

Utilizing a Coherent Sequence of Observations to Restructure the Principal Practicum

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Using research-based practices a principal preparation program located in Texas restructured its practicum activities. Funded by a research grant, sponsored by Academic Partnerships, three coherently sequenced field activities, were developed and mandated as part of the practicum. These activities were performed by principal preparation candidates on school campuses and archived using video recordings. The video recordings were asynchronously observed and evaluated by certified university field supervisors. Upon completion of the evaluation, individual feedback, coaching statements, and goals were shared with each candidate in a one-to-one synchronous conference led by field supervisors. Researchers analyzed data to identify qualitative themes concerning the impact of the coherently sequenced activities. Data from the principal candidates and field supervisors were analyzed. (In memoriam, the authors recognize the contributions of Donna Azodi in this research effort.)

Keywords: Principal Preparation, Principal Internship, Field Supervision

During the spring of 2022, a university located in Texas piloted research-based processes in the practicum effort of its principal preparation program. Evolving state and national standards, administrative rules from the state educational agency, and a desire for program improvement created the impetus that advanced substantial change in the practicum experiences of principal candidates. Enhanced with the assistance of revenue awarded from a competitive research grant, the principal preparation program developed three coherently sequenced and program mandated practicum observations that shaped the evolution of the practicum experiences.

The coherent sequence of observations found principal candidates being observed three times while leading one major campus-based project that stretched across 15 weeks. The observation activities were considered coherently linked to each other because they addressed a single purposed project/topic outlined in a document entitled *Observation Guidelines*. They were considered sequenced observations because the activities built upon each other. The first observation conducted within the first five weeks of the practicum established a base for future observations. The second observation, conducted in the middle of the 15-week experience, built upon the base that was established in the first observation. The third and final observation conducted toward the end of the practicum appropriately concluded the activities of the campus-based project. Principal candidates video recorded themselves leading these coherently sequenced campus activities. These recordings became practicum observations.

Theoretical Framework

Often, the principal practicum and its activities have clear compliance requirements but have nebulous and inconsistent processes. Tally (2011) revealed that many principal candidates reported principal preparation programs needed restructuring to incorporate more clinical experiences in which candidates were afforded opportunities to both practice and apply leadership skills. Specifically, candidates wanted more opportunities for collaborative problem-solving in a community of peers. In addition, principal candidates valued, as an integral part of their skill development, the presence of a trusted, experienced leadership coach, or field supervisor, who guides, supports, and monitors their performance. In Tally's (2011) study, candidates readily shared examples of critical incidents where leadership coaches or field supervisors assisted them in handling real school issues.

Since Tally (2011), the standards associated with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2018) were significantly updated with the implementation of the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Program Standards for Education Preparation Programs (EPPs). A significant portion of the updates directly and indirectly require more opportunity in the field, including the following:

- The preparation of school leaders requires overt connections and bridging experiences between research and practice.
- The preparation of school leaders requires comprehensive practice in, and feedback from, the field over an extended period.
- School leadership preparation programs must provide ongoing experiences for candidates to examine, refine, and strengthen the leadership platform that guides their decisions— especially during difficult times.

According to Martin et al. (2022), best practices during the design or redesign of principal practicum include the development of activities that increase teaming between the candidate,

the university, and the site campus thereby serving as a catalyst for the professional growth of candidates involved in the process. Practicum activities should be relevant, challenging, and high-level activities that are closely supervised. The immersion of candidates in real-world experiences positively affect the perceptions of all involved regarding the impact the practicum had on the development of administrator skills.

