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Conceptualizing Mindful Leadership in Schools: How the Practice of Mindfulness Informs the Practice of Leading

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 paper advances the conceptual notion of mindfulness for educational leaders. The findings presented acknowledge the current levels of stress that school leaders face and posits that the practice of mindfulness may reduce these stressors while improving the effectiveness of leadership. The author also presents a synthesis of the literature from resonant leadership, emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and neuroscience findings, using the constructs of mindfulness as the foundation to develop a conceptual framework for mindful leadership in the schools. The attitudinal foundation of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2009) awareness, being fully present, compassion, equanimity, non-judgment, non-reactivity, letting go, listening, self-compassion, patience, and trust are presented at constructs of mindfulness for educational leaders. These constructs are reviewed for their ability to inform leadership practice for educational leaders.

Our world is a new world, and it requires a new kind of leadership.
Boyatzis and McKee (2005, p. 1)

Leadership theory has largely been described by the behavioral or trait characteristics of leaders (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Northouse, 2013). These descriptions focus on the activities or the *doing* of the leaders where what often defines leaders is what they *have* or *do* (Fry & Kriger, 2009). Mindfulness departs from those approaches by suggesting a way of *being* as opposed to a way of *doing*.

The dimensions of mindfulness such as being fully present, aware, accepting, and non-judgmental embody this way of being. As opposed to emphasis on an act of *doing*, mindfulness

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allows for a sense of spaciousness that enacts patience, listening, and compassion, all qualities important for leaders. Although classic leadership theory defines leaders by traits, (Northouse, 2013) mindful leadership offers a description of presence, a subtlety of describing how leaders enact these traits by *ways of being*.

Boyatzis and McKee (2005) called for a different type of leadership, one that they refer to as resonant leadership, where leaders are mindful and emotionally intelligent, inspiring hope and offering compassion for all they serve and lead. By being in touch with the concerns and issues of the workers, the leaders demonstrate empathy and compassion (Goleman, 1998; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002).

A conceptual framework is helpful for understanding how educational leaders can respond to their current work demands, take care of themselves, and contribute to work environments where empathy, compassion and non-reactivity are present. The construct I am proposing is one of mindful leadership, one that integrates components of mindfulness with those of emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and resonant leadership, one that is informed by findings from neuroscience to suggest a different way of practicing leadership. I discuss these components or dimensions of mindfulness and their relationship to mindfulness below.

Four distinct yet related areas informs the conceptualization of mindfulness for educational leaders:

1. The stress levels of educational leaders apparent in the literature;
2. The literature of mindfulness that presents information about stress relief;
3. The development of using ‘constructs’ of mindfulness reviewed for their applicability to leadership strengths; and
4. Literature taken from emotional intelligence, social intelligence, resonant leadership, and neuroscience findings.

The assertion advanced is that *the practice of mindfulness may relieve stress and improve the practice of leadership*. Constructs of mindfulness as defined in this paper are applicable in advancing the practice of educational leadership. The literature from business informs our work as educational leaders and it yields alternatives that describe renewal as an antidote to the continual pressure and burnout reported by those leading schools and school districts; mindfulness is a practice that contributes to a cycle of renewal.

Stress and Educational Leaders

Leaders operate in organizations that present challenges and opportunities, with problems that are complex and without easy answers (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). The challenges for leaders are considerable with stress being a common denominator (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Despite the challenges caused by the stress of leading, leaders can successfully respond, suggesting that a crisis can be an opportunity for learning and growth (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Knowing how to respond to a crisis is a skill that can be cultivated. It is possible to develop emotional intelligence, restore relationships and be effective as a leader after difficult challenges or threats have emerged (McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008).

Educational leaders may benefit from learning methods of stress reduction and responses to crises as they encounter stress related to decreased budgets, and increased scrutiny for student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Johnson, 2004; Wells, 2013a;

2013b). Furthermore, the chief educational administrator also deals with the political realities of interacting with the public, school boards, and responsibility for the entire district (Crippen & Wallin, 2008; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Kowalski, 2006; Winter, Rinehart, Keely & Bjork, 2007). Realities of the work of principals reveal dramatically different job realities, with expectations for building management, instructional leadership, and expectations to resolve many of the problems that exist in the communities they serve (Kafka, 2009). As a result of these factors, principals and superintendents often report high levels of stress in their work (Johnson, 2004). Although superintendents feel a high percentage of stress there are few wellness programs to alleviate that stress (Hawk & Martin, 2011).

Building principals report increased levels of responsibilities and resulting stress in their work (Kafka, 2009; Louis et al., 2010). Building principals are engaged in myriad sources of conflict, in particular where demands for providing vision for student success occur amidst diminished revenues in the school (Grubb & Flessa, 2006). Often such conditions lead to school principal attrition (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Whitaker, 1996). Concerns for the attrition rate of principals are also impacted by the fact that teachers who are the usual pool of replacements for these roles have expressed little desire for the same (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005; Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009). With the rate of turnover in the field of principals, principals without experience are entering the field at greater numbers, without plans of sustainability for previous school improvement initiatives (Fink & Brayman, 2006).

School districts may also add to the level of stress for administrators with a culture that perpetuates anxiety and tension. As stated, schools with high expectations for performance and fewer resources contributes to the burnout and frustration that educational leaders feel (Sorenson, 2007). School principals in one Midwestern study reported personal stress as the highest stressor next to diminished resources, revealing high mean scores in “insufficient time to get the job done, constant interruptions, loss of personal time, keeping up with email communications, job expectations of the principal, and work-life balance” (Wells, Maxfield, & Klocko, 2011, p. 34). Finding ways to thrive is important to the emotional well being of a leader; mindfulness is listed as one means for thriving in a leadership capacity (Murphy, 2011).

Mindfulness and Stress Reduction

Mindfulness is a practice of meditation where the focus or attention is on the present moment. Meditators often focus on the breath without trying to analyze or control it; instead, they breathe naturally with a focused attention on the breath as it enters and leaves the body (Smalley & Winston, 2010). Kabat-Zinn (2003) offered, “An operational working definition of mindfulness is: “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (p.145). Boyatzis and McKee (2005) reported, “Mindfulness is the capacity to be fully aware of all that one experiences *inside the self-* body mind, heart, spirit- and to pay full attention to what is happening *around us-* people, that natural world, our surroundings and events” (p 113). McKee, et al., (2008) added, “People who deliberately practice mindfulness are consciously self-aware and self-monitoring; they are open and attentive to other people and to the world around them” (p. 45).

Mindfulness, through its approach to generating stillness, moment-to-moment awareness, and calm, centered breathing, contributes to decreased anxiety, blood pressure, depression, and

increased immunity, compassion, empathy, and non-reactivity- all symptoms of stress (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Fries, 2009; Garland, 2007; Greeson, 2008; Shapiro, Oman, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008). The results of studies show a relationship between how much people practice meditation with how mindful they become, resulting in positive increases in mental and physical health (Greeson). Mindfulness qualities benefit personal and professional lives. It is the benefits that are central to this paper, in particular, how the practice of mindfulness might contribute to the success and effectiveness of the educational leader, while also supporting the leader's personal life.

Mindfulness has roots in Buddhism, with practices that have existed for over 2,500 years; however, the particulars of paying attention on purpose is a universal principle, one that has continued to gain popularity in the west as a secular tradition (Kabat-Zinn, 2009). Mindfulness is widely reported in journals and press articles, with publications from neuroscientists, psychologists, psychiatrists, business analysts, and other professionals (Boyce, 2012; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Davidson & Begley, 2012; Davidson et al., 2012; Davidson & Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Garland & Gaylord, 2009; Greeson, 2008; Hölzel, Lazar, Gard, Schuman-Olivier, Vago, et al., 2011; Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006; Teasdale, Segal, & Williams, 2003); over 1,000 research articles about mindfulness have been published in peer-reviewed journals (Ryback, 2006).

Mindfulness has received media attention in the public domain and medical and scientific literature, and moved into mainstream Western culture in the past 30 years (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Mindfulness is being explored for its contributions on a personal and professional level, with large businesses offering training in mindfulness meditation. Businesses are also including mindfulness as part of their training within their organizations; selected corporations include: Target, Google, eBay, General Mills, Ford Motor Company, Facebook, Twitter, and Aetna International (Hunter, 2013). The advocacy in this paper is for educational leaders that would benefit from the training in and support for mindfulness, specific to the concerns that these school leaders experience, as do professionals in other occupations.

Integrating Mindfulness Constructs with Educational Leadership

The conceptualization for mindfulness for educational leaders is drawn from the integration of the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) with emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2000); social intelligence (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008); resonant leadership (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005); and neuroscience (Davidson, 2012). The foundation for this conceptualization begins with Kabat-Zinn's attitudinal foundation of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is a form of meditation in which the intention is to focus on the present moment, without judgment, on purpose (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Kabat-Zinn presented attitudinal foundations for mindfulness that include: awareness, being fully present in the moment, compassion, equanimity, non-reactivity (responding), non-judgment, letting go, listening, patience, self-compassion, and trust. The attitudinal foundations relate directly to qualities that are present in descriptions of effective leaders (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman, 2000; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). The attitudinal foundations of mindfulness are concepts; Dooley (1995) defined concepts as "abstract aspects of reality... concepts, especially complex inferred ones such as empathy often go by the name of construct" (p. 61). I chose the term *construct* to articulate how the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness were as Dooly reported "mental constructions" (p. 61). These mental constructions describe the

various forms of practice that school leaders engage in as they interact with members of the school community. Dooley further reported, “Concepts, constructs, and theoretical variables all refer to abstract, unmeasured aspect of people, events, or things, which we envision in our mind’s eye” (p. 61). Hence, the term construct provided a rich foundation for the conceptualization of mindfulness for educational leaders.

The background for the integration of mindfulness constructs with emotional and social intelligence, and resonant leadership is taken from (a) the research on the stress levels of educational leaders (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cooley & Shen, 2003; Griffith, 1999; Glass & Franceshini, 2007; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Hawk & Martin, 2011; Petzko, 2008; Pounder & Merrill, 2001) as reported in this paper; (b) the reports that I have heard from 20 years of teaching educational leadership courses at the university level; (c) the formal and informal discussions of educational leaders at professional gatherings; and (d) my own 15 years of experience as a high school administrator, five as high school assistant principal, and ten as high school principal, one of which I was assigned to two high schools.

I am informed by teaching concepts of mindfulness to the aspiring and practicing leaders, the graduate students in educational leadership courses, and to the doctoral and medical students at the university where I work. The graduate students in my classes often relate the level of change that occurs because of the practice of mindfulness in their personal and professional effectiveness; some of these students are also reporting how the practice of mindfulness is changing their classrooms as they teach some of the concepts to their students.

Conceptualizing mindfulness for educational leaders includes utilizing the various elements of mindfulness practice and applying them in the school or school district. These characteristics are cultivated with the practice of mindfulness meditation, whether in formal sitting practice, or in mindful moments throughout the day as educational leaders take ordinary moments and pushing what is often referred to as a ‘pause button’ to stop and observe, without analysis or judgment, or in a longer practice, anywhere from a few minutes to longer, sitting meditations of 20, 30 minutes or longer.

The constructs of mindfulness relate to the practice of leadership. These constructs are cultivated through mindfulness practice. As mindfulness constructs are practiced and present in leaders, the emphasis is on a *way of being* or *presence*. This presence is associated with the reduction of stress, important for leaders that are striving to cope or thrive in their leadership roles. Mindfulness may enhance the effectiveness of leaders with the cultivation of important traits associated with social and emotional intelligence. In this sense it is the *practice of mindfulness* that may contribute to the *practice of effective leadership* in substantive ways.

Table 1
Leadership Actions that Relate to Mindfulness Constructs

Leadership Actions	Relation to Mindfulness Constructs
Creating Vision	Awareness, being fully present, patience, listening, trust, equanimity, letting go, non-striving, non-judgment, non-reactivity
Building Culture	Listening, non-judgment, trust, equanimity, awareness, compassion, self-compassion, patience, letting go
Communicating	Listening, awareness, non-judgment, patience, equanimity, compassion, self-compassion, trust, letting go, non-reactivity
Influencing	Awareness, compassion, non-judgment, acceptance, non-reactivity, patience, trust
Getting buy-in	Patience, awareness, non-judgment, listening, trust, equanimity, compassion
Modeling the change	Being fully present, listening, awareness, equanimity, letting go, non-reactivity, self-compassion
Reculturing the organization	Patience, awareness, being fully present, equanimity, trust, non-reactivity, listening
Building collaboration	Being fully present, non-judgment, compassion, trust, listening, letting go
Building capacity within the organization	Compassion, non-judgment, listening, being fully present, patience, acceptance
Developing common goals	Patience, awareness, listening, being fully present, letting go, beginner's mind
Resolving problems, conflict	Patience, listening, being fully present, awareness, compassion, non-judgment, letting go
Evaluating performance	Awareness, patience, trust, listening, compassion, letting go, non-reactivity
Encouraging transformation	Patience, listening, trust, compassion, awareness, equanimity, being fully present
Recognizing others	Awareness, compassion, listening, being fully present, letting go, patience
Inspiring others	Patience, listening, compassion, equanimity, trust, self-compassion, being fully present, non-reactivity
Serving others	Compassion, awareness, trust, self-compassion, listening, non-reactivity, patience, equanimity, letting go

Educational leaders engage in what is referred to as role overload with numerous and competing demands for their time (Catano & Stronge, 2006). Although the actions listed in Table 1 are not indicative of every leadership action involving school leaders, it serves as a compilation of some of the important leadership characteristics and actions represented in leadership references (Bolman & Deal, 2014; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Fullan, 2001; Goleman, 2000; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2010; Lynch, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Northouse, 2013; Wagner et al., 2009).

As the constructs of mindfulness are practiced in the workplace, the leaders emulate characteristics that are associated with social and emotional intelligence. These characteristics become part of the experience that people in the workplace witness. The emphasis of experience

may serve to be dramatic to the culture of the organization. Kotter and Cohen (2002) reviewed the importance of the change that occurred as a result of an experience as opposed to persuasion through analysis or logic. In this sense, it is the experience that is important to developing a change in behavior. Leaders may try to influence the behaviors of people in the organization by exercising authority or persuasion, something that would be categorized as a *way of doing*. With mindfulness, the experiential elements of practice may provide a path that leads to a different *way of being* as leaders begin to demonstrate being fully present, listening to hear what is being said as opposed to thinking of a reply, accepting a situation for the reality of it, being non-judgmental, feeling compassion for the other person or self-compassion for one's own errors, being patient, and letting go of thoughts and feelings from the past. In this way, it is the *practice* of mindfulness that can cause subtle and dramatic changes in the way that leaders present with others in the organization.

People who witness these qualities may more readily accept the leader who emulates social and emotional intelligence, as demonstrated in the enactment of mindfulness constructs. As the people in the organization witness this way of being, or presence from the leader, they become part of the experience as well. The mindfulness presence may provide important insights into the change processes that schools are trying to enact with *ways of being* ultimately being more conducive to educational change than other methods that may use mandates or strong persuasion.

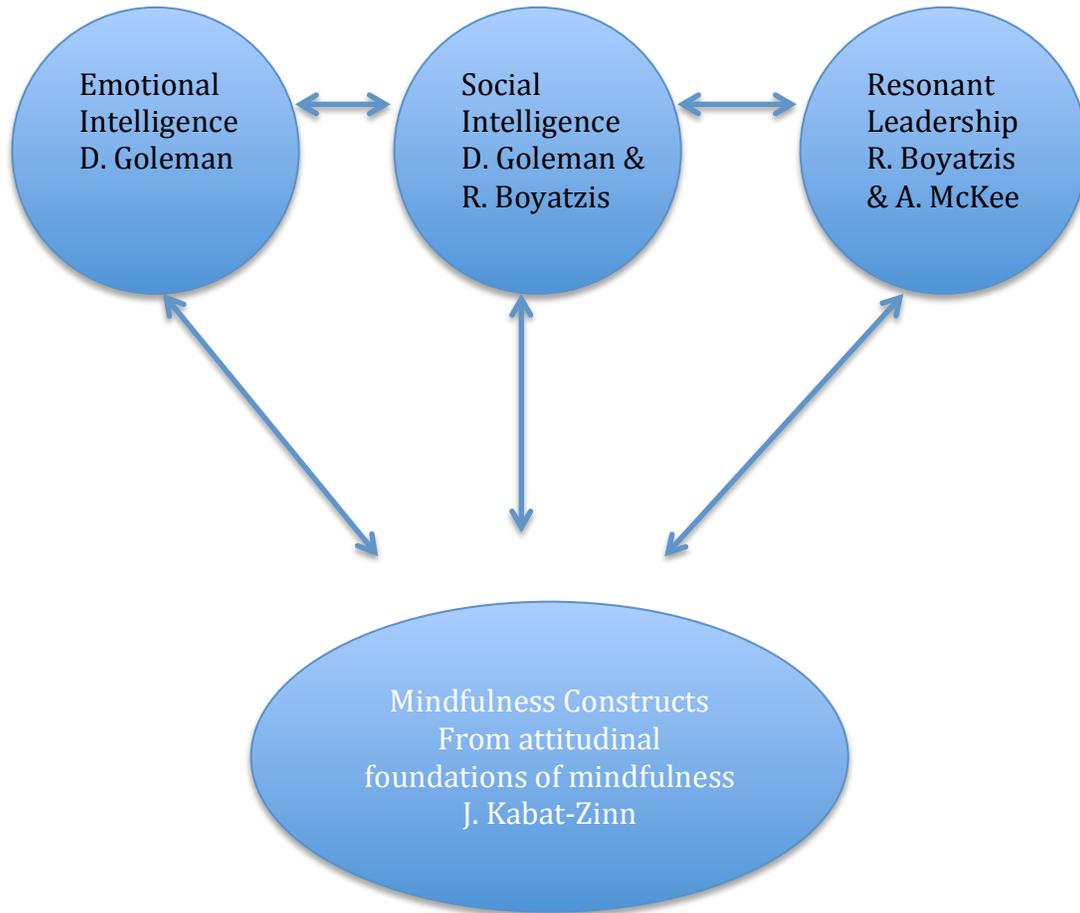
Mindfulness has conceptual and experiential elements, both important for understanding how its practice may inform the actual practice of leading. Just as the conceptual and theoretical elements of mindfulness inform the experiential elements of practice, the experiential elements inform the conceptual literature and give us additional insights as to how actual experiences are an application of the literature.

Table 2
Constructs of Mindfulness as Informed by Conceptual and Experiential Factors

Mindful Leadership	
Qualities	Informed By
<p style="text-align: center;">Personal</p> Acceptance, awareness, being fully present, compassion and self-compassion, empathy, letting go, listening, non-judgment, non-reactivity, patience, trust	<p style="text-align: center;">Conceptual</p> Research-based, theory, models, literature
<p style="text-align: center;">Professional</p> Acceptance, awareness, being fully present, compassion and self-compassion, empathy, letting go, listening, non-judgment, non-reactivity, patience, trust	<p style="text-align: center;">Experiential</p> Practice; being with; meditating, time in stillness

The concepts depicting mindful leadership are represented in the following Figure 1:

Figure 1 Conceptualization of Mindfulness for Educational Leaders



Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence relates to personal, professional, and political arenas of leaders, with personal and social competencies that include self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 2000). These competencies are qualities that influence an organization by their affiliation with people (Goleman). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) wrote, “One of the distinguishing qualities of successful people who lead in any field is the emphasis they place on personal relationships” (p. 75). Heifetz and Linsky viewed personal relationships as a key variable in the ability to act politically in any organization. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) related that relationship management included “inspirational leadership, influence, developing others, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, and teamwork and collaboration” as the factors that matter (p.29). Emotional intelligence was found to account for 85 to 90 percent of the difference in the success of superior leaders from that of those reviewed as average, in the compilation of over 500 competence models from companies in the United States and international sites (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). In short, it was emotional intelligence over IQ that mattered in the success of the leader, being increasingly more important as the highest levels of the organization, where the technical skills are diminished. School

administrators often derail on the job because of problems with social connections as opposed to technical competence (Seyfarth, 2005).

