narrowed in on problem of practice related to diversity. The framing of the projects specifically addressed a need to use a diversity lens in 7 of the 44 projects. Aspiring school leaders who focused on this area tended to highlight specific needs of unique subgroups. For instance, one project aimed to examine Latino parental involvement at the high school level; whereas, another project centered on at-risk, third-graders, common assessments, and the role of a math coach. For the most part, these projects focused on existing programs in school settings, such as a two-way immersion program of English Language Learners, independent living settings for 18-22 year-old students with disabilities, and physical education teachers’ preparation needs as related to supporting students who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ communities.

Enhance Leadership Behavior

Only two of the 44 projects focused on leadership behavior as a problem of practice. One of the projects shared that principals are tasked with serving as instructional leaders, but that there is major variation as to how that role is interpreted and what serving as an instructional leader actually requires. This aspiring school leader, for example, argued, “As emphasis in instructional leadership continues to develop, it is imperative for educators to understand whether instructional leadership has a direct impact on student achievement.” The project disclosed that too many interpretations for instructional leader creates large variations among leadership demands and, essentially, impacts other important school factors. The second project focused on leadership behaviors, but the problem of practice was that the principals’ behavior has a direct impact on teacher attrition. The purpose of this proposed project was to be able to identify key leadership behaviors that might lessen teacher attrition.

Proposed Methodology, Grade Level, and Gender

Along with identification of a problem of practice, students were required to select methodology and method, or design, to research the problem. With regards to the proposed methodology to examine the identified problem of practice, a majority of the final projects included a focus on qualitative research, with 26 of 44 projects using a qualitative methodology. The majority of qualitative methodologies selected a case study design, and other projects narrowed in on grounded theory, narratives, and phenomenology. Conversely, the 18 remaining projects reflected a quantitative methodology to examine the identified problem of practice. For these, the projects primarily included a correlational approach; although, some projects focused on survey research, group comparisons using chi-square and *t*-tests, and causal-comparative designs.

In reference to the grade-level focus of the problem of practice, elementary and secondary levels were fairly balanced, with 21 and 19, respectively, out of the 44 projects. For three of the projects, no grade level indication was found through the content analysis. Additionally, the analysis revealed that 32 of 44 final projects were developed by females, while the remaining 12 records pertained to males.

Other Unique Distinctions

The grade-level and gender demographics revealed an important lens into additional distinctions among the final projects submitted by aspiring school leadership. For example, when examining gender against the identified problems of practice, the themes were generally identified by both male and female aspiring school leaders. However, two themes were not proportionally balanced by gender. Specifically, the theme of Safety was identified as a problem of practice among eight female graduate students, while only two male graduate students used this theme. In addition, a much larger and disproportional distinction was found within the theme of Collaboration, with 12 females identifying this as a problem of practice and only two males. A gender disproportionality was also clear when examining the chosen methodology; specifically, while 26 of 44 final projects were qualitative, 21 of those were proposed by females. Lastly, a large distinction was also found by grade level and theme; nine of the final projects that focused on Collaboration as a problem of practice were situated within the elementary school level, whereas two that focused on

Collaboration were centered at the secondary school level. The remaining identified problems of practice were proportionally distributed across grade levels.

Discussion

The identified themes from this study point to significant, current trends in education. For example, Burns et al. (2018) affirmed that “working in teams has become an integral part of being an educator (p. 394). These teams may be structured horizontally, vertically, and as learning communities, for example. Indeed, PLCs are widely used for reform efforts toward school improvement, with a culture of collaboration serving as critical component (Thessin, 2015). Certainly, PLCs are widely known as a model for learning communities, and the aspiring school leaders’ projects in this study tended to focus on collaboration, particularly through PLCs, as a problem of practice. This also points to their recognition in practice related to challenges of PLCs, which mirror existing research noting that challenges to develop and sustain PLCs are very apparent (Jones, Stall, & Yarbrough, 2013). Through the aspiring school leaders’ identification of this problem of practice, it appears they find collaboration as an essential aspect of successful school leadership, but they are also aware that current efforts need support to implement effective forms of collaboration that impact change.

Perhaps the most significant component of change, particularly with today’s accountability demands for school leaders, is that of student achievement. To that end, PLCs have been linked to student achievement, especially when focused on collaborative leadership processes (Burns et al., 2018). Therefore, the aspiring school leaders’ second theme of student achievement also aligned with this current trend in education. However, the specificity for the focus on student achievement led to the identification of program needs, strategies, and implementation efforts. This aligns with Leithwood’s (2018) work highlighting that principals’ have important qualities and carry out practices that influence school improvement efforts. It appears that aspiring school leaders may reflect an understanding of existing research-based practices that are being implemented, and they were broadening that understanding to focus on needs of specific subgroups or populations that need additional educational support.

