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Education Leadership Review of Doctoral Research **Fall 2015**

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Understanding Leadership through Poetics of Leadership: Searching for Personal Meaning and Authentic Understanding

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



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The author examines, using educational poetics as form of aesthetic inquiry, pedagogical practices that incorporate a poetics of leadership activity in preparing educational leaders. In particular, the author draws forward John Dewey's philosophical positioning of aesthetic experience. Poetics involves a deepening of understanding and sensitivity to reasoning and imagination in leadership practice, and mirrors how events, actions, and the conduct of others can all express intellectual, aesthetic, and moral meaning. Poetics as an aesthetic mirror is examined in developing moral literacy and ethical frames of leadership. The author explores how leadership preparation and leadership practice have a significant poetic dimension with respect to the search for personal meaning and the development of authentic understanding. Imaginative projection enables the study of leadership to examine the self as an ethical being. Research findings and exemplars of poetic elements are presented in the study. Four years of research data are reported.

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Poetics is an aesthetical, emotional, and creative expression. I view it as an artistic, introspective immersion and exploration of one's perception and understanding of self and an attempt to exemplify, as close as possible, the human condition relating to one's philosophy of leadership. (Toby, A Doctoral Student)

Poetics as imaginative projection, when merged pedagogically with leadership preparation, translates, in part, as a "process of active response to the world, involving a deepening understanding and sensitivity" to democracy, and "mirrors how events, actions, and the conduct of others can all express intellectual, aesthetic, and moral meaning" (Hansen, 2004, p. 122). Dewey (1958), in his book *Experience and Nature*, is instructive in this respect: "Poetic meaning, moral meaning, a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings, rather than of truth; a large part of our life is carried on in a realm of meanings to which truth and falsity as such are irrelevant" (p. 411). Kearney (1968), writing in *The Wake of Imagination*, helps us to understand the value of a poetics for leadership preparation, and of poetic imagination:

It is the willingness to imagine oneself in the other person's skin, to see things as if one were, momentarily at least, another, to experience how the other half lives. . . . The poetical imagination equally empowers us to identify with the forgotten or discarded persons of history. It invites excluded middles back into the fold, opens the door to prodigal sons and daughters, and refuses the condescending tolerance of the elite. . . . the saved towards the damned. The poetical imagination opposes the apartheid logic of black and white. (pp. 368-369)

A poetics for leadership preparation provides a way of examining the importance of imagination in leader preparation and learning, deepening meaning that is concerned with the work of leading in educational settings. Analyzing the problems confronting society, Dewey (1931) argued that what is wrong, lies " . . . with our lack of imagination in generating leading ideas. Because we are afraid of speculative ideas, we do, and do over and over again, an immense amount of specialized work in the region of 'facts' (p. 11). Poetics as a pedagogical consideration in leadership preparation enables both the student and the professor of leadership to engage, imaginatively, in examining the theoretical and practical. For Dewey (1934), the "imaginative experience" exemplified "more fully than any other kind of experience what experience itself is in its very movement and structure" (p. 281), and such experience is at the heart of leading the educational enterprise.

Marcuse (1968), writing in *Education and Social Change*, draws attention to the value of poetics for leadership preparation when he cautions us concerning the role of education,

To create the subjective conditions for a free society [it is] no longer sufficient to educate individuals to perform more or less happily the functions they are supposed to perform. . . . [We must also] educate men and women who are incapable of tolerating what is going on, who have really learned what is going on, has always been going on, and why, and who are educated to resist and to fight for a new way of life. (p. 6)

Preparing future generations of educational leaders, against the backdrop of contemporary social issues and problems confronting education, requires that we re-examine our pedagogical and epistemological foundations in leadership preparation programs. We are at a crossroads where

education, as a cultural-transformative agency of society, must decide how to best realize its potential efficacy in relation to preparing educational leaders “with a moral and political vision of what it means to educate . . . to govern, lead a humane life, and address the social welfare of those less fortunate than themselves” (Giroux, 1994, p. 45).

The author’s purpose in this paper is to examine the epistemological and pedagogical implications of poetics as imaginative projection in preparing educational leaders. Poetics as an aesthetic mirror for leadership preparation serves to illuminate the experiences of learning to lead, within the social and political as well ethically challenging contexts of education and the larger problematics that define a democratic and moral society. The author takes a pedagogical stance that poetics serves to illuminate the experiences of learning to lead, within the social and political contexts of education and the larger problematics that define democratic society. Poetics, as a philosophical and pedagogical convention, presents an opportunity for students of leadership to examine the social texts of their experience, causing them to ask not only *what* the text means but also *how* it means, what its epistemological and theoretical grounds are. And, as Dewey (1927) argued of art, herein poetics, it is argued, serves to “break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness” (p. 184). Further, the author argues that poetics offers students of educational leadership an opportunity to examine the social and cultural texts of their experience, causing them to ask not only *what* the text means but also *how* it means, what its epistemological and theoretical grounds are.

The author provides a discussion of poetics for leadership preparation, drawing on Dewey’s aesthetics and experience as a foundation. Next, an overview of the study and the inquiry method used is discussed. The author then discusses poetics in leadership preparation, demonstrating how the idea of poetics helps bring together aesthetic, moral, intellectual aspects of the work of leading, in relation to the pedagogical considerations for leadership preparation, with examples of curricular elements comprising a poetics activity provided. In the concluding section, a poetics for leadership preparation is hallmarked, focusing on what the practice of leading offers to those who recognize and accept its multiple demands.

Foundation for a Poetics of Leadership

Poetics, as Hansen (2004) notes, is an ancient term, with many meanings, dating back as early as Aristotle’s *Poetics* circa 350 BC¹. In contemporary terms, it is derived from philosophical and structuralist studies of literature, descriptive of the way sounds, words, phrases and sentences form literary units. But conventional poetics might also be construed as the way ideologies, ‘master narratives,’ are threaded into the text, in content and in genre: fiction and nonfiction, objective and subjective voice, definite and indefinite register. It can, as Hansen (2004) explains, “. . . represent studies of makings, creations, and compositions,” and it “. . . can constitute a theory of such making” (p. 122).

Poetics translates into aesthetic form and aesthetic criticism, considering the aesthetics of cognition and meaning. Poetics serves to illuminate the experiences of learning within the social and political contexts of education. It offers students of leadership and leadership preparation faculty members alike an opportunity to examine the social and cultural texts of their own experience, causing them to ask not only *what* the text means but also *how* it means, what its

¹ See Aristotle, *Poetics*, Joe Sachs (trans.), Focus Philosophical Library, Newburyport, MA, Pullins Publishing, 2006.

epistemological and theoretical grounds are. A poetic translates into aesthetic form and criticism, considering the aesthetics of cognition and meaning.

Poetics and Dewey's aesthetic experience. Dewey (1934), writing in *Art as Experience*, suggests that the roots of aesthetic experience lie in commonplace experience, in the consummatory experiences that are ubiquitous in the course of human life. The heart of Dewey's (1934) aesthetics resides in his formulation about the artistic experience (as opposed to a normal experience). According to his definition, an experience is viewed as a total encounter with external phenomena, which runs a complete course from beginning to end and is totally integrated into consciousness as an entity distinct from other experiences.

Learning to lead, to be an educational leader, requires that students and professors of leadership learn to overcome the "inertia of habit" that is necessary to engendering consciousness of our experiences, integrating new learnings through the "imaginative phase of experience" (Dewey, 1934, p. 272). As Greene (1995) explains,

. . . imagining things being otherwise may be a first step toward acting on the belief they can be changed. And it would appear that a kindred imaginative ability is required if the becoming different that learning involves is actually to take place. A space of freedom opens before the person moved to choose in the light of possibility; she or he feels what it signifies to be an initiator and an agent, existing among others with the power to choose for herself or himself. (p. 22)

Poetics within leadership preparation programs illuminates the pedagogical import of the aesthetic and the intellectual, as well as the practices that are concerned with shaping alternative realities.

Poetics and Dewey's poetic meaning. As Dewey (1958) explained in his *Experience and Nature*, poetics is instructive in this respect: "Poetic meaning, moral meaning, a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings, rather than of truth; a large part of our life is carried on in a realm of meanings to which truth and falsity as such are irrelevant" (p. 411). Pedagogical considerations necessary to a poetics for leadership preparation poetic addresses a concern for the responsibilities for preparing leader practitioners that understand the responsibility of working in ethically, culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse educational settings.

Dewey (1958) notes that "a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings," poetic and moral meanings, "rather than of truth; a large part of our life is carried on in a realm of meanings to which truth and falsity as such are irrelevant" (p. 411). In similar fashion, leadership that is bound in aesthetics is leadership that is concerned with forming new wholes. Preparing the mind for leadership is concerned with the value of an "aesthetic imperative" to guide learning and practice, not disconnected, but reflexively in concert so as to engender an appreciative value for imaginative possibilities. Without imagination, as Dewey (1934) reminds us, "there is only recurrence, complete uniformity; the resulting experience is routine and mechanical. Consciousness always has an imaginative phase, and imagination, more than any other capacity breaks through the inertia of habit" (p. 272). Leadership that is concerned with the aesthetic is leadership that embraces the imagination; leadership that is animated by an understanding of creating "an experience" through imaginative pedagogical practices.

Poetics as a necessary grounding. Poetics is the necessary grounding of aesthetics and an important element in any productive construal of the notion of the aesthetic. Aesthetic experiences, like poetry, film, novel, stage play, or music, are a constant symbol of the possibilities of educational leaders, teachers, and students creating different the future they will take part in as citizens. When ‘strongly spent’, the aesthetics of leading invests in the development of ‘Others’ whose wills “pitch into commitments deeper and deeper” developing through aesthetic experiences an ability to see beyond existing realities, to engage in imaginative possibilities.

Aesthetic experiences guided by poetics give form to leadership possibilities through students of leadership struggling with the conventions of an ‘organized society.’ Poetics is the grounding for the aesthetics of leading and learning, and necessary to enlivening the critical voice of leadership. Poetics speaks to differences, to possibilities, to actualization of aesthetics in leading—of the aesthetic imperative and democratic possibilities. Poetics, as a form of aesthetic criticism, fosters in the student of leadership an understanding of the responsibility of the educational leadership to make the realities of the day visible, and therein enable the teacher and the students with whom the teacher engages to offset the implications of ‘organized society’ by creating different possibilities – alternative realities – in the school and classroom.

Poetics as imaginative projection. Thomas Alexander (1993), in his book, *John Dewey and the Moral Imagination*, is instructive in pointing out that imagination is one part of human activity, and is complementary to perception, activity, habit, and intelligence. Dewey (1934) observes, “The constant adjustment of both the new and the old is imagination” (p. 272). This adjustment comes from within the learner, not from the material being learned. Warnock (1978) explains imagination:

Imagination is our means of interpreting the world, and it is also our means of forming images in the mind. The images themselves are not separate from our interpretations of the world; they are our way of thinking of the objects of the world. We see the forms in our mind’s eye and we see these very forms in the world. (p. 194).

Maxine Greene (1995), writing in *Releasing the Imagination*, is insightful when she writes:

Imagination is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner through a stranger’s eye and hear through their ears. That is because, of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions. (Greene, 1995, p. 3)

The lived experience revealed in personal narratives of one’s life emerges in our “consciousness, and by so doing, transforms it, as social scientific accounts, or even psychological ones would never do” (Greene, 1995, p. 4). This is the power of imagination; the possibilities of poetics as imaginative projection in leadership preparation and practice.

Overview of Inquiry Methods

The perspective of a poetics for leadership preparation presented in this paper incorporates a philosophical examination of poetics, Deweyan in nature, and a pedagogy as ‘poetic practice’ complimented by an analysis of data from the use of a *Poetics of Leadership Activity* (2007-2015) integrated in doctoral courses over eight years. The doctoral program, premised on a “scholar–practitioner” construct of leadership, is in its eighteenth year (see Appendix A for a discussion of scholar–practitioner). The primary courses included *AED 602 – Inquiring into the Ethics and Philosophy of School Leaders*² and *AED 612 – Conceptualizing Scholar-Practitioner Models of Leadership*.³ The participants included 136 doctoral students in the program for the academic years 2006-2007 – 2014-2015.

The *Poetics of Leadership* activity, in its origin and throughout its development, was instructed, in part, by Dewey’s (1934) notions of aesthetics and his discussion of what constitutes “an experience,” when the aesthetic, artistic, intellectual are drawn together with the practical encounter of the world, a work or practice, an event, etc., in such a way that what is experienced “. . . carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency” (p. 35). The primary elements that shaped the ‘poetics’ include: aesthetic experience, aesthetic criticism, and aesthetic form (Brown, 1989, 1990; Dewey, 1916, 1927, 1931, 1934, 1938; Granger, 2001; Greene, 1973, 1978, 1981, 1986, 1988, 1995; Giroux, 1992; Hansen, 2004; Sartre, 1965, 1972; Stevens, 1951, 1964; Marcuse, 1978; Oakeshott, 1962). The primary elements that shaped the “poetics as pedagogical practice” include: cognitive aesthetics, moral creativity and practical wisdom, metaphor and language, and cultural texts and narrative (Brown, 1989; Foster, 2002; Giroux, 2002, 2004; Hansen, 2004; Hunt, 1990; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Murdoch, 1970; Nussbaum, 1990, 1995; Reimer, 1992; Ricoeur, 1975/1977, 1981, 1983/1984; Trier, 2003).

Complimenting and extending the philosophical examination of poetics and of pedagogy as ‘poetic practice’, the researcher analyzed a longitudinal data set. The philosophical examination and the analysis of data focused on two years of experience using the “Poetics of Leadership” activity in the doctoral courses. The poetics activity included the selection and presentation, by students and the professor, of aesthetic and literary works that served to interpret the ethical, moral and philosophical dimensions of educational leadership in AED 602. The poetics activity was subsequently revisited as a theoretical interpretation of models of scholar-practitioner leadership in AED 612.

Aesthetic and literary works were examined as the curriculum, student-selected in nature, for the poetics, and included poetry, film, novel/novela texts, and lyrics from songs. Metaphorical language was also incorporated as interpretive text and as analytic convention. Students engaged in selection, oral and dramatic presentation, and narrative interpretation of the poetics, connecting elements of the poetics with leadership philosophy, theory and practice. During the orientation to each course, the professor introduced the *Poetics of Leadership* activity

² AED 602 Course description: This course is a survey of major ethical and philosophical influences of importance for educational leadership. The educational leader as scholar-practitioner will serve as a focus for examining the relevant dimensions of leadership. Specific focus will be given to the inner self and understanding the relationship of philosophical foundations, ethical and moral theory, spirituality, and social justice and caring to the development of educational leaders (see Jenlink, 2015).

³ AED 612 Course description: This course is specifically designed to bring closure to the doctoral coursework experience. It provides the candidate a philosophical and practical setting in which to design models of scholarship, practice, and leadership (scholar-practitioner leadership) for the educational setting. The candidate will be expected to use his/her model in a practical setting to evaluate its applicability (see Jenlink, 2014).

by presenting his own dramatic and interpretative selections of poetics that afforded the doctoral students exemplars of how film, literature, and poetry might be used to examine the philosophical and / or theoretical tenets of scholar-practitioner leadership.

Data for the study included poetic elements from each doctoral student (both the curricular selections made by each student and the respective narrative analysis constructed by the student), respectively from the two courses. As well, data included a longitudinal set of interview data spanning the two-year time span during which the Poetics of Leadership activity was used in courses for each of four cohorts, respectively. Data were organized and analyzed using narrative analysis and an “educational poetics” frame (Gitlin & Peck, 2005). The work of Shotter (1996) served to frame an analytic lens to examine the narrative process of making meaning, through poetics, of ethical and moral dilemmas and decision-making. Shotter’s framing of social poetics as a conceptual tool for examining the cognitive reasoning, not only involves analyzing what is said through narrative, but also draws attention to the importance of focusing on ‘arresting moments’, moments that may clarify thought, challenge beliefs and create new possibilities for thought and action (Shotter, 1996, p. 294).

Poetics in leadership preparation. Poetics as imaginative projection for leadership preparation clarifies our image of what the role of imagination is in understanding the complexity of maturing as an ethical being. Poetics as imaginative projection calls attention to multifaceted nature of the leader’s work in the educational setting, drawing the student of leadership into a deepened and broadened sense of the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic nature leading a school. Poetics as imaginative projection also illuminates that the work of leadership preparation is as much about the leader’s disposition as it is about his or her formal preparation.

Teaching educational leadership entails an in-depth knowledge of content within the discipline, and particular content or subject knowledge depending on the course and the program. As well, teaching educational leadership requires an in-depth knowledge and understanding of pedagogy, and particular pedagogical considerations. In part, these pedagogical considerations require an understanding that pedagogy is a political practice that illuminates the relationships among power, knowledge, and ideology.

However, self-consciously, if not self-critically, we must recognize the role pedagogy plays in influencing how and what knowledge and identities are produced within particular sets of classroom relations. As a moral practice, what the faculty of a leadership preparation program teach cannot be abstracted from what it means to invest in public life, presuppose some notion of the future, or locate oneself in a public discourse. The moral implications of pedagogy also suggest that our responsibility as educators cannot be separated from the consequences of the knowledge we produce, the social relations we legitimate, and the ideologies and identities we offer up to students (Giroux, 2004, p. 122).

A pedagogy that incorporates a poetics of practice illuminates what is done, the style or manner in which it is done, and the impact of all this upon those involved. Poetics highlights truths about human cognition and conduct. Such truths include the fact that art, conceived both as a way of conducting oneself and as an accomplishment, and in turn leadership that is conceived similarly, can yield an enhanced sense of purpose and meaning. Art as process and as product helps substantiate the self and the connections between persons and their world (Hansen, 2004). In similar fashion, the art of leading helps substantiate the self and the connections between leaders and their world. Learning to lead through poetics shapes the art of leadership and the practice of leading.

Pedagogical practices within leadership preparation cannot be abstracted from the context in which they take place. It is precisely this critical contextualization that connects what and how leader educators teach to how they translate the connection between what students of leadership bring to the university “classroom and those larger public discourses and social events that bear down on their lives” (Giroux, 2004, p. 123).

Giroux (2002), writing in *Breaking Into the Movies: Film and the Culture of Politics*, argues that the “. . . pedagogical can be taken up as a form of cultural production that rewords the relationship between cultural texts, teachers, and students” (p. 77). For leadership faculty in a preparation program, “. . . this means developing a theoretical case for using popular cultural texts such as film, television, advertisements, music videos, and mass circulation magazines as serious objects of knowledge related to the power of self-definition and the struggle for social justice” (Giroux, 2002, p. 78).

The pedagogical task of poetics within leadership preparation involves more than an act of translating different cultural texts and artistic media into learning experiences for students of leadership. It involves engaging students these cultural texts as a form of writing, allowing the students of leadership to make the ‘text’ mean differently by “. . . reorganizing the systems of intertextual, ideological, and cultural references in which it was constructed historically and semiotically, and in relation to the wider social events” (Giroux, 2002, p. 89). A pedagogy of leadership preparation, guided by poetics that takes cultural texts such as film, novel, poetry, stage play as an object of study, must work to both engage and disrupt those meanings held by the student as well as the cultural meanings ideologically embedded in the texts “. . . so as to break into the commonsense assumptions while simultaneously challenging the lived experiences and social relations that they produce . . .” (Giroux, 2002, p. 97).

A pedagogy guided by poetics works to engage the student of leadership in the ethical and practical task of analyzing critically how different forms of cultural text might function as ways to examine and interpret social practices of school leaders, to examine the everyday lives of educational leaders and position them within existing social, cultural, and institutional orchestrations of power; how the historical and contemporary meanings that cultural texts produce might serve to “. . . align, reproduce, and interrupt broader sets of ideas, discourses, and social configurations at work in the larger society” (Giroux, 2002, p. 7).

Poetics speaks to artfulness as a quality or dimension of human, social activity; leadership preparation and practice are forms of activity in a social context. A “poetics of practice” encompasses actions and consequences of leadership preparation activity (Hansen, 2004). The notion of a ‘poetics of practice’ merges *poiêsis*⁴, whose root meanings include ‘making’ and ‘creating,’ with *praxis*, whose primary meanings include ‘action’ and ‘how one is faring.’ A poetics of practice illuminates what is done, the style or manner in which it is done, and the impact of all this upon those involved. Finally, a poetics illuminates the relationship between the cognitive and aesthetic dimensions of human learning and conduct.

Moral creativity, imagination, and practical wisdom. Poetics lends to the fostering of moral creativity and practical wisdom. The ethicist Martha Nussbaum (1990, 1995) brings to the

⁴ In Book VI of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes *phronêsis* (practical wisdom) from *poiêsis* (art of production in the following way. While *phronêsis* and *poiêsis* have in common that they both deal with “things which admit of being other than they are”, *phronêsis* “is itself an end,” namely a work of art or a product. For purposes of this text, *phronêsis* is interpreted as “practical wisdom” and understood as the product of “making,” “creating,” or for our purposes “poetics.” See Aristotle, 1962, book VI, 1140b, lines 5-6.

foreground dimensions of post-modernism within her Aristotelian view of the role in practical wisdom of fictional literature. Poetics for Nussbaum (1990) functions not to establish the end toward which practical wisdom should be directed, but as a means, literature being a vital, perhaps even necessary, instrument for becoming a practically wise person.

Pedagogical considerations of imaginative projection through such elements as novels and tragic poems and plays – which for Nussbaum epitomize *poiêsis* – provide a unique and important education in what she calls ‘moral attention,’ that is, attention to the concrete particularities of actual persons and situations around us (1990, p. 162). Practical wisdom consists in overcoming ‘moral obtuseness’ and ‘simplification’ by sharpening, through literary narratives, our capacities for ‘moral perception,’ ‘moral imagination,’ and ‘moral sensibility’ (1990, pp. 154, 164, 183-185). These phronetic capacities are not a means for ‘applying’ historically established moral ends, but for Nussbaum, the very end and completion of moral life as such. Moral wisdom consists precisely in attention, care, and perception of human particularity.

The place of narrative stories in poetics, within Nussbaum’s ethics, provides a means to this phronetic end. For Nussbaum (1990), “Stories cultivate our ability to see and care for particulars, not as representatives of a law, but as what they themselves are” (p. 184). Moral tragedy – which for Aristotle was the height of poetics – plays a particularly strong role for Nussbaum because it attunes its audience to the need for overcoming the simplification and narrowness that cause tragic conflicts in the first place, by teaching us to attend to the particular singularity of others. The use of novels/novelas and tragic poems and plays presents the student of leadership with cultural texts within which to situate his or her own life text, and through which to critically examine one’s lived experiences, assumptions, values, beliefs, and the depth to which these influence his or her practice.

The fostering of moral creativity and practical wisdom through poetics in leadership preparation enables the student of leadership to further develop an ethical and moral positioning as a leader. Poetics merges a moral dimension to the aesthetic. This interprets as pedagogical perceptiveness encompassing moral perceptiveness. A moral perception in leading, much the same as in teaching, has to do with the qualities of attentiveness and of what has been previously referenced as aesthetic criticism or critical appreciation. For the faculty person teaching leadership, it has to do with a his or her “capacity to discern the salient issues and concerns at stake in an educational situation and to act upon them (or to “rise” to meet them, as Dewey might put it” (Hansen, 2004, p. 133). For the student of leadership, it has to do with, again in similar fashion, his or her capacity to discern the salient issues and concerns and to act upon them; to take a particular position or stance such as a position on social justice in the face of injustice to others.

Metaphor and poetics as imaginative projection. Iris Murdoch (1970), writing in *The Sovereignty of Good*, explains that metaphors “are fundamental forms of our awareness of our condition: metaphors of space, metaphors of movement, metaphors of vision” (p. 77). Poetics present the student of leadership and the professor leadership alike with a form of inquiry through metaphorical inquiry. Metaphor “. . . influences reasoning, argument, logic, and explanation” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 193). It does so by actively enabling and helping constitute these cognitive processes. Metaphor

. . . unites reason and imagination. Reason, at the very least, involves categorization, entailment, and interference. Imagination, in one of its many aspects, involves seeing one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thing – what we have call metaphorical thought. Metaphor is thus imaginative rationality. (p. 193)

A poetics for leadership, as ‘pedagogical practice,’ is sensitive to the premise that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing and experiencing one kind of things in terms of another,” (p. 193). Foster (2002), arguing in “The Decline of the Local: A Challenge of Educational Leadership,” is instructive in understanding that our use of language and metaphor to some extent determines how we think and that language and metaphor are the primary tools that leaders use to manage meaning. “That is, leadership is language and language is how leadership is exerted” (Foster, 2002, p. 3).