Literature Review

Definitions

- Candidate – An individual who has been formally admitted into an educator preparation program. In this paper, the term specifically refers to a graduate student seeking principal certification (19 Texas Administrative Code §228.2, 2020).
- Field supervisor – A certified educator with advanced credentials, hired by the educator preparation program to observe candidates, monitor their performance, and provide constructive feedback and coaching to promote the candidates’ professional growth. The field supervisor has a minimum of three years of experience as a principal and/or district-level leadership and specific training for field supervision (19 Texas Administrative Code §228.2, 2020).
- Observation – Each candidate is observed by a field supervisor during the first, second, and third portions of the practicum/internship timeframe. The observations are of structured, coherently sequenced activities, conducted by the candidate, which are recorded and submitted to the university field supervisors (19 Texas Administrative Code §228.35, 2020).
- Practicum – Candidates seeking principal certification are required to conduct a practicum (i.e., internship) in an authentic and state accredited school setting. For the purpose of this paper, practicum is synonymous with internship (19 Texas Administrative Code §228.2, 2020).
- Site supervisor – A campus principal who supervises, supports, mentors, and evaluates the candidate’s practicum/internship experiences serves as the site supervisor. The site supervisor must hold a valid principal certificate, have at least three years of experience as a principal and be located on the campus where the practicum/internship will be conducted (19 Texas Administrative Code §228.2, 2020).

Principal’s Role

The role of the principal has shifted over time to become quite complex. In addition to the responsibility of maintaining a safe and well-managed school environment, current principals are expected to be instructional leaders who support curriculum and instruction, to ensure equity and inclusiveness for students and staff, and to do these in collaboration with the entire school community (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2018). The impact of an effective campus principal can be linked to observable outcomes. Obviously, the principal’s leadership skills matter in a host of school outcomes. These outcomes include increasing student

achievement, building a productive and positive school climate, facilitating collaborative learning communities, and engaging with teachers on instructional practices (Grissom et al., 2021). Consequently, educator preparation programs (EPPs) are responsible for preparing principal candidates to be proficient in all current principal standards of knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Using the Practicum to Prepare Principal Candidates

The complex nature of the principal's role demands that EPPs adapt their curriculum, instruction, and particularly the design of candidates' field work to provide authentic experiences that prepare candidates for leading a campus in today's school environment. According to Hora et al. (2020), internships are noted as providing high impact strategies for increased principal candidate engagement and future career success. Higher education is feeling the pressure to foster principal candidates' "employability" through work-based learning activities. Ergo, experiences in the field with real-world problem-solving for school improvement have become more significant for principal preparation in recent years.

While building level leadership preparation programs are ultimately an institutional responsibility, the strength of the design, delivery, and effectiveness of these programs will be significantly enhanced by P-12 participation and feedback (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2018, p.7). In addition, Standard 8 of the NELP Program Standards Building Level (2018) calls for candidates to complete an internship under the supervision of practitioners who are experts in their field. Candidates should be provided with coherent and authentic internship activities within a school setting. Candidates should also be engaged in multiple and diverse school settings.

Thessin et al. (2018) posited principal candidates could only improve their growth as administrators when they were given opportunities to lead and assume authentic campus leadership responsibilities. Candidates who demonstrated a strong work ethic and established trust with their mentors/supervisors were provided opportunities to lead relevant activities. Conversely, Thessin et al. (2018) learned that authentic experiences were not provided to the candidate in situations where innate abilities, commitment, and communication skills were questioned. Hence, it is incumbent upon EPPs to develop strong systems and supports for principal candidates to have significant and robust field experiences.

Field Supervisor's Role

Augustine-Shaw and Reilly (2017) asserted one way to build capacity in beginning principals is through effective mentoring practices. Principal preparation programs could help reduce the initial gaps in knowledge and skills, or the leadership gap, of novice principals by incorporating meaningful, effective mentoring practices while training new principals. The field supervisor serves as an integral piece of the mentoring triad that also includes campus site supervision and the EPP personnel. According to Faulk et al. (2021), candidates in principal preparation programs greatly need field supervisors who encourage individual growth. Uniform feedback and meetings devised solely to meet program mandates do not provide for individual growth opportunities. Consequently, field supervisors need professional development focused on the need for

targeted, specific, and timely feedback for candidates in order to promote optimum growth in proficiency throughout their experiences in the field.

In addition, the relationship between the candidate and field supervisor is of paramount importance in fostering and enhancing the professional development of the principal candidate. Hora et al. (2020) revealed after a project or task is completed, providing timely and regular feedback to candidates is especially important to foster learning new skills and decision-making strategies. Further, candidates in the Hora et al. (2020) study rated supervisor support highly, showing the candidates sensed care and respect for their work from their supervisors. The researchers concluded that candidates felt their capacity to attain goals for development of professional skills was enhanced when field supervisors focused on candidates' psychological needs including respect, appreciation, well-being, and care.