Table 3

Competencies of Emotional Intelligence that are Aligned with Mindfulness

Competencies of Emotional Intelligence	Qualities of Mindfulness that serve all competencies of Emotional Intelligence
Self-awareness- Awareness of emotions and their effect on others; self-confidence Self-management- Flexibility, emotional self control, optimism, achievement, initiative, transparency, and achievement Social Awareness- Empathy, service, organizational awareness Relationship Management- Inspiring and developing others; resolving disputes, influencing, creating shared vision and energy, team building, and bolstering change	Being in present moment for all that arrives at the door Mindful awareness; listen in stillness Observing and listening Listening without judgment Patience and trust Compassion and self-compassion Acceptance Non-reactivity

Source: Table created from Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002), *Primal leadership: Realizing the power of emotional intelligence*

Social Intelligence

The elements of social intelligence are closely related to mindfulness and mindful leadership in a variety of means. Social intelligence underscores and embodies the importance of the soft skills that relate to the human connection, concepts such as empathy and collaboration (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). Table 4 represents the elements inherent in social intelligence that relate to mindfulness.

Table 4
Social Intelligence and its Relation to Mindfulness

Social Intelligence	Relation to Mindful Leadership
Empathy- sensitivity to others and their needs	Empathy is central to mindfulness, where a focus is on compassionate understanding
Attunement- Listening to others with attention and thinking about how they feel	Attunement is aligned with the empathic listening to others
Organizational Awareness- An appreciation of the values and cultures of the organization	Meditation practice involves the observation of the present moment, something invaluable to understanding and being aware of the organization
Influence- The ability to persuade others by including them in important discussions and connecting to their interests	Mindfulness presents an influence for others because of its practice in listening and compassion, traits that can be demonstrated in an organizational setting
Developing others- The coaching and mentoring of others with compassion	Compassion and nonjudgment are central to mindfulness
Inspiration- Articulating a shared vision that builds cohesion and energy	Although not directly emphasized, the traits of mindfulness such as compassion, empathy, and nonjudgment contribute to traits that may inspire others
Teamwork- Engaging input from all people in the organization	Mindfulness practice engages others because of the devotion to listening and nonjudgment while being aware and attentive to the present moment.

Source: Table created from Goleman and Boyatzis, (2008) pp. 78-79.

Resonant Leadership

The new leadership called for by Boyatzis and McKee (2005) is one they refer to as resonant leadership, where leaders are inspirational, creating hope in the organization, being open and compassionate with the workers, and mindful where the leader is acting authentically, in touch with self and others. The resonant leader displays emotional intelligence, able to be self-aware and self-manage (Goleman, 2000). The resonant leader also displays social competence and social awareness that includes empathy, organizational awareness, and service (Boyatzis & McKee).

Problems within the world of work often result in a cascade of issues or challenges. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) referred to some of the challenges that leaders face, describing a form of dissonance known as the sacrifice syndrome to explain what occurs when leaders are deeply impacted by stress and not engaged in a cycle of renewal. In the sacrifice syndrome, leaders are engaged in stress and sacrifice, leading to diminished effectiveness at work. Leaders engaged in turmoil on the job, dealing with constant pressures, with exhaustion or burnout might result in the loss of resonance with the people they are leading. Boyatzis and McKee pointed to

mindfulness, hope, and compassion as solutions for leaders who are dealing with the sacrifice syndrome. Thus, mindfulness is important for its ability to renew as well as focus on the present moment. Renewal is important for leaders to be able to stay the course of leading while learning how to maintain effectiveness as a leader.

Boyatzis and McKee (2005) related four concepts that are evident in resonant leaders, to be asked as questions, depicted below in Table 5:

Table 5
Elements of Resonant Leadership and the Relation to Mindfulness Constructs

Does the leader have, or is the leader...	Relation to Mindfulness Constructs
Inspirational	Awareness, letting go, listening, non-reactivity, non-judgment, trust
Positive emotional tone	Patience, non-judgment, non-reactivity, letting go, listening, compassion, patience
Compassion	Compassion, self-compassion, non-judgment, being fully present, listening, equanimity, patience, trust
Mindful- aware of the environment, in tune with self or others	Awareness, being fully present, equanimity, non-reactivity, non-judgment, patience, trust, compassion, self-compassion

Source: Table created from Boyatzis and McKee (2005), *Resonant leadership*, p.22

Educational leaders that deal with continual crises, threats, and problems and adversity may slip into the challenging position of the sacrifice syndrome. By working with mindfulness, and offering hope and compassion, they may find way to renew. It is through renewal that these leaders may experience sources of resiliency where they can thrive as opposed to just coping or enduring what is happening (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Renewal can be learned by practicing the mindfulness constructs; educational leaders can begin by paying close attention to self and others, as opposed to default mechanisms of blaming, denying, or projecting, methods that often make the situations worse (Boyatzis & McKee).

Resonant leadership was chosen as a key element of the conceptualization of mindfulness for educational leaders. Resonant leadership is aligned with the constructs of mindfulness, presents help for these leaders to improve the practice of leading, and offers assistance for them to renew their practice. By renewing practice, the hope is that school leaders will opt to stay in the profession they have chosen and thrive, instead of leaving it or just coping day to day.

Neuroscience

The research reported by neuroscientists provides important evidence in understanding how mindfulness meditation practice is correlated with positive changes in the brain, changes that include deeper awareness, positive outlooks, neuroplasticity, and resilience (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Davidson, Jackson & Kalin, 2000; Paulson, Davidson, Jha, & Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Siegel, 2010). Contemplative practice such as mindfulness is correlated with promoting wellness, paying attention, regulating emotion, and reducing a variety of medical symptoms (Davidson, et al., 2012). The research on mindfulness has recently focused on emotion and how mindfulness contributes to emotional processes (Davidson, 2010). Davidson (2013) reported that it was mindfulness that contributed to resilience because of the continual focus on the present, watching

thoughts and feelings, without getting caught in the trajectory of the storyline or perseveration of adverse thoughts; as this occurs, there is a faster recovery of the emotional state (Paulson, et al.).

References to emotions, or listening, responding, and *being with*, were at one time referred to as soft sciences; these concepts are now gaining traction as evidence points to their effectiveness in the workplace (Goleman, 2013). Goleman (2000) advocated for the “hard case for soft skills” referring to the importance of emotional intelligence in the work environment (p. 30). Reiss (2010), a Harvard physician offered, “The study of empathy is no longer a ‘soft science,’ but is increasingly grounded in empirical data” (p.1604). Mindfulness includes the development of empathy and compassion while being fully present in the moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2005; McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008).

It is these concepts that offer possibilities for educational leaders who may be able to reduce their levels of stress while building the elements of the ‘soft skills’ that mindfulness promotes. And in doing so, it is important to note that these leaders may also be contributing to resilience, which may result in their interest to remain in the profession as opposed to leaving it.

How Mindful School Leaders Respond While Leading

Leaders are action-oriented and their influence matters a great deal to the effectiveness of an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Fullan, 2001; Goleman, 2000; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2010; Lynch, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Northouse, 2013; Wagner et al., 2009) so it is a valid question to ponder as to how a way of *being* would contribute to the effectiveness of a school leader. If school leaders practice leading mindfully, how do they present themselves differently from ones that would be engaged in a more traditional form of *doing*?

Mindful leadership is cultivated from the practice of mindfulness meditation, with awareness of the moment, without criticism or judgment. Mindful leadership for school leaders includes traits of compassion, empathy, and trust within the school and school district. It is these qualities that relate to providing leadership by responding with *presence* with fully attending and responding to the concerns that surface. The differences of mindful leadership may appear subtle at first, but they provide a powerful mosaic that may influence a school organization, all enhanced by elements of emotional and social intelligence.

Mindful school leaders learn to cultivate awareness by focusing on the present moment and observing the current reality within the organization. As such, mindful school leaders see the landscape of the reality, not just the focus on the most positive information or emotions. These leaders face negative, stressful situations in the school. All encounters in the school provide opportunity for learning and growth. Mindful leadership for school leaders includes a realistic check of all that is happening within the school or school district. Continual observation is key to the success of a leader, in particular with noticing his/her leadership in relation to the organization (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2001). As such, it means not turning away from negative experience to only be aware of the positive ones. Instead, mindfulness would suggest the opposite: *facing into* the conflict for understanding, insight, and a different type of power—that of *being*. There is power in the dramatic ways that leading with presence and mindfulness yields- the power is in influence as opposed to directing or delegating. Too often, leaders make the problems they are encountering worse, by denying them, ruminating in thoughts of shame or anger, and feeling trapped (Germer, 2009; Murphy, 2011). The results of these emotions can have serious consequences for physical and mental health, with increased blood pressure,

depression, anxiety, or burnout (Bezold, 2006; Davis, Eshelman, & McKay, 2000; Minter, 1991; Murphy; Overholser, & Fisher, 2009; Stahl & Goldstein, 2010; Stanton, Balzar, Smith, Parra, & Ironson, 2001; Sorenson, 2007).

Instead, mindfulness qualities may result in a way *of being* that relieves conflict and angst for school leaders. The mindfulness constructs in this paper are suggested for their applicability to complex, conflict situations in which school administrators often find themselves. The mindful leadership constructs are presented in the context of leading in an organization with examples of how the practice of mindfulness meditation informs leadership practice. As conceptualized in this paper:

Mindfulness for educational leaders serves the leader and the people in the schools through the practice of being fully present, with qualities of emotional and social intelligence such as listening, not judging self or others, while having compassion for self and others in the organization, constructs that are developed in mindfulness meditation.

Figure 2 depicts the attributes of mindful leaders, reflecting the various emphases on empathy and attention. Mindful leaders demonstrate high empathy and attention, resulting in actions that are engaged and interested in people in the organization. In contrast, the opposite would be leaders who demonstrate low empathy and attention, resulting in being disregarding and disengaged. Leaders who demonstrate high empathy and low attention appear caring but preoccupied or distracted. Leaders who demonstrate low empathy and high attention appear observing and detached to the people in the workplace.

Figure 2. Continuum of Attention and Empathy Traits in Leaders

High Empathy/Low Attention

High Empathy/High Attention

	Mindful Leaders
Caring and Preoccupied- Distracted	Engaged and Interested- Mindful Awareness
Disregarding and Disengaged	Observing and Detached

Mindful leadership, in this depiction is both a state and a trait. Smalley and Winston (2010) offered, "... that mindfulness is an inherent trait influenced by genes, biology, and experience" (p. 6). A state would refer to the ability to change one's reaction to events; there are changes in perspective as well as physiological states that may occur with mindfulness practice (Smalley & Winston).

Becoming a Mindful School Leader

Previous descriptions of educational leaders often portrayed them as actively doing and producing; mindfulness constructs result in a different type of spacious presence, where these leaders may present as people who pause, listen, and attentively observe what is happening in the school or school district. As the leaders enact these qualities, this different type of experience may result in a different type of influence, one of presence, listening, observing, and attending by being fully present in the moment, as portrayed in the Table 6:

Table 6
Descriptions of Leadership in Contrast with Mindful Leadership

Previous Descriptions of Leadership	Mindful Leadership
Striving	Letting go- not grasping or ‘hanging on’ to things that no longer serve you or others; letting go of past judgments
Doing	Being- being fully with what is at hand to understand
Talking	Listening- to hear as opposed to interrupt, or argue one’s point of view
Making Things Happen	Accepting reality- for what it is, and then making the decision of what would happen next
Clutter	Spaciousness- of mind as well as material objects
Judging	Compassionate Understanding – of self and others
Telling	Hearing- as the foundation for knowing
Multitasking	Single tasking- giving undivided attention to what is at hand
Distracted thinking about ‘to-do’ list	Being in the moment- without being preoccupied
Directing	Accepting- for the foundation of responding
Busyness	Stillness- to be able to patiently be quiet to observe, notice, and attend
Distracted Preoccupation	Attentive awareness- using the senses to fully observe

Mindful leadership offers hope for educational leaders, as a source of renewal for the stress in their lives, and as a way of *being* as a resonant leader, one that may offer hope and inspiration for the people in the school system. *It is the practice of mindfulness that informs the practice of leading.* Mindful leadership is the practice of being fully present in the moment for all that comes to the door of the leader. It involves the practice of being still, observing, not judging self or others, and having compassion for self and others. Mindful leadership is more about a way of being as opposed to a way of doing, although it is the way of being that sets up the conditions for effective leadership practice of creating vision, influencing others, building relationships, communicating, building capacity among the people in the organization, reculturing the workplace by modeling behavior, and building a harmonious and productive culture, all important functions of leadership (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman, 2000; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Resonant leaders, by their presence, build the capacity for others to follow (Boyatzis & McKee).

Mindfulness does not equate with the absence of problems; instead, it is the deliberate facing of everything that is brought to the door of human experience. Mindfulness, because of

giving attention to the present moment provides resources for the challenges of observing what is happening in the present moment. It is stillness and quiet that may assist in learning how to observe. Mindfulness may also nurture and add to a sense of inner calm and peace, important principles for educational leaders who may otherwise decide to leave the profession because of unrelenting pressures and stress.

Mindful leadership also contributes a way to deal with the pressures that are seen as threats and dangers. Without a balance of compassion, people can lose control of their ability to focus on improvement and instead be involved with non-productive blaming, avoidance, or withdrawal (Gilbert, 2009). Leaders spend much of their time thinking about their struggles, many trying to avoid or eliminate them (Weinzimmer & McConoughey, 2013). Mindfulness for school leaders offers a different approach, a sense of calm in the middle of the storm.

How Mindfulness Relates to the Cultivation of Leadership Traits

The constructs of mindfulness relate to the practice of leadership. These constructs are cultivated through mindfulness practice. As mindfulness constructs are practiced and present in leaders, the emphasis is on a *way of being or presence*. This presence is associated with the reduction of stress, important for leaders that want to thrive in their leadership roles. Table 7 includes each construct and how it is cultivated through mindfulness.

Table 7
Mindfulness Constructs and the Explanation of how Cultivated Through Mindfulness

Construct Defined	How mindfulness cultivates this construct
Being fully present- being fully with people for what is happening as it is happening; paying attention on purpose	Mindfulness prompts are for the continual awareness of what is occurring, with emphasis on observing, being with
Compassion- often referred to as “empathy in action” (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005)	Mindfulness prompts are for non-judgment and non-criticism
Equanimity- the acceptance of what is as opposed to denying what is happening	Mindfulness teaches to focus on the present moment, being alert to all that is present, good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant
Letting to- allowing thoughts that interfere with, distract, or cause rumination to be released (Kabat-Zinn, 2009)	Mindfulness teaches to focus on the present moment, watching distracting thoughts instead of developing a storyline about them; as thoughts come and go, the person is an observer, in the practice of letting the thoughts arise and depart
Listening- the practice of hearing what is being said; listening to hear as opposed to interrupt or state another point of view	Mindfulness prompts repeatedly ask to listen and observe, over and over, in stillness; the quiet observation allows for a deeper listening, without analysis
Non-judgment- the practice of choosing to withhold judgment; not being critical of another person or that person’s ideas	Mindfulness continually reinforces observing and responding without judgment or criticism
Non-reactivity- the practice of responding to thoughts, ideas, and current reality through observation and attention without reacting to it	Mindfulness reinforces the concept of responding to events and ideas as opposed to reacting to them or judging them
Patience- using a type of wisdom that lets things unfold without trying to hold on to, change, or control them (Kabat-Zinn, 2009)	Mindfulness, through its slow and deliberate sitting in silence reinforces patience in observing and listening
Self-Compassion- using self-kindness instead of	Mindfulness continually reinforces non-judgment

self-reproach, seeing the common human conditions that unite people, and being an observer of one's problems as opposed to overidentifying with them (Germer & Neff, 2013)	and non-criticism of self and others; it also trains people to observe thoughts and actions as opposed to analyzing or developing a storyline to what is being observed
Trust- refers to the trust one may develop in one's own abilities (Kabat-Zinn, 2009)	Mindfulness allows for the non-judgment of one's own errors or problems, deliberately choosing to observe without the harsh self-criticism that may otherwise exist

Mindfulness may enhance the effectiveness of leaders with the cultivation of important traits associated with social and emotional intelligence. In this sense it is the *practice of mindfulness* that may contribute to the *practice of effective leadership* in substantive ways.

Meditation is a practice, one that takes time to cultivate. The good news for busy leaders is that in as little as ten minutes a day for a period of eight weeks can result in changes that can be observed in functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), (Kabat-Zinn, 2009). The practice of mindfulness meditation can be useful in a both a personal and professional sense; the principles that contribute to mindful leadership, such as listening, responding, equanimity, compassion, and self-compassion serve in personal and professional relationships.

The principles of mindful leadership are interrelated. Listening is foundational to the cultivation of compassion (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Leaders, who listen to hear what is being conveyed, instead of thinking of their own response, or listen without being distracted or judgmental, are able to take the time that is needed to respond, as opposed to reacting. Leaders who accept what is currently in front of them without denying the reality or blaming are better able to respond to the situation at hand. And, when leaders develop self-compassion, they are able to project compassion and act upon it for others furthering the development of relationships (Gilbert, 2009).

Mindfulness provides opportunities for educational leaders to grow in resilience, emotional regulation, and gaining accurate perspectives (Hölzel, et al., 2011). Mindful leadership includes a sense of attention, intention to be present, with hope and compassion, (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005) all areas that contribute to the effectiveness of school leaders. When stressful situations occur, superintendents and building principals can observe, listen, attend to, and respond with compassion. And when the educational leaders misstep, miscalculate, misspeak, falter, fail, derail, or plunge into despair, self-compassion allows for a nourishing reflection with hope for clarity and a practice of mindful difference. The non-judgmental reflection after a problem may provide a strong foundation for effective leadership, growth, change, and resilience. Table 8 presents the qualities of mindful leadership.

Table 8
Qualities of Mindful Leadership

MINDFUL LEADERSHIP IS:		
Instead of	Mindful Leadership Approaches	Instead of acting
Refusing to accept reality	← A c c e p t a n c e →	Blaming others
Preoccupied or distracted	← A w a r e n e s s →	Observing with intention
Regretting the past	← B e i n g F u l l y P r e s e n t →	Worrying about tomorrow
Not caring or listening to someone in need	← C o m p a s s i o n →	Judging + criticism
Not caring enough to be interested	← L e t t i n g G o →	Holding on
Disregarding	← L i s t e n i n g →	Thinking of your reaction + what you will reply
Not observing or being aware of a situation not on the ‘radar screen’	← P a t i e n c e →	Interrupting
Denying; avoiding	← R e s p o n d i n g →	Angry outburst; reacting
Disbelief; disregard	← T r u s t →	Believing in self; Caring for others

As educational leaders consider paths that may increase their effectiveness while reducing the stress they feel, mindfulness may offer a practice that offers both. Ultimately it is a passionate commitment to stress reduction and leadership effectiveness that fuels the advancement of mindfulness for educational leaders. It is with this belief that I teach mindful leadership to the graduate students in educational leadership classes. School principals, superintendents, and teacher leaders provide inspiration and hope for their colleagues and students. Mindfulness offers possibilities to renew optimism, trust in oneself to complete the job of leading, and a compassionate view of education that encourages solutions for the challenges that are present in schools across the nation. Mindfulness also offers a sense of renewal for school leaders. And, it is just possible that while reducing stress and improving leadership, mindfulness may help school leaders stay in the profession rather than become part of the statistic of health leaves, early retirements, burnout, or requests for job changes.

Physicians Ronald Epstein and Michael Krasner (2013) have developed comprehensive programs for their colleagues by teaching a curriculum of mindfulness, designed to help physicians stay the course with regard to developing resilience, or the ability to ‘bounce back’ after setbacks, problems, or burnout. Programs in mindfulness for physicians have demonstrated reductions in stress, increases in resilience, and the quality of patient care (Epstein & Krasner; Krasner, et al., 2009). The advocacy in this paper is one for effective programs in mindfulness for educational leaders to assist them in learning how to control stress, learn effective qualities of presence to effectively deal with issues in the schools, influence a culture of emotional and social intelligence, and to learn resilience to bounce back after challenging or distressing issues. Mindfulness offers these possibilities for educational leaders.

Students in my educational leadership classes report that mindful practice is reducing their stress load and increasing effectiveness at work. Some report that they are presenting the practice of mindfulness to their students who ask for more stillness in their classrooms. I look forward to the next level of research to review how mindful leadership will continue to evolve as a practice; be received in the culture of the school; taught in educational leadership programs; and measured for its efficacy in stress reduction, resilience, and leadership effectiveness. I look forward to the perceptions of superintendents, principals, teachers, and students who practice mindfulness within the school district, schools, and classrooms.