In an expanded sense of poetics as imaginative projection, dominant models of discourse – the language of ‘organized society,’ of ‘ideological constraint,’ or ‘moral management’ – use metaphor as convention and label to bind and organize us; as a form of social control. The languages used to preserve domination are complex and sometimes contradictory. Much of how they operate to anesthetize desire and resistance is invisible; they are merged with our common sense. These languages contain us, and we are simultaneously bearers of the codes of containment. To understand, as Foster (2002) argued, that “. . . language and metaphor to some extent determines how we think” is to realize the importance of metaphor as a poetic element of pedagogical practice. Hunt (1990) explains the essence of poetics as pedagogy: “Whatever damage or distortion the codes [metaphor] inflict on our subjectively elastic conception of ourselves, socially we act in an echo chamber of the features ascribed to us,” Black man, White women, Latino student, educational leader, writer, poet, worker, homeless person, and so on (Hunt, 1990, p. 200).

Cultural texts, narratives, and pedagogy. Cultural texts such as films, novels/novelas, poetry, plays, and music are rich with metaphorical language as a way to understand, express, interpret, and examine the meanings of the world. Integrating poetics in leadership preparation expects an understanding that metaphor is not just as an alternative way to represent a concept, but as a dialectical means by which particular new meaning is formed.

Examining leadership meaning within cultural texts such as films, poetry, novels, plays, and music lyrics places emphasis on metaphors as “the most brilliant illustration of the power of language to create meanings by the means of unexpected comparisons” (Ricoeur, 1975, p. 27). Although metaphors differ from symbols in comparing two or more terms with one another . . . they retain the analogous poetic function of symbols by, as Ricoeur puts it, “introduc[ing] the spark of imagination into a ‘thinking more’ at the conceptual level” (1975 p. 303). Situating the student and the teacher in “both cultural texts and the readings that circulate within, above, and against them must be examined,” as Giroux (2002) argues, “as part of a broader discourse that takes up the circuits of power that constitute the ideological and material dynamics of capitalism (or any other social and economic system)” (p. 94).

Situating the student of leadership within cultural texts, in particular literature in the form of novels/novelas (or film interpreted as text) draws to the foreground Ricoeur’s (1981) poetics of the semantic innovation involved in narratives. Like symbols and metaphors, narratives (both fictional and historical) can be understood under a “. . . philosophy of the creative imagination”

as “operati[ing] on the verbal level to produce new configurations of meaning” (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 39).

Narratives involve a ‘semantic innovation’ in a similarly dialectical way to symbols and metaphors: by ‘configuring’ language into a concrete story or text with a world of meaning of its own, narratives are able to ‘refigure,’ through their interpretation, the further world of meaning (or thought) of their reader; the student or the teacher of leadership interprets his or her understanding (theoretical, philosophical, methodological, pedagogical) through the narrative texts, furthering the meaning of leadership as the pedagogical is translated into a ‘poetics of practice.’ Trier (2003) is instructive, pedagogically, in understanding that a “poetics of practice” necessarily considers that as text is interpreted, “. . . the meanings one makes of a text can be radically different from someone else’s, and [that] the difference in the readings lies less in the text and more in who is reading it, as well as when and under what circumstances and with whom they are reading it” (p. 129).

Poetics of Leadership—Interpretations of Doctoral Students

In the sections that follow, texts from philosophical and theoretical interpretations of doctoral students will be examined with respect to the poetics activity. In particular, exemplars of how film, literature (novel/novela), poetry, and metaphor served to inform the aesthetic, moral, and intellectual development of the doctoral student as he or she was in a process of becoming a scholar-practitioner leader. Selected elements from doctoral student poetics will be presented to serve as exemplars of student selected film, literature, and poetry. A closing section will hallmark a complete poetic from one doctoral student, providing an in-depth examination of the complexity of merging the elements, and at the same exemplifying a “poetics of practice” that shapes and is shaped by the doctoral student’s interaction with cultural texts.

Poetry as a lens for poetic practice. Poetry is both artistic creation and cultural text, presenting to poet’s interpretation of social issues or artistic interpretation of the times, and within particular cultural contexts. Poetry, such as the works of Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, Pablo Neruda, and Dylan Thomas speak across generations as the social and political memory of a society. Just as there is a temporal and aesthetic dimension to poetry, there is a moral and intellectual dimension that speaks to the people that follow decades later, providing a cultural-historical lens through which society might examine, and reexamine its existence. There is an aesthetic dimension that serves the artistic and at the same time moral creativity necessary to constructing meaning in daily experiences and interpreting the experiences in terms of the ethical and moral implications.

There is also a dimension of poetry that is political – poetry as critique of social issues – and therein poetry takes a form as political memory in society. Poets and those concerned with politics, such as Hejinian (2000) have clearly articulated this form of politics and influence:

. . . it [poetry] is also a denotatively social and therefore political practice. Poetry comes to know that things are. But this is not knowledge in the strictest sense; it is rather, acknowledgment—and that constitutes a sort of unknowing. To know *that* things are is not to know *what* they are [this is selling], and to know *that* without what is to know otherness (i.e., the unknown and perhaps the unknowable). Poetry undertakes

acknowledgement as a preservation of otherness—a notion that can be offered in a political, as well as epistemological context. (p. 2)

In relation to this political dimension, an educational poetics of leadership has as its object the critical assessment hegemonic patterns, embedded ideologies, and persistent cultural patterns that marginalize, oppress, and otherwise set up and maintain asymmetrical relationships of power.

In the text that follows, the poetry and respective philosophical and theoretical interpretations of doctoral students exemplify aesthetic experiences with the poetics, in particular poetry as imaginative and cultural texts. Importantly, the texts demonstrate how poetry serves as a lens through which to question, challenge, and otherwise acknowledge social issues of the day.

Stan's thoughts on Robert Frost's poetry. Stan,⁵ selected Robert Frost's poem, *Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Night*, sharing that the poem "means many things to many people. However, I find this poem to directly pertain to the scholar-practitioner leader. The scholar-practitioner leader has a critical awareness. This awareness allows them to see beauty, potential, and opportunity where others cannot." In his experiencing the poem, Stan interprets Frost's thoughts in concert with his own self-examination of what it means to be a scholar-practitioner.

Frost's rider in this poem stops in the woods one evening to enjoy their beauty while they fill with snow. These woods do not belong to him, but none-the-less he admires their majestic quality. A scholar-practitioner leader follows the same path very often. He has a keen eye for aesthetic beauty. He sees not only potential but opportunity to learn and develop new ideas and processes. School leaders learn not only from their own surroundings but as well as others. Beauty is not only found and developed within their schools but in others as well. The scholar-practitioner leader learns from the work of others and tries to apply it to their own practice. John Dewey (1980) wrote that "In order to understand the aesthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens . . ." (p. 4). Frost's rider takes the time to admire the beauty of another's land while taking in a rich observation.

The night is very dark and lonely in this poem. I have found through my own experiences that the woods at night can be very frightening. The woods are typically devoid of artificial light. The strange sounds are unidentifiable. Fear can be overwhelming. However, if one can gather their courage and remain calm a wondrous world will unfold before the observer. Your eyes slowly adjust to the dark and the sounds become pleasant rather than frightening. School administration often has the same qualities. The future often seems devoid of light. Finding new strategies for educating students and leading teachers can be worrisome. If the scholar-practitioner leader will gather their courage and stay the course, beauty and opportunity can be found. Francis Duffy (2003) wrote about school leadership stating it is ". . . not for the timid. It requires a great deal of courage" (p. 7).

The rider's horse finds it strange to stop in such an isolated place. Without a farmhouse near, there appears to be no reason to stop. Leadership is sometimes questioned when the leader stops at an unknown landmark. When a leader attempts to

⁵ Stan (pseudonym) was a second-year doctoral student taking AED 612 in Fall 2005.

break new ground and encourages a faculty to explore foreign concepts their reaction can be much like the rider's horse. Individuals will question the leader and wonder if the leader really knows what he is doing. The leader must ignore these shortsighted responses and stay the course. The scholar-practitioner leader encourages and introduces the concepts that he is exploring so that others may see. Michael Fullan (2001) identifies schools as facing "turbulent, uncertain environments" (p. 109). Fullan (2001) wrote that holding firm to an uncharted course requires "moral purpose; incomprehension is to respect the complexities of situations that do not have easy answers" (p. 123). This is often what I find to be the most difficult task as a leader.

Frost's character identifies the woods as being "lovely, dark and deep." He sees the beauty in what many would describe as frightening and lonely. The rider takes in the possibilities and opportunities that exist in this isolated place. However, there is a recognition that one cannot dwell in such a place for extended periods of time. Frost states "and miles to go before I sleep." Educational administration is often the same. We are faced with many tasks. Possibilities and opportunities abound in many areas. We cannot dwell in just one place. Instead, we must be attentive to a variety areas in an effort to insure that many needs are met. Gordon Donaldson (2001) found "Leaders who succeed at maximizing time on task for both students and staff find themselves impaled on their own pikes, their own attempts at leadership thwarted by a conspiracy of busyness" (p. 11).⁶

Joan's⁷ thoughts on William E. Henley's poetry. Joan's selection of the poem *Invictus*, by William E. Henley, spoke to her about resiliency and courage. She quoted the poem at length:

OUT of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

⁶ For references cited see Appendix A.

⁷ Joan (pseudonym) was a first-year doctoral student taking AED 602 in Spring 2006.

Joan, a high-school principal in an urban center school district, explained that “. . . many of the students who enter into school today have so much more weight on their shoulders and on their minds other than completing assignments and meeting project deadlines.” She goes on to explain that the “. . . barriers to success include but are certainly not limited to cultural differences, poverty, violence in the home, various beliefs and non-beliefs about the value of an education, and no one to voice these inadequacies to those who can make a difference.”

Joan notes that the poem *Invictus*

. . . does not specifically address any one problem nor does it give any solutions, but it allows the reader to take their circumstance and replay it in their minds while internalizing the words “unconquerable, wrath, horror, master, and captain.” It simply says that life may not have dealt you a hand worth playing, but there is still a choice to be made.

As Joan interprets *Invictus* through the lens of her own experience and that of her students, she explains that while a scholar-practitioner may never have encountered the struggles that many students face today, yet

. . . he or she can be there to help someone make choices that have the possibility of changing that person’s life forever. The scholar-practitioner leader should have a wealth of knowledge about options that can be made available to help the downtrodden rebound, recover, and receive the benefits of those options.

Denise’s⁸ thoughts on Robert Frost’s poetry. Denise reflects that in Robert Frost’s poem, *Road Less Traveled*, the traveler discovers in the journey of life there are decisions that irrevocably alter the course of life. In the poem, the traveler is confronted with two paths that require a commitment—an either/or choice. While the poet expresses the desire to travel both paths, he is cognizant that an individual traveler can only choose one path. Consequently, situated in the traveler’s choice is the discovery of his destiny. Relatedly our destinies are linked to the roads we choose. Denise shares:

As I read this stanza of the poem, I recall the choices that members of Cohort 03 and I made when we chose the road that would situate us in a program that promoted and fostered a scholar practitioner concept of educational leadership. In this journey, each of us would traverse a path that continues to alter our lives and the lives of the people we touch in an authentic, meaningful way. In Frost’s poem, the traveler stands and peers down the path seeking to gain knowledge of the journey ahead before making the final commitment.

Denise, in her reflections on Frost’s poem, finds herself as a traveler on a journey. She quotes the first three lines:

⁸ Denise (pseudonym) was a second-year doctoral student taking AED 612 in Fall 2005

Two Roads diverged in a wood
And I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the difference

Recalling her entry to the doctoral program, she notes having been “introduced us to scholar-practitioner leadership and its tenets of democracy social justice, equity, and caring. I remember the stories of challenges, sacrifices and changes in life styles. Consequently, I began a journey “that has made all the difference” (Frost as cited in Felleman, 1965, p. 317). As Denise examines the nature of scholar-practitioner leadership, she goes deeply into the connections between poetry and leadership. She shares the following:

The Choice of the Road: Commitment and Challenge

In the second stanza of Frost’s poem, the traveler ponders on the reason for choosing the second path that is “grassy and wants wear” (Felleman, 1965, p. 317). Embedded in the traveler’s musings are the essences of criticality and commitment. In the life of the scholar practitioner, the road beckons one to attempt the path of scholarly inquiry that results in “personal transformation, the improvement of professional practice, the generation of knowledge, and the appreciation of the complexity, intricacy, structure and –some would say the beauty of reality” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 68).

Because of my commitment to the journey, I accept the challenges of the road that creates a scholar-practitioner that is shaped by scholarly inquiry and professional experiences. In this transformation is the construction and reconstruction of scholar-practitioner leadership that is both transformed and transforming. Also present in the journey is the personal construction of the framework of the scholar practitioners’ obligation and the challenges that confront and confound me as I confront the realities of educational leadership in the public school system.

However, in order to fully understand the challenges inherent in the traveler’s choice is the paradox of the two roads in our uncertain world. While Frost presents the traveler with two roads, Wheatley (1999) notes we must be aware of the paradoxes that are an inherent reality in a scholar practitioner’s life—right and wrong, heaven and earth, equilibrium and chaos, hope and discouragement . . . (p. 90). Further, Wheatley posits that these “paradoxical but natural processes exist for growth and self-renewal” (p. 90). It is in this growth and self-renewal that the scholar practitioner is created. Much like the traveler, we are required to choose our road and as a result to grow in the requisite skill and strength that the journey requires.

Commitment to the Road Taken: No Turning Back

After the traveler chooses the road and the commitment is made, Frost ends the second stanza with the notion that once the commitment is made there is no turning back. While the traveler intends to revisit the choice and explore the road not taken, Frost doubts that he will ever return. Inherent in Frost’s doubt is the ideas of commitment and resilience to meet the challenges of the road taken and the journey ahead. In the scholar-practitioner’s life commitment to the task and resilience in the presence of adversity are key attributes to successful educational leadership.

Situating these concepts of struggle and resilience in scholar-practitioner leadership practice, Starratt (2004) notes the struggles that we face an educational

leaders—the “tragedies of thwarted human potential, diminished human dreams, seemingly crushing handicaps that populate the corridors of our schools” (p. 19). However, Starratt suggests that as scholar-practitioner leaders, we must not walk away from these harsh realities; we must find the strength within ourselves to recognize “the deep wellsprings of human possibility that human beings can achieve even in the most desperate circumstances” (p. 19).

Accordingly, Wheatley (2002) notes that that educational leaders will “walk through many dark nights” when she encourages us to consider the “dark nights of the soul” as a catalyst for rebirth (p. 3). In that moment of regeneration, Wheatley reminds us that we “emerge into the light” (p. 3). It is this hopeful expectation that motivates the traveler and the scholar-practitioner to remain committed to the journey.

Reflecting on the Journey: The One Less Traveled

In the final stanza, Frost notes that when reflecting on the road not taken, the traveler took the one less traveled and that “made all the difference” (Felleman, 1965, p. 317). Relatedly, the road of the scholar practitioner is also a journey of individualism that reminds me of the following quotation from Henry David Thoreau:

If a man does not keep pace with his companions,
Perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.
Let him step to the music which he hears,
However measured or far away.

As I reflect on the scholar practitioner paradigm, Frost’s descriptions of the roads and Thoreau’s imagery of the different drummer, I am aware of the importance of blending scholarly knowledge, ethical, caring action, and unwavering commitment into the scholar practitioner leadership mosaic. Additionally, I am inspired by the challenge and commitment that can be found in the journey of the scholar practitioner resulting in a rich, multifaceted, and meaningful life—scholarly, spiritual, ethical, caring, and committed. Therefore my metaphor is the following: Scholar-practitioner leadership is an uncharted journey of individualism and challenge.⁹

Trina’s¹⁰ thoughts on Maya Angelou’s poetry. Trina’s selection of the elements of her poetics, as she explains, “ is a representation of my authentic self and my concept of a scholar-practitioner leader.” She shares: “. . . my personal experiences and personal preferences have colored my choices. The poem . . . examined in this poetic reflects what I value in a scholar-practitioner leader.” The poem Trina selected is entitled Inaugural Poem, written by Maya Angelou for the inauguration of President William Jefferson Clinton. She shares her poetics, reflectively merging her interpretation of poetry with her understanding of scholar-practitioner leadership.

When I read this poem I hear the poet’s voice vividly speaking to me through imagery and metaphor. It is as if she is beckoning me to reach my fullest potential a scholar-practitioner leader. This triumvirate parallels the nature of the scholar-practitioner leader.

⁹ For references cited see Appendix A.

¹⁰ Trina (pseudonym) was a second year doctoral student taking AED 612 in Fall 2006.

In the second stanza of the poem, Angelou (1993) writes, “But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully, Come, you may stand upon my Back and face your destiny, But seek to haven in my shallow” (p. 1). The rock immediately brings to mind the image of strength and integrity. Just as leaders are called to care for others and scholar-practitioners engage in experiential learning and knowledge sharing, the rock supports others but does not shield them from new experiences or their destiny.

The river in this poem beckons others to, “. . . come rest here by my side.” To those who heed the call, the river offers to, “. . . sing the songs of the Creator gave to me when I and the Tree and the Rock were one. Before cynicism as a bloody sear across your Brow and when you yet know that you still knew nothing.” The water seems to be reaching out to those in turmoil and attempting to provide guidance to them. This image may be related to an ethic of care. Effective leaders inspire others to trust in the idea that their needs will be met and experiences will be shared. Scholar-practitioners engage in the cycle of inquiry, which exemplifies the idea knowing that we know nothing. Our cup of learning is never full. By continuing to create new knowledge, put this knowledge into practice, and explore further questions, scholar-practitioners know that knowledge is not stagnant.

The tree in Angelou’s work offers roots and stability to the reader. It is introduced as, “I am the Tree by the River, Which will not be moved.” The tree is constant. It knows the past and looks to the future. It tells the reader, “History, despite its wrenching pain, Cannot be unlived, and if faced With courage, need not be lived again.” Out of imperfect practice, new questions and new knowledge are created. This inquiry into new knowledge prevents the scholar-practitioner from engaging in uniformed, repetitive practice.

Clinton’s inaugural poem concludes by offering hope for the future. The last stanza reads, “Here on the pulse of this new day You may have the grace to look up and out And into your sister’s eyes, into Your brothers’ face, your country And say simply Very Simply With Hope Good morning.” The new day brings the opportunity for change and encourages readers to continue their journey with the courage to view the future optimistically.

Trina concludes that the metaphor of River, Rock, and Tree provide translate into the actions of scholar-practitioner leaders. She explains that the poetic furthers the cycle of inquiry, quoting Cahnmann (2003): “A poetic approach to inquiry requires the careful study of our own written logic, technique, and aesthetic” (p. 33). A poetic, Trina explains, “brings a personal dimension to the object or concept being examined.”¹¹

Film as a Lens for Poetic Practice

Film as media entertainment and cultural text, represents what Giroux (2002, 2004) terms the popular culture. Alice Walker, reflecting on the making of the movie *The Color Purple*, warns us, “I believe movies are the most powerful medium for change on earth. They are also a powerful medium for institutionalizing complacency, oppression, and reaction” (1996, p. 282). The pedagogical challenge with film, as Giroux (2002) argues, lies in trying to engage the film as a form of writing. This requires the student and teacher of leadership to “. . . mean differently by

¹¹ See Appendix A for references cited.

reorganizing the systems of intertextual, ideological, and cultural references in which it was constructed historically and semiotically, and in relation to the wider social events” (Giroux, 2002, p. 89). Film as popular culture, when considered as an element of poetics for examining leadership, acknowledges the importance of rethinking the role that educational leaders as scholar-practitioners “. . . and other cultural workers might play in addressing how the issue of political agency is defined through the cultural representations and resources that are largely enacted in the social formations that constitute everyday life” (Giroux, 2002, pp. 92-93). In the text that follows, selected film and respective ethical, political and theoretical interpretations exemplify doctoral students’ renderings of popular culture through poetics, in particular focusing on the work of the scholar-practitioner.

Paul’s¹² examination of Crash, the film. The film *Crash* (2004), for Paul, symbolized the principles he associated with the scholar-practitioner. As he explained, for him, the : “ . . . the various scenes in the movie . . . challenged the inner prejudices that are within all of us. Similar to the scholar-practitioner, the characters of the movie used critical reflection to analyze (assess) their experiences. Paul examined the film in relation to his own cultural experiences as an African-American male, and an assistant principal. His insight draws from his experiences as he deconstructs the film in relation to the work of a scholar-practitioner leader.

Throughout the movie, issues of hate, stereotyping, and discrimination were at the forefront. In every scene in which a character displayed or experienced hatred or discrimination, they would have to reflect on the scene to determine how they would respond to a person from a different ethnic group than the one they represent. In some cases, regardless of the race of the characters, the response was positive.

I would like to emphasize the roll of one character that displayed the traits of the scholar-practitioner. On two occasions the character, Daniel, who was a locksmith, was discriminated against because of his ethnicity (Hispanic). Once, in the home of a Caucasian couple who had just been carjacked by two African American men. The second time, he was spoken to rudely by an Indian gentleman, who was a business owner. The Caucasian female and Indian gentleman assumed that Daniel was a thief and their thoughts were directed by the fact that he was Hispanic.

Daniel responded to both of them by trying to provide them with quality work. After he heard the comments made by the female, he ignored her and continued to focus on his goal of installing new locks. The scholar-practitioner must be committed to producing quality work even in the midst of those who expect a sub par performance or some form of impropriety. In his conversation with the gentleman, he was cursed and disrespected repeatedly. He listened and continuously tried to stress to the gentleman that he needed a new door. As an educator the scholar-practitioner must employ this same determination. The scholar-practitioner must be determined to provide quality leadership to all stakeholders in both good and bad times.

The characters of the movie also displayed a courage that is present in the scholar-practitioner. As stated earlier, the characters used critical reflection to analyze their experiences. Several times during the movie characters were challenged to reflect on their beliefs and make decisions that contradicted these beliefs. It is a courageous individual

¹² Paul (pseudonym) was a second-year doctoral student taking AED 612 in Fall 2005.

that can challenge her or his on belief system and change their practice. This is a challenge that must be accepted by the scholar-practitioner in an attempt to make socially just and equitable decisions.¹³

Darlene's¹⁴ examination of *Coach Carter, the film*. Darlene is a middle school principal in a large district situated within a university community. The film she chose, *Coach Carter* (2005), is based on a true-life account of the controversial basketball coach, Ken Carter. Coach Carter was labeled a trouble maker and a hero when he made national news for a gymnasium “lockout” of his entire undefeated basketball team because of their poor academic performance. Darlene examines Coach Carter as a scholar-practitioner who understood the importance of a strong academic background for students if they were to rise above their existing conditions. Darlene shared the following quote for the film as further explication of the values that a scholar-practitioner must inculcate in individuals:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate; our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were all meant to shine, as children do. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same; as we are liberated from our own fear. Our presence automatically liberates others. (The character Cruz in the film, *Coach Carter*)

As Darlene explains, the young man, Cruz, internalized the values that Coach Carter stressed; values that” . . . helped him become a ‘winner’ in life.” Darlene contrasts the person Cruz was before Coach Carter arrived, a high school student who rebelled against high expectations, such as those set by Coach Carter for participation on the basketball team. Through the work of Coach Carter and the success of his teammates, Cruz sacrifices himself, giving up attitude and old life in order to become part of team.

The film exemplifies also the courage of taking a public stand, such as Coach Carter did when he enforced the “lockout” at the threat of his coaching success and job and under staunch criticism from parents, community, and fellow educators. Darlene compares the work of being a scholar-practitioner with the work exemplified by Coach Carter, focusing on the words by Cruz as he and his teammates take their own stand to protect Coach Carter. Cruz realized, as Darlene noted, “. . . his potential and the effects his life could make in others.” Cruz recognized, just as scholar-practitioners do, that: “Our presence automatically liberates others.”¹⁵

Nina's¹⁶ examination of *Mona Lisa Smiles, the film*. All her life she wanted to teach at Wellesley College so when a position opened in the art history department she pursued it simple mindedly until she was hired. It was whispered that Katherine Watson, first year teacher from Oakland State made up in brains what she lacked in pedigree. Which is why she was on her way to the most conservative college in the nation. But Katherine Watson did not come to Wellesley to fit in, she came to make a difference. (Film, *Mona Lisa Smiles*)

¹³ See Appendix A for references.

¹⁴ Darlene (pseudonym) was a first-year doctoral student taking AED 602 in Spring 2005.