Whether it is to enhance educational support for student achievement or improve upon collaborative efforts, the aspiring school leaders’ next theme of safety needs can also assist in these efforts. Similar to the focus on student achievement, it seems that the aspiring school leaders were able to identify key subsets of safety needs that warrant attention to promote school improvement. Notably, Saracho (2017) acknowledges there are principles of protecting and establishing a safe environment in schools, with focus on bullying, for instance. However, the areas of concern among the aspiring school leaders included more specific disciplinary efforts related to classroom achievement, including policies focused on cell phones, tardiness, and absenteeism. These unique areas of emphasis can demonstrate that aspiring school leaders identify topics in which changes in policies and unique supports for students could continue to drive positive, student achievement. Leithwood (2018) argues that policy-driven reform is largely dependent upon principals’ responses to specific policy initiatives.

Interestingly, the themes of diversity and leadership appeared to be in the background of the aspiring school leaders’ identified problems of practice. It is difficult to determine why the themes were not as prominent as the others in these projects, but it could be that the aspiring school leaders need more experience and exposure to existing diversity needs in education. Additionally,

it could also be that their current backgrounds as educators serve as a limitation to examining leadership needs from a research-based perspective.

Intriguing findings, particularly by gender, grade-level, theme, and methodology are also important to consider. For example, an important distinction is that more females focused on the theme of collaboration, which aligns with existing research on how women lead organizations, such as that women lead in a more participative manner than men (Northouse, 2018). Moreover, it was also revealed that this focus on the need for improved collaborative efforts was within the elementary-level setting, which supports that collaboration tends to be more frequent at the elementary level than the secondary level (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015). In addition, the majority of projects used a qualitative methodology to explore problems of practice, as opposed to considering quantitative methodologies. This could potentially provide insight about aspiring school leaders' levels of discomfort with the use of data or potentially being data-averse. Moreover, gender issues could be of concern with the apparent disproportionality of aspiring female school leaders who did not consider a quantitative methodology. Lastly, a focus on action research as a methodology was visibly lacking. Purely from an anecdotal perspective, but worth noting, it could be that the course content of action research is discussed last in the course sequence, so perhaps the delivery of information is too late in the process for students to consider action research as a means to conduct a study on a problem of practice. Perhaps, having a strong focus on action research would serve to support the intended course emphasis on the scholar-practitioner.

Implications for Practice

Principal preparation programs must prepare our future school leaders to embrace and conduct research within their school settings. The scholar-practitioner lens will strengthen opportunities for school improvement within today's demands of school accountability and increased student achievement. This study provided a lens into aspiring school leaders' identified problems of practice and their proposed methods for studying such issues. However, these efforts must be encouraged early on in principal preparation programs, so that school leaders can be ready to explore, conduct, and implement research-based practices in their school settings. Overall, it appears that aspiring school leaders tend to identify problems of practice that do exist in current educational settings, but there is some concern with the lack of focus that appeared in their diversity lens and leadership focus. While these could be areas that could be strengthened as aspiring school leaders shift into actual leadership roles, it is important for principal preparation programs to proactively emphasize diversity and leadership within their coursework and field experiences. At the same time, it is difficult to determine whether the aspiring school leaders' sense of autonomy or choice influenced their decision-making process in identifying existing problems of practice.

Further Research

Further research on the ways in which aspiring school leaders identify problems of practice and propose to conduct research studies can provide insight about the scholar-practitioner in school leadership. While this study only focused on 44 existing documents, an increase in data sources, as well as aspiring school leader demographics would provide more in-depth knowledge and context about this topic. Also, the content analysis could be augmented with qualitative interviews

or focus groups to gain a better understanding of how aspiring school leaders make meaning of problems of practice and the ways available to explore topic areas. Lastly, a longitudinal mix-method study focused on current school leaders and how they identify problems of practice, while working to resolve them, would provide further insight for the scholar-practitioner lens with a strong intersection of research and practice.

Conclusions

It is essential for principal preparation programs to encourage the scholar-practitioner lens among aspiring school leaders. Through this lens, future school leaders will be better equipped with the tools and ability to promote ongoing cycles of continuous improvement for PK-12 students and staff. The scholar-practitioner lens needs to begin taking place in master's-level coursework, rather than only at the doctoral level. These future leaders will be required to identify and provide potential solutions for problems or concerns at their sites. As they learn to interpret the current literature in the field, they will be able to connect site-based needs with the relevant research and, then, design site-based research projects. In order for this to occur, aspiring leaders need to have a basic level of understanding and ability to: design projects using appropriate research methods and designs, collect and analyze data, draw conclusions, and develop and monitor next steps.