There is a metaphor about sailing that applies to the work of educational leaders. It has been said that there is only one condition that is impossible for sailing and that is to have no wind at all; sailors sail in extremes of weather, adjusting the sails to accommodate rough seas. And so it is for educational leaders that adjust their sails in white water conditions. What I have learned from the work of mindfulness, my own experience and that of others is this: ***There will be storms. Storms are OK- they give you a chance to use your anchor.*** Hopefully, the positions advanced in this paper, that elements of mindfulness, emotional and social intelligence, supported and strengthened by resonant leadership are the anchors that support and sustain educational leaders. Life unfolds in the schools as it does in life, moment by moment. May we be fully present to witness and know it.

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Closing the Achievement Gap Means Transformation

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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Educating students in public schools has never been at a higher priority. As our nation enters the informational-based economy public schools are going to be required to educate far more students at a higher and more rigorous level. As Schlechty (2005) argues, this is something that public schools were never designed to do. Data from Economic Policy Institute indicates that the earning potential of high school dropouts has dropped significantly since 1970. Individuals with advanced degrees earned twice as much as high school dropouts in 1970. Today that earning gap has increased to individuals with advanced degrees earning three times as much as high school dropouts (William, 2011). Data indicate that policy reform efforts at the federal level can make a difference. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), federal policies enacted in the 1970s had a positive impact on student achievement.

These investments began to pay off in measurable ways. By the mid-1970s urban schools spent as much as suburban schools and paid their teachers as well; perennial teacher shortages had nearly ended; and gaps in educational attainment had closed substantially. Federally funded curriculum investments transformed teaching in many schools. Innovative schools flourished, especially in cities. Improvements in educational achievement for students of color followed. In reading, large gains in Black students' performance throughout the 1970s and early 1980s reduced the achievement considerably, cutting it nearly in half in just 15 years...However, this optimistic view of equal and expanding educational opportunity, along with the gains from the "Great Society" programs, was later pushed back. Most targeted federal programs supporting investments in college access and K-12 schools in urban and poor rural areas were reduced or eliminated during the Reagan administration in the 1980s. (p. 18)

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Boykin and Noguera (2011) asserted in today's society White students have access to superior programs both at school and outside of the educational setting. In addition to the racial divide, the effects of children living in poverty continue to create challenges for public schools. Edmonds (1979) was one of the first researchers to emphasize this point in his *Effective School* research.

Inequity in American education derives first and foremost from our failure to educate the children of the poor. *Education* in this context refers to early acquisition of those basic school skills that assure pupils successful access to the next level of schooling. If that seems too modest of a standard, note that as of now the schools that teach the children of the poor are dismal failures even by such a modest standard. (p. 15)

Kirp (2013) reported how these statistics have recently increased. Using data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) he showed that between 2007 and 2011 students living in poverty increased from 17% to 21%. "Add in the near-poor, those barely scraping by, and that figure nearly doubles. For Black and Hispanic youth, poverty is a double whammy" (Kirp, 2013 p.6). Given this background, the study addressed in the paper sought to analyze the quality of academic programming that was available to White students as compared to students of color and offerings available to low income students versus non low-income students. According to Marzano (2003) this exposure to high quality programming has the largest impact on student achievement.

Inspired by theories of educational equity, the study discussed henceforth sought to explore the problem that not all students in Illinois public schools are achieving at high levels. In doing so, secondary data from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) was used to assess the differences between students who have completed Advanced Placement (AP) courses and those who have not in traditional Illinois public high schools. Specifically, the researcher examined the course placement and standardized test score performance of students across the state of Illinois.

The data set included information on 145,560 Illinois high school students eligible to complete the ACT during the 2012-2013 school year. Alongside participation in AP courses, students' socioeconomic status and race were considered in analyzing the data. Among students included in the data set 80,939 (56%) were identified as White; 29,437 (20%) were identified as Latino; 24,953 (17%) were Black; 6,302 (4%) were identified as Asian; 3,426 (2%) were identified as Two or More Races; 377 (less than 1%) were identified as American Indian; and 123 (less than 1%) were identified as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Island. Among all students included in the sample 87,223 (60%) did not participate in the National School Lunch Program and 58,337 (40%) participated in the National School Lunch Program. Participation in the National School Lunch Program was used to define low-income status for the purposes of the study. As intended, the findings may contribute to the closing of achievement gaps identified by socioeconomic status and race, and potentially lead to increased high school graduation and college enrollment rates. Accordingly, the results are of practical significance to researchers and practitioners interested in pursuing achievement equity in public education.

Pursuing Achievement Equity

Achievement equity is not currently a reality in American public schooling. This problem is perhaps most visible as a result of achievement disparities across racial and socioeconomic backgrounds (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Howard, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Muhammad, 2009; Wagner, 2008). For example, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a congressionally mandated measure of student achievement that has been administered by the National Center for Educational Statistics since 1969, indicated striking gaps in academic achievement between Black and Latino students and their White counterparts. A gap is similarly witnessed between students, regardless of race, who come from low-income backgrounds and their peers who come from middle-class or affluent backgrounds (Howard, 2010).

The abundance of data indicating achievement disparities across racial and socioeconomic backgrounds presents a problem that has not gone unrecognized in contemporary education. In fact, over the past few decades, discrepancies in educational outcomes between various student groups have compelled schools to provide greater attention to the educational needs of poor and disadvantaged children; students with learning disabilities; recent immigrants and English language learners; and African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and other students of color (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Many of the recent school reform measures have been initiated in response to what is commonly referred to as the “achievement gap.”

Making achievement equity a reality for all children, however, will require far more than transactional reform efforts. To illustrate this concern, consider the academic performance of the students of Illinois on the 2013 ACT, a curriculum- and standards-based educational and career planning tool that assesses students' academic readiness for college. The ACT is administered in all 50 states and accepted by all four-year colleges and universities in the United States. This assessment, which is taken by more than 1.6 million high school students every year, consists of four multiple-choice tests: English, mathematics, reading, and science (ACT, 2013).

Fewer than one quarter of the Illinois students who completed the ACT in 2013 did so having participated the most rigorous coursework available to them at their respective high schools. The students who did participate in Advanced Placement courses, however, scored significantly better on the ACT than those who did not. Advanced Placement, or AP, courses are accelerated courses created by the College Board to offer college-level curriculum and examinations to high school students. These courses are audited by and receive the AP designation from the College Board.

Using a cross-sectional survey design, the study used secondary data from the Illinois State Board of Education indicating high school students' socioeconomic status, race, placement in AP courses, and ACT scores to answer five research questions that reflected a general understanding of tracking policies and practices as currently employed in American public schools. Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the differences in ACT scores between students who completed at least one AP (English, mathematics, science, and/or social studies) course and those who did not?
2. What are the differences in ACT scores between (a) Black students and White students who completed at least one AP (English, mathematics, science, and/or social studies) course when income is accounted for, (b) Latino students and White students who completed at least one AP (English, mathematics, science, and/or social studies)

course when income is accounted for, and (c) Black and Latino students who completed at least one AP (English, mathematics, science, and/or social studies) course when income is accounted for?

3. What are the differences in ACT scores between (a) Black students who completed at least one AP (English, mathematics, science, and/or social studies) course and those who did not, (b) Latino students who completed at least one AP (English, mathematics, science, and/or social studies) course and those who did not, and (c) White students who have completed at least one AP (English, mathematics, science, and/or social studies) course and those who did not?
4. What are the differences in ACT scores between low-income students and non low-income students who completed at least one AP (English, mathematics, science, and/or social studies) course?
5. What are the differences in ACT scores between (a) low-income students who completed at least one AP (English, mathematics, science, and/or social studies) course and those who did not, and (b) non low-income students who completed at least one AP (English, mathematics, science, and/or social studies) course and those who did not?

The statistical technique known as analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the relationship and differences between students who completed AP courses and those who did not in Illinois public high schools. ANOVA is a hypothesis-testing procedure used to evaluate mean differences between two or more treatments. The goal of ANOVA is to determine whether a treatment effect exists. Treatment effects are said to cause variance when the differences between treatments are significantly greater than can be explained by chance alone (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2007). An effect size between 10% and 25% suggests a medium strength treatment effect. Anything below 10% is considered to have a small effect, and anything above 25% suggests a large effect (Cohen, 1988).

In the case of the second research question, where there are three treatments, post hoc tests were conducted following the ANOVA to determine exactly which mean differences are statistically significant and which are not. Specifically, Tukey's HSD test was conducted to compare the individual treatments two at a time. This comparison is possible through the calculation of the honestly significant difference (HSD), which represents the single value that determines the minimum significance between treatment means that is necessary for significance (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2007).

ACT performance of students who participated in AP courses is compared to that of their peers who participated in less rigorous courses in Table 1.

Table 1
Differences in Students' ACT Mean Scores by Content Area

	N	M	SD
English			
Participated in AP English course(s)	24,500	25.89	5.87
Participated in lower track English course(s)	119,941	18.49	6.11
Mathematics			
Participated in AP mathematics course(s)	22,204	28.08	4.75
Participated in lower track mathematics course(s)	122,360	19.12	4.36
Science			
Participated in AP science course(s)	20,657	25.82	4.91
Participated in lower track science course(s)	123,827	19.35	4.97
Reading			
Participated in AP social studies course(s)	37,255	24.13	5.98
Participated in lower track social studies course(s)	107,241	17.98	5.51

Of the students who completed the ACT, 24,550 (17.0%) participated in AP English classes, earning a mean score of 25.89; 22,243 (15.3%) participated in AP mathematics classes, earning a mean score of 28.08; 20,686 (14.3%) participated in AP science classes, earning a mean score of 25.82; and 37,329 (25.6%) participated in AP social studies courses, earning a mean score of 24.13.

Table 2
ANOVA Summary Table

	F (df _b , df _w) ^a	F	p	ES
English	(1, 144,439)	30,317.65	< .001 ^b	0.173
Mathematics	(1, 144,562)	77,070.52	< .001	0.348
Science	(1, 144,482)	30,156.02	< .001	0.173
Social Studies/Reading	(1, 144,494)	32,975.08	< .001	0.186

^a df_b – degrees of freedom between groups, df_w – degrees of freedom within groups

^b Significant at 0.01 level of significance

Further, and as shown in Table 2, the results indicated that participation in AP courses produced a medium treatment effect in English (0.173), science (0.173), and social studies (0.186) and a large treatment effect in mathematics (0.348). Similar treatment effects were observed when students were compared to similar peers, indicating that students of color and low socioeconomic status benefit from participation in AP courses. The observed effect sizes suggested participation in AP courses is important in all students' educational outcomes and, thus, increasing student exposure to AP courses will likely improve ACT scores. Ultimately, none of this should be considered too surprising.

In addition to demonstrating the merits of participating in rigorous courses, data from the Illinois State Board of Education exposed common inequities related to students' access to AP courses. Low-income students and children of color across the state of Illinois were statistically underrepresented in AP classes during the 2012-2013 school year. For example, while 40.1% of the children studied were considered low-income, only 19.3 percent of the state's AP mathematics course participants were low-income students. Similarly, Black students made up 17.1% of the total student population in Illinois, but represented only 6.2% of the total AP mathematics course participants. And while Latino students made up 20.2% of the total student

population in Illinois, they accounted for only 13.0% of the total AP mathematics course participants.

Based upon these findings, one may assume that ameliorating achievement gaps based upon socioeconomic status and race is merely a matter of addressing inequitable course placements. In other words, the reason that low-income students are not performing at higher levels of proficiency like their more affluent peers is because they are not receiving equitable opportunities to participate in rigorous courses. In the same way, it can be hypothesized that White students outperform African American and Latino students because of their increased access to rigorous educational opportunities. Therefore, it can be reasoned that low-income students and children of color will achieve at higher levels if provided the opportunity to participate in more rigorous AP courses. In response, schools across the state and throughout the nation have undergone policy changes to increase participation in AP courses. In fact, over the past decade, the number of students who graduate from high school having taken AP courses has nearly doubled, and the number of low-income students taking AP courses has more than quadrupled. Between 2012 and 2013, representation of African American students in AP courses increased in 30 states, and representation of Latino students in AP courses increased in 28 states, including Illinois (College Board, 2014). Despite this progress, the gaps in academic achievement that adversely affect low-income students and children of color have remained static.

The Complexity of the “Achievement Gap”

A more complete examination of the data reveals the true complexity of the “achievement gap.” Consider, for instance, the English ACT test performance of Black students in Illinois. Those who participated in AP English courses obtained a mean score of 20.61 on the English ACT test. Their performance was significantly better than the 14.91 mean score of Black students who completed less rigorous English courses. With a medium treatment effect of approximately 12%, it can be concluded that participation in AP English courses benefits African American students. When the academic performance of said students is compared to that of White students, however, there is considerable cause for concern. As it turns out, White students who did not participate in AP English courses obtained a mean score of 20.32 on the English ACT test. In other words, the performance of White students in less rigorous courses was comparable to that of Black students who participated in AP courses. And when White students participated in AP English courses, their mean score increased to 27.93, a full seven points higher than that of Black students in AP courses. Similar trends were visible across content areas and when Latino students were compared to White students and low-income students were compared to non low-income students.

As a result of these findings, one may notice inequity in educational opportunities is not simply limited to access to the most rigorous courses. Instead, it appears that the construct of traditional schooling, including the design of courses, may be particularly advantageous to select student groups. An examination of the mean differences between students who participated in AP courses and those who did not lends further support to this argument.

Table 3

Mean differences between students who participated in AP courses and those who did not (compared by race)

	Black	Latino	White
English	5.70	5.63	7.61
Mathematics	5.58	6.63	8.63
Science	4.46	4.69	6.16
Reading	4.40	4.89	5.91

As depicted in Table 3, across all four content areas studies (English, mathematics, science, social studies/reading), mean differences between students who completed AP courses and those who did not were considerably higher amongst White students when compared to Black and Latino students. These higher mean differences indicate that, while all students benefit from participation in AP courses, White students derive a greater benefit from participating in these courses than their Black and Latino counterparts.

As demonstrated in Table 4, similar trends were apparent when low-income students were compared to non low-income students.

Table 4

Mean differences between students who participated in AP courses and those who did not (compared by socioeconomic status)

	Low-Income	Non Low-Income
English	5.63	7.44
Mathematics	6.77	8.59
Science	5.05	6.03
Reading	4.57	5.84

Again, with higher mean differences, non low-income students derive a greater benefit than low-income students from participation in AP courses. This being the case, the Black/White, Latino/White, and low-income/non low-income achievement gaps cannot be eliminated by merely equalizing participation in the courses deemed most rigorous by traditional schools. Rather, the findings suggest that the design of these courses within the traditional construct of schooling benefits White and non low-income children and, therefore, an attempt to increase rigor within the current system augments this effect. In other words, if Illinois public high schools were to enroll every student in rigorous AP courses, the academic performance of all students would likely increase, but gaps in academic achievement would continue to exist because the performance of White students would increase more substantially than that of Black and Latino students, and the performance of non low-income students would increase more substantially than that of low-income students. This reality presents a complex challenge for schools aspiring to not only improve educational outcomes but also make achievement equity a reality for all students. In pursuit of this end, educators must recognize the important distinction between transactional and transformation change.

The Case for Transformation

According to Schlechty (2009), in the context of recent school improvement efforts, reform generally entails making changes with the intent of improving the performance of existing operating systems. In other words, reform is aimed at making existing systems more effective at

doing what they have always done. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) use the term “first-order change” to describe incremental steps taken by a school or district pursuing improvement within the existing culture. Similarly, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) describe “technical change” as deploying existing competence in a different context. Frontier and Rickabaugh (2014) prefer the term “transactional change,” as initially coined by James Burns in 1978, to describe efforts to increase efficiency within the established system and culture.

Changes to AP placement policies and practices will predictably amount to transactional change. For example, if AP placement policies and procedures are revised to allow more students the opportunity to experience the school’s most rigorous courses, then student performance will likely increase. Under this scenario, the existing system becomes more effective in a manner consistent with the definition of transactional change. The reform effort will not, however, eliminate the gaps in academic achievement that already exist as a result of the traditional system and culture of schooling (Schlechty, 2009).

Accepting that the existing system and culture may perpetuate achievement inequity allows educators to embrace transformational change rather than settle for transactional change. Unlike transactional change, transformation involves repositioning and reorienting action through the adoption of radically different means of doing the work it has traditionally done. Whereas transactional change seeks to install initiatives that will work within the context of the existing structure and culture of schools, transformation necessitates altering the social structure and culture to support the needed change (Schlechty, 2009).

Many seeking transformational change in education have made a case that traditional schools are not intentionally organized to empower all students to achieve at high levels (Delpit, 2012; Schlechty, 2009; Sims, 2008). In support of this argument, it is contended that the American interpretation of schooling has been derived almost exclusively from the classical and popular cultural formations of the dominant society. In other words, traditional school culture is and always has been that of White middle class America (Delpit, 2012).

The fact that the courses most revered under the current construct of schooling did more to benefit non low-income and White students than they did to benefit low-income and Black and Latino students suggests that equality in educational opportunities is not limited to the access of particular courses, but also how curriculum and instruction are delivered within these courses. Accordingly, the pursuit of achievement equity must extend well beyond reforming students’ access to the courses traditionally considered to be the most rigorous. Rather, closing the “achievement gap” is a matter of transforming curriculum and instruction in a manner that better reflects the cultural inclinations of a pluralistic society. Such transformative action requires educators to undergo philosophical and pedagogical shifts in their thinking and practice (Howard, 2010).

To this end, educators must recognize that low-income students and children of color are marginalized as a result of traditional schooling practices. They cannot continue to allow the cultural formations of the students they serve to influence their judgments about the intellectual capabilities of these children, particularly those from families of low socioeconomic status and color. Further, they must challenge traditionally accepted notion of “rigorous” curriculum and instruction in favor of a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach to education (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2010).

Providing a Culturally Responsive Education

Culture can be defined as the lens through which people interpret life events (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Culture includes the learned behaviors, orientations, interpersonal patterns, beliefs, values, and underlying assumptions that are prevalent among the members of a society. Culturally competent educators recognize the connection between culture and learning. While teaching, they consistently demonstrate an awareness and sensitivity of the cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices that students bring into the classroom. In doing so, they remain responsive to the culture-related inclinations of the students they serve. Due to the diverse nature of America's classrooms, the pursuit of achievement equity requires attention to culturally responsive pedagogy.

According to Howard (2010), "Culturally responsive pedagogy assumes that if teachers are able to make connections between the cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices that students bring from home, and the content and pedagogy that they use in their classrooms, the academic performance and overall schooling experiences of learners from culturally diverse groups will improve" (p. 67-69). In other words, educators must incorporate diverse cultural inclinations into teaching and learning contexts, so students, particularly those traditionally marginalized under the traditional system of schooling, are more likely to remain engaged in learning.

As demonstrated through the ACT performance of Illinois students', providing all students with equitable opportunities to participate in rigorous courses will likely improve the academic achievement of all children. But because such improvement does not in and of itself translate to a narrowing of achievement gaps based upon socioeconomic status and race, it can be concluded that culturally responsive pedagogy is necessary. More specifically, educators must begin to recognize the valuable contributions that all students, including low-income students and children of color, bring into the classroom and use this knowledge to create equitable opportunities for all children to succeed in school and life. Among these opportunities is access to a rigorous curriculum and uniform quality of instruction that reflect the cultural inclinations of a pluralistic society. By transforming the traditional construct of schooling to create truly equal opportunities, achievement equity can become a reality for all children.

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Does Implementing an Emotional Intelligence Program Guarantee Student Achievement?

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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Being a 21st century learner may require a shift in the education paradigm. To be successful students may need to possess a different type of intelligence. Cherniss (2001), Goleman (1995), and O'Neil (1996), suggest that the key to positive life outcomes might consider emotional intelligence as more important than intellectual quotient (IQ). Emotional intelligence is associated with positive life outcomes, as seen in several studies conducted on emotional intelligence in business leadership, educational leadership, achievement, and life success. The purpose of this study was to compare the implementation of a positive behavior support (PBS) system (The Leader In Me [TLIM]) that embeds emotional competencies throughout an entire learning community with its affect on student achievement.