¹⁵ See Appendix A for references.

¹⁶ Nina (pseudonym), was a second-year doctoral student taking AED 612 in Fall 2005.

Nina opened her film discussion with this quote from *Mona Lisa Smiles* (Roth, et al., 2003), explaining that the film portrays the struggles that are created when making a difference is the goal. Katherine saw a chance to make a difference in the lives of many young women who attended Wellesley College to learn the ‘graces’ of becoming a hostess for their prospective wealthy husbands. She faced many hurdles before being accepted as a teacher. Through steadfast resolve, Katherine became their mentor.

Nina explains the importance of Katherine’s choice to make a difference and the importance of building relationships:

To make a difference involves effective leadership. Effective leadership requires authenticity in building and cultivating relationships. . . . Relationships within a school determine and influence the outcomes. Relationships built on trust are durable, enabling the leader to be effective without ruling through mandates . . .

Katherine Watson stated, “I came to Wellesley because I want to make a difference.” The scholar-practitioner . . . [embraces] the idea of making a difference through the promotion of equity, justice, caring, and democracy. . . . Katherine presented the ideas that opened the hearts and minds of the young women to look to the future. Katherine saw potential in many of the young women for advancement in careers.

The idea of advancement was against the [traditions] of Wellesley College and the Board. It took great courage on the part of Katherine to stand for what she believed. Often, the scholar-practitioner, in spite of opposition, must have courage to stand for what is best for those whom he or she serves.

Truth Beyond Tradition, Beyond Definition, Beyond Image

My teacher, Katherine Watson, lived by her on definition and would not compromise that, not even for Wellesley. I dedicate this to an extraordinary woman who lived by example and compelled us to all see the world through new eyes. She’ll be sailing to Europe where I now she’ll find new walls to break down and new ideas to replace them with. I’ve heard her called a quitter for leaving, an aimless wanderer, but, not all who wander are aimless, especially not those who seek the truth beyond tradition, beyond definition, beyond the image. (Editor of Wellesley College Newspaper, Film, *Mona Lisa Smiles*)

These words were written by the editor of the college newspaper, a young woman who resisted change the most. Betty sought every opportunity to pit Katherine against the other young women and often promoted vocal resistance. . . .

The words “lived by example and compelled us all to see the world through new eyes,” “know she” “find new walls to break down and new ideas to replace them with,” and “an aimless wander, but not all that wander are aimless, especially not those who seek truth beyond tradition, beyond definition, beyond image,” express the tasks of the scholar-practitioner. The practitioner who is able to apply all these concepts while promoting equity, social justice, with an ethic of care in a democratic way becomes a true scholar-practitioner.

Betty’s final words were, “We’ll never forget you.” Those who truly practice the scholar-practitioner [way] are not forgotten because they make an indelible imprint upon the hearts of those to whom they mentor and teach. . . Foster (1994) sums it effectively in

his statement: “A practice is a lifework, an attempt to develop excellence in a calling” (p. 48)¹⁷

Literature as a Lens for Imaginative Projection

Literature, novel/novela, works of fiction serve to engage the imagination, stimulating cognitive aesthetics and providing text and context within which to examine values, beliefs, and assumptions about one’s life and practice. As a lens for poetic practice, literature, what we call the literary, has been that which poses the greatest danger to representations:

It might be called the “post” that has always haunted the “modern”, the (im)possibility of representations that has haunted representations. . . . Literature comes to be that which can, in some sense, mark the break, the interruption, the insufficiency of truth as representation, and the necessity to tell the story differently. (Nealon, 1993, pp. 237-238)

Literature provides the student of leadership a literary challenge to his or her own beliefs, values, and assumptions, and at the same time provides a context within which to examine one’s story and change one’s story as it is told through the experiences of self in relation to others.

Literature of different genre provides an aesthetic window into the moral creativity and practical wisdom of the author and at the same time makes public the author’s work as public intellectual in a particular cultural-historical moment of the time. The novel/novela may provide social critique on issues and problems in society, or direct the reader to reflect on his or her own issue or problems in the large context of society. Literature as cultural text and context, as the voice of artfulness and moral reason and at the same time reflective of the voiceless an immoral, situates the reader in such a way as to cause question of one’s on positionality and practice. In the text that follows, literature in form of novel/novela is examined as a dimension of the poetics of leadership, and students’ ethical and theoretical interpretations of scholar-practitioner leadership presented.

Jean’s¹⁸ narrative interpretation of *The Fire Next Time*... Educational leaders, Jean explains, “. . . must care about those entrusted to our guidance and work daily to debunk the myths and misconceptions that have become truths to so many students, parents, and community members.” Jean selected James Baldwin’s novel, *The Fire Next Time* (1963) as a literary lens through which to explain scholar-practitioner leadership.

James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* (1963) speaks to American people both Black and White and urges them to mutually find a way to end racism in order to change the history of the world. It opens with a letter to his nephew entitled “My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation.” In this letter, he basically tells his nephew that he cannot believe what White people say about him – that he is not inferior. He goes on to explain why he feels that many Whites believe their misconceptions while others know what is true and what is right but choose not to acknowledge those truths. He says, “To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of

¹⁷ See Appendix A for references.

¹⁸ Jean (pseudonym) was a first-year student taking AED 602 in Spring 2006.

their identity” (p. 23). In the second part of the book “Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind,” Mr. Baldwin goes on to chronicle his younger years in the ministry, his departure from Christianity, and experiences with Elijah Muhammed and Muslim movement of the Nation of Islam. In both the first and second parts of the book, James Baldwin speaks about loving Whites in spite of themselves. He encourages everyone to move past the ignorance and the suffering toward healing. He states,

I do not mean to be sentimental about suffering – enough is certainly as good as a feast – but people who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are. That man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it knows, if he survives his effort, and even if he does not survive it, something about himself and the human life that no school on earth – and indeed, no church – can teach. (p. 113)

The course objectives relating to ethical reasoning, moral responsibility, and democratic community resound throughout *The Fire Next Time*. Leadership can no longer be directed from above, but leaders must work as facilitators in a communal setting where all voices are heard and acknowledged. The scholar-practitioner leader is bound to a “moral democratic concept of leadership, which includes the principles and practices of caring, trust, social justice, and collaborative inquiry” (Heckman, 1996, p.142). Leaders must also encourage members of the school community to be aware of the cultural needs of the students and community members.

Transformative leadership is also interwoven throughout the book as James Baldwin is on a quest to help transform the minds of American people in order to place racism in the consciousness of the minds of both Blacks and Whites so that history could be changed forever. . . .

The scholar-practitioner leader, as Jean explains, “. . . is a moral, ethical, and transformative leader who understands and accepts an expanded role of leading change in the social setting of the school learning community, as well as in the social context of society.” Her thoughts direct us to see the scholar-practitioner leader as “. . . a life-long learner who constructs knowledge from practice and resists social injustices and oppressions of groups by working through communal and collaborative processes.” Jean believes that the for the scholar-practitioner leader, his or her “. . . leadership role is not grounded by one theoretical perspective, but includes tenets from various educational theories and ideologies. Jean concludes by stating: “We must embark on a transformative mission to impart truth and subsequently lead students to the possibilities that await them.”¹⁹

Wanda’s²⁰ narrative interpretations of *Teacher Man*. Wanda selected Frank McCourt’s novel, *Teacher Man* (2005) for her poetics. She opens her discussion that the book is tribute to all educators. She considers McCourt as “. . . a scholar-practitioner in today’s society.” A New York teacher with thirty years experience, McCourt “tells the stories of his days as a teacher and the challenges that he is faced with. The challenges that arise during his teaching career are both student challenges and challenges he is confronted with by other educators, who have different beliefs and philosophies.” As Wanda examines the novel, she understands that the book, while fictionalized to some degree, is also

¹⁹ See Appendix A for references cited.

²⁰ Wanda (pseudonym) was a first-year doctoral student in AED 602 Spring 2006.

autobiographical, a self-reflective examination of his own experiences set against the backdrop of New York City Schools.

A Scholar-Practitioner's Story

Mr. McCourt's teaching philosophy and methods were not conventional. He was able to greatly impact the lives of his students when others overlooked them or did not challenge them to their full potential.

Within our current education system and our schools, the ability for a scholar-practitioner to exist sometimes seems impossible with the hierarchies that are currently present and clearly in place. It is as though we are not encouraging or leading our teachers and students to become scholar-practitioners. "The scholar-practitioner's work, in part, is to illuminate and interrogate injustices-such as those created by hierarchies of participation and forms of social control" (Jenlink, 2003-04, p. 3). Mr. McCourt challenged the hierarchies and stood up for the rights of students who were labeled as disadvantaged and destined to never attend a college. Power was not the object of Mr. McCourt's goals as a teacher. His reasons for becoming an educator far surpassed the notion of power. He explains:

There are teachers who teach and don't give a fiddler's fart what their students think of them. Subject matter is king. Such teachers are powerful. They dominate their classrooms with personality backed up by the great threat; the red pen inscribing on the report card the dreaded F. Their message to their students is, I am your teacher, not your counselor, not your confidant, not your parent. I teach a subject: take it or leave it. (Mccourt, 2005, p. 147)

Mr. McCourt promoted democratic leadership and meaningful participation and respect for everyone. He maintained a classroom where all involved had the right to participate and influence in the decision-making process. This process does not involve a select few making decisions for all. Mr. McCourt was involved with his students and their education and wanted what was in their best interest.

A scholar-practitioner leader, as per Starratt, "is primarily concerned to cultivate an environment that supports participation, sharing of ideas, and virtues of honesty, openness, flexibility, and compassion" (2001, p. 338). Scholar-practitioner leaders work together collaboratively to discuss problems and concerns involving mutual perspectives. A scholar-practitioner leader ensures that there will not be unheard voices. The voices of the students were clearly heard by McCourt. He provided a safe learning environment where students could be risk takers and actively participate. Mr. McCourt thought carefully about how statements and his actions would affect his students.

In order to have equality for all, leaders need to look at democratic leadership and the impact that it would have in our schools. As scholar-practitioners we must look to take down these hierarchies of power and build open communication where all voices are considered equally important and crucial. Scholar-practitioners must bring these injustices that are created by the hierarchies to light. This can be done through democratic leadership and the scholar-practitioner. The scholar-practitioner "understands that s/he occupies objective positions within a variety of contexts, and that from these objective positions s/he must necessarily take a stance on

differing social issues” (Jenlink 2003-04, p. 3). This is an understanding that Frank McCourt demonstrated in his career as an educator.

Poetics (including productions such as poetry, fiction novels, movies, plays, and music) as an epistemological/pedagogical tool pushes us to ask: What is it we believe/value as an educational leader? Who are we as educational leaders, as scholar-practitioners? Who are we as ethical and moral beings? What perspectives guide our actions? Where are others in relation to us? What are our understandings, our frames of reference for societal and educational issues? What responsibilities do we, as educational leaders, have for/with others.

Conclusions and Final Reflections

It was the intent of the author in this paper to extend the lines of inquiry and pedagogical considerations concerning leadership preparation by elucidating a poetics for leadership preparation. It is believed that a poetics for leadership preparation can help faculty and scholars of leadership preparation better articulate a collective sense of the meaningfulness experienced in leading in the educational setting.

The poetics for leadership preparation translates, in part, as a “process of active response to the world, involving a deepening understanding and sensitivity” to democracy, and “mirrors how events, actions, and the conduct of others can all express intellectual, aesthetic, and moral meaning” (Hansen, 2004, p. 122). Examining one’s own practice in the mirror of poetics affords a critical, reflective pedagogy for understanding the necessity of ethical sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and moral imagination in relation to ethical leadership.

As the participants engaged in self-critical reflections, their understanding of leadership exists, in part, emerged in the experiencing of the activity, and in the ‘arresting moments’ where the construction of meaning was most profound. Most participants noted that the experience of poetics made it possible to examine personal and professional experiences in a non-threatening way, allowing for imaginative moments through which they could move beyond the realities of a world as it was or had been experienced.

Poetics, as participants noted, provided space for examining theory and practice, making connections that heretofore had not existed, and a chance to make sense of their experiences as they were learning to become education leaders. The poetics also made an otherwise complex and daunting theory base more accessible while engaging participants in examining underlying epistemological foundations. As Greene (1967) reminds us, to teach “is to understand a profoundly human as well as a professional responsibility” (p. 3). A poetics of leadership preparation creates the imaginative space wherein democratic possibilities become reality when reality is transformed by the liberation of the mind.

Situating poetics in leadership preparation challenges the student of leadership to interpret lived experience deeply so that we might realize the multiplicity of possible constructions and the inevitable partiality, and even impermanence, of our own visions. As the participants reflected in their self-critical examinations, understanding leadership exists, in part, in the experiencing of the activity (the poetics of leadership activity), and in the ‘arresting moments’ where the construction of meaning was most profound. Most participants noted that the experience of poetics made it possible to examine personal and professional experiences in a non-threatening way, allowing for imaginative moments through which they could move beyond the realities of a world as it was or had been experienced.

This pedagogical approach opens discursive and conceptual space for alternative thinking. Finally, different media of creative expression and production as epistemological/ pedagogical tools of leadership can (as read by students and professors of leadership through these different artists and poets) allow for questioning, critically, one's own beliefs, values, and assumptions; to evolve our own understandings in relation to the understandings of others. Shelby, a doctoral student in her second year (2006-2007), is instructive in understanding the power of poetics as a pedagogical approach to leadership preparation when she explains:

I was overwhelmed by concepts that were new and confusing so I created a mind map, something that I taught my students to do but that I had not used myself with new learning. The result was an incredible mind map that revealed the twists and turns in my thinking and helped me to organize this new learning in a meaningful way. My practice was becoming integrated into this new scholarship and I felt successful.

Shelby's experience is characteristic of many doctoral students who found the doctoral program intense and the poetics activity a way to begin understanding the complex process of becoming a scholar-practitioner. Shelby often wrote poetry, a form of mind mapping for her, as an expression of her own process of working through the confusion, as demonstrated in her original poem "Möbius Strip":

Möbius Strip

A magician's trick, illusion
the irony of using a mathematical concept
to illustrate new ideas
a heuristic of sorts for a
bricolage of etymologies,
critical theories,
epistemologies.

That should have been my first
clue that my educational journey would be bumpy.

Research design that could only be comprehended
through the variegated colors of Crayola
markers and a mind map
that grew to amazing proportions.

My comfort zone – learning – seemed uncomfortable,
a wrong fit as I searched for solid ground on the Doctoral plain.

A critical lens, a pragmatic lens,
a postmodern lens, a feminist lens –
Better here or here

I squinted - hoping for a clear vision, the perfect lens
only to return to my Moebius strip of the scholar-practitioner leader.

An infinite loop of learning.

Poetics in leadership preparation challenges us to interpret lived experience deeply so that we might realize the multiplicity of possible constructions and the inevitable partiality, and even impermanence, of our own visions. The possibilities for understanding leadership exists, in part, in the aesthetic experiences we as professors of educational leadership can make possible, the imaginative moments through which we can enable our students to move beyond the realities of a world as it is experienced in the present. To move the mind beyond the mind. We must remember that, as Wallace Stevens (1951) explains, “Reality is life and life is society and the imagination and reality; that is to say, the imagination and society are inseparable” (p. 28). Leadership, like an aesthetic experience, has its own rhythm, tone, resonance, and drama.

Appendix A

Scholar–Practitioner Leadership Preparation²¹

The construct of scholar–practitioner as used throughout this paper is premised on an alternative epistemology wherein the educational leader as scholar and his or her leadership practice are inseparable from scholarly and critically oriented inquiry and practice. This interprets, for purposes of understanding the relationship between scholar and practitioner, as leadership praxis. In this sense, praxis connotes a necessary relationship between theory and practice, that is, theory means social, cultural, political, and economic theory, and practice means actions and decisions that an individual takes part in to fulfill his or her professional, political, and social/civic responsibilities. Scholar–practitioner leadership is grounded in a postmodern – post-formal view of leadership, which seeks to blur boundaries in the knowledge-practice and inquiry-practice relationships. A scholar–practitioner leader is aware of the origins, context, and patterns of the knowledge related to an issue. Equally important, the scholar–practitioner leader works from a repertoire of inquiry methods to explore, create, and transform social relations and knowledge within the larger political, economic, and cultural struggles of education and society. This post-formal way of knowing or inquiry creates deep understanding and facilitates continuous formation of questions that are the essence of scholar–practitioner leadership (Jenlink, 2001; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1999). Post-formal inquiry in the critique of practice enables the scholar–practitioner to examine the origins of practice while considering the historicity of the phenomena. Central to the critique of professional leadership practice is the role of “self” that “can only become critical when we appreciate the historicity of its formation. We are never independent of the social and historical forces that surround us—we are caught at a particular point in the web of reality” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1999, p. 62). In this sense, the scholar–practitioner engages in a self-critical inquiry and at the same brings a critical lens to his or her praxis. This type of critical praxis implies that at the same time as the questioning and researching occurs, the knowledge, values, and beliefs that are uncovered must be framed within a consideration of their implications for social justice, caring, and democracy. This framing, questioning, and researching activity is embedded within a continuous critical reflection on what is uncovered.

The scholar–practitioner leader understands the complexity of social relations and in general the complex nature of political and cultural struggles in which education is engaged within society. Pragmatically, the scholar–practitioner is consciously aware that every action has critical implications for themselves and others. They also realize that reality is not something external to human consciousness that can be discovered through some scientific process. To be a scholar–practitioner leader implies that knowledge, values, and beliefs cannot be given or transmitted to others, but that these other individuals must be allowed participation in the construction of meaning, definition, knowledge, or action. Simultaneously, the scholar–practitioner understands the import of facilitating a critical literacy, for him or herself and for others. The scholar–practitioner leader embodies the values of social justice, caring, equity, self-criticality, and democracy and they understand that their role as leader is equally one of cultural

²¹ Excerpted from P. M. Jenlink (2007). *A poetics of leadership exemplar: The scholar–practitioner’s obligation: Freedom’s poetic*. Paper presented at the 8th Annual Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference, Marble Falls, TX, October 3-7.

worker, scholarly practitioner and public intellectual within the classroom, school, college, educational community, and in state and regional/national policy making contexts.

The conceptualization of leadership that is defined by a blurring of boundaries between "scholar" and "practitioner" suggests, at first glance, as seemingly a merging of contraries, or contradictories. However, the merging of such contradictories has important implications within a postmodern, post-formal context of education. The synthesis developed from such merging has implications for redefining the practice of educators and other cultural workers: the kinds of relationships educators create, how educators frame and carry out work, and how educators give voice to social activism, knowledge creation and transformation, and democratizing education.

The notion of what stands as "scholar" takes new meaning, no longer bound within a modernist dualism. In a post-formal sense, the educational leader employs criticality as a scholarly lens in concert with multiple inquiry methods to create a scholarship of practice. Such a scholarship of practice offers important considerations for educational leadership's place in critically examining and addressing issues and problems that "schools of education need to think about regarding the social responsibility of school administrators and teachers and the role that both public schools and higher education might have in terms of their wider political and social function" (Giroux, 1994, p. 31).

A scholar-practitioner stance suggests an interrelatedness of both positional (position in situ) and orientation (position-taking) to convey physical positions of the person and the intellectual activities and perspectives carried over time and across different contexts. In this sense, stance makes visible and problematic the various perspectives through which scholar-practitioners frame their questions, illuminations, interrogations, and actions. A scholar-practitioner stance is, in part, a disposition through which the scholar-practitioner reflects upon her or his own actions and those presented by others. Rather than passively accepting information or embracing a false consciousness instructed by dominant ideologies, the scholar-practitioner takes a much more active role in leading, learning, and reflecting upon her/his relationship with her/his practice and the social context in which the practice is situated. A critical stance for the scholar-practitioner is undergirded by a perception of reality that considers the world and our place within it as incomplete, becoming, and subject to our own projections. It is a critical encounter in which such issues as what counts as knowledge or practice becomes subject to individuals' own histories, ideals, practices, and perceptions (Freire, 1998, pp. 73-80).

The critical stance does not simply acquiesce in or absorb new knowledge or practice but rather encounters it as a claim that exists alongside many alternative possibilities and therefore must struggle to retain its legitimacy (Curzon-Hobson, 2003). A scholar-practitioner who embraces a critical stance subjects her or his knowledge and practice to a variety of frameworks that he or she has encountered and reflects upon this practice or knowledge in social contexts characterized by tensions and conflicts.

The notion of scholar-practitioner stance is underpinned by a sense of fragility and openness in the social context, the positions one has in contrast to the position-taking one engages in gives way to the fragility and openness. Importantly, the scholar-practitioner recognizes the value that is gained within a social context that is exploited by all in order to reflect upon and imagine anew what is presented and the perceptions of our interrelationships (Freire, 1985, p. 44). The scholar-practitioner often brings to question and introduces conflict to bear on the object of inquiry through her or his practice. Freire (1972) explains this process as "epistemological encircling" in which new ideas—through dialogical inquiry—conflict with and challenge what is considered absolute and show the learner that things can be different" (p. 53).

Thus, in mediating injustices and inequities within the educational setting, the scholar-practitioner works to create a more democratic culture while fostering a sense of becoming, both in her or himself, as well as in others with whom s/he interacts. This creates a symmetry in the relationships and practices, participation and power, wherein the scholar-practitioner is working alongside others toward defining a socially just and democratic society.

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Positive Behavior Support in Schools (PBSIS): An Administrative Perspective on the Implementation of a Comprehensive School-Wide Intervention in an Urban Charter School

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



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This research explores the implementation of a school-wide intervention program that was designed to foster and instill intrinsic values based on an external reward system. The Positive Behavior Support in Schools (PBSIS) is an intervention intended to improve the climate of schools using system-wide positive behavioral interventions to discourage disruptive behaviors. The charter school that was the focus of this research experienced high staff turnover, negative school climate and student suspension rates that exceeded the state average. A mixed methods research design included de-identified data that were retrieved from 200 students in grades kindergarten through two, 205 parents and 54 staff members. The data sources included data from the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET), Climate Survey and Office Discipline Referrals (ODR). Results indicated the implementation of Positive Behavior Support in Schools had a positive and significant impact on improving student behaviors and school climate. Results indicated that the implementation of the program significantly reduced the number of office discipline referrals and in-school suspension rates, and improved perceptions of students, staff and parents regarding the school climate. However, the results also indicated that there was no significant difference in the out-of-school suspension rates during the two-year implementation of PBSIS. This study provided administrators and staff with a comprehensive understanding of the implementation challenges associated with a school-wide intervention, as well as evidence to support practices that were effective.

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Introduction

Managing student behaviors has always been an area of concern for school teachers and administrators. Classroom disruptions have been proven to lower student achievement, not only for the offending student, but also for his or her classmates (Lannie & McCurdy, 2007). Students with behavior problems are at risk academically and socially. They are more often suspended, expelled, placed in an alternative setting, and are more likely to drop out of school before completing high school than students not at risk (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Higher rates of student exclusion from school often lead to disengagement, loss of instructional time, and academic failure. Because challenging behaviors plague inner-city classrooms across the nation, teachers and administrators should develop innovative strategies to minimize negative behaviors. Positive behavior interventions provide an affirmative alternative to punitive interventions that contribute to the school to prison pipeline (Losen, 2015).

Research suggests the implementation of a school-wide discipline plan similar to Positive Behavior Support in Schools (PBSIS) would help administrators, teachers, and ultimately students, employ consistent discipline strategies in both the classroom and in non-instructional areas, such as the cafeteria, playground and gymnasium. Key elements of PBSIS include (a) active teaching and reinforcement of a small number of clearly defined social-behavioral expectations, (b) implementation of consistent consequences for violations of school expectations, and (c) use of data to drive intervention planning (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2012).

Focus of the Investigation

The urban charter school, which was the focus of this analysis, experienced an excessive number of office discipline referrals, high staff turnover and negative school climate. The school administrators recognized that there were several systems that existed within the school: Non-classroom Specific Systems (e.g., hallways, cafeteria, playground, bathroom, etc.); Classroom Systems; and Individual Student Support Systems (e.g., students with challenging behaviors are placed on the Check In/Check Out System, or CICO). Each system overlaps and impacts the others. The administrative team identified the behavioral challenges that existed within their school at each level. They knew and understood that there were concerns with the office discipline referral process, school climate, and excessive number of discipline referrals in non-classroom specific areas throughout the school. Once these concerns were identified, they were able to move forward in the process of developing, implementing and maintaining a school-wide intervention.