Additional insight into how such master's-level, aspiring school leaders identify existing problems of practice and how they propose to examine such issues is needed. It may also be illuminating to understand how aspiring administrators' selection of problems of practice may be influenced by their professional experiences, demographics, school levels, and mentor principals' input. This increased understanding could be used to better support principal preparation program design efforts, enhance the way in which aspiring leaders are guided in their coursework, and model a cycle of continuous improvement with which schools and stakeholders could reap the benefits.

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What Matters Most in Superintendent Evaluation

Frank D. Davidson

Northern Arizona University

Michael Schwanenberger

Northern Arizona University

Richard Wiggall

Northern Arizona University

In the fall of 2018, all school superintendents in a state in the southwest were invited to take part in a survey which included a section related to superintendent perceptions of the board's evaluation process for superintendents. The present article addresses the factors perceived to be important in evaluations of superintendents by governing board members. The survey revealed the most important factors in governing board evaluations of the superintendent, as perceived by superintendents. The survey also revealed that superintendents perceive high levels of trust in their relationships with board members. The results indicate that the most important factors in board evaluations of the superintendent include management of the financial affairs of the district, maintaining the quality of the education program, relationships with employees, developing and implementing long term plans for the district, student performance measured by state-mandated assessments, and maintaining a safe environment for students.

Superintendents play a critical role in influencing the culture, policy agenda, strategic decision-making, and overall leadership of their districts. In literature which spans decades regarding the superintendency, various roles have been associated with the position, including teacher-scholar, manager, negotiator-statesman, applied social scientist, and communicator (Cuban, 2001; Hurst, 2017; Kowalski, 2006). Within recent decades, many authors have argued that, given a variety of social, political, and economic factors, the superintendency has evolved into a complex and almost unwieldy position (Bjork & Keedy, 2002; Brunner, 2002; Fusarelli, Cooper, & Carella, 2002; Glasman & Fuller, 2002; Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Kowalski & Glass, 2002; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Papa, English, Davidson, Culver, & Brown, 2013; Parsons, Brandon, Friesen, & Jacobsen, 2019; Petersen & Short, 2001; Tekniepe, 2015; Wells, 2019). The complexities associated with the position have been compounded through factors including social media (Hurst, 2017) and increasing cultural and political polarization (Bowers, 2016).

Literature Review

What We Expect Superintendents to Know and Do

Studying superintendents' leadership has historically posed some challenges to the researcher, in that superintendents might be sometimes concerned about the political consequences of being forthcoming about their perceptions regarding the job (Melton, Reeves, McBrayer, & Smith, 2019). Effective superintendents tend to be very conscious of their public image (Hurst, 2017), and concerns related to one's image could lead to describing one's experiences in ideal rather than actual terms, as well as focusing on areas such as instructional leadership, rather than the actual political and managerial roles that are likely to dominate their time and attention. In the polarized times in which we live, even in the relative safety of a private interview with a researcher, it is reasonable to assume that some superintendents may be more likely to provide politically safe answers to questions about their role when a more controversial response may result in unpleasant political consequences.

While subject to factors such as the political, social, and cultural contexts in which they work, superintendents must find an effective balance between their political, managerial, and instructional selves. The current context of school accountability demands significant and measurable instructional improvements despite overwhelming financial challenges, yet superintendents cannot ignore the political and managerial dimensions of their work. To be effective leaders, superintendents must adequately attend to functions in areas such as human resources, finance and budgeting, maintenance, transportation, food services, public relations, and facilities planning, while also demonstrating the moral authority to lead their districts (Davidson & Hughes, 2020; Fowler, 2019).

We expect superintendents to be all things to all people. They are to be effective managers, ensuring that a school district's financial, accounting, transportation, food services, and technology departments operate capably and smoothly. They are to be savvy politicians, communicating effectively with local taxpayers and with policymakers at the state, local, and national levels to shape legislation so that it will be of benefit to the school district. They are to be instructional leaders who are conversant in a wide range of curricula and instructional strategies.