More than 1,200 schools across the United States use TLIM approach. The schools chosen for this study were located solely in the state of Texas. Data were obtained from the publicly available archival datasets from the Texas Education Association (TEA). A causal-comparative analysis using a one-way ANOVA was used to determine whether a significant correlation existed between schools that used TLIM and those that did not. Results indicated no statistically significant difference between the two school groups. Additional analysis was performed to examine the level of implementation. Schools that had reached Lighthouse status demonstrated a significantly higher achievement level in ELA and mathematics compared to schools that did not use TLIM.

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Introduction

The 21st-century school is charged with serving a socio-culturally diverse group of students with varying needs and interests that require schools to prepare students for life successes through a balanced education that ensures both mastery of academic skills and the social competence required to be productive adults (Payton et al., 2008). Currently, academic curriculum is focused on four core content areas that include reading, math, social studies, and science. With the increased concentration of academic achievement focused on these areas, little time left to teach social and emotional skills. Schools are charged with the demands of academics, discipline, global participation, and social issues that include bullying and violence. With these added factors in mind, one might consider that infusing the core curriculum with social and emotional competencies might not only help with behavioral issues, but also improve student achievement.

While the push for academic excellence has surged upward, the focus on character education and emotional and social competencies has begun to wane (Covey, 2008). The current U.S. Chamber of Commerce (2012) report, *Leaders and Laggards*, is an annual state-by-state report that discusses the effectiveness of American education. The report admonishes the American education system for not preparing children for the intellectual demands of the modern workplace and 21st century society. Despite the call from business for educational innovation and college and career readiness, America continues to fall short in preparing its students with the skills necessary for postsecondary life.

Covey (2008) shared the “Top 10 Qualities and Skills Employers Seek” (p. 30) in his book *The Leader in Me*. These skills are not academic skills; rather, these are pre-requisite skills required for academic and future success. Employers seek the following skills, which might be correlated with emotional intelligence:

- Communication skills (verbal and written)
- Honesty/integrity
- Teamwork skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Self-motivation/initiative
- Strong work ethic
- Analytical skills
- Technology skills
- Organizational skills
- Creative minds (Covey, 2008, p. 30).

The Leader in Me is based on Covey’s (1987) book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and is a paradigm shift that changes focus from teaching leadership skills as an isolated incidence to embedding those skills in the actions and beliefs of the community. Additionally, it like many other character programs, the tenets of The Leader in Me are aligned with the core concepts of PBS programs. However, different than a mere program, TLIM (2013a) website asserts, “*The Leader in Me* is not an event and it’s not a curriculum, it’s ubiquitous leadership development—meaning everywhere and all the time” (para. 4). Rather than teaching social skills every week for 30 minutes, leadership skills are embedded in an integrated approach with every lesson and subject in the school day. As such, “the model impacts everything—the traditions, events, organization, culture, instructional methodologies, and curriculum of the

school. However, as teachers often say, "It's not doing one more thing; it's doing what you're already doing in a better way." (TLIM, 2013a, para. 4).

Statement of the Problem

The Surgeon General's Report of 2000 indicated that, at the time, the current infrastructure of schools did not lend itself to universal instruction and intervention for the delivery of PBS (Sugai & Horner, 2007; United States Public Health Service [PHS], 2002). Since this report, PBS programs that focus on emotional and social competencies have emerged; however, little has changed in the way of infrastructure. Schools that serve kindergarten through grade 12 are providing initiatives such as "race to the top" with the purpose of sending more children to college, building data systems to track student growth and inform practice, recruit effective teachers, and turn around failing schools (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2009). However, these reforms have resulted in an inadvertent practice of teaching skills in isolation (Hayes-Jacobs, 2010).

These skills include academics and college readiness in specialized classes without a component that focuses on students' social and emotional competencies. Additionally, students are removed from physical education (PE) classes, music, recess, lunch, and other social situations for remediation in subjects in which they are underperforming. While reforms that focus on increased rigor and longer school days have led to more instructional time in reading, mathematics, social studies, and science, the focus of citizenship, creative arts, and athletic skills have been pushed aside in favor of accountability ratings. Yet in a time where the focus is on school reform and improved student performance, America appears to be missing the warning signs of high pressure education on students and their overall success in both the socioemotional and academic realm (Zhao, 2009).

High pressure education, without the emotional skills to manage that pressure has resulted in increased numbers of children being referred for and diagnosed with anxiety; a direct increase in ADHD as correlated with standardized testing; and, in some of the most severe cases, suicide (Wilkens, 2002; Zhao, 2009). Equally, high-pressure education does not measure success in the business world; rather, this system is measuring success on an isolated test on an isolated day, which means nothing to future employers.

Inadvertently, researchers have echoed employers concerns suggesting that school performance and high IQ are not necessarily true predictors of life success (Cherniss, 2001; Goleman, 1995; and Zhao, 2009). Rather, emotional intelligence, recognized as emotional quotient (EQ), may be the key (Goleman, 1995). Further, Zhao (2009) challenged one to consider whether the high academic success valued in schools is beneficial to what is valued in real life. With this notion in mind, one can assume that neither high academic success nor the need for social and emotional competence will be eliminated. Thus, it is important to consider the necessity of integrating these two skills during every lesson taught during the academic day.

Teachers may feel they lack the expertise to integrate academic courses and emotional competencies (Wilkens, 2011). In an unpublished study by Wilkens (2011), teachers indicated that they supported the need to teach social and emotional skills using PBS programs, but they did not feel competent to deliver those skills. Further, teachers have indicated that teaching simply for the sake of teaching is not what they wanted (Covey, 2008). Rather, teachers want what they teach to be relevant and help students succeed in and out of school (Covey, 2008).

Several curricular programs have been developed to teach emotional intelligence; however, few, if any, have provided a component that trains the teacher and administrator to implement these programs. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a program that focuses on an embedded culture, and teaches and reinforces the skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. Equally, instructional strategies that spur strong analytical skills, the ability to think, and foster social competencies are as necessary as the content taught. The purpose of this research was to investigate whether the focus on using TLIM as a means to teach social and emotional competence directly impacted academic success as measured by the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR).

The Evolution of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence has been studied for several years and continues to be redefined in both theory and understanding (Goleman, 1995). In 1937, Thorndike wrote on the idea of *social intelligence* as “the ability to understand, men, women, boys, and girls, to act wisely in human relations” (Nelson, 2009, p.36). Using the term social intelligence, he associated overall success in life with acting wisely (Nelson, 2009; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Wechsler (1958) observed that not all abilities were related solely to cognitive factors. He believed that some abilities were noncognitive in nature. As a result, he proposed an addition to the verbal performance grouping on the Wechsler Scale of intelligence (Bar-On, 2006; Nelson, 2009), called social intelligence.

Gardner (1983) defined intelligence as “the bio-psychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in culture” (p. 33-34). In earlier research, Gardner (1983) developed theory of multiple intelligences, which included the following seven basic types of intelligence: logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal. His theory also included two forms of intelligence that paralleled emotional intelligence: intrapersonal (the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of others) and interpersonal intelligence (the capacity to understand one’s self, and one’s feelings, fears, and motivations). Both forms of intelligence contain tenets of emotional and social intelligence.

Goleman’s (1995) definition of emotional intelligence parallels several different theorists including Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates. These men described an intelligence that encompasses an “array of noncognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one’s ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures” (Nelson, 2009, p. 36). Goleman (1995) added a fifth competency to Salovey and Mayer’s work, “The ability to know one’s own emotions, manage emotions, motivating oneself, recognize emotions in others, and handle relationships” (p. 223-224). Goleman further studied emotional intelligence in terms of leadership and organizational performance and found a correlation between the emotional strengths of the leader and overall productiveness of the organization.

Emotional Intelligence and Academic Success

Over the course of the 20th century, there was much debate as to what formal education should include in the United States (Cohen, 1999). During the 1800s, education was designed to develop the citizen (Tozer, Senese, Violas, 2009). Horace Mann expounded on the development of the citizen, and urged educators to mold student behaviors using empathy. His intent was to shape children emotionally as well as intellectually (Tozer et al., 2009). Dewey later called for

social change that would promote a social order. He felt that such change should develop the child for participation in a democratic life. Included in Dewey's educational reform was the belief that children not be passive receivers of information, but rather active participants who are able to construct their own learning (Tozer et al., 2009).

Other reforms replaced Dewey's call for constructivist learning. The aftermath of the Cold War caused Americans to rethink the curriculum and spawned a thrust for increased math and science instruction. During this era, James Bryant Conant sought to approach education and its structure through standardization selection (Tozer et al., 2009). Conant believed that the best students could be identified through standardized testing (Tozer et al., 2009). Thus, there was little to no focus on the emotional development of children during the post-Cold War era. Laden with discriminatory practices against females and children of minority decent, federal laws including *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) were enacted to provide equal education (Tozer et al., 2009).

Emotionally Intelligent Students

In his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman (1995) stated, "educators, long disturbed by school children's lagging scores in math and reading, are realizing there is a different more alarming deficiency: emotional illiteracy" (p. 231). Goleman referred to basic problems experienced by the young a crisis for youth. Indications of withdrawal and social problems, anxiety and depression, attention or thinking problems, and delinquent or aggressive behaviors steadily increased from 1970 to 1995. Wilkens (2002) compared two student cohorts and found that the 2002 cohort experienced greater stress and anxiety than did the 1980 cohorts. In fact, in 2002, children with emotional problems rated higher on stress indices than those who were institutionalized for those same problems in the 1980s.

However, hope is not gone. The theologian Desiderius Erasmus once said that "The main hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth." Programs designed to teach social and emotional intelligence have increased since the first publication of *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995). These programs include skills in social and emotional competencies such as respect, integrity, conflict resolution, self-awareness, and empathy.

Recent research has shown that direct teaching of social and emotional competencies yielded increased emotional intelligence within 1 year of receiving instruction (Bar-On, 2006, p. 32). Nelson (2009) found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and student achievement in at-risk populations. Additionally, Nelson's research yielded information relating the significance of each of the four branches of emotional intelligence on student achievement. Her study found that students' understanding of emotions was the greatest individual contributor to student achievement among at-risk students (Nelson, 2009).

Building Community Emotional Intelligence

Twenty-first century skills require that students gain leadership skills that focus on character, good judgment, principles, and interdependence on the organization as a whole. While researchers have examined leadership skills extensively, no one has applied them to all facets of the organization until recently (Covey, 2008; Bennis & Nanus, 2003; Bohlman and Deihl, 2004; Goleman, 1995; Spainhower, 2008). In 1998 DuFour and Eaker (1998) identified learning for both the student and the educational professional as a community of learners. Their researchers

suggested that to help students gain knowledge and skills in a given area, the educational community must study and develop the same competencies that are taught.

Covey (2008), demonstrated that emotional intelligence can and should be embraced and taught to the entire learning community. He found that teaching leadership skills builds the emotional competence of the learning organization. He found support for this growth when organizations applied concepts discussed in his work, *Seven Habits for Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1987). Using the *Seven Habits for Highly Effective People*, Covey (2008) developed The Leader in Me (TLIM) which focuses on the development of leadership skills for the entire community.

The Leader in Me

The Leader in Me is not a curriculum; rather, it is a philosophical approach to school culture and leadership. Developed by Covey (2008), TLIM is based on the book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1987). With the intent of directly teaching leadership principles, TLIM is designed to build the leadership capacity of every member of the school community.

As a transformational model, TLIM has been shown to produce higher academic achievement, fewer discipline problems, and increased engagement among teachers and parents (Covey, 2008). This program began in 1999 with the intention to transform the culture of the A. B. Combs Elementary School in North Carolina. After taking a course in the seven habits, Principal Muriel Summers began to using these habits to teach effective skills to students (Covey, 2008; Fonzie & Richie, 2011). As a result, A. B Combs Elementary School experienced improved test scores, decreased disciplinary infractions, and has sustained a culture of success for more than a decade.

This program purports that every child is capable, and every child is a leader. However, TLIM does not approach leadership skills from the typical top-down paradigm. Instead the program approaches these skills as a whole system reform that focuses as much on the relationships among adults who work in the school as it does the students. One might consider this approach to be system reform from the inside out. This program is based on three major beliefs, and it approaches leadership skills from a unique paradigm.

Underlying Beliefs of The Leader in Me

The Leader in Me is based on the belief that everyone is a leader and has the capacity to guide his or her own life. This belief contrasts the traditional hierarchical model in which leadership is a position or an appointment (The Leader in Me, 2012). Equally, Covey (2008) suggested that one can lead regardless of his or her socioeconomic status or position in life.

A second underlying belief suggests that the seven habits of highly effective people are not race, gender, class, or age specific. Rather these habits are universal and pertain to all (Covey, 2008). By embracing this belief, schools will see a long-term metamorphosis of its culture as it transforms from a top-down school to a school of leadership, accountability, adaptability and problem solving as a universal practice among students, teachers, and administrative staff. DuFour and Eaker (1998) referred to this type of transformation as a “non-linear” (p. 282) and “persistent endeavor” (p. 283), which suggests that the campus culture is not a factory that produces one specific standardized product. Thus, the cultural shift begins by

“fully integrating the habits into the curriculum, systems, and culture of the school”(Fonzie & Richie, 2011, p.4).

The third and final belief that underlies TLIM is the focus on a diffusion of innovation in which the seven habits are distributed into the surrounding community. After applying this program, highly impoverished schools have reported increased parent involvement and satisfaction (Fonzie & Richie, 2011). This finding is particularly interesting given that schools in highly impoverished areas often report low parental involvement. Moreover, business leaders from companies (e.g., Panda Express, Enersolv, and Criterion Catalysts and Technologies) and non-profits (e.g., United Way) have commented on the success they have seen from students and communities that have implemented TLIM.

The Leader in Me Process

The focus of TLIM is a cultural shift in teaching and learning. In this new paradigm, schools focus on developing the adults first. The program developers and those at the Covey Institute believe that educators cannot expect positive changes in their students until they have examined and developed their own goals for change. This approach is called the inside-out approach, and the process is rigorous and requires a commitment from everyone involved. When implemented effectively, the outcome is more than a simple structural change; it is a cultural shift in beliefs, attitudes, and school operation.

Continuous capacity building and learning for all is also built into the professional development plan. Professional development does not stop after the initial training. Three months into the program, a trainer returns to the school to provide staff with additional professional development. At this follow-up, professional development includes a continuation of the vision with the intent to integrate TLIM into the environment, traditions, curriculum, systems, and instructions of the campus (FranklinCovey, n.d.a). At the same time, a Lighthouse team and group of trainers is organized to continue the seven habits and ensure sustained training for new employees.

True system reform is the key component of effective implementation of any program (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, Fullan, 2003). However, the commitment to create a leadership community is not a simple endeavor. As a matter of fact, it is much more. Franklin Covey Education (TLIM, 2012) makes it very clear that this program is not an event or a curriculum, but an “ubiquitous leadership development” that focuses on teaching leadership and emotional and social competencies as an integrated approach. Specifically, this approach is embedded into every lesson, instructional method, the school organization. Teachers at TLIM schools have reported, “it’s not doing one more thing; it’s doing what you’re already doing in a better way” (Covey, 2008, p. 34).

Lighthouse Schools

Like any program, there exists varying levels of implementation of TLIM. The amount of exposure to the program, adherence to implementation methods, the quality of the process, and the adaptation of the program within the culture are all critical to the effectiveness of implementation (Dusenbury, Brannigan, Hansen, Walsh, & Falco, 2005). As such, Covey developed the Lighthouse school award to encourage both implementation and program effectiveness (TLIM, 2013b).

Lighthouse status is more than a programmatic checklist. Selected schools that have been in the program for at least 3 years are eligible to achieve this status. The Leader in Me (2013b) symposium guide indicates that it typically takes a school 3 years to meet the criteria of Lighthouse status, which requires schools to prove sustained excellence in nine specific areas. These areas include the development of a lighthouse team, staff collaboration, community engagement, leadership environment, leadership instruction and curriculum, student leadership, leadership events, goal setting and tracking, and measureable results. As of the writing of this study, only 55 Lighthouse schools existed worldwide, and four were located.

Method of the Study

A causal-comparative approach was used for this study. For this study, the researcher attempted to establish a causal relationship between schools that used TLIM and those that did not. According to Gall et al. (2007), “The critical feature of causal-comparative research is that the independent variable is measured in the form of categories” (p. 306). As such, this study used two categories as the independent variables: schools that used TLIM and schools that did not use TLIM.

It would be reasonable and preferable to test several grade levels and perform a cross section of similar demographic schools and school district types, such as rural, suburban, or inner city to increase the generalizability of the results. However, for the purpose of this study only grade 5 results were included.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided a focus for this study:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between schools that use TLIM and those that do not in reading and English language arts (ELA) on the STAAR?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference between schools that use TLIM and those that do not in mathematics on the STAAR?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference between schools that use TLIM and those that do not in disciplinary placements?

To test the hypotheses, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted with a 2-level factor. The factor was divided into groups that had implemented TLIM and those that did not. The four dependent variables examined were student achievement based on the 2011-2012 fifth-grade STAAR test results in ELA, mathematics, and student disciplinary placements. Quantitative data for the dependent variables were the mean score of each group.

Study Sample

The target population for this study included all public, traditional, and charter elementary schools in the state of Texas. From this population, the researcher collected all the elementary schools that used TLIM and sorted them to ensure that the campuses selected served fifth-grade students. This collection yielded 42 traditional and charter elementary schools across five regions. In addition to the schools that used TLIM, the researcher collected the total number of

traditional public elementary and charter schools, spanning EE (early elementary, ages 3-5 years) through eighth grade in the state of Texas. Data were collected from TLIM and Texas Education Agency (TEA) websites, respectively. A matching sample was developed to equate schools identified as TLIM users and non- users with corresponding demographics including, socioeconomic, racial, limited English proficiency (LEP), and mobility.

Data Analysis

Three specific data sources were used to analyze student achievement. The Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports provide performance information about every public school and district in the state of Texas. Additionally the AEIS reports provide extensive profile information about staff, finances, programs, and student discipline. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) Snapshot provides an overview public education in Texas for each individual school year. The report includes state-level information as well as a profile of the characteristics of each public school in Texas. Finally, Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) results measured in the federal accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act were used to determine academic achievement rates.

Using the TEA snapshot and the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) for the 2011-2012 school year data were gathered to identify student and campus demographic and disciplinary data. Information from the AEIS provided the number of disciplinary placements for each campus. Student achievement information was gathered from the 2012 (AYP) results located on the TEA website. These data for ELA and mathematics scores were used to examine student achievement in each school included in the study. Student achievement is defined in the AYP data as a district's total student population that passes the STAAR test in ELA and mathematics across all grade levels tested.

Is there as Statistically Significant Difference Between the Schools?

For the 2011-2012 school year, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the amount of variance between group (TLIM and NTLIM) academic performance on the STAAR. For each of the 30 TLIM schools, there were 30 NTLIM schools matched for comparison. The mean ELA score for TLIM schools was $M = 88.4$ ($SD = 7.726$), which indicates that these schools yielded an average of 88% to 89% pass rate on the STAAR. The mean ELA score for NTLIM schools was $M = 89.8$ ($SD = 7.383$), which indicates that these schools yielded an average of 89% to 90% pass rate on the STAAR. Based on the descriptive statistic for ELA achievement, NTLIM schools had a higher ELA score than did TLIM schools. No statistically significant difference existed in STAAR ELA achievement scores between fifth-grade students at TLIM schools compared to those at NTLIM schools.

A second one-way ANOVA was used to compare the amount of variance between school group (TLIM and NTLIM) academic performance on the STAAR math for fifth-grade students. The mean score on the STAAR mathematics test for TLIM schools was $M = 85.3$ ($SD = 8.558$), which indicates that TLIM schools had an average of 85% to 86% passing rate on the STAAR. The mean score on the STAAR mathematics test for NTLIM schools was $M = 88.667$ ($SD = 8.523$), which indicates that NTLIM schools had an average of 87% to 89% passing rate on the STAAR. There was no statistically significant difference in STAAR mathematics achievement scores between fifth-grade students in TLIM schools compared to those in NTLIM schools.