Site Supervisor's Role

The role of the site supervisor is also critical to the candidate's development, as the site supervisor has the most contact with the candidate day to day. Accordingly, expectations and training must be provided to the site supervisor by the EPP. Improving university-based principal internships by collaborating with school campuses produces graduates who have the skills to equitably improve student achievement and increase instructional capacity through instructional coaching. Furthermore, it develops marketable and job-ready principal candidates. (Palmer et al., 2021).

As with the field supervisor, the site supervisor–candidate relationship appeared to have a critical impact on the candidate's growth. Thessin et al. (2018) found in a case study, which included pairs of candidates and site supervisors, that candidates and site supervisors who developed a positive, trusting relationship influenced each other's contributions and growth during the internship process. It was further concluded that when the site supervisor trusted the candidate to conduct complex and diverse tasks, not only did the candidate develop proficiency in the NELP Building Level Standards, but the site supervisor also reported that they, too, grew from the leadership/mentoring relationship with the candidate.

Faculty's Role

It is obvious to state that faculty are responsible for continuous improvement of curriculum and instruction as standards evolve. In addition, however, the field experiences of principal candidates have become critical to developing the complex and diverse skill sets and dispositions. As EPPs strive to adapt their program to address current principal standards and expectations for principal candidates, seeking feedback from candidates, field supervisors, and site supervisors can often provide valuable ideas when revising the principal internship. For example, one university ended the practice of requiring university field supervisors to approve internship projects. While the university field supervisors provided feedback and input, the direct design of activities became the responsibility of the site supervisor and candidate. Site supervisors valued improved relevancy of internship projects and the new impact that internship activities had at their schools (Greer, 2020). The need for the EPP faculty to initiate and structure a framework of effective communication with field supervisors, site supervisors, and candidates is imperative for

candidates' optimum growth. Principal candidates value access to course instructors, their site supervisor, and their field supervisor. Working closely with site supervisors increases professional communication. Additionally, access and communication with university staff, including field supervisors, assisted with successful completion of the principal internship (Nicks et al. 2018).

Methods and Procedures

This study, via survey, examined the perceptions of twenty-five university field supervisors and 323 principal candidates regarding the impact of a coherent sequence of observations on principal candidates enrolled in a principal preparation program. All the 323 principal candidates successfully completed the coherent sequence of observations during the spring of 2022, which was a major component of the principal preparation program.

During the spring of 2022, each of the 323 assigned principal candidates participated in three individual one-to-one synchronous conferences with their assigned field supervisor selected from the twenty-five above-mentioned field supervisors. This resulted in a total of 969 individual one-to-one synchronous conferences. Each of the candidates successfully completed the practicum and completed the coherent sequence of observations developed for the restructured program.

Demographic profile data of the 323 candidates showed that 138 classified themselves as elementary teachers and 185 classified themselves as secondary teachers. While all the candidates were pursuing certification as a principal, eighty-two candidates were also pursuing a master's degree in educational leadership, 227 candidates already held a master's degree and were solely pursuing principal certification, and fourteen candidates were pursuing a master's degree in technology leadership while also pursuing principal certification. Approximately 54% of the candidates indicated they received certification as a teacher via a traditional route, while 46% of the candidates indicated they received certification as a teacher via an alternative route.

Process – The Coherently Sequenced Observation

The university was committed to implementing three practicum observation phases that emulated the research based "Observing, Participating, and Leading" framework (Gray et al. 2007). The university was equally committed to structuring practicum observation activities where principal candidates addressed identified needs of socio-economic disadvantaged or at-risk students at their campuses. It was hoped that the coherent sequence of practicum observations would better prepare future school principals, as measured by certified field supervisors, and increase the proficiency and marketability of the principal program's graduates.