Conflict Management

A significant role for superintendents in recent decades, it has been argued, also involves managing conflict between various stakeholder groups (Hughes & Davidson, 2020; Melton et al., 2019; Noppe, Yager, Webb, & Sheng, 2013). Issues ranging from school closures to the school calendar to school busing plans can attract significant attention and conflict (McCullough & Leithwood, 2016). Decades ago, Cuban wrote that, “Conflict is the DNA of the superintendency” (1985, p. 28). There is scant evidence that superintendents experience less conflict currently than when these remarks were written, and most superintendents report that they receive little training in managing or mediating conflict (Hughes & Davidson, 2020). Negotiating the conflicts and opposing forces requires a commitment to the acceptance of dissent, as well as constant attention to the many influences and demands of employees, taxpayers, parents, state departments of education, and lawmakers (Melton et al., 2019; Parsons et al., 2019). Wells summarized the challenges superintendents face as follows:

financial challenges, pressures in a day of accountability and high visibility, school board and special interest group pressures, expectations for improved student achievement, litigation, declining enrollment, students with increased social and emotional issues, and expectations for increased job performance. (2019, p. 227)

The public demand for reform of the schools has intensified scrutiny and criticism of the position. The attention on standards and accountability, while not necessarily a new phenomenon, has increased superintendents’ sense of vulnerability. The use of achievement testing as an instrument of accountability, fueled by factors that are economic, political, and social in origin (Davidson, 2015), is a blunt instrument of reform that has unseated many school leaders. Noted Elmore, “Policymakers generally like solutions that are simple and cheap rather than those that are complex and expensive” (2003, p. 6).

Petersen and Fusarelli noted that, “Although superintendents view themselves as professional educators and not politicians, nearly all adopt political strategies in dealing with board members, staff, and the community at large” (2008, p. 117). Necessity dictates that the contemporary superintendent must develop skills in exerting political influence. Conflicts can surface among a wide variety of constituencies including parents, staff, employee organizations, elected officials, taxpayer groups, faith-based groups, advocacy groups, neighborhood associations, and major corporate employers. In order to effectively manage the conflict that is an inevitable fact of life in public schools, superintendents must be adept at establishing and maintaining strong relationships and coalitions of support.

Recent literature on the superintendency is replete with images of superintendents overwhelmed with seemingly innumerable political and managerial responsibilities. Some express the sense that the superintendent’s greatest potential influence lies in creating collective will and distributing leadership and influence (Leithwood, 2013; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). Despite the efforts of individual superintendents to collaboratively create and enlist support for a shared vision of success, current accountability policies make clear that the consequences of a superintendent failing to improve student achievement can be career-altering for a superintendent. Superintendents are increasingly held accountable for consistent, significant, and measurable improvements in student academic achievement. Summarizing the disparate demands, Mountford and Wallace ask, “How can contemporary school district administrators, specifically

superintendents, contend with so many difficult, and almost impossible competing commitments?” (2019, p. 4).

Superintendents as Instructional Leaders

In recent decades, increasing demands for student achievement have changed expectations for this role (Clouse et al., 2019). Bredeson stated that, “Despite the managerial activity trap that ensnares all but the most savvy of administrators, superintendents are still looked to for leadership in curriculum and instruction” (1996, pp. 245–246). Systemic improvement is dependent upon a high level of involvement in curriculum and instruction activities on the part of the school superintendent.

There are, however, fairly obvious limitations to the amount of direct instructional leadership that superintendents can provide. As noted previously, they bear a number of responsibilities related to district support that have little or nothing to do with instruction. Moreover, both organizational structures and the physical locations of district offices create real and perceived distance from the work that goes on in classrooms.

Despite these acknowledged limitations, there is increasing evidence of ways in which school districts can influence student achievement (Brandon, Hanna, Donlevy, Parsons, & Green, 2019). Superintendents can have a strong direct or indirect effect on those district characteristics associated with higher student achievement. Leithwood and colleagues (Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Leithwood, Sun, & McCullough, 2019; McCullough & Leithwood, 2016) have identified nine practices associated with high-performing school districts: establishing a shared mission and vision, providing a coherent instructional program, using evidence to inform instructional decision-making, creating learning-oriented improvement processes, providing job-embedded professional development, aligning procedures with the mission and vision, promoting leadership-development efforts, supporting a policy-governance approach, and nurturing productive relationships. Through the ways in which they signal the importance of factors such as these, and through their efforts to foster trust in leaders and in the organization as a whole, superintendents can have a significant effect on student learning. For leaders committed to improving student achievement, these nine practices can serve as a research-based framework for their districts’ instructional improvement efforts.

The Benefits of Collaborative Practice

Based on his experience as a superintendent and an academic, Cuban made four points about the role of the superintendent as instructional leader that still apply today. First, no superintendent can “secretly improve a school district” (Cuban, 1984, p. 147). The basis of authority for a superintendent’s direction is the school board, and superintendent initiatives require the public support of the school board. Second, the superintendent makes decisions about when to “open the gate to new ideas and when to close it” (p. 147), in other words, when to deny permission and when to lend support. Third, the superintendent’s influence shapes whether or not the school district’s climate is supportive of instructional improvement. “Once the superintendent becomes identified with the mission of school improvement, even symbolic visibility in schools and classrooms carries weight” (p. 147), Cuban notes. Fourth, the superintendent’s decisions about resource allocation and staffing, particularly at the highest levels of the organization, affect the

advancement of the district's mission and efforts to monitor and assess the instructional program (Cuban, 1984).