Finally, a one-way ANOVA was used to compare the amount of variance between disciplinary placements in TLIM and NTLIM schools. Disciplinary removals are a primary concern that affects academic success. If students are not present in the classroom, their access to adequate instruction is limited. Data for question three was compiled using the AEIS reports available to the public on the TEA website. The discipline result for TLIM schools was $M = 1.733$ ($SD = 2.083$), which indicates that TLIM schools averaged 1.7 disciplinary removals per year. The discipline result for NTLIM schools was $M = 1.333$ ($SD = 2.643$), which indicates that NTLIM schools had an average of 1.33 disciplinary removals per year. Based on the descriptive statistic for disciplinary placements, NTLIM schools had a lower rate of disciplinary removals than did TLIM schools. Again, no statistically significant difference existed in disciplinary placement between fifth grade students in TLIM schools compared to those in NTLIM schools.

Additional Analysis

Because no statistically significant difference were found between TLIM and NTLIM schools, the researcher sought to analyze the differences between NTLIM schools and TLIM schools that had reached Lighthouse status. All Lighthouse schools are listed on TLIM website as well as in *The Leader in Me Symposium Guide* (2013b).

Using the original list of TLIM schools that served fifth-grade students and the original comparison reports, a convenience sample was obtained. All schools included in the new sample were in the original group of TLIM and non-TLIM schools. It is important to note that in the original random sample, two of the Lighthouse schools were eliminated. To ensure a similar comparison, the researcher used the AEIS comparison campus reports to find schools that had similar demographics as the Lighthouse schools. All schools used in the sample were included in the original group of TLIM schools and NTLIM schools prior to the random sampling. For the additional analysis, the researcher chose to examine the relationship between Lighthouse schools and non users of *The Leader in Me* in mathematics and reading/ELA.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between TLIM Lighthouse and NTLIM schools (IV) and passing rate of the STAAR ELA (DV). The analysis yielded a statistically significant difference between TLIM Lighthouse and NTLIM schools in ELA, $F(1,6) = 17.22$, $p = .006$. There was a statistically significant difference in achievement scores on the STAAR ELA between fifth-grade students at TLIM Lighthouse schools compared to those at NTLIM schools.

A second one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between TLIM Lighthouse and NTLIM schools (IV) and passing rate of the STAAR mathematics test (DV). The results yielded a significant difference between TLIM Lighthouse and NTLIM schools in mathematics, $F(1,6) = 12.04$, $p = .013$.

No additional ANOVA's were conducted on disciplinary placements due to the format of the available data. Further research on disciplinary placements would have required added permissions for campus and student specific data as well as additional Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine an emotionally intelligent school culture that use TLIM and analyze student achievement and disciplinary (in-school and out of school suspension)

placements. Analyzing student achievement and programs that promote emotional intelligence is important because millions of tax dollars are spent on educational initiatives each year. More importantly is the level of implementation of these programs. The typical cost for an elementary campus is between \$25,000 and \$50,000 for implementation of TLIM program. It could be argued that poor implementation is an ineffective use of tax dollars.

An examination of the findings for this data resulted in the conclusion that TLIM schools did not significantly differ in fifth-grade academic achievement from NTLIM schools. However, schools that had achieved TLIM Lighthouse status did statistically differ in fifth-grade academic achievement from NTLIM schools. Further, the results of the data analysis indicated no significant difference in disciplinary placements between TLIM and NTLIM schools. This finding means that, for the particular set of data used to compare the variables, the use of TLIM did not positively affect academic achievement or disciplinary removals.

Though the original aim of this study showed that there is no statistically significant difference between TLIM and NTLIM schools on STAAR reading/ ELA, math scores, and disciplinary placements, the researcher might suggest that implementation level is the key to the success of the program. Although the TLIM schools did not outperform NTLIM schools, the schools that achieved Lighthouse status did. Thus the researcher might conclude that TLIM Lighthouse schools demonstrate a statistically significant difference in achievement that did their NTLIM and TLIM counterparts.

The literature suggests that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in predicting life success (Cherniss, 2002; Goleman, 1995) and academic achievement (Hatch, 2012; Nelson, 2009; Rimm-Kaufman, 2006), as well as improving campus culture and discipline infractions (Ross & Laurenzano, 2012; Spainhower, 2008). There are infinitely many programs that promote emotional intelligence. With respect to those programs, effective implementation makes a significant difference in the outcome. Further, emotional intelligence is equated to personal growth (Goleman, 1995; Goleman et al., 2002), which is not necessarily measured in linear terms. Rather, personal growth requires trial and error and, in some instances, a reexamination of conclusions and decisions. Envisioning an outcome prior to acting is aligned with the habit, begin with the end in mind (Covey, 1987; 2008). This habit provides for setting a clear path and set of objectives to reach a defined goal. However, because there is no experimental control over variances in the path, the very existence of uncontrolled human variables can create a deviation along that path. Considering the 21st-century skills required for success in the greater global society, it is important to continue research on TLIM and other programs that promote emotional intelligence.

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Leading Change for the Implementation of Common Core State Standards in Rural School Districts

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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Rural school districts across the nation, with their limited resources, face daunting challenges posed by the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. This article presents a recent study of 13 rural school districts in the Central Valley of California and how these districts are responding to those challenges. A total of 352 teachers and 36 administrators responded to the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ), which measured the concerns of respondents associated with CCSS implementation. Qualitative responses by administrators to questions relating to concerns and leadership approaches associated with CCSS implementation were also analyzed.

Major findings were that teachers were mostly concerned about their own personal efforts of CCSS implementation while administrators were more concerned about collaborative processes involved with implementation. Also teachers in their first years of service generally had greater perceived levels of concern at all levels. Recommendations included continuous data collection and assessment of the implementation with greater efforts at communicating findings and next steps for all stakeholders utilizing a blend of instructional and distributed leadership.

Introduction

It is a privilege and a human right for children to attend school. Among the central reasons students attend school is to gain knowledge, build life and career skills, and to become productive members of society. Curriculum is at the core of a student's education. When districts are faced with the need to redesign curriculum, such as to transition to the Common Core State Standards, it is imperative leaders clearly define the rationale and redesign process to

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all stakeholders and work to make clear that the end result is to increase student achievement. Moreover, the curriculum redesign process should be viewed a “win-win” situation for all stakeholders. The organization of the process is just as important as designing the curriculum (Ainsworth, 2010).

This article presents the results of a study that was conceived with this idea in mind. Therefore, the study investigated the concerns of teachers and administrators and the perceived levels of use as they relate to the California Common Core State Standards. An additional intent of the study was to investigate the leadership approaches to lead the necessary change processes to take place for the California Common Core State Standards.

Leadership

Being an effective school leader in this day and age can be a formidable task. Leading schools in times of change, however, is even more demanding (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003). The expectations placed upon school leaders continue to increase in a dynamic and changing environment (Bossi, 2007; Fullan, 2002). In order to address concerns associated with change, school and district leaders will need to utilize appropriate leadership skills. Using appropriate leadership skills requires school leaders to have an understanding of the different types of leadership approaches and when each of these leadership approaches is most effective. For that reason, it is imperative that school leaders have an understanding of major leadership approaches including transactional, transformational, instructional, and distributed approaches. Having a good understanding of these leadership approaches and using them appropriately will enable the creation of ideal situations for teachers to bring about the changes necessary for successful implementation of the CCSS.

Without effective leadership skills, change cannot happen in a meaningful manner. Certain leadership approaches are more conducive to the change process than others. For instance, leaders that follow a transactional leadership model tend to follow established protocols and as a result may find it difficult to adapt to change and to meet unexpected demands (Smith & Bell, 2011). On the other hand, transformational leadership has been shown to strongly influence teachers’ practices by motivating them to evaluate their current practices as well as to evaluate the need for change or action (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Furthermore, the components of transformational leadership including charisma, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation are critical for leaders, especially in organizations that are faced with demands for change (Bass, 1990).

Other leadership approaches have been demonstrated to be effective in promoting change. Instructional leadership, for example, has been demonstrated to be positively correlated to organizational change (Kursunoglu & Tanriogen, 2009). The more teachers viewed their principal as an instructional leader, the more positive their attitude was towards change. Some of the elements contributing to this phenomenon include the ability of the school leader to successfully create inclusionary environments that give subordinates a voice. Other aspects of instructional leadership that impact change include the ability of the school principal to participate in professional development and to model for staff (Kursunoglu & Tanriogen, 2009). Additionally, the practice of distributed leadership, that of sharing leadership with others at the school, alone has also been demonstrated to be a positive force in the change and development of schools (Harris, 2008).

Having a thorough understanding of these leadership approaches will assist educational leaders who constantly deal with change processes. Change is an inevitable and constant phenomenon in P-12 education. Because of the inevitability of change and the need to understand and manage change, school systems must learn to adapt to change in order to be effective and to keep up with increasingly rapid innovations. It is even more important to understand change when institutions enter into uncharted territory, such as the implementation of the Common Core.

Change

In an environment of increased accountability, educational organizations have had to learn much about change. Finding a common definition of change, however, is difficult. Various definitions of change exist and most definitions of change include multiple aspects. Lewin (1947), for example, defined change as the “difference between a preceding situation and a following situation which has emerged out of the first as a result of some inner or outer influences” (p. 151). Quattrone and Hopper (2001) argued that organizations change when their structures and operations are transformed. Such transformation occurs as the object of change passes from one state to another and as a result gains or loses identifiable features. Kotter (1995), on the other hand, stated that change by definition requires creating new systems, which in turn demands leadership. Without effective leadership, Kotter (1995) stated, the initial change process is compromised.

Tsoukas and Chia (2002) argued that change “is the reweaving of actors' webs of beliefs and habits of action to accommodate new experiences obtained through interactions” (p. 570). Change has also been noted as having quantifiable attributes. For instance, the essence of organizational change is found in the small, but frequent adaptation and adjustment of repetitive actions and routines (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Although adjustments in some cases may be small, the continuous and frequent adjustments produce alterations in structure and practice, which is the fundamental nature of change (Orlikowski, 1996). Change has also been defined as the establishment of new understandings, new practices, and new relationships (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). Such an encompassing definition leads to the concept that everything could be construed as change including people, organizations, ideas, and even identifiable resting points (Sturdy & Grey, 2003). In other words, simply “being” is change. To complicate matters, the research and writing of organizational change is undergoing a metamorphous (Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron's 2001). This is to say that the conceptualization of change in the academic literature itself is changing.

Oftentimes leaders fail to effectively implement promising reforms due to a lack of understanding of the type of change required. The specific type of change is especially critical for school leaders to understand, especially as they lead their schools in the transition to the Common Core State Standards, a radical change in K-12 education.

Common Core State Standards

When California became one of 45 states to adopt the same standards for English and math (California Department of Education [CDE]) in 2010, it set the stage for a complete overhaul of its approach to instruction and assessment (Reed, Scull, Slicker, & Winkler, 2012). The adoption of the Common Core State Standards initiative also represents what is perhaps the most

sweeping educational change in the K-12 system since the passage of the No Child Left behind Act of 2001 (Vecellio, 2013). Additionally, while much has been written about the instructional shifts and other elements entrenched in the Common Core State Standards; little has been written about the mental shifts that need to occur to successfully implement these standards. Still, in order for educational changes of this magnitude to be implemented effectively, stakeholders need to have a good understanding of the major instructional changes required by the Common Core State Standards, as well as the shifts in thinking.

The process to create the same K-12 standards for the multistate consortium was led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (Porter et al., 2011). This process marked the most impactful shift in the Common Core State Standards by moving away from dissimilar content standards in English language arts and mathematics across individual states. Another significant shift in the standards is the focus on digging deeper, which means fewer standards compared to previously adopted standards, in order to develop a greater understanding of the content (Maloch & Bomer, 2013; Phillips & Wong, 2010).

Focusing on informational text is another key feature of the Common Core State Standards for English language arts/Literacy (Santos, Darling-Hammond, & Cheuk, 2012). The idea is that by focusing on informational text, students will be able to build on their knowledge by using the complexity and academic language found in the text to provide evidence and justify their point of view. In short, this new type of learning will allow students to engage in an improved form of written and oral communication that would allow them to form eloquent argumentation from the text.

The demands of the new math standards will require students to focus on understanding and making sense of mathematical concepts. This shift moves away from focusing on finding the correct answer to a problem by using procedural knowledge. The CCSS math standards will also require students to understand various representations of mathematical concepts, which will be presented in text, numbers, tables, diagrams, and symbols. Understanding the step-by-step actions that lead to reliable results, while having a firm understanding of the relevant ideas are key for developing a firm understanding of the CCSS (Santos et al., 2012).

To assess students' understanding of the CCSS, new assessments were created (Herman, Linn, & Moss, 2013). The assessments will be performed by two consortia, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The assessments are based on the new standards, as well as on the capabilities of new technologies.

The implementation of the CCSS and the assessments that gauge understanding of the new standards pose various challenges for teachers and site leaders. Sawchuk (2012), for example, stated that in order to ensure that students master the new standards; teachers will have to change the methods they employ to deliver instruction. Additionally, the challenge of preparing teachers to teach the common core state standards is the enormous. Part of the problem is that curriculum that is aligned to the common core standards is in the developmental stages. Furthermore, the cognitive demands of the CCSS require teachers to function at a higher cognitive level. This is going to require time for teachers to familiarize themselves with the rigor associated with the standards, as well as the strategies needed to deliver instruction. Moreover, teachers will need training in utilizing technology in creative ways, so that they could deliver the CCSS, while ensuring that students become digitally fluent (Cosmah & Saine, 2013).

Research Design

The research design utilized in this study was a mixed method approach that incorporated quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research consisted of the 35-item Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ) administered to teachers and their administrators, which rated their concerns relating to the CCSS. The qualitative component consisted of open-ended questions, which were posed to administrators regarding concerns or challenges associated with leadership and change relating to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

The SoCQ is a major component of the Concerns Based Adoption Model. The Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) is a widely applied theory and methodology, which is often used for studying the process of implementing educational change by teachers and school leaders (Anderson, 1997). The CBAM involves measuring, describing, and explaining the process of change experienced by teachers or others who are involved in the implementation of new practices or innovations. The CBAM is based on the assumption that change is on-going and that it involves personal experiences. Additionally, the effectiveness of the implementation or change is partially dependent on the extent that training was matched to the needs and concerns expressed by the individual. In other words, the CBAM considers implementation of initiatives or innovations in educational institutions as a developmental process that involves users of the innovation by examining the process people go through when they engage in the implementation of a new innovation or initiative.

Results

Requests to participate in the study were sent via email to superintendents from 19 school rural school districts. Thirteen district superintendents agreed to participate in the study. Superintendents from participating districts forwarded an email from the researcher, which included a letter and survey link to school site principals, who then forwarded the email to their respective staffs. To ensure a higher participation rate, follow up emails were sent to district and site administrators by the lead researcher.

Of the 1,074 individuals invited to participate in the study, a total of 388 actual participants completed the SoC questionnaire. Participants in the study included 352 teachers of various grade levels from Pre-school to 12th grade. Thirty-six administrators also completed the SoC questionnaire.

The researchers analyzed results of the Stages of Concerns Questionnaire of administrators and teachers from 13 rural school districts, which provides figures illustrating peak scores of stages, as well as statistical analysis. Determining peak scores was important because peaks represent the greatest relative intensity of users' concerns. Hall et al. (1977), for example, argued that as users of innovations move from unconcerned and non-use into beginning use and more established use, their concerns developed from being most intense at Stages 0, 1, and 2, to most intense at Stage 3, and ultimately to most intense at Stages 4, 5, and 6. The opposite was also hypothesized. This was important because non-users' concerns were normally highest on Stages 0, 1, and 2, and lowest on Stages 4, 5, and 6. Qualitative data were analyzed to investigate and determine themes relating to concerns that administrators had regarding CaCCSS implementation. Patterns relating to implemented tasks associated with the CaCCSS were also examined.

The findings (Figure 1) revealed different overall concerns between administrators and teachers. Results of the Stages of Concern Questionnaire revealed that teachers were mostly concerned about their own personal efforts (Stage 2, Personal) at successfully implementing the CaCCSS. Administrators, on the other hand, were mostly concerned about the collaborative processes (Stage 5, Collaboration) involved with implementing the CaCCSS. These differences were statistically significant for both stages and would seem to indicate that teachers and administrators have very different perceptions of the implementation of the CCSS.

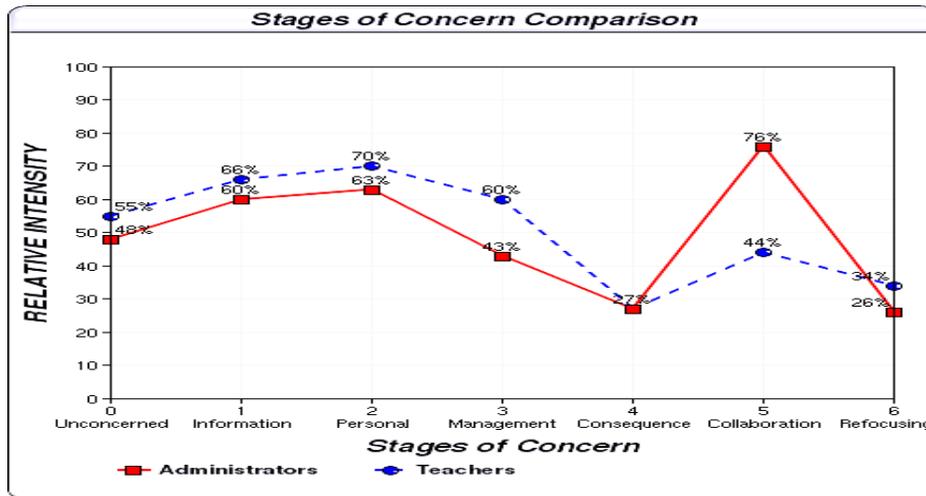


Figure 1. Stages of concerns of administrators (n=36) compared to teachers (n=352).

Results of the Stages of Concern Questionnaire also revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the means of respondents when classified by years of experience (Figure 2). Data indicated that respondents with 1-2 years of experience had a higher intensity level of concern at Stage 4, the Consequence Stage, and Stage 5, the Collaboration Stage, than the other groups. These differences were also statistically significant.

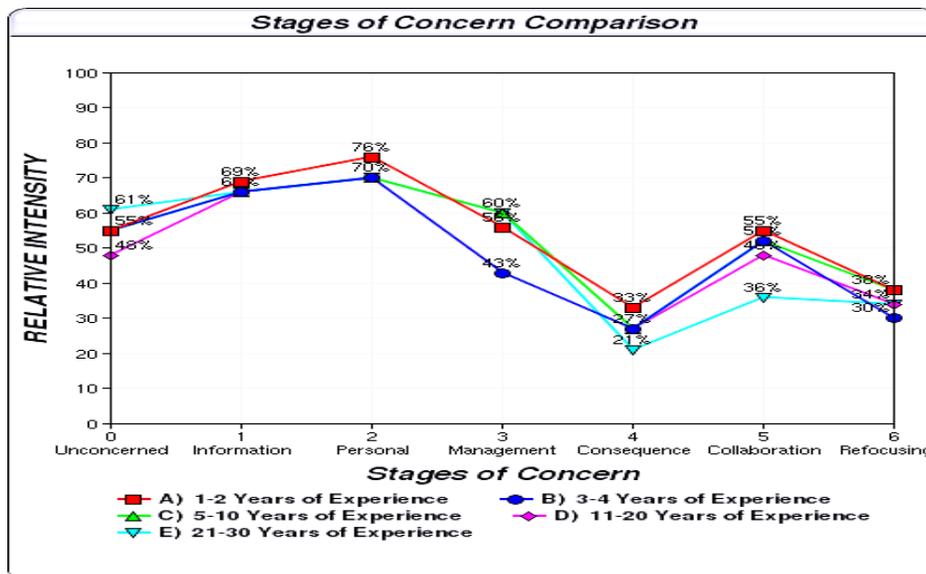


Figure 2. Stages of concerns of respondents (n = 388) by years of experience.