During year one of PBSIS training, the administrators received on-going training and technical assistance from an appointed PBSIS liaison who helped formulate the tenets of the program. Through the training, the administrators and teachers received professional development in the following areas: assessing the school climate, using office discipline referrals (ODR) to drive school-wide decisions, developing a school-wide recognition system, modeling desired behaviors to students, and defining school-wide behavioral expectations. The administrator was responsible for ensuring that PBSIS was implemented with fidelity. Through weekly articulation sessions with the teachers, the administrator was able to collect data and monitor the implementation process.

Through the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Report System (EVVRS), all public schools within the state of New Jersey are required to upload data regarding student incidents.

Within the reporting system, incidents are categorized as Violence, Vandalism, Weapons and Substance Abuse (New Jersey Department of Education, 2014b).

Districts that exceed the number of student incidents in a given year may be placed on the Persistently Dangerous Schools List. The Persistently Dangerous Schools List is comprised of public elementary, middle, secondary or charter schools that have met two of the following criteria for three consecutive years: the school reported seven or more Category A offenses that are classified as involving a firearm or aggravated assault. According to the 2012-13 NJDOE Public Fact Sheet, there are 2,492 public schools in the state of New Jersey; and during the 2004-2011 school years, 17 schools were placed on the Persistently Dangerous Schools List (New Jersey Department of Education, 2014a).

Based on the data from grades kindergarten through grade four during the 2008-2011 school years, this school exceeded the number of office discipline referrals and the annual State suspensions rate of 4%. The table below depicts the annual suspension rates for the case study school within this study (Table 1).

Table 1
Annual Student Suspension Rates at Case Study School

Annual Student Suspension Rates	
2008-2009	18%
2009-2010	4%
2010-2011	9%

Source: New Jersey Department of Education (2014b)

Over the three-year period, the suspension rate of the case study school fluctuated due to the increase in student enrollment, staff turnover, and the lack of consistency and clarity of the office discipline referral process. Due to the need for corrective action, the administrative team applied for a grant that would allow the case study school to participate in a two-year training of PBSIS. The grant was sponsored by New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), New Jersey Office of Special Education (NJOSE), The Elizabeth Boggs Center for Developmental Disabilities, and UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. In August of 2011, the case study school received confirmation that the school would be included in the 2011 cohort of schools which would receive ongoing training and technical assistance.

Significance of the Study

This study sought to measure the impact PBSIS had on school climate, office discipline referrals and student suspension rates. Discipline concerns are issues that continue to plague administrators, teachers and parents. The significance of this study was to provide administrators and staff with a comprehensive intervention program that focuses on a proactive

approach to school-wide discipline concerns. Teaching and learning opportunities were often interrupted by discipline problems within the classroom. To help correct the problem, students needed to learn and observe appropriate behaviors through modeling. Teachers had to learn how to identify, acknowledge and reward desired behaviors and expectations. When schools effectively implement PBSIS, they typically experience a decrease in inappropriate behaviors and often find that academic performance improves because teachers are able to return to teaching after stabilizing social behaviors (Simonsen, Sugai, & Negrón, 2008, p. 33).

School Climate

There has been an increased concern about the importance of linking school climate to student and teacher outcomes through measures that are psychometrically sound and of practical utility (Bear, Yang, Pell, & Gaskins, 2012). Research suggests that student outcomes are often related to students' perceptions of school climate but also to teachers' perceptions of school climate and job satisfaction (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009).

Educators have suggested for decades that the group dynamics of a classroom should focus on the way teachers and students interact with one another. Classrooms are complex societies where teachers and students interact with each other on a daily basis. Within these societies, the teachers are the leaders and the way they demonstrate their leadership abilities affects the interactions that take place within their classrooms. The interactions, both social and instructional, have a great impact on the academic and social growth of students (Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-Davis, & Hunt, 2010).

Creating an environment where students experience a sense of belonging, including feeling safe and accepted, is integral in maintaining and fostering school connectedness. School connectedness has been associated with a positive school climate and enhanced academic motivation. School connectedness can be defined as feeling connected to peers, teachers, and staff at school; a sense of enjoyment and liking of school; a belief that school is important; active engagement in school activities; and a perceived sense of belonging, closeness, and commitment to school (Daly, Buchanan, Dasch, Eichen, & Lenhart, 2010).

Since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, two aspects of school climate--achievement and safety--have become central in school improvement initiatives that aim to enhance achievement and reduce discipline problems. Positive school climate is an important aspect of successful schools. It defines the shared beliefs, values and attitudes that shape the interactions between students, teachers and administrators and set the parameters of acceptable behavior and norms of the school (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008).

School Safety

Safety is a basic need to every human being, and should include but is not limited to emotional and physical safety. According to Devine and Cohen (2007), feeling secure while at school greatly promotes the performance and learning of students. This in return ensures good relationships and promotes students' physical and mental health. Unfortunately, many students do not feel safe at school, either physically or emotionally. Students are at risk of bullying, peer victimization, violence and punitive disciplinary actions if supportive norms, healthy relationships and structures are lacking in a learning institution. A negative climate can

contribute to high absenteeism, academic underperformance and high dropout rates (Attar-Schwartz, 2009).

Bandyopadhyay, Cornell, and Konold (2009) provide evidence for the validity of three school climate factors that are important to overall school safety: (1) the perception that teachers and staff members are responsive to bullying and threats of violence, (2) the perception that peers regard aggressive behavior as a serious problem, and (3) the perception that teasing and bullying can be safely reported to teachers and administrators. The three factors were predictive of a series of measures when identifying school safety conditions (Shirley & Cornell, 2011).

Since the early 1990s, the national discourse on school discipline has been dominated by the philosophy of zero tolerance (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Zero Tolerance was originally developed as an approach to drug enforcement and then became widely adopted by schools in the early 1990s as a philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Supporters have credited zero tolerance policies with helping students feel safer in schools. Administrators, educators and policy makers are encouraged to establish positive school climates and environments by developing and enacting discipline policies that are applied fairly and equally to all students (Daly et al., 2010).

More recently, Zero Tolerance Policies have been identified as significant contributors to the school to prison pipeline. Behavioral and disciplinary infractions, particularly in urban schools, are addressed with punitive sanctions such as out of school suspension instead of positive modeling such as PBSIS (Losen, 2015).

Teachers in urban schools often experience structural (e.g., large classrooms), contextual (e.g., limited resources), and administrative (e.g., zero tolerance policies) obstacles that serve to negatively impact their ability to maintain proper classroom management (Daly et al., 2010). When teachers are provided with adequate training in behavior management, broad-ranging positive effects can be expected including fewer disciplinary and special education referrals, increased student achievement, improved teacher retention, and an enhanced climate of respect within the school (Daly et al., 2010).

Research Design

A mixed methods research design included survey research from climate surveys and the School-Wide Evaluation Tool (SET), student and staff interviews, and descriptive statistics on the number of student disciplinary incidences and suspensions. The data that were extracted and analyzed from multiple data sources were used to determine the impact of PBSIS on student behaviors and school climate over a two-year period. Table 2 provides information regarding the related research question, data sources used, data collected and the data analysis.

Table 2
Research Questions and Methodology

<i>Related research question</i>	<i>Data Source</i>	<i>Data Collected</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
What is the impact on student discipline as evidenced by: (a) office discipline referrals and (b) the number of suspensions	Office Discipline Referrals (ODR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discipline referral data: The total number of ODR ▪ Number of Out-of-School suspensions ▪ Number of In-School suspensions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SPSS, descriptive analysis to compare pre-implementation year one to implementation year two.
What is the impact of PBSIS on school climate?	Climate Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A climate survey was administered to parents, staff and students during Year 1 and Year 2 of the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Climate Survey: descriptive statistics to compare frequency counts and percentages for parent, student and teacher responses.
	School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The School-wide Evaluation Tool was administered to staff, students and administration in December 2011 and December 2012. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET): Using qualitative data content analysis techniques to sort responses by themes.

In order to assess the efficacy of PBSIS, de-identified archival data were collected from office discipline referrals, climate surveys and the School-Wide Evaluation Tool (SET). The de-identified archival data were extracted from office discipline referrals included the total number of office discipline referrals by month, the total number of suspensions, type of discipline offense and offense location.

The climate survey was developed by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, in collaboration with the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, UMDNJ- Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. The SET was developed by Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd and Horner (2005).

Research Setting

The charter school is located in northern New Jersey with an enrollment of 505 students. In the 2008-2009 school year, the average percentage of student suspensions in this district's charter schools was 11%, almost double the district average of 6%, and almost three times the state average of 3%. The school offers grades kindergarten through four. There are four classes at each grade level. There are twenty-five students in each class. The ratio of students to teachers in grades kindergarten through four is 2:25.

Sample

During the 2010-2012 school years, de-identified data were retrieved from 200 students in kindergarten through second grade, 205 parents and 54 staff members. The 200 students were in kindergarten and first grade during the 2010-2011 school year, and during the implementation year of 2011-2012 the same cohort of students was in first and second grade. Student demographics were 94% African American and 6% Hispanic, 52% female, 48% male, 92% free and reduced lunch, 11% special education. The teaching staff was 78% African American and the administrative staff was 99% African American, combined staff was 87% female with 22% holding advanced degrees. The parents were 80% African American, 5% Caribbean/West Indian, 4% Hispanic, 4% African, 6% other. Two-parent households, with both parents working, comprised 43% of the sample, two parent households with one parent working 14%, two parents with neither working 3%. One-parent households comprised 38% of the sample, with 32% of the single parents working. The remaining 2 percent were classified as "other" reflecting grandparents or other relatives as primary caregiver.

Analysis of Data

Utilizing SPSS, paired t-tests were conducted to determine the impact that PBSIS had student behaviors. Frequency counts and percentages were calculated for each survey response during 2010-11 and 2011-2012 school years. Data from the SET was also analyzed to determine the fidelity of the overall procedures and practices of PBSIS.

A paired t-test was conducted to explore the differences in office discipline referrals during Year 1 and Year 2 (Table 3 and Table 4). Table 5 provides descriptive statistics regarding the average number of office discipline referrals per month. Table 6 provides data regarding the total number of office disciplinary referrals per month.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviation for the Number of ODRs in Year 1 and Year 2

Variable	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total Yr. 1	5.45	183	5.789	.428
Total Yr. 2	3.22	183	3.157	.233

Table 4

Paired t-test for the Total Number of ODRs in Year 1 and Year 2

Year	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.	Std. Error
Total Incidences Yr.1-Yr.2	2.230	2.965	10.171	182	.000	.219

The paired t-test results were significant at the 0.001 alpha value, p value = 0.00. In Year 1, the mean was at a rate of 5.45, and in Year 2 the mean was 3.22 with a mean difference of 2.23. We observed a statistically significant decrease in the number of incidents in Year 2 compared to Year 1. The data suggest that PBSIS contributed to the decrease in office discipline referrals between the pre and post years. There is enough evidence to suggest that the implementation of PBSIS in Year 2 had a significant impact on student behaviors by decreasing the number of office discipline referrals.

To determine if the implementation of PBSIS will show a significant decrease in the number of suspensions between Year 1 (pre) and Year 2 (post), a paired t-test was conducted on in-school and out-of-school suspension data. (Table 5 and Table 6).

The paired t-test results for OSS rates were not significant at the 0.05 alpha level, $p > 0.05$ indicating the decrease in the mean was not statistically significant and PBSIS did not have an impact on decreasing OSS.

However, the results for ISS were significant at the 0.01 significant alpha level, $p < 0.001$. The results suggest that there is strong evidence that the implementation of PBSIS in Year 2 contributed to a decrease in ISS rates.

Data from the climate survey and School-wide Evaluation Tool were used to determine the impact of PBSIS on improving the school's climate. We identified the number of respondents who agreed or disagreed with each question under the following categories: Behavior and Conduct Priorities, Prevalence of Behaviors, Staff Priorities, Respect, and School Climate. Descriptive statistics were used for comparing frequency counts and percentages of each response during Year 1 and Year 2.

Table 5
Means and Standard Deviations for the Number of Suspensions in Year 1 and Year 2

Variable	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Full Day Suspension Yr. 1	.91	183	1.400	.103
Full Day Suspension Yr. 2	.77	183	1.310	.097
In-school suspension Yr. 1	1.75	183	2.335	.173
In-school suspension Yr. 2	1.16	183	1.278	.094

Table 6
Paired t-test for Suspension Rates in Year 1 to Year 2

Variable	T	df	Sig.
OSS	1.463	182	.145
ISS	4.009	182	.000

Respect and School Climate

The following questions were analyzed from the Respect and School Climate section of the survey:

- Q1-Overall my school is a positive place
- Q2- I feel welcomed at this school/The school has a welcoming atmosphere
- Q3-Adults ask students their opinions about issues important to them/Staff and/or Parents are regularly asked to give input
- Q4-Staff care about me and my success
- Q5-Adults help me with my problems/Staff take time to help students

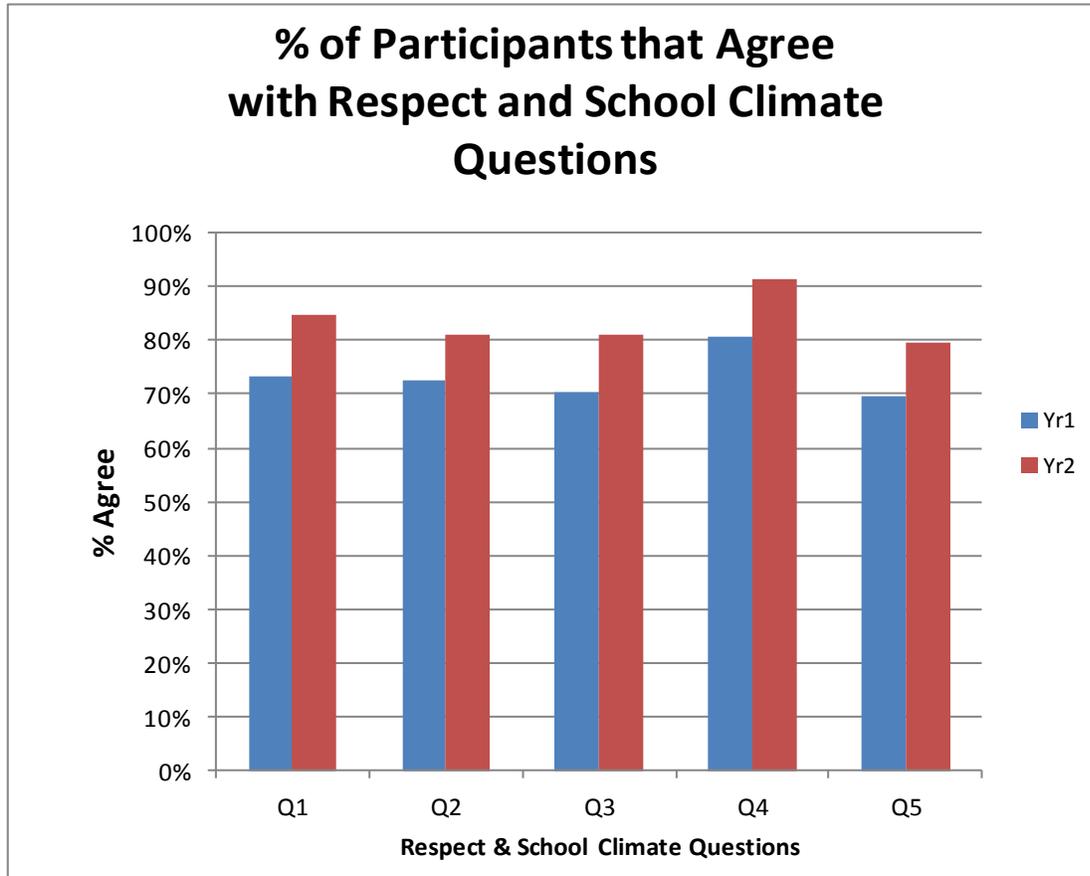


Figure 1 Percentage of Participants that Agree with Respect and School Climate Questions

The overall perception of the students, staff and parents showed a positive increase between Year 1 and Year 2. The data suggest that PBSIS had an impact on improving the perceptions of staff, students and parents, thus improving the overall school climate.

Prevalence of Behaviors

The following questions were analyzed from the Prevalence of Behaviors portion of the survey:

- Q1-Students gossip about one another
- Q2- Students bullying or intimidating one another at school
- Q3- Students bullying or intimidating one another before or after school
- Q4- Students bullying or intimidating one another over the Internet
- Q5-Students fighting with one another

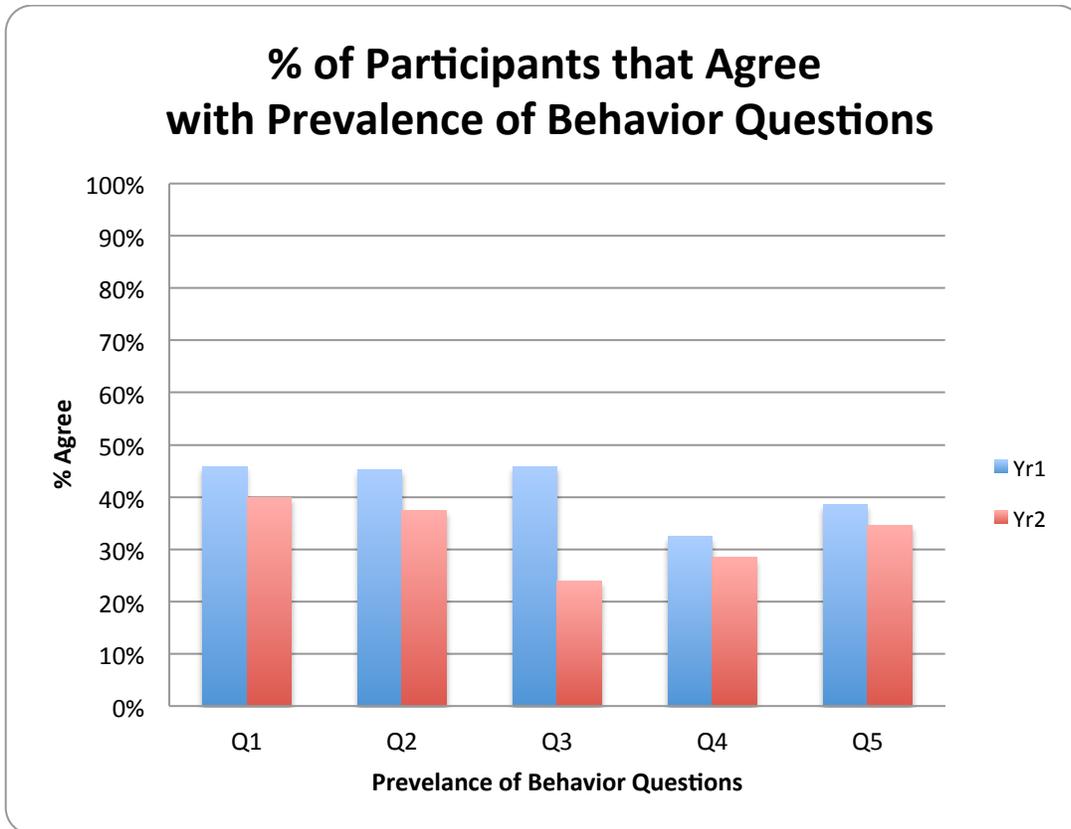


Figure 2 Percentage of Participants that Agree with Prevalence of Behavior Questions

Based on the findings from the survey, the overall perception of the students, staff and parents is that reoccurring behaviors of students have shown improvement. The data suggest that PBSIS had an impact on improving the overall school climate.

In addition to the Climate Survey, data were extracted from the School-Wide Evaluation Tool (SET). The SET was administered to determine the fidelity of the overall procedures and practices during the pre and post years. Data from the surveys were analyzed and reported according to the following subscales: Expectations Defined; Behavioral Expectations Taught; On-going System for Rewarding Behavioral Expectations; System for Responding to Behavioral Violations; Monitoring and Decision-Making; Management; and District-Level Support.

The school showed an increase in SET overall score pre- and post-intervention. From Year 1 to Year 2, the SET results from the subscales showed an average increase of 5.7. In Year 1, the overall score was 89.9 and in Year 2, the score was 95.6. The data demonstrate that the school was implementing school-wide positive behavior support at the universal level with fidelity and the climate within the school showed an improvement during Year 1 and Year 2.

SUMMARY

The results in this study provided data that were statistically significant with regard to improving student behavior. The data extracted from the office discipline referrals provided a context with regard to the impact that PBSIS had on decreasing the number of office discipline referrals and in-school suspension rates. However, the rate of out-of-school suspensions did not decrease as a result of PBSIS being implemented within the school. Data obtained from the climate surveys

and the School-wide Evaluation Tool suggest that the perceptions of the students, parents and staff improved. Based on their responses during Year 1 (pre) and Year 2 (post), the overall perception was that the climate within the school improved as a result of the implementation of PBSIS.

The findings in this study support the implementation of PBSIS to manage student behaviors and improve school climate. PBSIS provided administrators, staff and students with a proactive measure to address student behaviors and classroom disruptions. It provided the school with a set of non-curricular expectations that were modeled and monitored on a daily basis.

Although there were positive findings regarding the implementation of PBSIS, the rate of out-of-school suspensions did not show a significant decrease. The data suggest that the management of minor student infractions was not properly handled at the classroom level (minor), thus causing the incident to be referred to the administrative level (major). Major incidents that were referred to the administrator were subjected to the Student Discipline Code. Therefore, if a student committed a behavior infraction such as physical altercations, physical aggression, profanity, harassments and/or bullying, the administrator had to assign a consequence. The consequence for students who committed these infractions was out of school suspension. The only difference between the consequence for committing a major infraction would be the number of days out of school that an administrator assigned to a student.

Administrative Level Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following administrative recommendations were made:

- Review the protocol and procedures for office discipline referrals. Provide professional development to staff to ensure that they understand school procedures.
- Extract office discipline referrals and discuss the underlying issues. The administrators should identify patterns and trends regarding the data. Once they have identified the underlying issues, they should develop a proactive plan, execute it and continuously monitor its progress.
- Provide ongoing professional development to teaching staff on positive interventions to disruptive behaviors.
- Provide ongoing professional development regarding the implementation of Behavior Intervention Plans and the CI/CO system.
- Identify teachers with the highest number of student discipline referrals. Review the data and develop individualized action plans to assist with classroom management.
- Identify students with the highest number of discipline referrals to understand underlying causes of disruptive behavior.
- Review the ODRs to ascertain if there is a pattern of referrals in reference to race, gender and age.

The recommendations, if appropriately implemented, will assist the school in identifying the underlying cause for their out-of-school suspension rates. In addition, the school should

identify the students who have persistent and recurring behavior problems so that targeted intervention plans can be developed.

Classroom Level Recommendations

Students who demonstrate recurring behaviors should receive Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) and be placed on the Check In/Check Out (CICO) system. At the time of this study, the BIP and the CICO system were not fully implemented. Prior to student infractions reaching the administrative level, teachers should be able to identify such behaviors and create a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) for the offending student. Through the BIP, short and long term goals can be created to help the student learn how to make good decisions and demonstrate pro-social behaviors. The BIP provides the teacher and the student with a framework that provides measureable goals and outcomes. As the student achieves his/her goals, the teacher provides incentives and reinforces desirable behaviors with positive praise. The implementation of a BIP must be enforced with fidelity and consistency. In order to help change and correct unacceptable behaviors, the student must be aware of the behavioral expectations and the consequences for his/her actions. The CICO system would provide students with accountability for their behavior. The system connects students with adults within the building who will help to keep the child's behavior from becoming misdirected. The goal is to teach students how to become responsible for their actions and to make good choices at all times. The behavior intervention plan is created to teach students how to change their behavior by providing them with weekly goals. The goals are created and discussed with the student and parent. The plans are monitored on a frequent basis throughout the day. Most behavior plans are incentivized to help students meet their goals by demonstrating the desired behaviors.

Based on the findings, the areas of focus for the school are centered on the need to decrease the rate of out-of-school suspensions. However, the school must also ensure that they continue to follow the PBSIS program with fidelity to ensure that the school will continue on a positive trajectory regarding student behaviors and school climate. In order to maintain the program with fidelity, the administrators should disseminate the climate and SET surveys twice a year. The PBSIS committee should review the survey results and discuss them with the teaching staff to develop a plan of action. And finally, model PBSIS expectations at the beginning of the school year and after holidays and continue to reinforce desired behaviors throughout the school day.

Future Research

Although PBSIS has been implemented in over 7,500 schools across 44 states, there is limited research on PBSIS implementation in urban elementary settings. Further research should be conducted to examine the effects of PBSIS within urban schools since the majority of research tends to focus on rural and suburban schools. More specifically, research should explore the relationship between socio-economic status and student infractions. In addition, research that explores the relationship between gender and student infractions as well as the level of discipline applied based on gender should be conducted. Finally, research on the role of the school leader in sustaining positive behavior interventions and reducing the number of exclusionary discipline practices is recommended.