As noted above, over the last three decades, standards-based reform has had a significant effect on school district leadership. Ideological shifts have produced an expectation on the part of policymakers and others that all students will demonstrate achievement of high academic standards on mandatory tests, and that educators can be expected to face consequences that can range from public humiliation to loss of pay or employment, should students fail to demonstrate desired gains. Though not directly involved in work at the classroom level, superintendents are increasingly held accountable for guiding and shaping the organizational vision, and, ultimately, the organizational culture, to the degree that the norms of the organization reflect an ongoing commitment to constant improvements in the academic performance of all students.

School superintendents are called upon to align their practices with the measurable outcomes on which they and their schools will be judged. They must understand and communicate to various audiences a wide range of legal requirements reflecting the will of federal, state, and local regulatory bodies, and they must also acquire and demonstrate fluency in existing and emerging knowledge on topics as complex and varied as school finance, student learning styles, personnel policies, instructional practices, personalized learning, air quality in buildings, behavioral and physiological disorders, and school safety. They must do so while attempting to satisfy diverse community concerns that run from the win-loss record of the football team to local tax rates to which bathroom children are permitted to use. The stakes faced by superintendents are high, and district leaders are challenged to provide the guidance and support needed in order for the students who are in their care to thrive.

Board members and evaluation of the superintendent

An exhaustive discussion of board-superintendent relations will not be undertaken here, but it is important to consider the role of board members as evaluators of the superintendent. In many instances, the evaluation process can be productive and purposeful, with the board and superintendent communicating a clear and unifying vision for the district. Unfortunately, however, this process can also be the superintendent's "worst nightmare when it is conducted in a climate of fear, distrust, malice, and petty politics" (Hoyle & Skrla, 1999, p. 406). It has been argued that superintendent-school board relationships have become increasingly politicized in recent decades (Alsbury & Gore, 2015; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2008; Thompson & Holt, 2016). This can lead to an approach to superintendent evaluation that is more reflective of the influence of pressure groups than the superintendent's job effectiveness.

There is some evidence that, in addition to other indicators, firsthand observations and community feedback about superintendents' relationships with others are significant factors in superintendent evaluations by the school board. Research by Gore (2016) revealed that board members look for evidence of harmonious relationships between superintendents and others, as well as evidence of improving student achievement. A separate statewide study (Webner, De Jong, Campoli, & Rush, 2017) found that board presidents perceived such responsibilities as effective relationships with the school board and the community, developing a healthy culture, effectively managing the budget, and being visible in the community as important factors in the evaluation of superintendents.

Board members bear many responsibilities, and legitimate questions can be raised about whether or not board members are adequately trained to carry out these responsibilities. Although

research has demonstrated the importance and benefits of targeted school board trainings (Gann, 2016; Hess & Meeks, 2010; Plough, 2014; Reimer, 2015; Weiss, Templeton, Thompson, & Tremont, 2014; Wilkins, 2015), less than half of U.S. states require some type of training for individuals elected to school boards (Cook, 2014; Pollard, 2012). In the state where this study was conducted, board members face no requirements other than being a resident for at least one year immediately prior to a school board election and being registered to vote. Brenner and colleagues reached a reasonable conclusion when they stated that, “Board members cannot monitor what they do not understand” (Brenner, Sullivan, & Dalton, 2002, p. iv).

A nationwide survey of board members and superintendents identified financial management, student achievement, and meeting goals as important factors in the evaluation of superintendents (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Over 90 percent of board members in this study identified these as very or extremely important in superintendent evaluations. Only 61 percent of board members in this study indicated that parental satisfaction was extremely or very important. Among superintendents, financial management (95 %), meeting goals (91 %), and having effective working relationships (89 %) were rated as very or extremely important factors in their evaluation. Significantly, although two-thirds of board members viewed student achievement as an extremely important indicator in superintendent evaluation, only 40 % of superintendents rated this as a very or extremely important factor in their evaluation.

Method

Research Questions

This study was carried out with the hope that it would help to inform graduate programs in educational leadership and provide insights that would be of benefit to practicing superintendents, governing boards, and the students they serve. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of currently-employed superintendents in this state?
2. What are the perceptions of school superintendents with respect to the evaluation process used by board members?
3. What do superintendents view as the most important factors in their evaluation by school boards?

Participants

In the state in which this study was conducted, public school districts can range in size from a handful to up to tens of thousands of students. The districts include the populations one might expect to find in a rapidly-growing border state, as well as populations one may not expect to find, including large communities of refugees from Africa or east Asia. In communities across the state, school districts are often among the largest employers in a community, and their success or failure can have a profound effect on not only the students that they serve, but also the economies and social fabric of the communities where they are located.