Qualitative data from the open-ended responses collected from site administrators revealed three major concerns: time, the Common Core assessments, and implementing effective trainings. Themes that emerged from responses from district level administrators included: a lack of knowledge of the CaCCSS, curriculum concerns, and fear of losing effective practices. Most administrators also felt that teachers were concerned about: (a) the lack of time to study the CaCCSS and to plan new lessons around the CaCCSS, (b) lack of CaCCSS materials, and (c) change itself. The analysis of respondents' Stages of Concerns and qualitative responses also revealed that the 13 districts in the study are in the early stages of implementing the CaCCSS.

Conclusion

As is the case with all major change, the process of implementing the CaCCSS resulted in various concerns for administrators and teachers. The current level of CaCCSS, implementation revealed through results from the Stages of Concern Questionnaire, demonstrated that teachers are mostly concerned about their own personal efforts at successfully implementing the CaCCSS. On the other hand, results revealed that administrators were mostly concerned about the collaborative processes involved with implementing the CaCCSS. Administrators also revealed concerns relating to: (a) collaboration and planning time, (b) knowledge of the CaCCSS, (c) accessing appropriate curriculum, (d) best instructional practices, and (e) moving away from current instructional practices. Our review of the findings suggests that teachers at the Pre-K to upper elementary level are a little further along than Jr. High/High School in understanding and implementing the CaCCSS.

Recommendations

We examined the concerns of teachers and administrators and the perceived levels of use as they related to the California Common Core State Standards. To address concerns regarding the level of implementation, specific needs, and specific concerns of staff(s), site and district level administrators should consider conducting a CaCCSS needs assessment. Schmoker and Wilson (1993) recommend that continuous improvement includes continuous data collection and assessments. This would be a good starting point, which would allow for a more precise and common understanding of where schools are in their level of CaCCSS implementation. Once a needs assessment is conducted, the sharing of results through effective systems of communication is critical. Hallinger and Murphy (1987) exhorted instructional leaders to promote a positive learning climate by directly and indirectly crafting systems and processes that communicate priorities. Communication is a key component throughout the entire change process (Marzano et al., 2005). Transformational leaders communicate high expectations, motivate, and inspire those around them (Bass, 1996, 1997).

Lack of time was also mentioned as a concern by teachers, specifically, lack of time to plan and to collaborate. To determine approximate amounts needed to make progress, district and site level administrators should participate to some degree in teachers' PLCs. This could serve two purposes. First, it could provide administrators information needed for forward CaCCSS planning and it could improve communication and collaboration with teachers. Harris (2004), for instance, found that distributed forms of leadership that emphasize collaboration help build capacity within schools, which in turn contribute to school improvement. Ainsworth (2010) stated that shifting long set beliefs is not easy and that an effective way of helping people change

their way of thinking includes allowing them to act or experience their way into new beliefs through collaboration.

In order to address curricular concerns, administrators should form a committee of lead teachers and administrators to research and recommend the purchase of CaCCSS materials. Fullan (2010) described how successful change is implemented by leaders who are empathetic to their employees' concerns and who listen to their colleagues and other stakeholders. Schmoker & Wilson (1993) emphasize that teamwork between and within units is an essential component of successful change.

To address concerns regarding fear of or resistance to change, all administrators should start or continue to be transparent in all of their forms of communication with teachers. Schmoker and Wilson stated that communication and trust between management and employees contributes to efficiency and helps maintain a focus of the important long term vision. Fullan (2010) stated that when dealing with fear of change, successful leaders, collaborate and take responsibility for change, thereby generating more buy-in from those who are concerned with failure. Ainsworth (2010) described the importance of connecting new knowledge or change to the big picture. This process would assist in securing support from subordinates and colleagues in implementing the CaCCSS.

The arrival of the Common Core in our schools represents a major change in the way we do business and how we lead our schools. This study provided some insights into just how different teachers and administrators of rural schools perceive where they are in the continuum of adjusting to the CCSS. Communication and support are paramount in bringing about successful change.

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Demographic Changes of Hispanic Populations and Hispanic Student Enrollment in Texas Community Colleges: A Literature Review

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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In this literature review, Hispanic demographic changes in the United States and in Texas are examined. Hispanics have accounted for large changes in population, population change, and proportion of population. Accordingly, the literature was reviewed regarding Hispanic immigrants, both authorized and non-authorized immigrants. The issue of poverty related to Hispanics was addressed. Hispanics and college enrollment, along with the educational attainment patterns of Hispanics, were discussed. The Texas Closing the Gaps plan was examined, as it was related to Hispanic students. The over-representation of Hispanics in community colleges was addressed. Finally, implications of this review of the literature were provided.

Researchers have reported that a confluence of forces (i.e., divergent skills distribution, a changing economy, and projected demographic changes) could soon create a “perfect storm” (Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, & Sum, 2007, pp. 2-3) for the whole U. S. economy by leaving some members of society more economically vulnerable than other members of society. Similarly, Texas researchers have posited that the economic outlook for all Texans could be at risk if educational gaps continued among racial and ethnic groups (Murdock, 2011a; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011b).

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In their foundation works, *The Texas Challenge: Population Change and the Future of Texas* (Murdock, Hoque, Michael, White, & Pecotte, 1997) and *The New Texas Challenge: Population Change and the Future of Texas* (Murdock, White, Hoque, Pecotte, You, & Balkan, 2003), Texas demographers documented related trends with respect to population growth in Texas. Two assertions emphasized within these trends was the population growth of non-Anglos, most notably, the growth of Hispanics, coupled with an aging, predominantly Anglo, baby boom population. Murdock et al. (1997, 2003) examined the implications of such trends including the impact on the Texas labor force, revenue base, and composition of traditional households. Murdock et al. (1997, 2003) posited that if educational gaps among non-Anglo and Anglo populations persisted, Texas would evolve into a poorer and less competitive state.

Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to survey the existing research on the Hispanic population change in Texas, as well as the Hispanic student enrollment change in Texas community colleges given that Hispanics represent a growing population in Texas and can impact its future labor force. As such, this review of the literature is separated into three general areas: (a) Hispanic demographic changes in Texas; (b) Hispanic immigrant, authorized and non-authorized ones; (c) Hispanics and poverty; (d) Hispanics and college enrollment; (e) Hispanics and educational attainment; (f) Hispanic students role in the Closing the Gaps plan; and (g) Hispanic presence in community colleges.

In reviewing the literature, a systematic approach was utilized. The Sam Houston State University Library Academic Search Complete online system was accessed, using the following search terms: Hispanic students; community colleges; Hispanic immigrants; Hispanic unauthorized immigrants; Hispanic educational attainment; and Hispanic population changes. An attempt was made to use the most up to date references possible so that this literature review would be reflective of the current state of affairs regarding Hispanics in Texas.

Demographic Changes of Hispanics in the United States and Texas

Hispanics come from 20 different nationalities, including descendants of early Spanish settlers and immigrants from Latin America (Tienda, 2009). In recent decades, births and immigration have alternated in driving population growth (Tienda, 2009). In the twenty-first century however, Hispanic births have surfaced once again as the primary determinant of population growth and by 2030, births will exceed immigration by 40%. Moreover, births from undereducated Hispanic women could continue the course of economic inequality for their offspring, as the children of undereducated Hispanic women will create increased numbers of students in the schools and workers in the labor market (Tienda, 2009).

Hispanics in the United States have experienced considerable growth in population, population change, and proportion during the last decade. From 2000 to 2010, the Hispanic population grew 43%, increasing from 35.3 million to 50.5 million in numeric growth, accounting for 56% of the nation's overall growth, representing 16.3% of the total population (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011). This statistic is striking compared to a White population growth change of 1.2%, increasing slightly from 194.5 million to 196.8 million in numeric growth, accounting for 8.3% of the nation's overall growth, and representing a decline from 69.1% to 63.7% of the total population (Murdock, 2011b). Moreover, although the increase in the

percentage of Hispanic growth within the last decade seems impressive, their percentage of growth change from the previous two decades (i.e., 53% in the 1980s) and (i.e., 58% in the 1990s) was even greater (Passel et al., 2011).

Young Hispanics accounted for large changes in population, population change, and proportion of population (Murdock, 2011b). From 2000 to 2010, among children ages 17 and under, Hispanics grew 38.8%, increasing from 12.3 million to 17.1 million in numeric growth, accounting for 253% of the nation's overall growth in this category and 17.1% to 23.1% of the total population in this category. In contrast, the population, population change, and proportion of White children ages 17 and under, decreased dramatically. White children in this age category experienced a decline in growth of 9.8%, decreasing in population from 44 million to 39.7 million, and accounting for -228% of growth and representing a total population decline from 60.9% to 53.5% in this category (Murdock, 2011b).

To appreciate the magnitude of growth change in Texas compared to the United States, Murdock (2011b) compared Texas and United States growth both historically and within the latest 10-year census count from 2000 to 2010. Since 1860, when the census first kept track of population changes, Texas has outpaced the United States in population percentage change in every 10-year count, the most recent year being a 20.6% change versus a 9.7% change. Of the 10 largest states in the United States by population size, Texas garnered the greatest increase in percentage change from 2000 to 2010. Texas also had the largest numeric change in population among all states from 2000 to 2010 (Murdock, 2011b).

Similar to Hispanic growth nationwide, Hispanics in Texas also have experienced growth in population, population change, and proportion. From 2000 to 2010, the Hispanic population grew 41.8%, increasing from 6.6 million to 9.4 million in numeric growth, while increasing from 32% to 37.6% of the total population (Murdock, 2011b). Of 9.4 million Hispanics, over 7.9 million were of Mexican origin, over 222,000 were of Salvadoran origin, and over 1.1 million represented other Hispanic origin populations (Ennis, Vargas, & Albert, 2011). In contrast, the White population experienced a population growth change of only 4.2%, increasing from 10.9 million to 11.4 million in numeric growth while decreasing from 52.4% to 45.3% of the total population (Murdock, 2011b). By 2015, researchers project Hispanics to become the largest population in Texas (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a).

Similar to Hispanic children at the national level, Hispanic children in Texas have also experienced impressive gains in population, population change, and proportion. From 2000 to 2010, among children 17 and under, the Hispanics population grew 39%, increasing from 2.3 million to 3.3 million in numeric growth, whereas the total percentage of the population of Hispanic children 17 and under grew from 40.5% to 48.3% (Murdock, 2011b). In contrast, the population, population change, and proportion of White children ages 17 and under again decreased dramatically. From 2000 to 2010, White children 17 and under in Texas declined 7.3%, decreasing from 2.5 million to 2.3 million in numeric growth, while the total percentage of the population of White children declined from 42.6% to 33.8% (Murdock, 2011b).

Fueling the increase in Hispanic population in Texas is the birth-to-death rate (Froeschle & Normington, 2010). For example, for every death of a White person, 1.5 White babies were born in Texas. In contrast, for every death of a Hispanic person, eight Hispanic babies were born in Texas (Froeschle & Normington, 2010). Additionally, the birthrate has also exceeded immigration as the primary source of Hispanic population growth (Murdock, 2011b) with the main recipient of both types of Hispanic growth being concentrated in metropolitan and suburban areas (Froeschle & Normington, 2010).

The projections of Hispanics in the United States and Texas show continued growth through the year 2050 (Murdock, 2011b). For example, from 2000 to 2050, the United States is projected to increase in total population to 439 million, with Whites accounting for 203.3 million, whereas Hispanics will account for 132.7 million. Murdock (2011b) projected from 2010 to 2040 Hispanics would account for 25.3 million and Whites would account for 10.9 million additional individuals.

Hispanic Immigrants

Immigration has a large influence on population growth and is a key factor toward the future size and composition of the United States (Toossi, 2009). Fifty-eight percent of Hispanics are immigrants (Ryu, 2010). Because of increased immigration and significantly higher fertility rates among Hispanics, their growth rates are projected to be much higher than other groups. Hispanic immigrants tend to have lower socioeconomic and educational attainment backgrounds than immigrants from other countries (Ryu, 2010). For example, Hispanic immigrants had the highest percentage without a high school credential compared to all other racial and ethnic groups (i.e., 20% United States born versus 50% immigrant). Hispanic immigrants also had the lowest percentage of postsecondary attainment (i.e., 14% held associate degrees or higher) compared to all other racial/ethnic groups (Ryu, 2010). Moreover, the low educational attainment of Hispanics may influence the educational attainment of their children.

Several factors adversely affect the education of Hispanic immigrants including country of origin, age of immigration, history of schooling prior to immigration, language, motivation for immigration and labor market mobility, and legal status (Ryu, 2010). For example, Mexican immigrants comprised 64% of Hispanic immigrants but were over-represented among individuals without a high school credential (i.e., 76%) and under-represented among those individuals with a college degree (i.e., 36%). In contrast, Cuban, Columbian, and Peruvian immigrants possessed similar educational attainment levels of U.S.-born Whites (Ryu, 2010).

In an analysis of data on Hispanic households, documented evidence of the occurrence of linguistic isolation wherein one in three Hispanics reported that they do not speak English or do not speak it well. Moreover, Spanish language use persisted in the home and community because of a preference to speak Spanish, even when one was fluent in English, and because Hispanics comprised a large segment of the population. However, although English language acquisition could affect academic achievement, children born in the United States to immigrant parents or children brought to the United States before the age of 12 could acquire the English language fairly well (Hurtado et al., 2010).

Unauthorized Hispanic Immigrants

Unauthorized and undocumented are used interchangeably in the research literature pertaining to demographic changes or educational attainment of immigrants. For the purposes of this literature review, the term unauthorized refers to immigrants who are foreign born non-citizens residing in the country without legal documentation. Nationally, three-quarters of unauthorized immigrants were Hispanic, and 59% were of Mexican origin. Unauthorized immigrants also comprised a large portion of the U.S. Hispanic population, workforce, and people who have U.S.-born children (Passel & Cohn, 2011).

Although unauthorized immigrants accounted for 4% of the total U.S. population, 8% of births were from unauthorized immigrants (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Interestingly, although the number of unauthorized immigrant children declined from 2000 to 2010, the number of U.S.-born children of unauthorized immigrants doubled in the same period (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Unauthorized immigrants of Mexican origin accounted for the majority (i.e., 70%) of these children, whereas unauthorized immigrants from other Latin American countries accounted for 17%.

Unauthorized immigrant settlement patterns also favored residing in the Southwest part of the United States. Although the settlement patterns of unauthorized immigrants showed a national decline from 2007 to 2010, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas together, grew 240% from 1.5 million to 1.8 million. Texas had the third largest share of unauthorized immigrant population (i.e., 6.7% or 1.6 million out of 24.8 million) behind Nevada and California at 7.2% and 6.8% respectively. Of the total unauthorized immigrant population in Texas, between 60% and 76% were of Mexican origin (Passel & Cohn, 2011).

Hispanics and Poverty

Hispanics comprise close to 3 in 10 of the nation's poor (Lopez & Cohn, 2011). According to Kim (2007), Hispanic families are four times more likely to be poor than were White families. The Hispanic poverty rate also is the highest compared to all other racial and ethnic groups when using the new Census Bureau Supplemental Poverty Measure (Lopez & Cohn, 2011). This measure includes a variety of factors in determining poverty in the United States including: "medical expenses, tax credits, non-cash government benefits (e.g., food stamps, housing subsidies, school lunch programs), and cost of living adjustments for different geographic areas" (Lopez & Cohn, 2011, para. 2).

As of 2010, poverty among Hispanic children increased to record levels, driven by high birthrates of Hispanic immigrants (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Over six million Hispanic children lived in poverty compared to 5 million White children and 4.4 million Black children. The poverty rate of Hispanic children was 35% overall, while the rate for Hispanic children of immigrant parents was 40% (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). In Texas, greater than 2.3 million Hispanics were living in poverty in 2009, accounting for 26.4% of the Hispanic population (Murdock, 2011b).

Educational attainment of parents also affected the poverty rate of Hispanic children. From 2007 to 2010, the U.S. poverty rate grew 9.7% for Hispanic children of parents who had a high school diploma or less, while the poverty rate grew 0.6% for Hispanic children who had at least one parent with a college degree (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Overall, the poverty rate of Hispanic children whose parents had a high school degree or less was 79%, whereas the poverty rate was 16% and 4% respectively for Hispanic children whose parents had attained some college or a college degree (Lopez & Velasco, 2011).

Hispanics and College Enrollment

Recent data indicate spikes in Hispanic college enrollment. During the 2009-2010 period, Hispanic enrollment surged 24% or 350,000 (Fry, 2011). Of the 12.2 million overall enrollments in 2- and 4-year colleges, college-age Hispanics accounted for 1.8 million, or 15% (Fry, 2011). Forty-six percent or 830,000 of young Hispanics attending college were enrolled in community

colleges compared to 54% or one million enrolled at 4-year colleges (Fry, 2011). In Texas, Hispanics accounted for 27% of higher education enrollment (Ryu, 2010).

Population growth, greater Hispanic high school completion rates, and the Hispanic enrollment of college eligible students accounted for Hispanic college enrollment growth (Fry, 2011). Population growth of 18-24 year olds grew larger among Hispanics (i.e., 1.6 million) and doubled since 2000 versus White 18-24 year olds (i.e., 1.5 million) since 2000. From 2009 to 2010, the Hispanic share of 18-24 year olds grew 7% to account for 19% of the total 18-24 year old population. Additionally, the share of Hispanics 18-24 who had completed high school rose to 73% in 2010, up from 70% in 2009 (Fry, 2011).

Some researchers have interpreted Hispanic enrollment growth with caution (Ryu, 2010; Villalpando, 2010). Villalpando (2010) reported that while the college-age 18-24 year-old population continued to increase, this group did not see similar proportions in college enrollment and graduation. Ryu (2010) documented that although college enrollment rates for traditional-college age populations 18-24 years rose for all racial and ethnic groups from 1988 to 2008, enrollment gaps widened by race and ethnicity with Hispanics lagging behind at 28%, versus Asian Americans 63%, Whites 45%, and Blacks 34%.

Zarate and Burciaga (2010) documented several factors contributing to widening enrollment gaps between Hispanics and other racial and ethnic groups. Factors included high Hispanic high school dropout rates, lower likelihood for Latinos to take the college prep curriculum, Hispanic males' underrepresentation in college, de facto segregation, unequal resources, less prepared teachers, less access to Advanced Placement courses, less access to financial aid, and lack of timely college financial aid knowledge to Hispanic families. Cejda and Short (2008) reported about Hispanic family perceptions and attitudes of loans and resistance to borrowing or incurring debt to finance college as influences on college attendance rates. Finally, Zeidenberg (2008) cited three key challenges faced by community colleges in dealing with surging enrollments: (a) unprepared students in need of remedial coursework, (b) limited funding that resulted in cost cutting measures, and (c) poor student outcomes.

Gender differences exist in college enrollment data. The gender composition of enrollments began to reverse in the 1970s and early 1980s as more Hispanic and White women began to enroll in college in larger rates than men did (Villalpando, 2010). In 2008, Hispanic enrollment rates for young Hispanic women were 33% versus 23% for young Hispanic men (Ryu, 2010). This statistic represented a gender gap second to African-Americans. As of 2007, Hispanic women represented 59% of Hispanic enrollments compared to 41% for men (Ryu, 2010). Zarate and Burciaga (2010) cited enrollment gap differences between Hispanic males and Hispanic females including (a) higher salary returns from college for females, (b) literacy performance by family socialization practices, (c) school engagement, and (d) interaction with school agents.

Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) voiced particular concern regarding declining numbers in the college enrollment of Hispanic males. Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) reported early learning experiences and socio-cultural factors that detracted Hispanic males from college including maintaining the "machismo" (p. 59) archetype and a value of "familismo" (p. 62). In the machismo archetype, boys maintained a strong and independent persona that hid a lack of academic confidence (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Hispanic males also possessed a value of familismo, which helped to define gender roles and led to sacrificing individual needs for the sake of family needs.

Hispanics and Educational Attainment

The United States graduates approximately 65,000 unauthorized immigrant students every year (Hurtado et al., 2010). Moreover, college enrollment by unauthorized populations is increasing. For example, Jauregui, Slate, and Stallone-Brown (2011) examined the unauthorized student population in Texas community colleges for 2001 to 2006 and cited evidence of yearly increases in proportion to overall student enrollment. Similarly, Zarate and Burciaga (2010) documented that college enrollment of unauthorized Hispanics has increased in states allowing in-state tuition. Furthermore, under the 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, community colleges will continue to be the foremost higher education setting that provides access and affordability to unauthorized immigrant students (Gardezi, 2012). As much as 1.76 million are estimated to find relief from deportation under DACA with half of this number in school (K-12) and a quarter, high school graduates (Gardezi, 2012).