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The Impact of Project-Based Learning on Minority Student Achievement: Implications for School Redesign

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Project-Based Learning (PBL) serves as an instructional approach to classroom teaching and learning that is designed to engage students in the investigation of real-world problems to create meaningful and relevant educational experiences. The causal-comparative study compared 7th and 8th students who had utilized the PBL with a comparison group in which PBL was non-existent. Using outcome measures of academic achievement in mathematics and reading, multivariate and univariate analyses of the data showed that the PBL groups performed at a higher achievement level than did the non-PBL students. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

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Since *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983, schools have made considerable effort to prepare students for the ever-increasing demands of the 21st century. However, even when preparing students to adapt to 21st changing technologies, information, jobs, and social conditions (Barron & Hammond, 2008), too many students continue to drop out of school. One recent estimate was that three out of 10 high school students, the majority of these minority and poor students drop out of America's public high schools every school day (Rumberger, 2011). This intersection between increased rigor in teaching and learning while decreasing dropout rates is problematic for school districts.

Interestingly enough, researchers have suggested that the main reason students drop out of school is that they found their classes boring and in turn became disengaged from high school (Beekman, 2006; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Prothero, 2014). It may be that the organizational forms and structure of schools contribute to student disengagement. It is suggested that conventional forms and structures continue to govern instruction remaining the same over time, with little change to the space, time, student classification, grading, and core operations of schools (Elmore & City, 2011; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Compounding the issue are standards-driven reform efforts in which districts continue to rely on school-based management and school restructuring to improve the conditions and outcomes of failing schools (Elmore, 1997; Stein & D'Amico, 2002). Even with the advancement of technology in schools, conventional school reform approaches remain because "teachers and schools continue to control access to content and learning" (Elmore & City, 2011, p. 25), leaving little room for innovative practice (Wolk, 2010).

Although the current educational system remains designed for standardization, some school districts are engaging in ways in which to improve academic achievement for minority student and children of poverty, reduce dropout rates, and prepare students for the demands of the 21st century workforce through school redesign. School redesign has emerged as a means to focus on the core function of teaching and learning. Rather than layer school wide initiatives, one on top of the other, as is often the case with reform efforts (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), school redesign changes academic programs altogether (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008). Examples include academic programs such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), International Baccalaureate (IB), Early College High School (ECHS), and the focus of this study, Project-Based Learning (PBL).

Transforming low-performing urban public high schools through these types of programs have commanded much attention of late. By design, these academic programs are innovative in nature because they concentrate on developing critical thinkers by engaging students in more authentic learning that requires solving real-world problems, collaboration, extensive research, inquiry, writing, analysis, collaboration, and effective communication (Hemmings, 2012; Newmann, 1996). As Barron and Darling-Hammond (2008) noted, by engaging in authentic projects that draws subject knowledge to solve real-world problems, students learn at deeper levels and perform better on complex tasks. However, less is known whether school redesign efforts, such as PBL, are able to show evidence of success in a standardized arena. For this reason, the impact of PBL on student academic achievement in reading and mathematics in one middle school in South Texas was examined.

The Study

As a means to combat declining school enrollment, declining test scores and a school rating hovering around academically unacceptable performance, a school district in South Texas took a radical approach by redesigning a middle school. Rather than adding conventional approaches that are often associated with school reform (Elmore & City, 2011), this district envisioned a school that was fundamentally different than any other district middle school. A major part of the school redesign was to address improving academic achievement for middle school minority students and children of poverty. From grade configuration, curriculum, course offerings to the ability for students to gain or earn postsecondary course credit, the district's vision for this redesigned school, to some degree, included what Hess and Manno (2011) suggested are customized educational services for at-risk students.

In 2010, this district applied for and received a United States Department of Education grant to establish PBL as a guiding construct for one middle school redesign. Project-Based Learning was adopted to promote the diversity and increased choices for these middle school students by engaging them in the investigation of authentic problems. The purpose of this study was to explore how a middle school redesign using PBL impacted student achievement in mathematics and reading. In an era of high stakes testing, standards, and accountability, it is important to examine whether school redesign efforts that include whole school innovative educational practices have a place. Therefore, this study examined the impact of PBL on reading and mathematics achievement of seventh and eighth grade students, and to test the hypothesis that an innovative approach such as PBL is effective in impacting academic achievement.

Background

Considerable empirical evidence exists that when students drop out of high school, the economic and social health of America is jeopardized. Dropouts are likely to be dependent on public assistance, engage in criminal activities, and experience health problems (Muennig, 2007; Rumberger, & Thomas, 2000; Waldfogel, Garfinkel, & Kelly, 2007). Much of the attention on dropouts has focused on high schools and their efforts to build and sustain high levels of student engagement in school and learning through innovative practices (Finn, 1993; Marks, 2000). However, as Orthernr, Cook, Rose and Randolph (2002) reported, many students do not have access to these innovative efforts because they disengage from their education well before high school. In fact, "the social-psychological and behavioral disengagement from school that leads to dropping out often begins in middle school" (Orthernr, Cook, Rose, & Randolph, 2010, p. 223). Equally concerning are the difficult transitions middle school students experience and the impact of such transitions on standardized test scores. Randolph, Fraser and Orthner (2006) reported that if students experienced difficult transitions from fifth to sixth grade, their math and reading scores significantly declined.

On one hand, adolescents, ages 10-15, go through rapid change and are vulnerable to their emotions (Johnson, 2012). Johnson goes on to say, they are fun, excited about life, sensitive, overwhelmed and in turmoil. Their emotions are high and logic rarely prevails. Friends begin to replace parents and peer acceptance, socialization, appearance and body image are everything. The middle school student continuously tests and breaks the rules but needs boundaries. They demand independence but seek the reassurance of love and caring from adults.

The middle school student is a conflicted human being. On the other hand, we know little of how middle schools are approaching these student behaviors amidst standardization.

Evidence exists that intervention programs aimed at over-age middle school students help students back on track for on-time graduation (Finnan & Kombe, 2011). These accelerated programs help students develop confidence through academic accomplishments, a sense of belonging and engagement in the classroom. However, with these types of intervention programs limitations exists because they rarely include preparing students for experiences outside of the classroom and as a contributing member of society. Furthermore, academic accomplishments do not necessary translate to whether a student is able to apply what he or she has learned to his or her daily life. As Dewey (1900) suggested, it is important to consider whether educational experiences isolate the student from life experiences. Others, such as Richardson (2012), suggested a shift in curriculum and pedagogy to allow for personalized learning experiences that allow students to connect his or her passions and interests as learners with society expectations. It is with this understanding that led the South Texas district in this study to adopt Project-Based Learning (PBL).

Project-Based Learning: A School Redesign

In the quest to pursue deeper learning for students, Project-Based Learning (PBL) classrooms are designed to engage students in the investigation of authentic real world problems (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; MaKinste, Barab, & Keating 2001; McGrath, 2004). According to Krajcik, Blumenfeld, Marx, and Soloway (1994) and Thomas (2000), an effective PBL environment consists of five components: (a) an authentic and engaging driving question, (b) student generated artifacts, (c) student collaborated research, (d) an audience of community, and (e) the use of technology-based cognitive and communication tools.

Within the tenets of PBL, students pursue solutions to problems by asking and refining questions, debating ideas, making predictions, designing plans, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, communicating ideas, asking new questions, and creating artifacts (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Mergendoller, Maxwell, & Bellisimo, 2006; Thomas, 2000). Students are placed in realistic, problem-solving environments that serve to make connections between phenomena in the classroom and real life experiences (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). In addition, PBL promotes interdisciplinary studies, coupled with in-depth exploration of the subject matter over extended periods of time that are then linked to meaningful activities for students thus resulting in a deep level of understanding of the content and concept (Blumenfeld et al., 1991).

Above and beyond, the PBL approach is more than student mastery of content knowledge; rather it enables students to transfer their learning to new kinds of situations and problems and to use knowledge more proficiently in performance situations (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008). As a result, PBL provides students with the opportunity to work autonomously over periods of time and produce realistic products that may include presentations to strategic audiences who have interest in the solutions (Thomas, 2000).

McGrath (2004) reported that PBL recognizes learning as a social process where the design of the learning environment relies heavily on the promotion of collaboration. Furthermore, the student takes on the role of cognitive apprentice and explores problems by working with other peers and resources in the community (MaKinster, Barab, & Keating, 2001). As a result, students in the PBL classrooms, which focus on authentic performance,

collaboration, and students' choice of the learning activity, exhibit a higher degree of motivation than do non-PBL students (Blumenfeld et al., 1991).

Theoretical Framework

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provided the study's theoretical framework. The ELT defines learning as the "process whereby knowledge was created through the transformation of experience from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). The ELT describes learning as a "holistic adaptive process that provided conceptual bridges across life situations such as school and work" (Kolb, 1984, p. 33). The term "experiential" is used to differentiate the ELT from cognitive and behavior learning theories and provides distinct emphasis and focus on the role that experience plays in the learning process. Experiences and experimentation are described as the way people make sense of the world (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999).

The ELT tenets provide conceptual connections across life experiences. According to Kolb, Boyatzis and Mainemelis (1999), the term experiential is used to emphasize the primary role that experience plays in the learning process. Additionally, the ELT "provides conceptual bridges across life situations such as school and work" (Kolb, 1984, p. 33). Furthermore, the ELT promotes learning transactions that take place between the individual and the environment (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). As such, ELT is applicable not only in classrooms but in all arenas of life.

The Experiential Learning Cycle as shown in Figure 1, begins with the concrete experience that is the basis for observations and reflections. The reflections and observations then lead to abstract concepts that create new ideas and thinking. The new thinking promotes active experimentation that applies the new learning and serves as a guide in creating new experiences. The cycle allows an individual to begin at any stage and for the stages to be repetitive (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

The ELT compliments the tenets of PBL because children are seen as naturally inclined to the scientific method and are curious to learn how various objects they encounter in daily life operate. According to Gutek (2005), children constantly explore their environment and are involved in interactions with their world. It is through these interactions that they develop intelligence and the ability to solve problems. Learning becomes more social as children learn that they can consult with adults, children, and teachers. Growth, like experience, is on-going with each stage having its own logic and psychology that prepares the learner for the next stage (Gutek, 2005).

Kolb's ELT is demonstrated in the PBL tenets because the learning environment has relevance and meaning to both the participants and to the real-world audience. The completion of the classroom tasks is required to have applications and experiences that go beyond the classroom and establish a sense of community. When students work collaboratively toward a common goal, the experience allows them to become part of something larger than their individual experience (MaKinster, Barab, & Keating, 2001).

Kolb's ELT framed the study on the basis of meaningful and authentic experiences for understanding how learning takes place in PBL. From MaKinster, Barab, and Keating (2001), we know that meaningful learning requires that students are afforded opportunities to leverage prior knowledge and participate in tasks that are both meaningful to them and to the world at large.

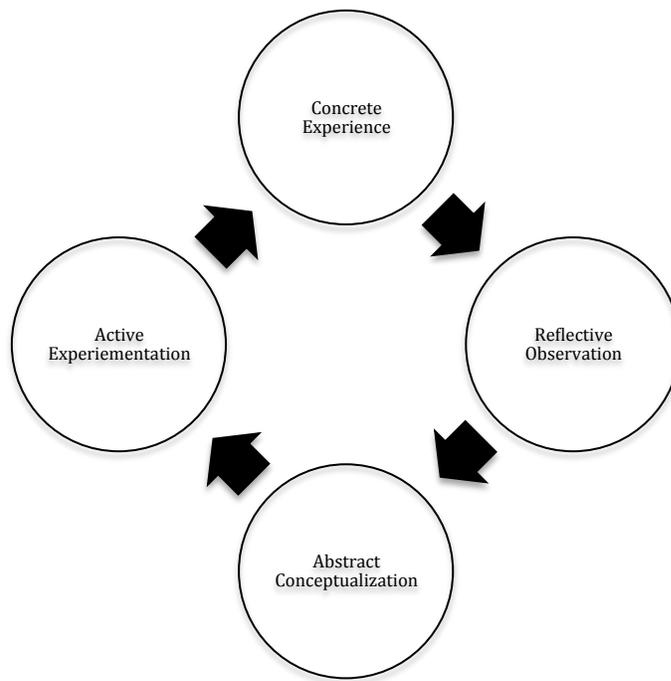


Figure 1. The Experiential Learning Cycle (adapted from Kolb, 1984)

Method

Research Design

The researcher utilized an ex post facto, causal-comparative research design (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007), which seeks to identify potential cause-effect relationships by forming groups of individuals in whom the independent variable is present or absent, followed by comparing the groups on the basis of one or more dependent variables. No causal inferences may be drawn due to non-experimental nature of the study. The characteristic-present group was identified as the group in which PBL was utilized. The comparison group was the group in which PBL was non-existent. The outcome measures were The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) mathematics and reading achievement scores.

Subject Selection

The subjects for the study were from two middle schools in an urban school district in south Texas as of 2011 – 2012 school year. The characteristic-present group consisted of a non-probability sample of 87 Grade seven students and 84 Grade eight students in the magnet school that incorporated the PBL as part of the curriculum. The comparison group consisted of 140 Grade seven students and 150 Grade eighth students in the other middle school where PBL was not used as part of the curriculum.

Instrumentation

In 2011-2012, the new STAAR standardized testing program was implemented to test students in the core subject areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies in grades 3 - 12. The STAAR test was designed to measure the readiness for success in subsequent grades and courses and ultimately for college and career (Texas Education Agency, 2013). For the purpose of the study, the 2012 STAAR scores in mathematics and reading for Grade seven students and Grade eight students were used. The proportion of correct answers was used to measure each STAAR Reporting Category. The data were obtained from the school district in which the study took place.

Achievement in Grade seven STAAR mathematics was measured by 5 Reporting Categories and a total of 54 items. Reporting Category 1 contained 13 items and assessed numbers, operations, and quantitative reasoning. Reporting Category 2 included patterns, relationships, and algebraic reasoning with 13 items. Reporting Category 3 consisted of 10 items associated with geometry and spatial reasoning. Reporting Category 4 targeted measurement with 8 items. Reporting Category 5 assessed Probability and Statistics with 10 items.

Achievement in Grade eight STAAR mathematics was measured by 5 Reporting Categories and a total of 56 test items. Reporting Category 1 assessed numbers, operations, and quantitative reasoning with 11 items. Reporting Category 2 consisted of 14 items that targeted patterns, relationships, and algebraic reasoning. In Reporting Category 3, a total of 8 items measured geometry and spatial reasoning. Reporting Category 4 had 13 test items that assessed measurement. Reporting Category 5 used 10 items to measure probability and statistics.

Achievement in Grade seven STAAR reading was measured by 3 Reporting Categories and a total of 50 items. Reporting Category 1 targeted the understanding/analysis across genres and included 10 items. Reporting Category 2 focused on the understanding/analysis of literary texts, using 21 items. In Reporting Category 3, 19 items were used to measure understanding/analysis of informational texts.

Achievement in Grade eight STAAR reading was measured in 3 Reporting Categories and consisted of 52 test items. Reporting Category 1 assessed the understanding/analysis across genres and used 10 items. Reporting Category 2 measured the understanding/analysis of literary texts and used 22 items. Reporting Category 3 targeted understanding/analysis of informational texts with 20 test items.

Data Analysis

The raw data were exported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which was used for the purpose of data manipulation and analysis. The proportion of the total number of test questions answered correctly to the total number of questions in each reporting category was used to measure student achievement in mathematics and reading. Descriptive statistics were utilized to organize and summarize the data. The level of significance was set, a priori, at .01 to reduce the probability of making Type I errors due to performing multiple tests. A series of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to test the hypotheses that the PBL group outperformed the non-PBL group on the basis of the outcome measures of mathematics and reading. A series of univariate F-test was performed for the purpose of post hoc analysis. Mean difference effect size, Cohen's *d*, was computed to examine the practical significance of the findings and characterized as .2=small, .5=medium, and .8=large (Cohen,

1988). Pre-experimental equivalence was established by comparing the two groups on the basis of reading and mathematics achievement scores one year prior to the implementation of the PBL program and finding no statistically significant differences.

Grade Seven Results

A Profile of Subjects

The characteristic-present group ($n = 87$) included seventh grade students who had participated in the PBL program and the comparison group ($n = 140$) consisted of seventh grade students who had not participated in the PBL program. Age differences between the PBL ($M = 13.60$, $SD = .62$) and non-PBL ($M = 13.73$, $SD = .62$) groups were not statistically significant, $t(225) = 1.54$, $p = .12$. The PBL group included more females (60.90%, $n = 53$) than males (39.10%, $n = 34$) while the non-PBL group included more males (54.30%, $n = 79$) than females (45.7%, $n = 64$). The group differences were not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 227) = 4.37$, $p = .04$. Ethnicity was coded as either Hispanic or non-Hispanics. The majority of the students in the PBL (85.10%, $n = 74$) and non-PBL (92.90%, $n = 130$) programs were Hispanic; group differences were not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 227) = 2.78$, $p = .09$. The majority of the students in both the PBL (88.50%, $n = 77$) and non-PBL (89.90%, $n = 125$) groups were economically disadvantaged, as determined by eligibility for free or reduced lunch; the differences were not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 226) = .01$, $p = .90$.

Reading Achievement

Achievement in reading was measured by the proportion of correct answers to questions in each of the three Reporting Categories. The means and standard deviations are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
STAAR Reading Achievement Measures, Seventh Grade

STAAR Reporting Category	PBL Group ($n = 87$)		Non PBL Group ($n = 140$)	
	M*	SD	M*	SD
Category 1	.72	.21	.60	.25
Category 2	.64	.17	.55	.22
Category 3	.65	.20	.54	.22

*Proportion of correct answers

Note: Category 1: Understanding /Analysis across Genres

Category 2: Understanding/Analysis of Literary Texts

Category 3: Understanding/Analysis of Informational Texts

The MANOVA showed that the group differences on the basis of the centroids were statistically significant, $F(3, 223) = 5.92$, $p < .01$, favoring the PBL group. The post hoc analysis showed that the PBL group outperformed the non-PBL group on all three STARR Reporting Categories.

Mean difference effect sizes, as computed by Cohen’s *d*, were used to examine the practical significance of the findings. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Mean Difference Effect Sizes, STAAR Reading Achievement Measures, Seventh Grade

STAAR Reporting Category	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>	Effect Size*
Category 1	.13	<.01	.51
Category 2	.09	<.01	.41
Category 3	.11	<.01	.51

* .2 = small effect, .5 = medium effect, .8 = large effect

Note: Category 1: Understanding /Analysis across Genres
 Category 2: Understanding/Analysis of Literary Texts
 Category 3: Understanding/Analysis of Informational Texts

Mathematics Achievement

Achievement in mathematics was measured by the proportion of correct answers to questions in each of the five Reporting Categories. The means and standard deviations are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3
STAAR Mathematics Achievement Measures, Seventh Grade

Mathematics Reporting Category	PBL Group (<i>n</i> =87)		Non-PBL Group (<i>n</i> = 140)	
	M*	SD	M*	SD
Category 1	.53	.23	.40	.22
Category 2	.54	.21	.42	.22
Category 3	.61	.21	.43	.22
Category 4	.46	.28	.31	.19
Category 5	.50	.20	.38	.18

*Proportion of correct answers

Note: Category 1: Numbers, Operations, and Quantitative Reasoning
 Category 2: Patterns, Relationships, and Algebraic Reasoning
 Category 3: Geometry and Spatial Reasoning
 Category 4: Measurement
 Category 5: Probability and Statistics

The MANOVA showed that the group differences on the basis of the centroids were statistically significant, $F(5, 221) = 8.50, p < .01$, favoring the PBL group. The post hoc analysis showed that the PBL group outperformed the non-PBL group on all five STARR Reporting Categories. Mean difference effect sizes were used to analyze practical significance of the findings as computed by Cohen’s *d*. Results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4
Mean Difference Effect Sizes, STAAR Mathematics Achievement Measures, Seventh Grade

STAAR Reporting Category	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>	Effect Size*
Category 1	.13	<.01	.57
Category 2	.12	<.01	.55
Category 3	.19	<.01	.82
Category 4	.14	<.01	.61
Category 5	.12	<.01	.63

* .2 = small effect, .5 = medium effect, .8 = large effect

Note: Category 1: Numbers, Operations, and Quantitative Reasoning
 Category 2: Patterns, Relationships, and Algebraic Reasoning
 Category 3: Geometry and Spatial Reasoning
 Category 4: Measurement
 Category 5: Probability and Statistics

Eighth Grade Results

A Profile of Subjects

The characteristic-present group ($n = 84$) included eighth grade students who had participated in the PBL program and the comparison group ($n = 150$) consisted of eighth grade students who had not participated in the PBL program. Age differences between the PBL ($M = 14.58$, $SD = .68$) and non-PBL ($M = 14.71$, $SD = .65$) group were not statistically significant, $t(232) = 1.44$, $p = .15$. The PBL group included more females (56.00%, $n = 47$) than males (44.00%, $n = 37$), while the non-PBL group included more males (53.30%, $n = 80$) than females (46.70%, $n = 70$); the group differences were not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 234) = 1.50$, $p = .22$. The majority of the students in the PBL (83.30%, $n = 70$) and non-PBL (96.00%, $n = 144$) programs were Hispanic; group differences were statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 234) = 9.49$, $p < .01$. The majority of the students in both the PBL (76.20%, $n = 64$) and non-PBL (90.70%, $n = 136$) groups were economically disadvantaged, as determined by eligibility for free or reduced lunch, and differences were statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 234) = 7.96$, $p < .01$.

Reading Achievement

Achievement in reading was measured by the proportion of correct answers to questions in each of the three Reporting Categories. The means and standard deviations are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5
STAAR Reading Achievement Measures, Eighth Grade

STAAR Reporting Category	PBL Group (<i>n</i> = 84)		Non-PBL Group (<i>n</i> = 150)	
	M*	SD	M*	SD
Category 1	.74	.18	.61	.21
Category 2	.63	.20	.55	.18
Category 3	.66	.22	.52	.20

*Proportion of correct answers

Note: Category 1: Understanding /Analysis across Genres
 Category 2: Understanding/Analysis of Literary Texts
 Category 3: Understanding/Analysis of Informational Texts

The MANOVA showed that the group differences on the basis of the centroids were statistically significant, $F(3, 230) = 946.11, p < .01$, favoring the PBL group. The post hoc analysis showed that the PBL group outperformed the non-PBL group on all three STARR Reporting Categories. Mean difference effect sizes, as computed by Cohen's *d*, were used to examine the practical significance of the findings. Results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6
Mean Difference Effect Sizes, STAAR Reading Achievement Measures, Eighth Grade

STAAR Reporting Category	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>	Effect Size*
Category 1	.13	<.01	.64
Category 2	.08	<.01	.43
Category 3	.14	<.01	.63

* .2 = small effect, .5 = medium effect, .8 = large effect

Note: Category 1: Understanding /Analysis across Genres
 Category 2: Understanding/Analysis of Literary Texts
 Category 3: Understanding/Analysis of Informational Texts

Mathematics Achievement

Achievement in mathematics was measured by the proportion of correct answers to questions in each of the five Reporting Categories. The means and standard deviations are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7
STAAR Mathematics Achievement Measures, Eight Grade

Mathematics Reporting Category	PBL Group (<i>n</i> =84)		Non-PBL Group (<i>n</i> = 150)	
	M*	SD	M*	SD
Category 1	.35	.27	.38	.24
Category 2	.29	.24	.25	.17
Category 3	.32	.27	.23	.19
Category 4	.29	.23	.27	.19
Category 5	.34	.26	.32	.21

*Proportion of correct answers

Note: Category 1: Numbers, Operations, and Quantitative Reasoning
 Category 2: Patterns, Relationships, and Algebraic Reasoning
 Category 3: Geometry and Spatial Reasoning
 Category 4: Measurement
 Category 5: Probability and Statistics

The MANOVA showed that the group differences on the basis of the centroids were statistically significant, $F(5, 228) = 4.90, p < .01$, favoring the PBL group. The post hoc analysis showed that the PBL group outperformed the non-PBL group on Reporting Category 3: Geometry and Spatial Reasoning only. Mean difference effect sizes were used to analyze practical significance of the findings as computed by Cohen's *d*. Results are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8
Mean Difference Effect Sizes, STAAR Mathematics Achievement Measures, Eighth Grade

STAAR Reporting Category	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>	Effect Size*
Category 1	-.03 ^a	.43	.10
Category 2	.03	.23	.16
Category 3	.09	<.01	.41
Category 4	.02	.48	.09
Category 5	.02	.49	.09

* .2 = small effect, .5 = medium effect, .8 = large effect

^a The non-PBL outperformed the PBL but the difference was not statistically significant.