During the practicum observing phase, the principal candidate and campus leaders drafted a campus level needs assessment that addressed the teaching and learning of socio-economic disadvantaged or at-risk students at the campus. The principal candidate then shared the drafted needs assessment with a campus level faculty team that collaboratively identified achievement gaps in the data and discussed barriers to student achievement. The team meeting, led by the principal candidate, was recorded as the practicum observation video #1 that had guidelines and a grading rubric. After submission, a highly qualified university field supervisor reviewed each practicum observation video. During one-to-one synchronous online conferences,

the field supervisors shared individualized feedback, coaching statements, and goals with principal preparation candidates regarding their leadership efforts in this phase.

During the practicum participating phase, the principal candidate organized a faculty team meeting to develop a proposal for an instructional activity or service activity that addressed the targeted gaps and barriers identified in the observing phase and demonstrated in the practicum observation video #1. A recording of the proposal development during the faculty team meeting was submitted as the practicum observation video #2 that had guidelines and a grading rubric. After submission, a highly qualified university field supervisor reviewed each practicum observation video. During a one-to-one synchronous online conference, the field supervisor shared individualized feedback, coaching statements, and goals with the principal preparation candidates regarding their leadership efforts in this phase.

During the practicum leading phase, the proposal developed by the faculty team in observation #2 had been initiated. Careful and deliberate collection of data became part of a monitoring/adjustment review. The faculty team, led by the principal candidate, reviewed progress, successes, and challenges related to the proposal developed in the participating phase and demonstrated in the practicum observation video #2. Collaboratively, the principal candidate discussed any need for amendments to the proposal or identified steps needed to continue the effort. The committee meeting was recorded as practicum observation video #3. After submission, a highly qualified university field supervisor reviewed each practicum video. During one-to-one synchronous online conferences, the field supervisors shared individualized feedback, coaching statements, and goals with the principal preparation candidates regarding their leadership efforts in this phase.

The three practicum observations were aligned to the state's administrative code which contained standards required for principal certification. Components of each required standard were embedded in the observations. These components are listed below:

School Culture - the principal:

- ensures that a positive, collaborative, and collegial school culture facilitates and enhances the implementation of campus initiatives and the achievement of campus goals.
- uses emerging issues, recent research, demographic data, knowledge of systems, campus climate inventories, student learning data, and other information to collaboratively develop a shared campus vision.
- facilitates the collaborative development of a plan in which objectives and strategies to implement the campus vision are clearly articulated (19 Texas Administrative Code §241.15, 2020).

Leading Learning - the principal:

- creates a campus culture that sets high expectations, promotes learning, and provides intellectual stimulation for self, students, and staff.
- facilitates campus participation in collaborative school district planning, implementation, monitoring, and curriculum revision to ensure appropriate scope, sequence, content, and alignment.
- implements a rigorous curriculum aligned with state standards, including college and career readiness standards.

- analyzes the curriculum to ensure that teachers align content across grades and that curricular scopes and sequences meet the needs of their diverse student populations.
- monitors and ensures staff uses multiple forms of student data to inform instruction and intervention decisions to maximize instructional effectiveness and student achievement.
- ensures that effective instruction maximizes growth of individual students and student groups, supports equity, and eliminates the achievement gap (19 Texas Administrative Code §241.15, 2020).

Human Capital - the principal:

- invests and manages time to prioritize the development, support, and supervision of the staff to enhance student outcomes.
- facilitates the campus's professional learning community to review data, processes, and policies to improve teaching and learning in the school (19 Texas Administrative Code §241.15, 2020).

Executive Leadership - the principal:

- gathers and organizes information from a variety of sources for use in creative and effective campus decision making.
- uses effective planning, time management, and organization of work to maximize attainment of school district and campus goals.

Strategic Operations - the principal:

- outlines and tracks meaningful goals, targets, and strategies aligned to a school vision that continuously improves teacher effectiveness and student outcomes.
- allocates resources effectively (e.g., staff time, dollars, and tools), aligning them to the school priorities and goals, and works to access additional resources as needed to support learning.
- establishes structures to regularly monitor multiple data points with leadership teams to evaluate progress toward goals, adjusting strategies to improve effectiveness (19 Texas Administrative Code §241.15, 2020).

Ethics, Equity, and Diversity - the principal:

- models and promotes the continuous and appropriate development of all learners in the campus community.
- ensures all students have access to effective educators and continuous learning opportunities (19 Texas Administrative Code §241.15, 2020).