Invitations to participate in this Internet-based survey were distributed via email to all members of a professional membership organization representing the vast majority of superintendents in the state.

In the state in question, there are 206 school districts that are categorized as either:

- Common school districts, serving pre-K through eighth grade
- Unified school districts, serving pre-K through twelfth grade
- Union high school districts, serving grades nine through twelve

Sixty-three completed surveys were received from superintendents, representing 31% of the above districts in the state. State law provides for other types of school districts including county accommodation districts and joint technological education districts. Five surveys were received from superintendents of such districts.

This is a state that is predominantly rural, with 98.1% of the state’s area designated as such (US Census Bureau, 2010). The remaining 1.9% of the state’s land is occupied by 89.8% of the state’s residents. Rural school districts, some covering several thousand square miles, serve the far reaches of the state (“School Districts by Geographic Size Ranking Table,” 2018). Despite the fact that many rural school districts cover large geographic areas, their enrollment tends to be generally smaller than their urban and suburban counterparts, as shown in Table 1. This table also includes the percentage of respondents representing rural, suburban, and urban school districts. As indicated in Table 1, nearly two-thirds of the superintendents responding to the survey represented rural districts.

Table 1

Size and location of districts represented in this study

Location	Percentage of respondents	Average District Size
Rural	65%	1,453
Suburban	23%	10,713
Urban	12%	8,256

This sample of superintendents possessed, on average, nearly thirty years of experience in education, with an average of just under eight of those years spent as a superintendent. Only two respondents reported having fewer than 20 years of experience in education. Just under a third of respondents’ careers (9.7 years) were spent as teachers. Participants reported that they had served in their current position anywhere from a few months to 23 years, with an average of 5.7 years.

Instrument

The 64-item Internet-based survey was based on a previous survey last administered in 2008 (Chopin & Wiggall, 2011). The 2018 survey was divided into 4 broad categories:

- Governing Board evaluation of the superintendent
- Evaluation of principals
- School Finance
- Charter Schools

In general, respondents were asked to respond via a five-point rating scale indicating agreement or disagreement. Participants also had the opportunity to respond to six open-ended questions on the above topics. The specific question addressed in this study is included in the appendix to this article.

Information about the type and size of school districts, along with the gender, ethnicity, and years of experience of each respondent was collected. Neither the names of participants nor the names of the school districts was requested. The survey was open and active from October 12 to November 2, 2018.

Results

Gender-related differences

Consistent with previous findings (Maranto, Carroll, Cheng, & Teodoro, 2018; Maranto, Teodoro, Carroll, & Cheng, 2017) the state’s female superintendents reported spending nearly three years more as teachers before becoming a principal than their male counterparts. As shown in Table 2, female superintendents also reported spending more total years on average in education (31.0) than male superintendents (29.1).

Table 2

Career Experiences of male and female superintendents

Career Experience	Male	Female
Total years in education	29.1	31.0
Total years as a teacher	8.6	11.5
Total years as a school administrator	19.3	19.1
Total years as a superintendent	8.7	6.6
Total years in current position	5.9	5.4

The superintendency has historically been made up predominantly of males, and that continues to be the case with this sample, with 38% of respondents being female. That is an increase from a 2008 study in the same state, in which 27% of respondents reported being female. These results are similar to those from another recent study from another western U.S. state, which reported that 25% of superintendents were female (Clouse et al., 2019).

Female superintendents also reported leading smaller school districts. The average enrollment of a female-led school district was 3,042. The average enrollment of a male-led school district was 77% larger, at 5,386.

From this sample, males appeared to be more likely to lead K-12 and union high school districts, and females were more likely to lead K-8 districts. 69% of K-12 districts reportedly were led by male superintendents, and 62% of K-8 districts were led by female superintendents.

Governing board evaluation of the superintendent

Superintendents reported high perceived levels of trust with board members. Over 92 percent of superintendents responded “*Agree*” or “*Strongly Agree*” to the statement, “In general, board members have a high level of trust in the superintendent's abilities.” Over 70% percent of superintendents responded “*Agree*” or “*Strongly Agree*” to the statement, “There is a degree of comfort that the Board's evaluation of the superintendent will be fair and unbiased.” Similarly, 83 percent of superintendents responded “*Agree*” or “*Strongly Agree*” to the statement, “With respect to the evaluation process, school board members in my district are trustworthy.” These findings are similar to the results of a recent study which revealed that 81% of New York superintendents reported harmonious relationships with the board (Bell, 2019).