Note: Category 1: Numbers, Operations, and Quantitative Reasoning
 Category 2: Patterns, Relationships, and Algebraic Reasoning
 Category 3: Geometry and Spatial Reasoning
 Category 4: Measurement
 Category 5: Probability and Statistics

Covariate Analysis

Among seventh graders, although group differences on the basis of selected demographic variables were not statistically significant, a fair number of simple correlations between the demographic data and outcome measures were statistically significant. The demographic variables were treated as covariates and multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was performed to compare the PBL and non-PBL groups on the basis of the adjusted outcome measures. The MANCOVA and MANOVA results were the same. On the basis of reading, $F(3, 217) = 5.55, p < .01$, and mathematics, $F(5, 215) = 7.69, p < .01$, the PBL group outperformed the non-PBL group, and post hoc results showed that group differences were statistically significant with respect to all three reading and five mathematics categories.

Among eighth graders, a notable number of simple correlations between the demographic data and outcome measures were statistically significant. The demographic variables were treated as covariates and MANCOVA was performed to compare the PBL and non-PBL on the basis of the adjusted outcome measures. On the basis of reading, $F(3, 225) = 7.63, p < .01$, and mathematics, $F(5, 223) = 4.22, p < .01$, the PBL group outperformed the non-PBL group, and post hoc results showed that group differences were statistically significant with respect to all three reading and the mathematics category of Geometry and Spatial Reasoning. Thus, the MANOVA and MANCOVA results were the same.

Discussion

More than 7,200 high school students fall through the cracks and drop out each day (Rumberger, 2011). According to Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morrison (2006), students dropped out of school due to boredom and irrelevance. Even with various reform efforts since the 1980s, the United States lags behind in mathematics and science compared to other international countries (Peterson & West, 2003). Districts and schools are under increased pressure to reduce dropouts while at the same time increase rigor in the classroom. Although Project-Based Learning (PBL) has a long history in education, dating back to John Dewey, it has gotten a second wind in the past decade as a strategy to engage diverse learners in rigorous learning. Districts are considering PBL strategies to increase rigor and relevance as they transition to the demands of increased core standards in order to assess students based on what they produce or demonstrate rather than recall for a test. Project-Based Learning involves the active engagement of students and places students in realistic, problem-solving environments that serve to make connections between the classroom and real life experiences. The activities of the PBL are designed to promote a deep level of understanding of the content that is meaningful to the learner and high in collaboration (McGrath, 2004). Even though the PBL is gaining momentum, the literature revealed that the movement is a slow and steady process for multiple reasons.

It may be that educational reform, specifically school redesign in the United States, is difficult because of the embedded culture of what Americans know a school to be like; specifically the basic grammar of schooling that relies on traditional organizational management (Tyack and Cuban, 1995). Coupled with the accountability reforms in recent years, society in general has grown accustomed to the *bubble tests* brought about from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Educational stakeholders are now conditioned to function using a standardized assessment and focus on increasing scores and meeting targets. Even though districts and

schools remain accountable to traditional state assessments, there is some evidence they are shifting the instructional models towards innovative concepts such as Project-Based Learning.

Amidst the standards and accountability movement, teachers and administrators are challenged to find ways to increase academic achievement, engage students, and prepare them for the real world; therefore, the impact of the PBL must be determined. The implementation of the PBL does deviate from the customary and traditional school practices and serves to challenge the practice of drill and kill as the only strategy to survive in the age of accountability. The school district in this study had been using the PBL as a new strategy for improving academic achievement as well as engaging and preparing students for real world experiences during this age of accountability and standards-based reform. The district's decision to redesign one middle school did not come easy. In a time when high stakes testing impacts student graduation rates, together with test scores tied to federal funding and sanctions, there exists an uncertainty. While the concept and practice of PBL is well known, little research has been conducted that examines PBL's impact on student achievement.

The implementation of the PBL has been in place for two years in the study's South Texas school district; however, its effectiveness had not been systematically investigated on its impact on academic achievement, thus, providing the opportunity and the need to conduct the study. The study did demonstrate that student participation in the PBL positively impacts academic achievement in seventh and eighth grade reading and mathematics based on STAAR outcome measures and generates implications.

The school district in which the study took place, would likely consider the expansion of the PBL to other middle schools and seek additional grants and funding for its implementation. Participation in the PBL, as the curriculum, would likely benefit students in other districts across Texas and the United States. The association between a student's participation in the PBL and achievement in reading and mathematics shows that the PBL does make a difference and would likely hold up to the demands of standards-based reform and accountability.

Implications

There are several implications that can be generated from the study; changing the teaching and learning environment in schools and districts, and professional development for teachers *and* administrators. The shift for innovation in teaching and learning through PBL presents challenges for the teacher accustomed to methods of recitation and direct instruction understood by the grammar of schooling. As a result, teachers are challenged to develop new content knowledge, pedagogical techniques, approaches to assessment, and classroom management (Edelson, Gordin, & Pea, 1999; Hancock Kaput, & Goldsmith, 1992; Marx, Blunfeld, Krajcik, & Soloway, 1997). Whereas many school and district leaders work in systems that have not developed the capacity to shift from a results-driven to a mission-driven focus by engaging in new ways to affect teaching and learning practice at scale (Fink & Silverman, 2014; Enfield & Spicciati, 2014). As such, when faced with a new initiative such as PBL, professional development for school leaders should be supported by districts by establishing networks focused on instructional leadership practices, and differentiated support to meet individual leadership needs and capacity.

Teachers. The new primary role the teacher must learn in a PBL environment is that of a facilitator in order to assist and coach students in developing an understanding of the materials and subject (MaKinster, Barab, & Keating, 2001). Professional development implications call

for a need to shift resources to provide PBL training and systems to support its sustainability. Instructional support will need to be established to provide continuous coaching and training in order to ensure PBL is the curriculum.

Educational Leadership. Leadership is another key implication in sustaining PBL. School administrators and central office leaders must provide flexibility in areas such as hiring practices, budget, curriculum, policies, programs, facilities and school operations to support PBL schools. For example, perhaps one of the significant practices a school administrator can assume is that of coach and mentor, especially when helping to build capacity within the system to accept a new program or innovative practice. Coaching is a fundamental practice that can be specifically designed to address implementation challenges, support evidence-based teaching practices as well as focus on school redesign efforts. One way in which leaders can better support school improvement and/or school redesign, is by establishing a natural system that allows for open and robust feedback and honest conversation. When coaching and mentoring are used accordingly, opportunities exist for teachers to engage in the process of ownership of their own learning and in turn new initiatives may be implemented with fidelity. While coaching is often seen at the campus level, school administrators can also benefit when coached by central office administrators. When doing so, school administrators and central office administrators partner to leverage resources, address curricular issues, model motivation, and adjust strategies to meet goals for student success.

Conclusion

In order to prepare the learners for the real-world, PBL calls for teachers and administrators to redesign instruction and assessments by giving students real-world problems to solve. The restructuring of educational reform now targets career and college readiness that spotlights a student's future beyond the classroom and K-12 experiences. Gone are the days where students only needed strong, basic, academic skills to have a hopeful future. Today, now more than ever, educators must help students graduate with 21st century skills such as collaboration, creativity, teamwork, problem-solving and decision-making in order for our students to learn, practice, adapt, thrive and succeed in a future we don't know.

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Value of Coaching in Building Leadership Capacity of Principals in Urban Schools

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



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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how coaching support structures enabled and sustained leadership practices of urban principals. The study investigated how the intervention of coaching for academic leaders can serve as evidence based professional development for building leadership capacity. The central focus was on principals' perceptions of coaching engagements over time to identify recurring themes and essential elements of the coach-to-client relationship. With a goal of meeting 21st century school accountability requirements of standards and assessments, the urban district in this study implemented coaching for academic leaders who were selected to participate in the coaching intervention as job-embedded professional development. The district assigned a cadre of trained coach leaders to building principals with the primary goal of coaching academic leaders to attain desired goals. The district's director of professional development was a certified coach leader and had the responsibility of screening applications from principals and assigning coaches. The data collection process included in-depth interviews, direct observations, and review of archival documents. Holistic analysis captured recurring themes and assertions. Essentials of participants' perceptions of coaching were collected through semi-structured interviews, analysis of textual content, coding, and categorizing by themes. The significant themes revealed the perceptions of coaching as: (1) Supportive Environment, (2) Relationship Built on Trust, (3) Confidential Conversations, (4) Leadership Support, (5) Significance of Reflection, (6) Benefits of Coaching Language in Communication, (7) Co-Constructor, (8) Thinking Partner, and (9) Trust.

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Introduction

The growing issues faced by principals to meet 21st century education standards of accountability for student achievement have continued to spiral with demands for greater productivity. One of the reasons for conducting this study was to highlight how schools are organizations that are ever-evolving and this evolution necessitates equipping principals with the skills to successfully lead 21st learning organizations. Grant (2012) suggested education leaders have historically used a diagnostic approach for decision making. He further offered that leaders instead should shift to solution construction which is a component utilized in leadership coaching (2012).

Leadership Development

School administrators are engaged in an array of roles, varying from educational visionaries and change agents to leaders of instruction, curriculum and assessment specialists, budget forecasters, facility supervisors, special programs directors, and community planners (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Effective principals work persistently to generate safe and orderly environments for learning, establish clear instructional objectives, anticipate lofty performance through increased time on tasks commencing with teachers to students, and build positive home-school relationships (Jacobson & Bezzina, 2008).

Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson (2010) conducted the largest in-depth study in the US to date on education leadership (p. 11). Reported findings from in depth case studies and extensive quantitative analysis reinforced the empirical link between school leadership and student achievement (Louis et al., 2010, p. 57).

Robinson's Leadership Dimensions (2007)	
Leadership Dimensions	Effect Size Estimate
1. "Establishing Goals and Expectations;	Average ES = 0.35
2. Strategic Resourcing;	Average ES = 0.34
3. Planning, Coordinating and Evaluating Teaching and the Curriculum;	Average ES = 0.42
4. Promoting and Participating in Teacher Learning and Development; and	Average ES = 0.84
5. Ensuring an Orderly and Supportive Environment" (Robinson, 2007, p. 8).	Average ES = 0.27

Figure 1. These dimensions can serve as evidence-based data to prioritize school improvement planning, professional learning team agendas, and professional development support for teachers and administrators. Robinson (2007) *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why* (p. 8). Effect size is a simple way of quantifying the difference between two groups that has many advantages over the use of tests of statistical significance alone. Effect size emphasizes the size of the difference rather than confounding this with sample size. In the figure above, number four is significantly higher than the other dimensions.

Coaching in the Education Setting

Leadership support and capacity building for impacting students and organizational outcomes can occur over time during coaching conversations. Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, and

Shuster (2010) explained, while coaching presence is ever present in coaching conversations, there are other competencies at work in the coaching zone...including the following:

- Coaching agreements;
- Committed listening;
- Intentional language;
- Powerful questions;
- Create awareness;
- Plan for action;
- Design action; and
- Manage progress. (p. 60)

Brock (2008) stated over the past decade coaching had been defined as a learning process. According to Sherman and Freas (2004), executives of fast-moving leaner organizations are recognizing the following understated set of competencies: the interpersonal skills and communication skills essential for influencing employees, the ability for rapid change, and respect for individuals from diverse cultures. B. Tschannen-Moran and M. Tschannen-Moran (2011) offered utilization of the simultaneity principle, which highlights affirmative lines of inquiry to facilitate favorable change. According to Reiss (2004), a well-trained coach is accomplished in the change process, supporting a course of action while individuals create their desired changes for themselves and the organization. Leadership coaching has been referred to as a supportive model for systems learning by district administrators and principals.

Goleman (2006) argued that the innovative field of social neuroscience presents why a personable leadership style shows promise. Ashcroft and Kirk (2001) stated, emotions can either enhance or inhibit the brain's capability to learn based on the existence of neural wiring connecting the thinking and emotional centers of the brain. Goleman (2006) asserted, as students, teachers, and school leaders take steps to boost their emotional self-awareness and social intelligence, a dominant climate for learning will occur. The leader's most customary style of interacting can either rejuvenate or collapse people in their organization (Goleman, 2006).

Significance

Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson (2010) suggested there is no documented evidence to support that achieving schools can accomplish this status without a successful leader. Coaching offers an applied skill used to construct a functional path to innovative performance, enhanced skills, and transformation leadership. When an organization experiences change and instability utilization of a constructive style of thinking can be beneficial (Cavanagh and Lane, 2012). Reiss (2004) stated during the forward-thinking and reframing process for individuals, coaches will acknowledge, question, empower, clarify, focus, validate, champion, and prioritize to skillfully support the leader for goal attainment. Grant (2013) offered, "...it is important to clearly define the main focus of the coaching intervention and to ensure that those issues are in fact within the sphere of influence or control of the coachee." Hargrove (2000) suggested the primary responsibility of a coach is to broaden the capacity of the individual's and/or group's capacity to achieve expected outcomes and to facilitate development.

Findings and Recommendations

Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential (International Coach Federation, 2009, cited in Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, & Shuster, 2010). This case study investigated principals' perception of the value of coaching in building leadership capacity in urban schools. The study examined the professional practice of three urban school principals in the school context as a result of them having been coached by an executive leader coach. Conclusions and recommendations of synthesized data to address the purpose of the study and research questions were completed. From the summaries, importance of leadership coaching was addressed and recommendations for future research were presented.

The researcher explored principals' perceptions of one-on-one coaching and the impact of coaching on building leadership capacity for school effectiveness and improved student achievement. The interview process included two elementary school principals, one middle school principal, and three executive coaches participating in an urban district's coaching program. This is a possible limitation to the sample because all principals were from the same school district and may have been hesitant to share negative views. Another possible limitation was that the researcher was also an employee of the district. Delimitations, on the other hand, included the selection of an urban district, identification of principals based on participation in the coaching intervention, and the use of interviews as a data collection process. Philosophical underpinning for this study was based on the constructivist paradigm. Constructivist researchers, according to Creswell, "focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants" (2007, p. 21). The propositions guiding the purpose, focus, data collection/analysis, scope of the study, and framework (Stake, 1995) were derived from the literature review with specific attention to effective leadership dimensions and practices.

Data were collected through five face-to-face recorded interviews and one recorded telephone interview. Data were also collected from documents and observations. Through analysis of data, the following nine major themes were confirmed: (1) Supportive Environment, (2) Relationship Built on Trust, (3) Confidential Conversations, (4) Leadership Support, (5) Significance of Reflection, (6) Benefits of Coaching Language in Communication, (7) Co-Constructor, (8) Thinking Partner, and (9) Trust. These nine themes steadily emerged from the data into three selective codes: (a) Leadership Support; (b) Relationship Built on Trust; and (c) Confidential Conversations. The selected codes emerged through in-depth interviews and through the transcription process completed by the researcher with the aid of Dragon Dictation software. The three selective codes from the data offered insight and clarity into the perceptions of principals on the value of coaching for impacting leadership practices. The preceding section offers discussions on the how, when, where, and why of coaching.

Theme: Leadership Support

Research Question: What were principals' perceptions of coaching engagements in supporting and sustaining leadership practices?

The first theme to emerge in the study was Leadership Support. Leadership was supported by four open codes: (a) professional, (b) coach, (c) growth, and (d) solutions. The

analyzed data indicated all three principals had positive experiences with their executive coach. Data also suggested participants were afforded professional growth opportunities which changed the way communication and interactions occurred with teachers, staff, parents, and colleagues. Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins summarized findings from empirical studies concerning “four core leadership qualities and practices...building vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning programme” (2008, p. 6). These core leadership qualities and practices were supported during the executive coaching process.

Morel and Cushman (2012) offered, the sociocultural learning theory formulated by Vygotsky (1978) and others is as applicable to the professional learning of teachers as to the educational learning of children. The way to maximize the capacity of teachers to meet student needs is to embed professional learning in the cultural and social life of the school. (p. 2)

According to the participants in this study, coaching facilitated professional and personal growth. The support of an assigned executive coach was beneficial in having a thinking partner available for goal-planning, action-planning, or solution-focused planning. Coaching provided avenues for the principal to support teachers by embedding professional learning in the culture and social life of schooling.

Solution focused coaching conversations were beneficial for the instructional leaders, so much so, these same strategies supported teachers in finding solutions to their problems, rather than the principal providing the solution to the teacher. Once teachers inferred coaching language and skills their conversations, questioning, feedback, committed listening, and reflection were improved in the areas of planning, teaching, and commitment to student achievement. After experiencing leadership coaching, principals understood that the best solution for teachers was for them to determine the answer with a co-thinking partner, in doing so, teachers would own the answer and they would be committed and dedicated to the solution. Through this commitment and dedication, teachers were better able to carry out their plan and get the desired results of improving achievement.

As related to professional growth, participants in this study described leadership coaching as helping tremendously because it was job embedded work. The principal was not doing extra work. The principal applied research-based strategies to job duties on a daily basis. Executive coaching enabled principals to assess situations through different lenses, as well as, assess the various practices employed, and reflect on the outcomes as aligned to goal attainment.

In supporting principals, executive coaches through conversations, examined the leaders' gifts and abilities and then coached the principals for maximum potential. Using their identified skill sets, principals had more confidence in thinking, planning, and problem solving. For example, the leadership strategy employed by the principal was to be proactive with issues by identifying solutions for problems, and listening to recommendations from employees, rather than concentrating on the barrier to success. Coaching developed confidence and a renewed mindset for leaders. The principals were more confident and interactive with teachers and staff after having an assigned coach. Executive coaching fostered better communication, such as, committed listening, paraphrasing, and feedback.

Theme: Relationship Built on Trust

The second theme to emerge in the study was relationship built upon trust. Relationship built upon trust was supported by four open codes: (a) facilitative, (b) confidential, (c) reciprocal, and (d) trust. Building principals said school leadership was lonely territory. Principals also voiced that they were cautious with sharing and discussing information. Executive coaching offered principals a supportive and confidential thinking partner. The coach was a facilitator on a journey of helping another person to develop their maximum potential both as a leader and as an individual.

The data revealed executive coaches were active, trusted, and reciprocal thinking partners supporting leaders to become problem solvers. They were also supporters of leaders in thinking through possibilities for solutions. An executive coach was a confidential, trustworthy colleague who partnered with school leaders. Thus, allowing school leaders to present ideas, concerns, and plans of action knowing that all judgment was being reserved. Coaching afforded principals a trusted space and support for leaders who many times were very isolated in lonely positions. Two of the three principals commented that they were reluctant to share with colleagues because there was a feeling of competition verses collaboration (Building Principal 1/1; Building Principal 2/1).

“The nature of relationship among the adults with a school has a greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything else” (Barth, 2003, p.8). These adult relationships were formed across the school community with the principal, teachers, instructional coaches, parents, support staff, bus drivers, crossing guards, and collaborative partners. The relationships fostered a sense of commitment to the mission and vision of the school. There was a common thread of commitment to goal attainment. Gladwell (2002) explained to achieve the goal of fundamental change in employee’s beliefs and behavior, you must build an organization in which those beliefs are “practiced and expressed and natured” (p. 173). The building principals in this study have incorporated coaching language, such as, committed listening, paraphrasing, and feedback in daily staff conversations, leadership team meetings, parent conferences, administrative meetings, community forums, and personal conversations. Relationships built upon trust ignited beliefs and behaviors for impacting school performance and student achievement.

Committed listening was one of the traits exhibited by executive coaches. This trait fostered trust in the coach-client relationship. All three principals said their executive coach was a confidential committed listener. The coach paraphrased the principal’s response before commenting or asking a clarifying question. This technique confirmed that the coach was a fully present committed listener for the client. At the beginning of each coaching conversation, the coach and client established the agreement on the topic for the coaching conversation. The agreement informed the type of questions asked by the coach, which may include, planning-focused, goal-focused, solution-focused, or reflection-focused or a combination. The executive coach received extensive training in how to proceed with the conversation after confirming the agreement with the client. Throughout the conversation the executive coach provided value statements to the client to acknowledge their shift in thinking. Value statements were also offered to the client during the action planning process.

Theme: Confidential Conversations

The third theme to emerge in the study was confidential conversations. Confidential conversations were supported by five open codes: (a) feedback, (b) listening, (c) discussion, (d) questioning, and (e) engaging. Leadership coaching was a partnership of equals. The goal was to support the principal's development, both professionally and personally, in order for the principal to become a more effective leader. The data revealed all three principals indicated coaching caused them to be more self-aware and more reflective. Many times at the end of the coaching session the client was asked how the conversation supported their thinking. The responses included: (1) I do not think that there were negative consequences with executive coaching. If the standards were upheld on both ends [executive coach and building principal] there were not any consequences because all conversations are confidential (BP2); (2) The coach allowed me to share and voice my concerns without feeling intimidated or that the discussion would be shared (BP3); and (3) In personal relationships and positive interactions, teachers don't always come looking for answers, but to have conversation for answers (BP/1).

Executive coaches provided unbiased committed listening, and they were comfortable with silence while allowing principals to reflect and think. The coaching goal for an executive coach was to coach the client based on the establish agreement. Executive coaches spent a great deal of time perfecting the skills of committed listening, paraphrasing, and providing feedback. The executive coaches also asked open-ended questions initiating the client to think deeper. Coaches asked clients questions and helped them discover the treasures and talents that lie within.

Research Question

The researcher's inquiry for question one focused on principals' perceptions of coaching engagements in supporting and sustaining leadership practices; and the sub-question centered on how leader practices promoted professional teachers practices. Executive coaching was perceived by principals as a valued leadership support as related to point-in-time authentic leadership situations. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) asserts leader's individual values, paths, and priorities are authentically articulated from a confident emotional course, whereby effective leaders shift people in constructive emotional paths because they are aware of their feelings and in turn create resonance (p. 38). Coaching engagements helped leaders to tap into the emotional intelligence paths within the cultural context to promote "relationship-management, self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness" (p. 38). According to Baron and Morin (2010), self-efficacy and management skills of leaders have improved with the intervention of leadership coaching. The building principals (BP1, BP2, and BP3) were better equipped to empower teachers and leadership teams to accomplish the school's vision, mission, and goals because the leader clarified expectations, nurtured social awareness, and managed relationships.

Robinson (2007) offered "planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum" as one of the... "leadership dimensions derived from 11 studies of effects of leadership on student outcomes" (p. 8). Executive coaching for leaders afforded time to discuss topics, such as, teacher observations, professional learning communities, classroom walk-through, and school improvement goals. Formative and summative feedback on teacher planning and instructional strategies were enhanced by the coaching competency committed listening. The principals in this study agreed that committed listening was a valuable coaching

strategy for providing authentic feedback. Through committed listening the principals (building principals 1, 2, and 3) were able to paraphrase and offer feedback, which in many cases the feedback, included the language spoken by teachers. Committed listening created awareness for teachers that the principal really heard what was said and specific feedback was provided. Reported findings by Robinson (2007) suggested leaders effect students outcomes as they “promote and participate in teacher learning and development” in their quest for reaching school improvement goals (p. 8). Judge and Piccolo (2004) offered the transformational leadership factor “individual consideration” where the leader attends to each follower’s needs, works as a mentor or coach, and commits to listening to the follower’s needs (p. 755), thus providing authentic leadership support.

Through confidential trusting conversations, principals in this study had facilitative conversations with the executive coach for support of leadership effectiveness. At a time when federal and state accountability mandates have made data analysis a fact of school life, effective principals know how to make the best use of data, learning to ask useful questions of it, and taking advantage of it for collaborative inquiry among teachers and helpful feedback to students (Portin, Knapp, Dareff, Feldman, Russell, Samuelson, et al., 2009). The significance of establishing and sustaining a trusting relationship allowed the client (principal) to release apprehensions of judgment and appraisal, and lift up their best thinking and planning for effective leadership. Principals (building principals 1, 2, and 3) welcomed the coaching support and valued the opportunity to communicate in a trusting and non-threatening environment. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moren (2011) suggested, “Trust matters most in situations of interdependence where people must depend on one another to achieve desired outcomes” (p. 438). According to Morel and Cushman (2012) trust is a significant component in collaborative conversations.