Research Questions

Knowing that the above-mentioned seedbed of data was available, researchers developed the following research questions:

Research Questions Using Field Supervisor Data

- RQ1 – What was the perception of field supervisors regarding the impact that the coherent sequence of observations had on the relationships between principal candidates and field supervisors?
- RQ2 - What was the perception of field supervisors regarding the impact that the coherent sequence of observations had on the professional growth of principal candidates?

Research Questions Using Principal Candidate Data

- RQ3 – What was the perception of principal candidates regarding the impact that the coherent sequence of practicum observations had on their ability to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems?
- RQ4 – What was the perception of principal candidates regarding the impact that the coherent sequence of practicum observations had on their ability to build collaborative relationships?
- RQ5 – What was the perception of principal candidates regarding the impact that the coherent sequence of practicum observation videos had on their growth as an aspiring administrator?

Data Collection

Survey data from field supervisors was garnered from two open-ended post observation conferences program evaluation questions:

1. How did the coherent sequence of observations impact teaming/relationships between principal candidates and field supervisors?
2. How did the coherent sequence of observations impact the personal/professional growth of principal candidates?

Survey data from principal candidates was garnered from a course embedded reflection opportunity provided to candidates after completion of the coherent sequence of observations. The reflection activity used six questions/prompts derived from a marketable skills instrument distributed by the university. The prompts included:

1. How did the coherent sequence of practicum observations impact your ability to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems?
2. How did the coherent sequence of practicum observations impact your ability to demonstrate originality and inventiveness?
3. How did the coherent sequence of practicum observations impact your ability to articulate thoughts and ideas clearly?
4. How did the coherent sequence of practicum observations impact your ability to build collaborative relationships?
5. How did the coherent sequence of practicum observations impact your ability to leverage the strengths of others to achieve goals?
6. How did the coherent sequence of practicum observations impact your growth as an aspiring administrator?

Qualitative Analysis

Archived data sources described in the data collection section were analyzed using qualitative methods from which the authors identified informative themes using the research questions as a structural guide. Specific statements were then dissected from the data and used as supporting evidence for the themes. Ultimately, the themes and supporting statements created a baseline for the improvement of internships and field supervision in principal preparation programs.

Results and Findings

Below are the results and findings from the study. As mentioned earlier, the findings are organized around themes related to the research questions. Themes from research questions 1 and 2 contain data from field supervisors and appropriately contain supporting statements for the themes from field supervisors. Themes from research questions 3, 4, and 5 contain data from principal program candidates and appropriately contain supporting statements for the themes from candidates.

Themes from Research Questions 1 and 2 (Field Supervisor Data)

Theme 1 - The coherent sequence of observation videos provided field supervisors a solid base upon which to build professional relationships with principal candidates.

- The sequenced observations with my principal candidates allowed me to provide personalized feedback and I was able to see how the candidate applied ideas from our coaching sessions in the post observation conference. I felt like I was able to build a rapport with the candidate and a professional relationship because we had the opportunity to have multiple conversations with one another.
- Meeting with the same candidates three times during these connected activities allowed for a true coaching/professional relationship to develop. The dialogue that occurred during the post observation conferences was more impactful because we had developed a trusting relationship. I had the opportunity to learn about the candidate professionally and personally, which in turn helped me with the type of feedback I could provide the candidate.
- The coherent sequence of observations greatly impacted teaming and relationships between the candidate and field supervisors. During our post observation conferences we could discuss recommendations for improvement and the probable outcomes if the recommendations were implemented. When following up and monitoring, we discussed the actual impact of the recommendations and what differences, if any, the recommendations really made. Because of this model of observations, we increased our comfort levels with each other.

Theme 2 - The coherent sequence of observation videos was a catalyst for professional growth in principal candidates because of better feedback and structured time for coaching and monitoring growth.

- The coherent sequence of observations allowed principal candidates to work closely with one field supervisor throughout the process. This allowed for better advice to be given and implemented by the candidate. It allowed for professional reflection and rich conversations between the field supervisor and the candidate.