Ryu (2010) reported that from 1997 to 2007, the number of associate degrees awarded to Hispanics doubled from 42,000 to 85,000, in addition, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Hispanics doubled from 64,000 to 120,000. Fry (2011) documented that Hispanics continued to be the least educated racial or ethnic group citing 13% of Hispanics 25-29 years old had completed a bachelor's degree. Similarly, Tienda (2009) documented that although Hispanic college graduation rates have increased from 5% to 12% for persons 25 and over, the college completion gap has widened between Hispanic and White, Black, and Asian groups during the same period. For example, Ryu (2010) documented that in 2007, Hispanics received 11.6 undergraduate degrees per every 100 Hispanics enrolled in college. In contrast, Whites and Asian Americans received 16.9 and 15.1 degrees respectfully per every 100 students of their ethnicity enrolled in college. Moreover, Kelly, Schneider, and Carey (2010) documented that Hispanic graduation rates lag the graduation rates of Whites at all levels of admission selectivity at 4-year institutions. Furthermore, a larger educational discrepancy exists when disaggregating Latinos into ethnic-origin subgroups with Cuban-Americans having the highest educational outcomes among Hispanics, whereas Mexican and Salvadoran-Americans having the lowest educational outcomes (Villalpando, 2010).

Researchers have analyzed educational enrollment in sub-baccalaureate programs (Alfonso, 2006). Utilizing the Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study of 1989-1994 (BPS89), Alfonso (2006) analyzed a nationally representative sample of 5,940 first-time postsecondary students establishing that Hispanics were slightly over-represented among associate degree seekers (i.e., 70% associate goals, 21 % certificate goals, 9% no stated goal). However, associate degree seekers were more likely to be employed more hours, enrolled in college part-time, and interrupt enrollment in their studies. Similarly, they were less likely to enroll in occupation programs, more likely to enroll part-time, more likely to interrupt enrollment in their studies, more likely to work more, and less likely to reach their goals than students identifying themselves as certificate seekers (Alfonso, 2006).

In contrast, certificate degree seekers were more likely to be female, older, married, have family responsibilities, have children, come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and be first generation students. Moreover, Hispanics had the same statistical probability of their White peers as completing a certificate, transferring to a 4-year program and completing a higher degree (Alfonso, 2006). Based on descriptive analysis, Hispanics were relatively successful at reaching their sub-baccalaureate goals particularly when compared to their Black peers (Alfonso, 2006).

Other circumstances were present that place Hispanic students at risk for not completing college. For example, Alfonso (2006) cited that Hispanic students are more independent, depending less on their parents' income, compared to White students (Alfonso, 2006). Tienda (2009) documented that Hispanics were more likely to attend larger, segregated, underperforming and urban schools. Cejda and Short (2008) observed that Hispanics held negative self-perceptions of not considering oneself college material, and that they maintained a reluctance to finance education through borrowing and incurring debt. Finally, O'Connor, Hammack, and Scott (2009) remarked that college qualified Hispanic students were less likely than White or Black college-qualified students to build sufficient social capital in order to obtain necessary information about college.

Tienda (2009) mentioned three circumstances that differentiated Hispanics from their White peers in higher education attainment. First, Hispanics were less likely to graduate high school, college ready. For example, Hispanics trailed their White peers in completion of advanced math and science in high school. Second, Hispanics held a higher propensity to attend community colleges. For example, one in three Hispanic high school graduates who were college ready enrolled in 2-year institutions compared to less than a fourth of their White peers (Tienda, 2009). Lastly, Hispanics had several other risk factors that were barriers to college success.

Alon, Domina, and Tienda (2010) documented intergenerational transmission deficits as other factors contributing to racial and ethnic educational attainment gaps. Alon et al. (2010) documented that 19% of White high school graduates had parents who lacked college education versus more than half of Hispanic high school graduates having parents with no college experience. Conversely, more than half of White high school graduates had a least one parent with a bachelor's degree, whereas only 19% of parents of Hispanic high school graduates had similar college backgrounds. Alon et al. (2010) explained Hispanic-White gaps in postsecondary educational attainment because of population composition and unequal ability on behalf of Hispanics to transfer educational advantages to their children. Moreover, the ethnic gap in parental education between White and Hispanic students widened between 1982 and 2004.

Texas data indicated an even wider ethnic gap in parental educational attainment. Among students with college-educated parents, White students were twice as likely to earn a college degree (Alon et al., 2010). Moreover, enrollment gaps existing between White students with college-educated parents and Hispanic students with college-educated parents existed for 2-year, 4-year, and competitive 4-year colleges for four cohorts of students (Alon et al., 2010). Similarly, in a Texas survey of high school seniors, Hispanic students were significantly more likely than were White, Black, and Asian peers to respond that they had first started thinking about attending college during high school (Tienda, 2009).

Educational gaps in college completion also exist among White, native born, and foreign-born Hispanics (Villalpando, 2010). For example, White adults 25 to 34 years of age outnumber native-born Hispanic adults in college completion by 2 to 1, and foreign-born Hispanic adults by 3 to 1. Additionally, associate and bachelor's degree attainment levels were higher for second- and third-generation Latinos than for foreign-born immigrants, suggesting that the current large populations of Hispanic youth immigrants enrolled in the K-12 educational system may continue to find challenges in their own level of educational attainment (Villalpando, 2010).

The Texas Closing the Gaps Plan for Participation and Success for Hispanic Students

The *Closing the Gaps* goal for participation is to increase the overall participation rate for students in public and independent higher education institutions from 5% in 2000 to 5.7% by 2015 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a). An analysis of the 2010 participation rate revealed the overall participation rate as “well above target” at 5.9%, leaving another 145,000 students to meet the 2015 participation goal of 630,483 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a, p. 10). Public 2-year institutions accounted for a majority of the growth in participation from 2000 to 2010 with a total of 295,254 or 60.8% of all students (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a).

The participation target for Hispanic students is to increase the overall participation rate for the Hispanic population from 3.7% in 2000 to 5.7% in 2015 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a). Although Hispanic enrollment increased faster than any of the three major racial/ethnic groups from 2000 through 2010, Hispanic enrollment was “well below target” or 12.2% below the target enrollment number of 236,606 for 2010 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a, p. 13). Hispanic participation will need to increase another 230,917, up from 207,789, to meet the 2015 Hispanic participation goal of 438,706 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a).

The *Closing the Gaps* goal for success is to increase the overall number of bachelor’s associates, and certificates (BACs) to 171,000 by 2000 and to 210,000 by 2015 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a). An analysis of BACs awarded by Texas public and independent institutions was “somewhat above target” (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a, p. 19) having awarded 176,604 BACs for 2010 and needing another 33,000 BACs to meet the 2015 goal. The overall goal of students completing associate degrees in Texas public and independent institutions by 2015 is 55,500 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011b). An analysis of the number of associate degrees obtained in 2010 revealed an actual number of associate degrees of 48,851 degrees as being “well above target” (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a, p. 21) compared to the target number of 44,400.

The success target for Hispanic students is to increase the attainment of BACs to 67,000 by 2015. In contrast to the overall number of BACs awarded in 2010, BACs awarded to Hispanics, (i.e., 47,750) was “somewhat below target” (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a, p. 24) of the target number of 50,000. Public 2-year institutions in Texas awarded over half of the BACs to Hispanics in 2010 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011a).

Hispanic Presence in Community Colleges

Several researchers have documented the over-representation of Hispanics in community colleges (Kurlaender, 2006; O’Connor, 2009; O’Connor et al., 2009; Villalpando, 2010). Villalpando (2010) reported disproportionate representation among first-generation Hispanic college-goers in community colleges that were more likely to work while going to school. Similarly, Kurlaender (2006) contended that Hispanic students were more likely than Black students and White students to choose to attend a community college over a 4-year institution. O’Connor (2010) examined the relationship between geography and community college enrollment. Hispanic students aspiring to obtain a bachelor’s degree were more likely to enroll in community colleges compared to White or Black students aspiring to obtain a bachelor’s

degree, with the exception of Hispanic students living in states with a strong Hispanic presence. In this case, Hispanic students were equally likely to attend community colleges and 4-year institutions.

Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, and McLain (2006) explored the relationship of critical mass or proportional representation and Latino student success in a community college. Critical mass brings about comfort, familiarity, and an alignment with the dominant campus culture that led to retention and persistence, as opposed to a traditional path of marginalization, isolation, and loneliness from a lack of proportional representation. Both a critical mass of Hispanic students and Hispanic faculty significantly predicted success for Hispanic students.

Conclusion

First, community college administrators may utilize this information toward gaining a better understanding on how a future Texas workforce will consist of a growing Hispanic population. Given this, opportunities exist for colleges to increase recruitment and retention efforts of Hispanic students through culturally sensitive programming that appeal to first generation and immigrant populations. As noted above, the Hispanic immigrant populations in Texas are some of the least educated. Hispanic males have also been documented as missing in higher education (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Culturally sensitive programming might entail communicating essential information to students and their families in their native language regarding the importance of attaining a college education at the sub-baccalaureate level and higher in order to compete for meaningful employment opportunities. Other essential programming would entail creating greater opportunities for financial assistance to students that may not necessarily qualify for assistance due to lack of citizenship status.

Second, Texas employers may utilize this information to initiate programs that prepare Hispanics toward gainful employment in a future Texas workforce that requires higher levels of technical skills. A particular concern of Texas human resource managers is the lack of Hispanics completing degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, with Hispanics currently accounting for only 20% of STEM graduates (Froeschle & Normington, 2010). Texas employers also acknowledge “knowledge transfer” (Froeschle & Normington, 2010, p. 19) as an important step in maintaining a ready workforce after baby-boomers decide to retire. Programming that could be initiated would consist of specialized recruitment, internships, and mentoring programs for Hispanic populations from grade school to graduate school level.

Lastly, Texas Hispanics, especially first generation and immigrant populations, may utilize this information to understand the economic benefits of educational attainment, including at the sub-baccalaureate level, that lead to plentiful employment opportunities that a Texas workforce will offer. This will entail schools, state governmental agencies, and employers working together to convey this message to Hispanic students and their families (Froeschle & Normington, 2010).

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Academic Performance Gaps and Family Income in a Rural Elementary School: Perceptions of Low-Income Parents

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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A wide range of research has been conducted regarding reasons for the achievement gap between low income students and higher income students, but there is limited research regarding parental perspectives, and particularly fewer studies of parental perceptions of low-income, rural elementary school parents. This study examined the extent to which an income-related achievement gap existed at a particular rural school and explored low-income parent perceptions of the achievement gap and factors contributing to it. This was a mixed-method, primarily qualitative study. Quantitative data was collected from a group of sixty-two free and reduced lunch students and a comparison sample of higher income students which included academic, attendance, and discipline reports. Findings indicated a gap does exist at the school. Qualitative data included interviews of six parents of low-income students and delved into topics regarding how participants perceive various factors affect the performance of their children. Four themes emerged: parental involvement and capacity, access to resources, the role of the schools and limits, and American societal and governmental systems. Implications suggest that this particular rural school and others with similar demographics would benefit from specific strategies to assist in understanding cultural differences to improve instruction and, ultimately, avenues to include parents by exploring current practices that may be unintentionally discriminating.

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Historically, children from low-income families have performed poorly in school and on standardized achievement tests when compared to their more advantaged peers (Lareau, 2000, 2011; OECD, 2011; West, 2007). Despite significant efforts to close this achievement gap, it remains one of the central challenges facing today's educational leaders. An extensive research base suggests that a wide variety of factors interact together in different ways, cultures, and contexts to produce levels of inequality that in turn affect student achievement (Allington et al., 2010; Fry, 2007; Gordon, 1996; Lareau, 2000, 2011; Rothstein, 2008; West, 2007).

One area that is not well researched is the achievement gap in rural schools, particularly from the perspective of low-income parents of children in those schools. While successful rural schools have been studied from various perspectives (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Yiu & Adams, 2013), there is limited research dedicated to examining the achievement gap between low-income and higher-income students in rural communities. What's more, there is little research that examines this achievement gap from the perspective of low-income parents whose children attend rural schools. Yet, parents play an important role in children's education and are uniquely positioned to shed light on the issue of why children from different economic classes achieve at different levels. For educational leaders whose work involves rural communities, it is helpful to understand the particularities of the income-based achievement gap within rural contexts.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was two-fold. We first examined the academic performance of low-income and higher income students in an elementary school in rural Illinois. Additionally, we explored low-income parents' perceptions of the income-related achievement gap and the factors contributing to it in this particular school. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. To what extent is there a gap between the academic performance of students from low-income and higher-income families in this particular school?
2. What do the parents of students from low-income families perceive to be the causes or explanation for the academic performance gap between students from lower-income and higher-income families in this particular school?

Theoretical Framework

In order for school leaders to understand the dynamics affecting the achievement gap between low-income and higher-income students, they must understand the differences and similarities among students. Cultural capital theory and the concept of culturally-responsive pedagogy attempt to provide a framework for clarity. Cultural capital theory is based on the premise that the greater an individual's cultural capital, the greater the likelihood of that individual procuring additional forms of capital, including economic and social success. Culturally responsive pedagogy attempts to clarify how utilizing culturally competent services and instruction may address the cultural gap and thus improve academic performance of students from low-income backgrounds.

Schools play an important role in the process through which the cultural capital of privileged classes is converted into opportunities and rewards. As framed by Lamont and Lareau (1988), children enter the institution of school needing key social and cultural codes that middle to upper class children have already acquired. To flourish in the educational setting, students must have the capacity to operate within this system of codes, but when a system is based on the dominant culture, the low-income student is disadvantaged (Lamont & Lareau, 1988).

Culturally responsive pedagogy suggests that using culturally competent services and instruction may improve academic performance of low-income students. Specifically, culturally responsive pedagogy rejects the deficit model implicit in many responses to the achievement gap and maintains that what educators think they know is often based on a distorted view of what they have gleaned through media, critics, and popular culture (Gay, 2002). According to Geneva Gay (2002), culturally competent services include "developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction" (p. 106). The premise is that by blending connections between daily lives of students outside the school with instruction, one can improve achievement by making instruction more meaningful and taught in a context that the children understand.

These two theories, cultural capital theory and cultural responsive pedagogy, are intricately intertwined and suggest that parents and parents' knowledge play important roles in the process through which cultural capital (and the lack thereof) contributes to differences in academic achievement and the inequality that results from those differences. Cultural capital theory suggests that some parents, particularly those from the middle and upper-middle classes, possess cultural advantages that their children carry with them into school. Conversely, parents from outside these privileged classes lack the cultural advantages and thus, their children enter school at a disadvantage.

One response to this gap is to bring children of low-income families into conformity with, or at least contact with, the cultural norms of the privileged classes. This approach is reflected in the work of Ruby Payne (1996) and the Knowledge is Power Program (Lack, 2009). However, this approach imposes the dominant culture onto children from outside that culture and places such children at odds with the cultural norms and values of their parents and communities. In contrast, culturally responsive pedagogy suggests that schools can address this gap in ways that avoid such hegemonic practices, and instead, make schools and teachers knowledgeable about and responsive to the cultural norms and values, as well as economic and social realities, of the less privileged parents and students in their midst.

Overall, cultural capital and culturally responsive pedagogy provide a conceptual framework from which to explore the achievement gap from the perspective of low-income families. Additionally, building upon Gay's (2002) assertion that much of how schools respond to low-income students is based upon assumptions about them, it is important to explore parents' perceptions to better understand the cultural background of low-income students, improve our pedagogical practices, and better serve children of low-income families.

Review of Literature

Researchers in the United States have confirmed that economically disadvantaged students do not perform as well academically as students from groups of higher socioeconomic status (SES); however, they disagree on what explains this achievement gap (Allington et al., 2010; Gordon, 1996; Lareau, 2000, 2011; OECD, 2011; Rothstein, 2008; West, 2007). The literature is varied and sometimes contradictory. For the purposes of this study, we grouped the approaches found in the research into three somewhat overlapping conceptual categories: cultural capital deficits, economic inequality, and familial conditions/circumstances.

Cultural Capital Deficits

Cultural capital refers to the skills and knowledge that are typically passed from one generation to another and these skills become capital that allows for advantages for members of the dominant group (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Sullivan, 2011). Sullivan (2011) posited that middle class children are more readily able to accrue educational credentials due to their cultural capital. Sullivan also stated that cultural capital is evident within the home (language, etiquette, social cues) and impacts performance of children on examinations, which many assert are culturally biased to the dominant middle-class culture (2011). Dumais (2005) contended that while sociologists have studied cultural capital for the past twenty years, results have been mixed as to whether applying the cultural capital theory to the American education system is appropriate. However, Gorski (2012) reported it is the misinformation inherent in stereotyping that most affects student outcomes and that theories regarding poor academic performance and the underprivileged student are tied to preconceived ideas that are held by members of particular identity groups.

Economic Inequality

Economic deficiencies in the home and the institution affect academic achievement. For example, Allington et al. (2010) and Rothstein (2008) agreed that limited access to financial assets within the family (such as technology, books, or education-rich experiences) affects performance. Additionally, characteristics of low-income families that influence children's performance include the inability to afford healthcare and high mobility/absence rates as parents move from place to place following work/job opportunities (Rothstein, 2004; 2008). Schools serving these students often lack quality teachers and resources that more wealthy districts may provide (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). Gorski (2012) contended that teachers and school officials may have lower expectations of economically disadvantaged students, which plays into the bias that people from low-income circumstance cannot learn, so there is not a pervasive reason for expecting them to achieve. Further, Gorski (2012) and Thomas (2010) felt that teacher workshops intended to assist in bridging cultural differences perpetuate the negative stereotypes by giving indicators of poverty that are not necessarily factual in every case and current professional development for educators oversimplify such issues.

Familial Conditions/Circumstances

Some research reports that there are specific characteristics of low-income families that contribute to low performance of children. For example, Fry (2007) and West (2007) felt that parental educational levels are directly related to whether youths stay in school. For example, professional parents produce children more likely to remain in school. West (2007) posited that less educated parents could contribute to lower achievement levels of their children by the nature of their own education or experiences. Additionally, parental involvement, in terms of home-school relationships and the differences in performance, appears to be less evident in low-income homes (Lareau, 2000; 2011).

While some research suggests that early learning environment (Brown, 2009) and skill gaps in expressive language (West, 2007) play a role in predicting school problems for at-risk students, others state that persistence is a key factor in student performance. The Organisation of

Economic Co-operation and Development (2011) reported that these students do not sustain persistence when faced with academic challenge which is the ultimate cause for the difficulties in school, whereas the children from higher socioeconomic groups are better equipped to persist because they may attack challenging tasks with a better self-concept and positive attitude. Thus, the low-income child who is unable to persist in the face of difficult academic tasks will continue to fall further behind, in fact widening the achievement gap (Brown, 2009).

The literature related to the achievement gap reflects agreement that the gap is a problem, but there is considerable disagreement regarding the causes of that gap. The research suggests that several dynamics contribute and that addressing them will require taking multiple factors into account. However, regardless of what factor or factors are evident as the explanation, the perspective of parents is important for two reasons. First, parents play a central role in the education of children. Parental attitudes, behaviors, and resources have significant impact on student achievement and contribute to gaps in that achievement. Second, parents are knowledgeable in ways that teachers and school administrators are not. Yet there exists little research examining parents' perceptions. This study partly addresses this lack of research.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was primarily a phenomenological exploration of the "meaning and interactions of ordinary people in a particular" setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, p. 25), specifically, low-income parents in one rural community. Inherent in this type of research is the process of posing questions, gathering data, composing codes and themes, and reporting findings (Esterberg, 2001). In addition, the study was secondarily quantitative, with sources regarding the academic achievement gap gathered from the school's data bases. In combination, these two methodological approaches captured both the extent of the income-related achievement gap in the school and parental perspectives on its causes.

Sample/Participants

This study focused on students from low-income families attending a small rural elementary school in southwest Illinois. For the purposes of the study, students who qualified for support through the federal free and reduced lunch program were identified as "low-income." Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the current poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals (USDA, 2012).