Contribution to the Field of Leadership

Job-embedded professional development for system-leaders was a valuable tool. While districts and policy makers identify effective strategies and allocate resources to support short-term and long-term goals, executive coaching can serve as targeted support for district leaders, principals, directors, content specialist, and central office administrators. The value of executive coaching was unveiled through the individualized support of effective leadership practices such as: (1) establishing vision and mission; (2) building trusting relationships; and (3) goal attainment. As leaders participate in executive coaching valuable skills were developed or enhanced. These skills include enhanced listening, improved problem solving, productive goal planning, and promotion of solution focused leadership.

Executive coaches in this study offered urban leaders a unique opportunity to engage in confidential conversations, solution focused planning with a thinking partner, facilitative conversations using effective questioning, and leadership support for accomplishing predetermined organizational goals. Findings from this qualitative case study suggested that leadership was a lonely place, and in many cases there was no one for the leader to confide in on issues that impacted success within the organization. Executive coaching helped fill this void. Additionally, executive coaches established trusting relationships that fostered open dialogue and genuine conversations to get at the heart of the matter. Leaders were better equipped to accomplish goals and model effective strategies for others to learn from and put into practice. Trusting relationships were paramount to the success of executive coaching.

The principals in this study spoke their truths regarding the conditions and support necessary to lead effective schools. Principals valued leadership coaching in building leadership capacity and supporting leader practices. Leadership coaching for principals served as targeted support in a safe, trusting, and confidential environment. These findings from principals in an urban district provided data for a relatively new area of research on building leadership capacity through leadership coaching.

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The Probability of a General Education Student Placed in a Co-Taught Inclusive Classroom of Passing the 2014 New York State ELA and Mathematics Assessment in Grades 6-8

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



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This study examined the influence of placement in a co-taught inclusive classroom on the academic achievement of general education students in grades 6-8 in a suburban New York school district on the 2014 New York State ELA and Mathematics Assessments. Propensity Score Matching (PSM) was utilized for sample selection in order to simulate a more randomized design methodology and to decrease the likelihood of selection bias (Randolph, Falbe, Manuel and Balloun, 2014). Logistic regression was used to determine the influence of gender, socioeconomic status, attendance, past academic performance, ethnicity, and assignment to an inclusive classroom on the probability of a general education student scoring proficient on the 2014 New York State Assessments in ELA and Mathematics in grades 6-8. Results indicated that grade 6 - 8 general education students who were not placed in a co-taught inclusive classroom had a greater probability of being proficient on both the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment, 5 to 1 odds, and New York State Mathematics Assessment, 2 to 1 odds.

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Introduction

Federal mandates have led to an increase of inclusion classrooms from grades K-12 throughout the country (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010). At the same time, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top legislation has placed increased emphasis on high stakes testing. Student performance on high stakes state assessments are now used to evaluate teachers. Poor evaluations for teachers could lead to consequences, including dismissal and restrictions on returning to the profession. Students with disabilities are held to the same standards as their general education peers in the inclusion classroom, as they are responsible for meeting the same state and national standards, as well as being proficient on the same high stakes assessments. As a result, effectively implementing an inclusion model that promotes high academic achievement for all students is of great importance (Murawski & Swanson, 2001).

One model of inclusion used throughout the country is the co-teaching model. The co-teaching model consists of two teachers, one regular education teacher and one special education teacher working together in one classroom as equals to educate students (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). However, the term co-teaching is also used in a more general sense in research to describe a classroom in which one or more teachers share the instructional responsibilities within the classroom (Park, 2014). To distinguish between the two, the model described by Dieker and Murawski will be referred to as the “co-taught inclusive classroom” throughout this paper.

The goal of the co-taught inclusive model is to improve student performance, educational options, and participation of special education students (Mastropieri et al., 2005; Murawski, 2008). Teachers in the co-taught inclusive model use different approaches like: one teach one assist, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching (Friend & Cook, 1995; Friend, Cook, Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

The wide use of the co-taught inclusive model raises questions for educators. Is this model the best way to educate ALL students? Analyzing the co-taught inclusive classroom’s influence on the academic achievement of general education students can assist in determining whether the model is a viable solution for complying with inclusion legislation mandates.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that students with disabilities have access to and be part of the general education curriculum. This amendment to the law in 1990 led to an increase in inclusion classrooms in public schools (Yell, Drasgow, & Lowrey, 2005). Since that time, a large number of empirical studies were conducted on the impact of inclusion on both special education and general education students.

Current and past research shows that students with disabilities can benefit from inclusion both academically and socially if the inclusion program is effectively implemented (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Effective implementation includes appropriate heterogeneous peer grouping. Past research indicates that classroom peers can have an influence on a student’s academic achievement (Burke & Sass, 2011). Research indicates that assignment based on ability, known as between-class ability grouping or “tracking” have little impact on high and low ability learners, but can have a negative impact on low achievers because of the stigma and low expectations placed upon them (Slavin, 1987). More recent research supports Slavin’s claims. Hoffer (1992) determined that ability grouping has no benefit in either math or science for students, and that in some cases grouping has a negative impact on academic achievement for low groups. Burke and Sass (2011) recommend tracking for high achievers, but make a point to indicate that this policy would not be best for low achievers.

Empirical studies regarding the co-taught inclusive classroom yield similar results to inclusion. These studies indicate that the co-taught inclusive classroom can have a positive impact on academic achievement for special education students (Mastropieri, 2005; Murawski & Murawski, 2006; Swanson, 2001). Murawski and Swanson (2001) conducted a meta-analysis on co-teaching, and determined that in some cases the reading scores of students with disabilities improved in the co-taught inclusive classroom. Murawski (2006) analyzed impact of the co-taught inclusive classroom on students with learning disabilities in an urban high school in Los Angeles. The data showed that students with learning disabilities achieved at a higher rate in the co-taught classroom than in the mainstreaming or self-contained classroom. Mastropieri (2005) used multiple case studies and determined that the co-taught inclusive classroom can be effective for students with disabilities if certain components for implementation like working relationships, co-planning, and levels of differentiated instruction are met.

There is less clarity regarding inclusion's impact on general education students. In fact, results vary on the impact of inclusion on the academic achievement of general education students (Brady, 2010; Brewton, 2005; Brown, 2015; Daniel & King, 1997; Robinson & Babo, 2014). Some studies identified little impact of the inclusive classroom on academic achievement (Brady 2010; Daniel & King, 1997; Harrison, 2011; McLeod, 2007). Other research indicated that general education students perform better in the co-taught inclusive classroom versus the general education classroom (Riedesel, 1997; Rigdon, 2010). More recent research does indicate that general education students in the inclusive classroom do not perform as well as their peers who are not placed in an inclusive classroom environment on high stakes assessments (Brown, 2015; Parker, 2010; Robinson, 2012).

Problem

While the number of empirical quantitative studies on the influence of inclusion on the academic achievement of general education students grows, mixed results create difficulty in determining whether or not the inclusive environment is beneficial to all students (Brady, 2010; Brewton, 2005; Brown, 2015; Daniel & King, 1997; Robinson & Babo, 2014). Specifically, limited empirical research exists on the impact of the co-taught inclusive model on the academic achievement of general education students (McDuffie et al., 2009). District and school leaders must determine if the co-taught inclusive classroom benefits not only the special education student, but also the general education student. The intent of this study was to increase the existing research and address gaps regarding the co-taught inclusive classroom.

Purpose and Research Question

Consequently, the purpose of this study was to examine the influence of the co-taught inclusive classroom on the academic achievement of general education students on the New York State Assessment for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics in grades 6-8 at a middle school in an upper middle socioeconomic school district located in a suburb of New York City. Additionally, the study examined the influence of other student mutable variables such as gender, socioeconomic status, class attendance, past academic performance, and ethnicity on the dependent variable, which was defined as student achievement on the New York State Assessment in ELA and Mathematics in grades 6-8. The overriding research question addressed in this study was: What is the probability of a grade 6-8 general education student passing the

New York State ELA and Mathematics Assessment based on placement in a co-taught inclusive classroom setting when controlling for gender, socioeconomic status, class attendance, ethnicity, and past academic performance?

Methods

Population and Sample

The participants in this study were selected from a suburban upper middle class P-12 school district located 25 miles from New York City. According to the Census Bureau, the district has 84,187 residents, 29,234 households, and 22,186 families.

The school district has over 9,100 students housed in nine elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. For the purposes of this study, the sample population was limited to the one middle school in the district.

The middle school in this school district has approximately 2100 students, with about 700 students in each grade level, 6-8. Students used in this study were (1) general education students in grades 6, 7, or 8, (2) placed in a general education or co-taught inclusive classroom in ELA and/or Mathematics, and (3) received a valid score on the New York State ELA and/or Mathematics Assessments during the 2013-14 school year.

General education students were placed in either general education or co-taught inclusive classrooms prior to the start of the study. Although the primary design can be classified as one that is a non-experimental explanatory relational design, Propensity Score Matching (PSM) was used for the purpose of sampling in order to reduce the influence of selection bias and to simulate a randomized design methodology (Olmos & Govindasamy, 2015). PSM pairs like students in the sample population from the control and the experimental groups, also known as “nearest neighbor matching” (Stone & Tang, 2013). This matching is based on similar characteristics. In the case of this study, the independent variables, gender, socioeconomic status, class attendance, ethnicity, and past academic performance were used to generate a propensity score match by creating a single summary score from a number of covariates for each student in the overall sample. The best matches are then delineated from the overall sample population and a subsample is identified and constructed for use in the quantitative analysis. In this case, the sample identified for the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment was 413 with 207 students considered the experimental group (general education students assigned to inclusive classrooms) and 206 students the control group (general education students NOT assigned to inclusive classrooms). For the 2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment, the sample population included 332 students with 166 considered the experimental group and 166 students in the control group.

Propensity Score Matching (PSM) is a unique sampling device that has been rarely used in the field of educational research but more widely used in the field of medicine. However, it has been gaining wider acceptance among social science researchers in recent years since true experimental designs are rarely if ever used for reasons of both ethical considerations and organizational limitations. Researchers have found that the use of PSM has been proven to lead to more stable results and reduce the rate of Type I error in many types of designs associated with social science research because it diminishes the effects of selection bias (Adelson, 2013). In our case, the PSM technique was able to reduce selection bias by 99% for both the ELA and Mathematics assessment analyses.

Results

Binary logistic regression was the primary statistical analyses used to determine the amount of influence the independent variables, gender, SES, attendance, past performance, and placement in a co-taught inclusive ELA & Mathematics classroom had on grade 6-8 general education students who achieved a score of proficiency or advanced proficiency on the 2014 New York State ELA & Mathematics Assessment. Binary logistic regression is used when the dependent variable is dichotomous (Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2011). The purpose of this type of analyses is to calculate odds ratios for each of the predictor variables in the regression model for the purposes of providing the probability ratio for the outcome variable occurring, in this case whether a student scored proficient or not proficient on the respective assessment. Typically, only those odds ratios for predictor variables found to be statistically significant contributors to the model are reported; however, all results were reported here to provide transparency. The independent variables were coded as follows: placement in an ELA or Mathematics co-taught inclusive classroom (0= general education classroom, 1= co-taught inclusive classroom), gender (0=male, 1=female), SES (0= no free and reduced lunch, 1=free and reduced lunch), attendance (scale), past performance (scale score from 2013 New York State ELA Assessment). Both dependent variables, 2014 New York State ELA and Mathematics Assessment Proficiency rating, were coded dichotomously (0= not proficient, 1= proficient).

2014 New York State ELA Assessment

The first binary logistic regression performed determined the probability of a grade 6-8 general education student achieving proficiency on the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment when controlling for the influence of gender, SES, attendance, past academic performance (Ela_12-13), and placement in a co-taught inclusive ELA classroom (incela). Although the primary variable of interest was placement in a co-taught inclusive ELA classroom the other independent variables previously listed were deemed important control measures due to their potential influence on the dependent variable (Robinson & Babo, 2014). The dependent variable, the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment proficiency score, was coded dichotomously (0= not proficient, 1= proficient).

The fitted model Chi-square test for the logistic regression analysis was statistically significant ($\chi^2= 200.917$, $p < .001$), thus indicating that the overall fitted model was able to better predict what students were proficient and those who were not proficient on the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment than what might be expected by chance prediction.

The Cox & Snell and the Nagelkerke statistics, which provide “pseudo” R^2 estimates for the model, were .385 and .514, respectively. These values give a rough estimate of the variance that can be predicted from the combination of independent/predictor variables used in the model with the Cox & Snell statistic being the more conservative estimate of the two (Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2011). These two values indicated that approximately 38.5% to 51.4% of the variance of whether students scored proficient on the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment can be predicted from the combination of predictor variables used in the model.

Table 1 presents the findings of the binary logistic regression analysis. Only two variables, placement in a co-taught ELA inclusive classroom (incela) and past performance (Ela_12-13) were found to be statistically significant predictors in the model. In order to make the interpretation easier to understand the dichotomous coding for the predictor variable

placement in a co-taught ELA inclusive classroom (incela) was reversed for the purposes of this logistic regression analysis.

The strongest predictor of proficiency on the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment was placement in a co-taught ELA inclusive classroom (incela), which had an odds ratio of 5.456 (5.5) to 1, (95% CI= 3.169-9.393). This means that general education students who were NOT placed in a co-taught ELA inclusive classroom had 5.5 to 1 greater chance, or 454% increase in the probability of scoring proficient on the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment than general education students who were placed in a co-taught inclusive classroom.

Additionally, past performance as measured by the student’s performance on the 2013 New York State ELA assessment was also found to be a statistically significant predictor variable in the model. A one unit increase in a student’s 2013 New York State ELA assessment score would equate to an increase in odds of 1.1 (1.095) to 1 or a 10% increase in the probability of the student scoring proficient on the 2014 New York State ELA assessment.

Table 1

Logistic Regression Analysis: Proficiency on 2014 New York State ELA Assessment

Predictor Variables	B	Wald Chi-square	P	Exp(B)* Odds Ratio	Lower	Upper
incela(1)	1.697	37.469	<.001	5.456	3.169	9.393
gender	-.291	1.265	.261	.748	.450	1.241
ses	-.144	.075	.784	.866	.310	2.418
attendance	-.005	.096	.757	.995	.964	1.027
Ela_12-13	.091	89.016	<.001	1.095	1.074	1.116
Constant	-29.371	90.399	<.001	.000		

Based on this analysis, placement in a co-taught inclusive classroom setting for ELA has a statistically significant influence on the probability of grade 6-8 general education students passing the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment when controlling for gender, SES, attendance, and past academic performance. General education students NOT placed in an ELA inclusive classroom setting had a significantly higher probability (5 to 1) of passing the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment than those placed in an inclusive classroom.

2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment

The second binary logistic regression performed determined the probability of a grade 6-8 general education student achieving proficiency on the 2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment when controlling for the influence of gender, SES, attendance, past academic performance (Math_12-13), and placement in a co-taught inclusive Mathematics classroom (incmath). Although the primary variable of interest was placement in a co-taught inclusive Mathematics classroom the other independent variables previously listed were deemed important control measures due to their potential influence on the dependent variable (Robinson & Babo, 2014). The dependent variable, the 2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment proficiency score, was coded dichotomously (0= not proficient, 1= proficient).

The fitted model Chi-square test for the logistic regression analysis was statistically significant ($\chi^2= 119.310$, $p <.001$), thus indicating that the overall fitted model was able to better

predict what students were proficient and those who were not proficient on the 2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment then what might occur if predicted by chance.

The Cox & Snell and the Nagelkerke statistics, which provide “pseudo” R² estimates for the model, were .301 and .437, respectively. These values give a rough estimate of the variance that can be predicted from the combination of independent/predictor variables used in the model with the Cox & Snell statistic being the more conservative estimate of the two (Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2011) These two values indicate that approximately 30.1% to 43.7% of the variance of whether a student scored proficient on the 2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment can be predicted from the combination of predictor variables used in the model.

Table 2 presents the findings of the binary logistic regression analysis. Only two (2) variables, placement in a co-taught Mathematics inclusive classroom (incmath) and past academic performance (Math_12-13) were significant. Past academic performance was measured using the 2013 New York State Mathematics Assessment. In order to make the interpretation easier to understand the dichotomous coding for placement in a co-taught Mathematics inclusive classroom (incmath) was reversed for the purposes of this logistic regression analysis.

The strongest predictor of proficiency on the 2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment was placement in a co-taught Mathematics inclusive classroom (incmath), which had an odds ratio of 1.921 to 1, (95% CI= 1.039-3.552). This means that general education students NOT placed in a co-taught Mathematics inclusive classroom had almost a 2 to 1 greater chance, or a 92% increase in the probability of scoring proficient on the 2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment than did general education students who were placed in a co-taught inclusive classroom.

Additionally, past performance as measured by the student’s performance on the 2013 New York State Mathematics assessment was also found to be a statistically significant predictor variable in the model. A one unit increase in a student’s 2013 New York State Math assessment score would equate to an increase in odds of 1.1 to 1 or a 10% increase in the probability of the student scoring proficient on the 2014 New York State Mathematics assessment.

Table 2
Logistic Regression Analysis: Proficiency on 2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment

Predictor Variables	B	Wald Chi-square	P	Exp(B)* Odds Ratio	Lower	Upper
incmath(1)	.653	4.332	<.037	1.921	1.039	3.552
gender	.394	1.643	.200	1.483	.812	2.711
ses	-.115	.065	.799	.891	.367	2.164
attendance	-.009	.159	.690	.991	.950	1.035
Math_12-13	.096	56.413	<.001	1.100	1.073	1.128
Constant	-30.681	60.684	<.001	.000		

Based on this analysis, placement in a co-taught Mathematics inclusive classroom setting has a statistically significant influence on the probability of grade 6-8 general education student passing the 2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment when controlling for gender, SES, attendance, and past academic performance. General education students NOT placed in an

inclusive classroom setting have significantly higher probability (2 to 1) of passing the 2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment than those placed in an inclusive classroom.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Results of this study indicated that placement in a co-taught inclusive classroom had a statistically significant negative influence on the performance of grade 6-8 general education students on both the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment and 2014 New York State Mathematics Assessment. Grade 6-8 general education students who were NOT placed in a co-taught inclusive classroom had a greater probability of being proficient on both the 2014 New York State ELA Assessment, 5 to 1 odds, and the New York State Mathematics Assessment, 2 to 1 odds.

Evidence is mounting that inclusion influences the academic performance on general education students as well as special education students, in fact, increasingly results like those posited here seem to suggest a negative influence on general education students (Robinson, 2012; Brown, 2015). This impact on general education students must be further explored and evaluated, as the co-taught inclusive classroom may not be the best placement for ALL general education students.

The practice of inclusion, especially the co-taught inclusive model, continues to grow nation-wide (Murawski, 2012). Some research indicates that the co-taught inclusive model can have a positive impact on the academic achievement of general education students (Riedesel, 1997; Rigdon, 2010) but point to the importance of proper implementation including professional development, adequate common planning time for teachers to collaborate, and careful selection of teacher participants in the model. Other studies have found conflicting results indicating potentially negative effects on general education students assigned to inclusive settings, such as what we discovered here in one upper middle class suburban New York school district (Brown, 2015; Robinson, 2012; Robinson & Babo, 2014). Consequently, these conflicting findings necessitate the need for school leaders to evaluate the specific co-taught inclusive model in their own setting to determine its overall efficacy for all students.

Implications for School Leaders

School district and building leaders need to be sure to follow the guidelines developed by Friend and Cook (1995) on the proper implementation of the co-taught inclusive model. This includes providing professional development on the various co-taught approaches and how to assist co-teachers in defining their roles. Leadership must also determine if teachers are the “right fit” by analyzing teacher perceptions of the co-taught inclusive model (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008). Combining these components with an equitably and properly selected heterogeneous student population for participation in an inclusive model might ensure a more adequately distributed level of student achievement for all students assigned to co-taught inclusive classrooms (Robinson & Babo, 2014).

Determining the “right fit” can be difficult, especially since scheduling may require teachers to co-teach without volunteering for the job. Murawski (2008) suggests that administrators can improve their chances of creating an ideal “professional marriage” by sending out surveys, allowing teachers to choose their co-teaching partner, and following similar

guidelines as Friend and Cook (1995) including providing adequate common planning time and professional development on the co-taught inclusive model.

One important suggestion would be for schools to examine scheduling and the process for which students are recommended and selected in the co-taught inclusive classroom. Creating homogenous groupings of low achieving students, both general education and special education can lead to poor academic performance (Slavin, 1987). Therefore, administrators should not overload their co-taught inclusive classrooms, or any of their classrooms for that matter, with too many low achieving students. A balance of high and low achieving students can promote greater achievement among the struggling learners in the classroom (Burke & Sass, 2011).

In closing, the results reported here suggest that at the very least, school and district leaders craft a well-developed implementation strategy when attempting to employ the co-taught inclusive model in their building(s), which includes being cognizant of teacher selection, and developing sustainability through common planning time. Failure to take these factors into consideration, along with the importance of student selection and assignment to co-taught inclusive classrooms, could lead to a flawed inclusive model design and possibly negatively influence the academic performance of all students.

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Leading Instructional Practices in a Performance-based System

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



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Given the shift to Common Core, educational leaders are challenged to see new directions in teaching and learning. The purpose of this study was to investigate the instructional practices which may be related to the effectiveness of a performance-based system (PBS) and their impact on student achievement, as part of a thematic set of dissertations that examined different aspects of a PBS system in three separate school systems in different areas of the continental US. This specific study examined the role of instructional strategies in implementing and sustaining a performance-based system in order to better understand how instructional strategies can improve the implementation of an innovative school reform as well as support a sustainable outcome that improves student academic achievement. In the study, a questionnaire was utilized to measure instructional strategy perceptions. Next, instructional strategy actions and perceptions were explored through face-to-face focus groups with participants. Finally, classroom observations were conducted to determine which components of instructional practices are commonly used in a PBS. The design for this mixed method study integrated both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The results of the study indicated that there were some differences in the perceptions and usage of instructional practices across grade levels and districts. It was found the participants believed that the individualized nature of a PBS along with instilling student self-motivation is what promotes student achievement, not the use of specific instructional practices.

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Introduction

As school leaders across the county are being challenged by the move to Common Core State Standards and the higher level thinking skills that these standards demand, new forward-thinking approaches towards education are being implemented. This study explored three school districts across the United States that utilize the forward-thinking approach of a performance-based educational system (PBS). The districts that were examined were given the pseudonyms of Central District, East District, and South District based on their continental US geographical location. As part of a thematic dissertation that examined multiple aspects of PBS, this study analyzed the extent to which direct instruction, collaborative learning, project-based learning, inquiry-based, and other instructional practices are used in a PBS system and their perceived impact on student academic achievement.

The variables in this study were instructional practices, perceptions, and actions regarding implementation of PBS. This study utilized a mixed-method approach to research and analyzed findings pertinent to the research questions using descriptive survey research, qualitative methods, and quantitative data analysis. Qualitatively and quantitatively, survey questions as part of the larger, thematic dissertation survey, accounted for a portion of the data analyzed. The other portions included qualitative interview data for further identification and analysis of the findings from the survey. In addition, observations of instructional strategies were observed in fourth and ninth grade classrooms in the three districts.

The following research question(s) were addressed:

1. To what extent do teachers use direct instruction practices in their classroom in a PBS?
 - a. When do teachers use direct instruction practices?
2. To what extent do teachers use collaborative learning practices in their classroom in a PBS?
 - a. When do teachers use collaborative learning practices?
3. To what extent do teachers use project-based learning practices in their classroom in a PBS?
 - a. When do teachers use project-based learning practices?
4. To what extent do teachers use inquiry-based learning practices in their classroom in a PBS?
 - a. When do teachers use inquiry-based learning practices?
5. What are teacher's perceptions of the effectiveness of various instructional practices on student learning in a PBS classroom?

Review of Literature

Performance based education is a student-centered approach to learning in which students are informed of their learning targets in advance. In a performance-based system, every student works at their individualized performance level and advances through curriculum that is designed to meet their individual learning styles only when they have demonstrated proficiency of the required knowledge or skills (LUSD, 2012). Much of the research surrounding PBS is often referred to as competency-based learning, and was produced many years ago. There are a variety of educational models that have a great deal in common with PBS including competency-

based, mastery learning, and outcomes-based. Of importance is that their relationship contrasts drastically with a traditional model of education prevalent in today's American schools (Johnson, 1974; Marzano, 1994; Patrick & Sturgis, 2011; Priest et al., 2012).