Superintendents were asked to rank the five most important factors in their evaluation by board members. As shown in Table 3, from a provided list of 23 factors in the governing board’s evaluation of the superintendent, the listed percentages of superintendents identified the following factors as being ranked in the top five:

Table 3

Percentage of superintendents selecting the factor as one of the most important factors in their evaluation by board members

Factor	Percentage of respondents identifying factor as most important
Management of Financial Affairs of District	61.9%
Maintaining the Quality of the Education Program	52.4%
Relationship with Employees	47.6%
Developing and Implementing Long Term Plans for District	44.4%
Student Performance Measured by State-Mandated Assessments	44.4%
Maintaining a Safe Environment for Students	42.9%
Relationship with the Board as a Whole	38.1%
Relationship with the Community at Large	38.1%
Attracting and Retaining Staff	30.2%
Developing Innovative Education Programs	20.6%
Developing Short Term Plans in Reaction to District Problems/Crisis Situation	12.7%
Maintaining a Balanced Budget	12.7%
Relationship with Community Leadership (not on Board)	11.1%
Relationship with Individual Members of the Board	11.1%
Accuracy of the Budget	9.5%
Student Discipline (Represented by the Number of Suspensions and Expulsions)	7.9%
Relationship with Parents Having Conflict with District	4.8%
Relationship with Teacher Leadership	3.2%
Removing Ineffective Employees	3.2%
Number of Students Going on to Higher Education	1.6%
Success of the Athletic Program	1.6%

Somewhat surprisingly, nearly all of the 23 items were selected by at least one superintendent. Only two items from the original list were not selected by any superintendent: “Not Reducing or Eliminating Student Educational Opportunities,” and “Personal Appearance.”

Since superintendents were asked to rank the five most important factors with the numbers 1-5, their responses can be further examined to identify those factors which received a rating of “1.” When examined in light of the factors selected as their number 1 priority, superintendents responded as indicated below. In Table 3, “Maintaining a Safe environment for Students” was not among the top five factors; however, as shown in Table 4, it received the second-highest number of selections as the highest priority. “Management of Financial Affairs of District” was the highest priority in each analysis.

Table 4

Percentage of superintendents rating selected factors as their highest priority

Factor	Percentage
Management of Financial Affairs of District	23.8%
Maintaining a Safe Environment for Students	14.3%
Maintaining the Quality of the Education Program	12.7%
Student Performance Measured by State-Mandated Assessments	12.7%
Relationship with the Board as a Whole	11.1%

Superintendents were able to provide open-ended responses to the question, “Would you like to make any comments regarding the evaluation of the superintendent?” Despite reporting high levels of trust with the board, representative responses to this question included the following:

“I am not sure that the Board always is aware of the magnitude of day to day tasks carried out by the superintendent.”

“Many board members do not have the expertise to be evaluating the superintendent.”

“The model is not conducive to excellent evaluation because of the level of politics... No other model in America takes five to seven people off of the street to evaluate the CEO of a \$300 Million operation.”

“The school board generally lacks in actual understanding of the process and district responsibilities and often don't appear to care about it beyond their personal agendas.”

Discussion

Implications for Practice

As indicated from the findings of this study, the participants tended to enter the superintendency after approximately 21 years in the field of education. Approximately half of their pre-superintendency time was typically spent in classroom teaching, and the other half in administration. Given policymakers' demands for student achievement, the centrality of student achievement as a goal for all school districts, and the relatively short amount of their careers that superintendents spend in the classroom, it is essential that efforts be undertaken to develop the instructional leadership skills and knowledge of current and aspiring superintendents. The

framework developed by Leithwood and colleagues (Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2019; McCullough & Leithwood, 2016) would be a useful guide for such efforts.

The factors that are perceived as important in superintendent evaluation should receive ample attention in leadership-preparation programs. Students who are preparing for superintendent certification should thoughtfully consider how they would approach the board-superintendent relationship and how they would create an environment in which the evaluation process is as productive as possible. Moreover, faculty in educational leadership courses must endeavor to ensure that coursework is current and relevant. Although school finance coursework is typically included in a certification program of study, it is not unusual for superintendents to be inadequately prepared to manage a district's finances (Abshier, Harris, & Hopson, 2011), even though financial management is a top concern. Finance courses with a heavy reliance on a textbook may not contribute to the level of technical knowledge needed by superintendents.

In practical terms, two areas of governing board training are suggested by the findings of this study. As was noted by some participants' responses to open-ended questions, governing board members do not necessarily bring any special expertise to the role of evaluator of the superintendent. As noted previously, the National School Boards Association (Cook, 2014; Pollard, 2012) has reported that less than half of U.S. states require some type of training for individuals elected to school boards. Although any training offered would involve voluntary participation, its effects could potentially be significant in improving board members' competence in providing constructive and meaningful evaluative feedback to superintendents.