The school is located within a small rural community that is part of a larger, primarily suburban school district that encompasses nearly 200 square miles. The community once prospered from the coal industry and now relies on income from the agriculture sector. The elementary school serves approximately 300 students in grades 3, 4, and 5. Students are predominately Caucasian and the Illinois State Report Card denoted a nearly 25% free and reduced lunch participant enrollment, which comprised the low-income population for this study.

For the quantitative component of this study, we aggregated performance data for low-income students as determined by the free and reduced lunch program. This is typically about 50 students, but does change annually due to changes in enrollment. We used Illinois Standards

Assessment Test (ISAT) results, AIMSweb scores, discipline reports, and attendance records. To provide a comparison group, we used stratified random sampling to select a number of students who do not qualify for free and reduced lunches equal to the number of low-income students who do. This was a layered approach whereby we examined the low-income group in terms of numbers of students within the group that have certain attributes (grade level, ethnicity, and gender). Then, all other students were grouped together by those attributes and we randomly drew from each layer of students who do not qualify for free and reduced lunches, a number equal to those layers in the low-income sample group. This ensured similar data sets in number, gender, and race for the low-income sample and the comparison sample. Care was taken in this research investigation to ensure demographics from each sample group were the same. The free and reduced lunch group (FRL) and the comparative group were each comprised of 62 students (n=62). There were 29 males and 33 females in each group. Grade level demographics were 14 third graders, 27 fourth graders, and 21 fifth graders. Ethnicity was 55 Caucasian, 5 Hispanic, and 2 Multi-race in each sample, which is representative of the overall ethnic population of the research school.

Participants for the qualitative component were chosen via purposive sampling. After identifying the parents of the 62 low-income students through the student management system, eSchoolPlus (Sungard, version 2.4), the lead author drew 31 names randomly and contacted those parents or guardians via the telephone to ask for volunteers for the study. Of the 31 households called, the lead author spoke directly to 20 parents. Of the remaining 11 households, 9 did not return the call and 2 phone numbers were disconnected. Six parents from 6 different households agreed to participate. The interview participant gender demographics included 5 females and 1 male. Ethnicity demographics included 3 Caucasian, 2 Hispanic, and 1 Multi-race. Grade level demographics included 1 third grade parent, 3 fourth grade parents, and 2 fifth grade parents. Additionally, three participants were from single female parent homes and three participants were from two-parent homes.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected through aggregate performance measures including 2013 Illinois Standard Achievement Test results, May 2013 AIMSweb scores, discipline reports, and attendance records for both the low-income group (n=62) and the comparative group (n=62). Discipline and attendance records were obtained through the district's student management system, eSchoolPlus (Sungard, 2.4). Qualitative data were gathered from parents through interviews using open-ended questions and a semi-structured format (Creswell, 2008). Each participant was interviewed once with the interviews lasting from 45 to 90 minutes in length. The interviews were audio-taped to guarantee accuracy of participants' responses and written notes were taken during the interviews to document aspects of the interview that may not be readily apparent from an audiotape (Creswell, 2008).

Data Analysis

The lead author examined data for the quantitative portion of this study to determine and describe the extent of the gaps between the academic performance, attendance, and behavior of students from the low-income group and the comparative group. Data points included: ISAT and AIMSweb raw scores and the percentage of students in each group who met and/or exceeded

expectations; the total number of office referrals for students in each study group; and total days missed between September 1, 2012 and August 31, 2013 for students in each study group. The lead author analyzed the qualitative data using Esterberg’s protocol (2001). The overall intent was to make sense of the data by breaking it into parts and analyzing each component. Attention was placed on common threads throughout the data and, eventually, focused codes were mined from the information. Once the lead author ascertained themes and subthemes, she compiled the data and reduced them into a summary of findings.

Findings

Quantitative Results

Overall, the quantitative data confirmed that gaps existed between the academic achievement, attendance, and behavior of low-SES students and higher-SES students. Two-sample t-tests were conducted and the first specific, significant finding was that the comparative group outperformed the FRL group on all four academic measures. The mean scores from both tables show that the comparative sample group consistently scored higher in math and reading on both ISAT subtests and AIMS assessments (see Tables 1 and 2). Overall, there was a 26 percentage point difference in reading scores between the FRL sample group and the comparative sample group: 82% of the comparative sample group met or exceeded standards on the ISAT reading assessment while 56% of the FRL sample group met or exceeded standards. Similarly, there was a 35 percentage point gap in math scores between the FRL sample group and the comparative sample group: 87% of the comparative sample group met or exceeded standards on the ISAT math assessment while 52% of the FRL sample group met or exceeded standards. When examining AIMSweb results, 91% of the students from the comparative sample group scored above the 25th percentile while 63% of the FRL sample group scored above the 25th percentile, accounting for a 28 percentage point difference in performance. Eighty-one percent of the students from the comparative sample group scored above the 25th percentile on the AIMSweb math assessment while 58% of the FRL sample group scored above the 25th percentile, accounting for a 23 percentage point difference in performance.

Table 1
Central Tendencies of Academic Performance of the FRL Sample Group

Measure	n	μ	Mdn	Mode	SD
ISAT Reading	62	221	225	246	24.54
ISAT Math	62	230	228	228	26.46
AIMs Reading	62	123	120	102	37.42
AIMs Math	62	37	34	33	19.77

Table 2
Central Tendencies of Academic Performance of the Comparative Sample Group

Measure	n	μ	Mdn	Mode	SD
ISAT Reading	62	238	238	256	21.06
ISAT Math	62	246	242	226	22.18
AIMs Reading	62	150	154	135	32.76
AIMs Math	62	44	47	49	17.87

While not proven statistically significant, it may be important to note that the low-income student group had more recorded discipline incidents and a higher number of days absent than the comparative sample group. The comparative group had 29 discipline referrals and the FRL group had 65, more than double the number of incidents. Additionally, students from the comparative sample group missed an aggregate of 404 days of school while the students from the FRL sample missed 581.5. That equated to an average of almost three days more per student in the low-income group than the comparative group.

Qualitative Results: Four Themes

Four themes emerged from the interviews with parents. Within the first theme, parents pointed to both a lack of parental involvement in their children’s education and a lack of parental capacity to be more involved. Within the other three themes, parents addressed broader institutional and social factors that they saw as contributing to the achievement gap in the school.

Theme 1- Limited parental involvement and capacity. Most participants discussed parental involvement as a critical issue affecting the academic progress of economically disadvantaged students, citing that parental support is essential but sometimes lacking. It seemed that most participants wanted to help their children, but could not see a way to obtain the resources, be it financial or other, needed for them to be on a level playing field with more wealthy children. The reasons for this varied.

Overall, participants felt that parents should be involved in their children's education to ensure success in the classroom, and, more widely, in life. The majority of participants felt that parents are not as involved in their children’s schooling as they should be. One parent stated, "[My child] is okay, but some of these parents just don't care what happens at school," while another said, "parents need to help their kids with their homework and make sure they get to school." The exception to this pattern was one parent who focused more on the role of larger social forces, believing that there was not a pressing reason for parents to assist with homework as children are destined to remain in the same social class as their parents.

Most participants also felt that low-income parents do not know what to do or how to help their children achieve at higher levels. For example, one participant said, "Maybe they just don't know how to help their kids." A second parent explained, "I think they don't know what to do, what questions to ask you all [school personnel], or don't know how to help their kids." However, one parent in particular felt that there is not a pervasive reason that he should be involved:

The only reason I'm here today is to keep you all from bugging me. I got work to do and things to see to. He's got an IEP, so I know I have to come up here and sign those papers, but other than that, there ain't a reason for me to be here. Home is home and school is school.

Theme 2- Limited access to resources. Participants believed that a lack of resources establishes a barrier to successful academic performance because low-income students have limited access to technology and other educational or financial resources. Parents also believed that this gap in access affects student performance and self-esteem.

Parents felt that the inability to access technology affects student performance in terms of parents' ability to assist their children with homework, lack of access to email communications from the school, and inability to monitor their children's progress via the online grading system. One parent explained, "I can't look it up on the internet and I don't have money for gas to take him back to school or to the library." A participant noted that it was difficult to know what was going on at school because the family does not have internet to check grades (progress). She felt it was unfair for her family to not have access when other families do.

It was also prudent to note that generally parents felt limited financial resources also affects student self-esteem and/or social interactions. One participant noted that students find it difficult to fit in socially as it is "tough growing up without all the cool gadgets all your friends have." Another parent stated:

I don't have gas money to run her into [town] to play soccer or go to kids' birthday parties. I think she gets upset and her friends don't understand that we just can't afford it. If you're upset, you can't do as good at school.

Theme 3- The role of the school: barriers and limits. The majority of participants noted that a good education and unbiased, caring teachers were important to the ultimate future success of their students beyond the school years. For example, one parent stated, "[School] is so important or she'll never get out and have a better life than me." Another noted, "It's important you have good teachers who don't take it out on the kids 'cause they can't pay for a field trip." For the most part, the parents reported that their children were getting this sort of education and that the school was treating low-income children well.

Despite this vote of confidence in the school, parents also reported that the attempts the school personnel make to include families are problematic for various reasons. Some parents noted that the ways in which the school communicates with families were ineffective. For example, one parent stated, "You all try to get us to come in. But you do it by sending home newsletters. We don't have time to read those. You need to call us up if you want us to come in." Other parents pointed to reasons why they are unable or unwilling to attend school meetings and events. One parent stated, "I don't want to come up here during the day--I can't anyway, someone has to take care of the babies until the older ones get home." Another said, "We are either working, or we're taking care of younger kids." In addition to these sorts of practical hurdles preventing parents from coming to the school, a third parent noted that parents may be uncomfortable attending some school events. She said, "We don't know what to do [at these events]. I am embarrassed to come up here on a big event night."

Although most parents voiced their belief in the importance that school has for their children's future, one parent suggested that the impact of the school is limited.

It don't matter who he gets or who gets him. It's not gonna change who I am or who he is. It's not gonna make him do his homework any faster or better. It's not gonna make me make him. It's your job to teach, so yeah, a good teacher is important, but only 'til he's done with school.

This observation is reinforced by the parents' perceptions of how some low-income parents lack the capacity and resources to support their children's achievement.

Theme 4- American societal and governmental systems. Parents unanimously felt that the way in which governmental systems are organized is unfair to low-income families or implied that American societal systems perpetuate the cycle of being poor. Specifically, parents felt that the government system works against the poor, imposes unrealistic testing requirements that make it difficult for their children to obtain higher education, and that the generational poor are relegated to their socioeconomic class. Opinions, almost unanimously, were that the government is contributing to the discrepancy by not ensuring that their children have what they need to be successful in schools, and more generally, in life. The consensus was that through its inability to provide adequate financial assistance for or the lack of interest in the needs of the low-income families, the government perpetuates social stratification. Additionally participants seemed to feel that if the government would afford assistance for needs outside of providing food stamps, for example, the families may be able to improve their socioeconomic status, which in turn will improve student performance. One parent stated:

The state needs to step in and say 'enough'. They give us food stamps, but that don't put gas in my tank to go to work or put clothes on the kids' backs. It don't make [students] do any better at school. How is it these other countries don't have people making millions and others making pennies?

Parents also implied that high-stakes testing contributes to social stratification in the school system. A parent said, "The government set us up to be poor. Why do they think a huge test is going to tell them which of our kids can go to college?" Another noted, "Our kids can't go to college without money or help, but they can't go to college without getting good grades, but they can't get good grades if they can't pass the test." This suggested that parents perceived the current meritocratic system is flawed by giving advantages to more affluent children.

Parents made specific references to the phenomenon of generational poor and the system that they felt is designed in such a way that makes it difficult for their children to succeed. Parents felt that they are stuck where they are socioeconomically and that they are powerless to do anything about it, which alludes to a perception that American societal systems allow this to happen. For example, participants made statements such as, "I just want her to have it better than I did," or "What it is, is he is stuck where he is because I'm stuck where I am and my dad was stuck where he was unless something changes." One of the six low-income parents interviewed, who it was important to note was the one male in the study and one of the two interviewees of Hispanic descent, believed that social status and the amount of money made in a family is impacted by race and that social class stratification is inevitable because poor people of color are especially vulnerable to being held within socioeconomic confines. He stated:

The lighter your skin, the better jobs you get. The darker your skin, the worse jobs you get. And there's a difference with every shade darker- light people and medium people and dark people. We are stuck where we are, with no money and there ain't no point trying to change that. How much money we make and what jobs we get depends on the shade of your skin. The darker you are, the lower your money. Simple.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which there is an income-related achievement gap at the study school and to explore low-income, rural parents' perceptions of that gap and the factors contributing to it. In this section, we address each question in terms of the findings and their implications for educational leaders.

Quantitative Findings

Low-income students perform poorly when compared to higher-income peers. The students in the comparative group sample performed higher academically, attended more school days, and had fewer discipline incidents than the FRL group.

First, students in the FRL sample group performed below peers of higher-income as evidenced on standardized achievement tests. These tests were nationally normed, state-normed, and locally normed. This supports research showing that low-income students do not perform as well on standardized achievement assessments as higher-income students (Allington et al., 2010; Gordon, 1996; Lareau, 2000, 2011; OECD, 2011; Rothstein, 2008; West, 2007).

Secondly, students in the low-SES group missed over 177 more days during the school year than the comparative sample group. This also supports research which has shown that students from low-income homes have higher levels of absenteeism (Lareau, 2000, 2011; OECD, 2011; Rothstein, 2008; West, 2007). The data did not clearly indicate whether the absenteeism was due to health problems or to other pervasive reasons, and determining what the reasons were would be helpful because if students are missing instruction, it follows that levels of achievement could be lower.

Finally, if students missed instruction due to disciplinary dispositions, levels of achievement could be lower. It was important for the lead author to consider that the discipline rate for the FRL group was more than twice that of the comparative group. Do these children lack persistence in the face of academic challenges as Brown (2009) and others (OECD, 2011) postulated? Or are there different expectations of these children as Lareau (2000) asserted and could student frustration be leading to misbehavior? Could lack of cultural awareness be leading the school leaders to misinterpret different behavior as misbehavior?

Therefore, a longitudinal examination of the issue of discipline in this school would be useful to discover if and how behavior or response to behavior impacts student achievement. This could be obtained through avenues such as tracking reasons for absences (illness, transportation, appointments, and suspensions) and discipline referrals (by incident type to isolate specific behaviors) via the school management data system. This would provide an opportunity to coordinate services with outside resources if necessary through support staff. Tracking the attendance and discipline incidents in a more personal way would allow patterns to emerge or isolate areas that could be addressed through appropriate interventions. Attention should be given to finding ways to ensure programs, actions, and consequences are culturally-

responsive so as to avoid unnecessary discipline incidents that may contribute to lower levels of achievement by removing students from instruction or alienating students from the school community.

Qualitative Findings

The explanations, causes, and barriers that parents perceived to affect student performance were intricately intertwined, and at times, difficult to separate from one another. Parents pointed towards limited parental capacity and resources as key factors they believed most affected their children's performance. Furthermore, while they did not explicitly refer to cultural cues or values as an explanation for the gap, they did note that social and institutional forces and policies contribute to it.

Limited knowledge/capacity. Participants reported that they and other low-income parents wanted their children to do well, but were often unsure of how to go about assisting them achieve at higher levels. It was interesting that while parents stated that a lack of parental support contributed to lower-income students' relatively low levels of achievement, most tended to see this as a problem for other parents, not themselves. This could be an accurate perception: perhaps the parents interviewed were not representative of the low-income population at the school due to selection bias in terms of the volunteers for this study. It also could be that the interviewer's position as an administrator in the research school had a negative effect on their willingness to be completely open.

The notion that parents do not know how to help their children may support the view that a lack of cultural capital contributes to the achievement gap. This calls for perhaps a reconceptualization of cultural capital theory to include academic skills as Lareau and Weininger (2003) asserted in terms of those skills needed to be successful in the very way schools and educational institutions are organized. Humans often interpret by standards set to their own culture, thus an argument could be made that is exactly why school leaders should tap into a more culturally responsive model as Gay (2002) posited. However, specific best practice training to work with economically disadvantaged students is not wide-spread and school leaders should seek professional development that is geared toward understanding this diversity to better formulate instruction.

Limited access to resources. Most parents spoke of their limited access to resources as an obstacle to their children obtaining certain important academic accoutrements. For example, parents noted that they have limited access to technology, yet school systems often utilize emails for communication and expect parents to have online access to view grades. This might be linked with the opinion of many of the participants that educational leaders need to find different ways to include parents and is directly related to Lareau's (2011) theory that parents are invited to be involved in their children's education, but it is not always recognized that some parents find it difficult to do so. Thus, personnel at schools may be unintentionally discriminating against low-income children through the methods by which they encourage involvement and/or communicate with parents. School and district leaders should work to make school policies more sensitive to the realities of lower-income parents.

At the same time, it is worth questioning whether low-income parents lack access to resources or lack knowledge needed to access those resources. To some extent, the data gathered for this study suggests that both are relevant. For example, one participant noted that a lack of money for gas makes it difficult to attend some school events. This certainly reflects a lack of

resources. However, another participant mentioned that it is difficult to access materials at the local library due to its limited hours but was misinformed about the extent to which the library is open in the evenings. A lack of family resources is something that school leaders should be aware of and sensitive to, even if they are not able to address the problem. Additionally, parents' reference to problematic school policies suggests that school personnel could be better informed about families' realities and more responsive to their needs. On the other hand, a lack of knowledge is something the educators can address through the sharing of information. In addition, to the extent that low-income parents lack the educational background to help their children with academic work, educational leaders may help address this through academic support and afterschool programs.

Macro-level factors. Participants recognized a disconnect between what is provided through government programs designed to assist the poor and what actually is needed to improve conditions of the poor. Additionally, most parents felt that the lack of government assistance, involvement, or understanding, in terms of the government's current system of support for the poor and over reliance on "high-stakes testing," may perpetuate the achievement gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students. While the anti-poverty programs have provided basic necessities such as food, they have not been successful in equalizing access to resources. This may reflect an overemphasis on fixing people and their individual conditions as opposed to reforming the system itself. This study supports the notion that poverty cannot be solved at the micro-level, but should continue to be an area of concern and focus for national policy makers.

One parent in particular felt that regardless of what parents do and how well a child does in school, socioeconomic class is predetermined by race. While this study did not focus on issues specific to race, this parent's perceptions were not far removed from other participants' beliefs that there are societal and governmental constraints placed upon the poor. In all cases, participants in this study perceived that shifts toward "standards-based education" favors advantaged socioeconomic groups whose cultural capital are reflected in such standards. While school and district leaders may not have much influence over the content of federal or state-mandated educational standards, they should be aware of the actual and perceived class bias those standards reflect.

Gay's (2002) theory states that some policies and educators oversimplify poverty by presuming that being poor is a reflection of bad choices while overlooking society's and educational institutions' own contributions to the overall issue of poverty. Lareau and Weininger (2003) argue that cultural capital strategies become imperative in terms of examining the system's institutional standards. Both points are applicable here. The parents who participated in this study demonstrated that they felt that the system by which American institutions are governed is unfair and this research supports that we should explore ways to meet the needs of our diverse population at the school level.

Conclusion

The findings of this study, while limited to one particular rural community, have more widespread implications for educational leaders. To some extent, the findings support the notion that gaps in educational achievement are not limited to the urban context. The study also suggests that low-income parents believe that such gaps are brought about by a complex interplay of forces and circumstances. However, from the perspective of the parents who

participated in this study, structural issues are more relevant than individual circumstances. The parents did point to ways in which some low-income parents sometimes fall short. However, for these parents, the impact of the efforts or lack of efforts of low-income parents and their children is lessened by other factors, some of which are exacerbated by education policies and officials.

In the end, this study supports both increasing school and district-level efforts to respond to the realities of low-income families in rural areas and lowering the expectations for what school and district-level policies can achieve on their own. Educators in rural schools have the ability to make changes that would benefit low-income parents and children. Some of these changes, such as contacting parents by phone rather than through email or notes home, are relatively simple. Others, such as supporting low-income parents' efforts to help their children and increasing a school community's cultural competence, are more complicated. These sorts of changes may not address the larger socioeconomic and structural forces that primarily drive the achievement gap. However, they will make rural school leaders more responsive to the needs and circumstances of low-income parents and reduce the extent to which schools add to the burden imposed by those larger forces.

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