The various types of instructional practice models reviewed were collaborative learning, project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and direct instruction. Although not all elements of these instructional practice models directly align together, commonalities in (a) organization, (b) curriculum, (c) standards, organization, (d) time, grouping, (e) cognitive level, (f) mastery criteria, (g) assessment, (h) mode of instruction, (i) teacher's role, and (j) authenticity are closely correlated to that of a Performance-based System (Johnson, 1974; Marzano, 1994; Patrick & Sturgis, 2011; Priest et al., 2012).

Collaborative learning was first reviewed for impact on student achievement. Slavin (1995) concluded that collaborative learning increased student achievement test scores by about one fourth of a standard deviation. Similarly, Qin, Johnson, and Johnson (1995) found that collaborative learning increases achievement outcomes and increases students' problem solving skills. Johnson and Johnson (2009) also determined that the collaborative learning increases students' academic achievement, learning behaviors, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being.

Project-based learning was then reviewed for impact on student achievement. Academic research supported the use of project-based learning as a way to help students cut absenteeism, boost collaborative learning skills, and improve test scores (Hitz & Scanlon, 2001). Tassinari, Wolk, and Worthy (2002) found there was a substantial body of research that had documented how students were more motivated when they were able to make decisions about what they will learn and how they will learn the material. In addition, Grant (2002) concluded that students maintained greater interest in their education when they were given the ability to make decisions about their education. Furthermore, project-based learning helps students become self-motivated and get engaged in their learning (Wasserstein-Warnet & Klein, 2002). The integration of improved lesson delivery specified to meet the needs of every student and student centered autonomy are the components of project-based learning that significantly assist students make academic progress who are below desired achievement levels (Marzano, 2000).

Inquiry-based learning was next reviewed for impact on student achievement. Research conducted by Esler and Sciortino (1991) substantiate the claim that students exposed to the inquiry-based learning curriculum tend to perform better in the classroom and on standardized tests. Research findings have found that students who receive instruction in inquiry-based classrooms throughout elementary school attain higher academic achievement test scores than students who receive traditional methods of classroom instruction (Smith, Lee, & Newmann, 2001). A study conducted by Nie and Lau (2010) indicated that with the use of the inquiry-based approach, students were able to process information, took ownership in the learning process, and improved academically.

Direct instruction was also reviewed for impact on student achievement. In the 1970s, one of the largest educational studies ever, entitled Project Follow Through, was undertaken (Watkins, 1977). The results of the study indicated that direct instruction performed better than other programs in core content areas and significantly improved cognitive skills, compared to control groups. In addition the study found direct instruction as the most successful school reform model to satisfy the needs of the largest number of students. The results thoroughly support the study's claims of success in closing achievement gaps (Watkins, 1977).

A review of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), as a subset of direct instruction, was also completed and student achievement results from this subset were also reviewed. Using a quasi-experimental design, a multi-year study found that lesson planning, self-monitoring and the awareness of how to integrate language into content classes were improved (Echevarria & Short, 2000). The second part of the seven-year study assessed the impacts that SIOP had on student academic achievement. Students who received SIOP instruction performed slightly higher on an expository writing task than students who were taught by traditional methods (Echevarria et al., 2006).

Method

The variables in this study were instructional practices perceptions and actions regarding implementation of PBS. This study utilized a mixed-method approach to research and analyze findings pertinent to the research questions using descriptive survey research, qualitative methods, and quantitative data analysis. Qualitatively and quantitatively, survey questions as part of the larger, thematic dissertation survey, accounted for a portion of the data analyzed. The other portions included qualitative interview data for further identification and analysis of the findings from the survey. In addition, observations of instructional strategies were observed in fourth and ninth grade classrooms in three districts.

Using a mixed-method design offered triangulation, complementary methods, and quantitative analysis informed qualitative research, phased for initiation of further questioning, and allowed the researcher to explore the results (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). This study used a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, which consisted of three phases (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). In phase 1, the survey results were coded and analyzed for frequency and through a One Way ANOVA measured to identify if there were any significant differences between the mean scores of the school sites. The survey also included qualitative, free-response questions. The qualitative data collected were analyzed to further identify common themes and patterns. Based on the analysis of collected data from the survey in the first phase, interview questions were developed to gain a deeper understanding of the survey results (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In phase 2, the focus groups were conducted. The focus group transcriptions were open coded and then axial coded for common themes and clarifying responses triangulated against survey analyses. In phase 3, observations were conducted within randomized classrooms among the different PBS schools. The randomized samples included samples from all school sites and in grade levels 4 and 9. The instrument used for observation collection was an open response form to determine which instructional practices were seen in use in a PBS classroom. The classroom observational tool provided operational definition of specified instructional practices and helped to prevent bias collection and allow for equal comparisons across school sites and grade levels.

The triangulation occurred when data were taken from multiple sources to speak to one another. Therefore, data were complementary in that qualitative and quantitative portions informed one another. Finally, the observational data were collected to allow for richer research, and organized collection (Greene et al., 1989).

Participants

Participants in this study were the certificated staff in the three districts which provide academic instruction to students at the identified schools utilizing a performance-based system of education. The districts were located in different areas of the United States that utilized a performance-based system. The districts were given the pseudonyms of East, South, and Central, based on their geographical location, for ease of identification.

Results

Specific areas that were explored in this study included the instructional practices of direct instruction, collaborative learning, project-based learning, and inquiry-based learning. The primary focus of this study was on instructional practices within a PBS system. Given the fact that research has shown the effectiveness of the previously mentioned instructional practices in a traditional school environment, this study examined the effectiveness of such strategies within a PBS system.

Three instruments were used to collect data for this study. The electronic survey was the instrument for all four dissertations involved in the PBS thematic dissertation, but only the highlighted questions indicate those that were used for this study. A 5-point Likert-type scale survey was used to collect data on the degree to which teachers implement each of the following instructional practices: direct instruction, collaborative learning, and project-based learning. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated to determine the overall construct of the internal consistency of the PBS survey instrument.

The results to the electronic survey informed participant selection for the individual and focus group interviews for further qualitative data collection. In addition, observations were conducted to determine the extent that specified instructional practices are in place in classrooms.

Classroom observations were completed through a representative sample to ensure that classrooms were observed on each school site and across the participating districts. The observational tool was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on instructional practices within PBS. The classroom observation protocol was created to be open ended and to record the amount of students that are engaged in the instructional practices of direct instruction, inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, direct instruction, collaborative learning, as well as any other instructional practices observed during a classroom observation. Four researchers were trained how to use the observational protocol to allow for inter-rater reliability of data recorded. The research team conducted 15-minute classroom observations in groups of two or more to ensure inter-rater reliability. After each classroom observation, the researchers met and discussed recorded results to ensure accuracy and consistency. The classroom observational data was then coded and transcribed. Qualitative and quantitative measures were used to analyze the collected data.

Survey and Classroom Observation Results

Direct instruction quantitative and qualitative data analysis found the following. Through examining frequency data from 206 classrooms in the three school districts, it was determined that direct instruction was used Fairly Often (40.8%). Specifically, more than 60% of

respondents used direct instruction for more than 40% of their instruction. The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the perceived use of direct instruction between districts was statistically significant, ($p = .029$). A Tukey Post Hoc analysis was performed resulting in a statistically significant difference between East and South ($p < .05$, $p = 0.021$) districts. In addition, the perceived estimated percent of use of direct instruction between districts ($p=.008$) and grade levels ($p=.020$) were statistically significant. It was found that direct instruction practices were most commonly used for the purpose of presenting new materials (92.2%). An analysis of the perceptions of when direct instruction is used to reteach learning objectives was statistically significant across districts ($p < .001$) and found statistically significant differences between East and South districts ($p < .001$) and Central and South districts ($p=.001$). According to classroom observational data, the most commonly used component of direct instruction was that classroom teachers posted the learning objective for their students. This component of direct instruction was observed in 37% of classroom observations.

Collaborative learning quantitative and qualitative data analysis found the following. Examination of frequency data found that collaborative learning was used fairly often (40.8%). Specifically, more than 65% of respondents used collaborative learning for more than 40% of their instruction. The analysis of the perceived estimated percent of use of collaborative learning between districts ($p<.001$) was statistically significant. It was found that collaborative learning practices were most commonly used for the purpose of presenting new materials (92.2%). An analysis of the perceptions of when collaborative learning is used to reteach learning objectives were statistically significant between districts ($p=.007$) and found statistically significant differences between Central and South ($p=.025$) districts. According to classroom observational data, the most commonly used component of collaborative learning was small groups of students working together (48.1%).

Project-based learning can be implemented differently in various settings and multiple components of instruction make up project-based learning. For the purpose of this research, project based learning was defined as the use of both active and self-directive instructional components. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis found the following for active instructional practices in a PBS. Through examining frequency data, it was found that active learning instructional practices were most commonly used fairly often (38.3%). Specifically, more than 60% of respondents used active learning instructional practices for 21-60% of their instruction. The analysis of the perceived use of active learning instructional practices between districts was statistically significant ($p < .001$). An analysis of the perceived percent of use of active learning instructional practices was not statistically significant between districts ($p=.065$) or grade levels ($p=1.000$). The findings indicated that active learning instructional practices were most commonly used for the purpose of creating deeper understanding (84.1%). An analysis of the perceptions of when active learning instructional practices are used to create a deeper understanding was statistically significant between districts ($p=.035$) and found statistically significant differences between Central and South ($p=.028$) districts. According to classroom observational data, all components of active learning were observed equally (3.7%).

Self-directed instructional practices quantitative and qualitative data analysis found the following. Through examining frequency data, it was found that self-directed instructional practices were used sometimes (37.4%). Specifically, more than 65% of respondents used self-directed instructional practices for 0-40% of their instruction. An analysis of the perceived estimated percent of use of self-directed learning was statistically significant between districts ($p=.020$) and found statistically significant differences between Central and South districts

($p=.001$). The findings indicated that self-directed instructional practices were most commonly used for the purpose of creating deeper understanding (74.6%). The analysis of the perceived use of self-directed learning across districts was statistically significant, $F(2, 205) = 3.966$ at a level of ($p=.020$). A Tukey Post Hoc analysis was performed resulting in a statistically significant difference between East and Central ($p=0.015$) districts. An analysis of the perceptions of when self-directed instructional practices are used was not significant between grade levels and districts for any purpose. According to classroom observational data, all components of self-directed learning were observed equally (3.7%).

According to classroom observational data, all components of project-based learning were recorded in solely one of the fourth grade classrooms in the East District. This one recorded observation accounted for 3.7% of classroom observations. However, survey data indicated that project-based instructional practice components were perceived to be used to create deeper understanding in 0-60% of classrooms by 83% of survey respondents.

Inquiry based instruction practices quantitative and qualitative data analysis found the following. Through examining frequency data, it was found that inquiry-based instructional practices were used sometimes (44.2%). Specifically, more than 70% of respondents used inquiry-based instructional practices for 0-40% of their instruction. The analysis of the perceived use of inquiry-based instructional practices across districts ($p=.067$) was not statistically significant. It was found that inquiry-based instructional practices were most commonly used for the purpose of creating deeper understanding (71.9%). An analysis of the perceptions of when inquiry-based instructional practices are used was not statistically significant between grade levels and districts for any purpose. According to classroom observational data, the most commonly used component of inquiry-based instructional practices was teacher posing open-ended tasks and/or questions (31.5%). All of the inquiry-based instructional components were observed during 20-31.5% of classroom observations.

Focus Group and Interview Results

In all teacher focus groups, administrator focus groups, and administrator interviews in the three districts, there was no mention of any other instructional practices aside from direct instruction, collaborative learning, inquiry-based learning, or project-based learning. In addition to qualitative data collected through focus groups and interviews, additional qualitative data were also collected through classroom observations by the researcher and a research team. Focus group participants were in agreement that what promotes student achievement in a PBS is not the specific instructional practices, but rather the demand for individualized and personalized instruction. Overall, teachers and administrators have the perception that the effectiveness of a PBS on student achievement is not based on different instructional strategies, but rather on motivating the learner to push on their own and become empowered.

Pearson r Correlation Results

Pearson r correlations was conducted to determine if there were relationships between the perceived extent that the participant and the teaching staff at their school site are able to influence academic achievement and the extent of use of the instructional practices of direct instruction, active instructional practices, collaborative instructional practices, inquiry instructional practices, and self-directive instructional practices.

Our analysis of the correlation data indicated there were several correlations between the use of instructional strategies and the teachers' perceived influences on student academic achievement or on the perceived influence of the staff's influence on student academic achievement. There was a positive, moderate correlation coefficient ($r=.529, p <.01$) between the perceived influence that the staff has on academic achievement and the perceived influence that the teaching staff has on academic achievement.

Correlation results indicated there was a weak positive correlation ($r=.182$), between inductive instructional practices and the perception of influence the individual has on student achievement. In addition, there was a weak correlation ($r=.199$) between inductive instructional practices and the perception of influence the staff has on student achievement.

Breakdown of Instructional Practice Findings

This study was designed to investigate instructional practices, which may be related to the effectiveness of a performance-based system (PBS) and their impact on student achievement, as part of a thematic dissertation that examined different aspects of a PBS system. Such investigation provided insights into the instructional practices that are used in a PBS system and their perceived impacts on student achievement. Table 1 displays a breakdown of the instructional practices studied during this research, the instructional practices most common frequency of use, the most common percent of use, the most common purpose of use, and the most commonly observed component during classroom observations. In addition, significance is displayed for district and grade level as identified from the quantitative data analysis.

Table 1
Breakdown of Instructional Practice Findings

Instructional Practice	% of Use	Significance of % of Use	Purpose	Significance of Purpose	Observed Component
Direct Instruction	More than 40%	District (.008) Grade (.020)	Presenting new material (92.2%)	District (.000)	Posted learning objective (37%)
Collaborative	More than 40%	None	Presenting new material (92.2%)	District (.007)	Small groups of students working (48.1%)
Active	21-60%	None	Create deeper understanding (84.1%)	District (.035)	All Components Observed (3.7%)
Self-Directed	0-40%	District (.020)	Create deeper understanding (74.6%)	None	All Components Observed (3.7%)
Inquiry	0-40%	None	Create deeper understanding (71.9%)	None	Open ended tasks and/or questions (31.5%)

Discussion and Implications

Possible Reasons for Instructional Practice Data Discrepancies

When examining frequency data of instructional practices, many discrepancies were found between the different districts and grade levels. This could be caused by personal teacher instructional styles or educational leadership opinions about the specified instructional practices and their perceptions of when they should be used. Differences could have also been a result of the manner in which teachers were taught to use the specified instructional practices or of the district's professional development emphasis.

Perceived Effectiveness of Various Instructional Practices

Correlation results indicated that there was a weak positive correlation ($r=.182$) with a strong statistical significance ($p=.01$) between inquiry-based instructional practices and the perception of influence the individual had on student achievement. In addition, there was a weak correlation ($r=.199$) with a strong statistical significance ($p=.01$) between inquiry-based instructional practices and the perception of influence the staff has on student achievement. Although there is strong significance, this suggests teachers do not perceive that inquiry-based instructional practices have a strong impact on student academic achievement. This finding is not in alignment with the literature reviewed.

Research conducted by Nie and Lau (2010) found that students who utilized the inquiry-based learning approach were able to process information at a higher cognitive level, took ownership in the learning process, and improved academically in the classroom and on their

academic achievement standardized assessments. Specifically, when teachers used open-ended questions during instruction and on classroom assessments, their students increased 4.3 points per month faster during ninth grade than students whose teachers used brief and/or close-ended questions. In addition, as the opportunities for student centered instruction increased, student learning rates increased by an average of 6.7 points per month (Nie & Lau, 2010). These results suggest that inquiry-based learning may be more effective than traditional teaching methods for raising student academic achievement in a performance-based system.

Next, correlation results indicated that there was a weak positive correlation ($r=.192$) with a strong statistical significance ($p=.01$) between collaborative instructional practices and the perception of influence the individual has on student achievement. In addition, there was a weak correlation ($r=.193$) with a strong statistical significance ($p=.01$) between collaborative instructional practices and the perception of influence the staff has on student achievement. Although there is strong significance, the weak correlation suggests teachers do not perceive that collaborative instructional practices have a strong impact on student academic achievement. This finding is not in alignment with the literature reviewed.

For instance, a meta-analysis conducted by Johnson and Johnson (1994) found differences in favor of collaborative learning conditions against both individual and competitive learning comparisons. Johnson and Johnson teamed up with Roseth for an updated meta-analysis of collaborative, competitive, and individualistic learning strategies (Roseth et al., 2008). Their synthesis of 148 primary studies showed advantages for collaborative learning instruction over competitive and individualistic learning conditions.

Finally, correlation results indicated that there was a weak positive correlation ($r=.172$) with a statistical significance ($p=.05$) between active instructional practices and the perception of influence the staff has on student achievement. Although there is statistical significance, this suggests that teachers do not perceive that active instructional practices have a strong impact on student academic achievement. This finding was not in alignment with the literature reviewed. Project-based learning integration has been found to inform and help improve instruction and student achievement, especially in the case of students performing significantly below desired levels of academic achievement (Marzano, 2000). Recent literature has validated the use of project-based learning as a means of helping students become self-motivated, get engaged in their learning, and improve academic achievement (Wasserstein, 2002).

There was a positive moderate correlation coefficient ($r=.529$) with a strong statistical significance ($p<.01$) between the perceived influence that the staff has on academic achievement and the perceived influence that the teaching staff has on academic achievement. This suggests that the staff does not strongly believe that they have an impact on student academic achievement and they do not share this opinion frequently with their staff members. In addition, none of the instructional practices had a strong correlation with their perceived impact of student achievement. The lack of correlation suggests that the staff does not perceive that various instructional practices have an impact on student achievement. Since, the performance-based system was designed to have the students as the key stakeholder and to remove the teacher from a facilitator role, teachers need to be instructed on their importance and impact in this new learning module. A lack of emphasis on teacher importance may account for a possible explanation of why teaching staff does not believe that they have an impact on academic achievement.

Focus group participants were in agreement that what promotes student achievement in a performance-based system isn't the specific instructional practices, but rather the use of

individualized and personalized instruction. Overall, participants perceived that the effectiveness of a PBS on student achievement is not based on different instructional strategies, but rather on motivating the learner to push on his or her own and become empowered. This finding is supported by the research's quantitative correlation data. It suggests that teachers do not perceive that their instructional practices have a strong impact on student academic achievement, but rather that student academic achievement may be a result of student efficacy. This could be an inherent result of the design of a performance-based system and its focus on student-driven learning modalities, motivation, and efficacy. The performance-based system is designed for students to take ownership of their learning experiences, thus promoting a sense of empowerment within these students. It is through student choice and empowerment that they gain content knowledge, rather than through explicit and direct instructional practices. However, these findings are not in alignment with the literature reviewed. Becker and Gersten (1982), during their longitudinal study, found that academic achievement was related to the exposure of instructional practices, guided practice, checking for understanding, and task clarity.

Overall, the research results were not in alignment with the literature reviewed. The literature included several studies which evaluated the effectiveness of direct instruction, inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, and project-based learning and their impacts on student academic achievement. Such studies suggest that direct instruction, inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, and project-based learning all have positive impacts on student academic achievement. However, the research conducted throughout this study of three different school districts utilizing a performance-based system found that teachers and administrators do not believe that such instructional practices have a strong impact on student academic achievement. However, it is important to note that the studies reviewed were conducted in a traditional school model of instruction rather than in a PBS model. This may account for some of the discrepancies in the research findings.

Future Research

This study should be replicated after full implementation of Common Core State Standards. Classroom observations should be completed in all classrooms across all grades to investigate specific components of all instructional practices used in a PBS. Specific classroom observation data should then be correlated with academic achievement scores from the SmarterBalance student academic achievement results. Such research could further analyze the effectiveness of instructional practices on student academic achievement.

The results of this study also suggest that additional research would be of value to determine the exact components of each instructional practice that promotes academic achievement in a PBS. This research would help educational leaders determine best practices in a PBS and provide research for best practice implementation.

Based on correlation data, teachers did not feel that any instructional practices have a particularly strong effect on student achievement. The reason for this finding should be discussed throughout professional learning communities and steps should be taken to implement instructional practices that have a strong positive effect on student achievement. This finding could pave the way for implementing effective instructional practices that teachers feel have a strong effect on student achievement.

Based on focus group data, participants believe that the individualized nature of a PBS and instilling student self-motivation are the primary reasons for student achievement.

Discussions should be conducted to determine how these two components may be integrated and enhanced through the use of various instructional practices.

Concluding Remarks

School leaders across the county are challenged by the move to Common Core State Standards and the higher level thinking skills that these standards demand. This study of school districts that chose to take a different approach prior to the Common Core State Standards may be of value to educational leaders and others. In education there are no high-yield instructional strategies; there are only high-probability strategies. The simple presence or absence of an instructional strategy does not define effectiveness, but it is rather the teacher's expertise in adapting that strategy to the classroom within the context of lesson segments that produces gains in student achievement (Marzano, 2008). In order for a PBS to remain sustainable, measures need to be taken to ensure instructional practices are having positive effects on student academic achievement. Although various instructional practices may have proven successful in a traditional school system, PBS is a new type of system with a new type of learning to meet the present day needs of students. These same principles apply to Common Core State Standard implementation. As such, educational leaders must be able to provide teachers the skillset required to adapt their instruction to this new way of learning to ensure positive gains in student achievement.

For educational leaders to provide teachers the skillset required to adapt their instruction, professional development opportunities need to be provided. The professional development opportunities need to be experimental, teacher-driven, collaborative, meaningful, sustainable, and integrated. Through the use of experimental learning opportunities teachers need be engaged in the concrete tasks of designing, implementing, managing, and assessing their own learning activities and projects. It is essential for teachers to observe other teachers' methods and skills during the experimental stage. This will allow teachers to develop their own questions and identify possible concerns with the new instructional methodology. To gain teacher buy-in, educational leaders should collaboratively build upon the collective experiences and expertise of teachers. The more that teachers are involved in the systematic change process, the more likely it is for teachers to begin to make the connections between their own work with students, their curriculum, and the new way of learning. Once a connected and collaborative framework is established, it is essential to provide teachers with intensive, ongoing support which includes modeling, coaching, mentoring, and collaborative problem solving with other teachers. These supports should be provided during all phases of professional development and implementation. Without these key supports being constantly and systematically provided to teachers, the initiative will not be sustainable (Triling & Fadel, 2009). To ensure sustainability, it is also essential for professional development to be integrated with other aspects of school reform and transformation which includes, but is not limited to aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessments (Bybee & Starkweather, 2006).

For educational leaders to implement the systematic change towards this new way of learning, it is essential to design an implementation process. The implementation process needs to not be identified as an event, but rather a mission-oriented process that includes multiple decisions, actions, and corrections. Prior to beginning the implementation process, it is important to take into consideration that the implementation process takes time and is not something that can be properly implemented within a short timeframe (Bierman, Coie, Dodge, Greenberg,

Lochman, McMahon, et al., 2002; Fixsen, Blase, Timbers, & Wolf, 2001; Panzano & Roth, 2006; Saldana, Chamberlain, Wang, & Brown, 2012). A successful implementation process includes the stages of Exploration, Installation, Initial Implementation, and Full Implementation. It is essential to understand that the stages of implementation are not linear, but rather should allow for interaction to produce the most optimal results. During the Exploration stage it is important to assess readiness in a manner that allows all key stakeholders to explore the systematic change in-depth (Fixsen, et al., 2001). When assessing readiness it is essential to assess potential barriers to implementation (Prochaska, Prochaska, & Levesque, 2001). The results of these assessments will provide the essential information that should be built into an implementation plan. Once needs are identified and readiness is created, the Installation stage may then begin. During the Installation stage it is important to acquire or repurpose the resources that are needed to fully implement the systematic change. There are tasks that need to be accomplished during the Installation stage before any form of implementation begins. These tasks include creating an infrastructure to support the new systematic change, placing organization supports in place, and making instrumental changes. After the Installation stage comes the Initial Implementation stage which is where all components of the systematic change need to be in place. This is when the teachers and staff begin to implement the systematic change and when the implementation process is in the most fragile state (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Saldana et al., 2012). To ensure that the initial implementation is successful, teachers and staff must be provided with intensive, ongoing support which includes modeling, coaching, mentoring, and collaborative problem solving with other teachers. Without these key supports being constantly and systematically provided to teachers, the initiative will not be sustainable (Triling & Fadel, 2009). After the initial implementation becomes “standard and skillful practice,” the Full Implementation stage has been entered. During the Full Implementation stage, the educational leader needs to ensure that the systematic change is maintained and improved over time and through the transitions of staff members and stakeholders. In this manner, true change and progress toward a performance-based system can take place.

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