A second area of governing board training could be in the area of gender bias. Females make up three quarters of the teaching workforce – a percentage that has increased over the last two decades – yet hold fewer than half of the positions in administration across the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Despite increases in the percentage of superintendent positions held by females from 2008-2018, females continue to be underrepresented in the superintendency. While this underrepresentation may in part be a function of female principals' disinterest in becoming superintendents (Maranto et al., 2017), it may also be a function of gender bias that could be addressed through increased awareness and improved training of both governing board members and district-level leaders.

On the subject of training for school board members, given the absence of statutory requirements related to such training, it is generally the case that at least some of the responsibility for training board members falls to the superintendent. Given this fact, leadership-preparation programs may be able to better prepare future superintendents for the responsibilities of training and guiding board members through case scenarios and the study of effective practices (Bowers, 2016; Scudero, 2019).

Recommendations for Further Research

Noted above were some suggestions related to training for board members. These areas of training may offer opportunities for research into the effectiveness of such training and the impact on superintendent-governing board relations.

Future research in this area that would benefit the field would involve a more detailed study of the specific processes used in the evaluation of superintendents. The authors of this study possess several decades of experience as superintendents, and can relate firsthand and anecdotal accounts of evaluation processes that vary quite substantially from district to district. Additional research is needed to examine board members' and superintendents' views of the evaluation

process and whether it contributes to superintendent effectiveness or simply amounts to a routine exercise.

It is recommended that continued research be conducted to develop greater understanding of the factors that discourage and inhibit female administrators' advancement. There is a need to better understand the dynamics of gender bias and the relationship between gender and factors such as culture, climate, and leadership practices that are known to affect student achievement. As noted above, females now hold a greater share of superintendent positions in this state than was the case ten years ago. If the current rate of change were to continue, this would mean that half of the state's superintendents would be female by 2030. Notably, although this would represent significant growth in the percentage of female superintendents, it would still fall well short of reflecting the field as a whole.

Conclusions

Superintendents face a number of challenges. Like their counterparts in other states, the superintendents in this sample contend with issues such as inadequate and unreliable revenue streams, and the demands of accountability policies. Perhaps to a greater extent than their counterparts elsewhere, they must also contend with a long-term teacher shortage, as well as statutes that aggressively promote free-market competition through school choice and charter schools. That they largely are able provide all students with an education in the face of these challenges is remarkable.

The most important factors identified by superintendents in this study are indicative of many of the contemporary issues addressed in recent literature on the superintendency. Similar to the nationwide study of board members and superintendents conducted nearly a decade ago by Hess and Meeks (2010), financial management surfaced as the most frequently-cited factor. Also similar to the findings from the Hess and Meeks study, student achievement, a focus on the achievement of goals, and relationships were also ranked highly in the present study. Although maintaining a safe environment for students was not mentioned in the Hess and Meeks data, it is understandable why this is identified as an important factor in the present study.

Petersen and Fusarelli assert that "It is unrealistic to believe school boards will be abolished any time in the next several decades" (2008, p. 129). If, as expected, this governance model indeed persists in the coming years, then it is worth the investment of time and effort for researchers, professors of educational leadership, practicing superintendents, and school board associations to continue to work toward understanding how to shape the board-superintendent relationship as one that is marked by trust, mutual respect, and a deep commitment to the district's goals.

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Appendix

Question 21 – Statewide Survey of Superintendents

Following are a list of factors that may be used by Boards of Education in the evaluation of the superintendent. Review this list and identify the five most important items to your Board in your evaluation. Rank them 1 through 5 by placing a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 in the space to the left of the item. *Please select only five.*

Possible Items Considered by the Board in the Evaluation of the Superintendent

Accuracy of the Budget
Attracting and Retaining Staff
Developing and Implementing Long Term Plans for District
Developing Innovative Education Programs
Developing Short Term Plans in Reaction to District Problems/Crisis Situation
Maintaining a Balanced Budget
Maintaining a Safe Environment for Students
Maintaining the Quality of the Education Program
Management of Financial Affairs of District
Not Reducing or Eliminating Student Educational Opportunities
Number of Students Going on to Higher Education
Personal Appearance
Public Speaking Ability
Relationship with Community Leadership (not on Board)
Relationship with Employees Relationship with Teacher Leadership
Relationship with Individual Members of the Board
Relationship with Parents Having Conflict with District
Relationship with the Board as a Whole
Relationship with the Community at Large
Removing Ineffective Employees
Student Discipline
Student Performance Measured by State Mandated Assessments
Success of the Athletic Program