- As the principal candidate reflected on quality feedback from the field supervisor, opportunities to implement strategies aimed at specific areas of growth were noted. For example – confidence to lead a meeting; organizing and structuring a collaborative meeting so that tasks could be completed; and the ability to reflect and improve upon leadership skills.
- I got to know the candidates and understand their thought processes and monitor the implementation of ideas from our conversations and coaching sessions. Instead of a one-time meeting, we were able to collaborate with the candidates, determine their level of commitment as a future administrator, and give more personalized feedback.

Themes from Research Questions 3, 4, and 5 (Principal Candidate Data)

Theme 3 - The coherent sequence of practicum observation videos helped to build principal candidate confidence with reviewing data, presenting data and problem-solving.

- The observation sequence really prepared me to collect data, analyze it, and develop a solution. Initially, I was unable to see how the information I was collecting would have an impact on the final outcome, or activity. However, now that I am done with all three observation activities, I can see how they all came together to focus on one goal. At first, I was a little nervous because I had never spoken in front of my co-workers. However, by the third observation, I was more relaxed and comfortable with the information that we discussed.
- The sequence of practicum observation videos was very streamlined, and it made the process naturally progress. Throughout the completion of my observation tasks, I was able to continuously build on ideas and implement my plan of action immediately. Each activity prepared me for the next. They built my confidence, and I was ready to begin the next task almost immediately. This is due to the natural progression and the preparation steps in the guidelines and rubrics. These activities increased my confidence and ability to analyze learning gaps on my campus, and to lead a team of teachers to make purposeful decisions. I was very pleased with the sequence of the observation videos.
- The sequence of practicum observations helped me grow as a leader. I learned the value of using data to identify issues that have been occurring on campus regarding students' performance levels in specific areas. Another thing I learned to appreciate was the impact that collaboration really has on decision making and problem solving. Reading data and making connections is not extremely challenging; however, finding ways to address the discrepancies is a task that requires multiple perspectives. Working alongside the Math department really opened my eyes to a variety of options when it came to addressing students' learning needs. The discussions that took place in each meeting along with the input provided by the team gave me confidence as we prepared to proceed in addressing the identified problems.

Theme 4 - The coherent sequence of practicum observation videos established a forum that assisted with building collaborative relationships between candidates and colleagues, and between candidates and field supervisors.

- This portion of the sequence is the most beneficial aspect of the course. The opportunity to involve others in decision making builds confident relationships that create a shared vision. Collaborating with members of the staff deepened relationships, connected thoughts and ideas, and created a sense of purpose and belonging. Being open minded to the perspectives of others allowed me to broaden my understanding of my stance and challenged my original thoughts on specific subjects or issues. Collaboration is key to success.
- I feel these exercises have assisted in fostering collaborative relationships with my colleagues and field supervisor. The practicum sequence impacted my ability to leverage the strength of others to achieve goals through our discussions and collaborative brainstorming on how to make our students more successful.
- By undertaking a project of this magnitude, I relied upon the experience of my fellow teachers to create goals and drive our department forward. The collaboration that took place resulted in teachers, who previously had not worked together, coming together to improve their instruction. I have always held great professional relationships with my department but by participating in this process those relationships are now more profound. Teachers understand that they can rely on me and come to me with issues they may be experiencing. Collaborating, listening, empathizing, and providing comfort/guidance has strengthened our professional bond.

Theme 5 - The coherent sequence of practicum observation videos impacted communication, team building, and leadership skills in principal candidates.

- The sequenced practicum activities created intensively active workdays. My teaching and other responsibilities required me to network/team with others to accomplish the tasks. Creative thinking became a constant, and my interactions with administrators and teachers needed a high level of communication. Teachers work hard. To engage them, it required communication and skills such as leading thoughtful discussions with a goal-oriented outcome. The coherent sequence emphasized the importance of communicating and teaming to solving challenges in the school environment.
- This work challenged my abilities as an administrator. These activities demonstrated how data can tell a story. But it takes practice and teaming to interpret data effectively. These practicum observations detailed the importance of preparing an agenda and resources for a meeting and to make sure teaming experiences are as productive as possible. It is critical for an administrator to honor everyone's time and keep the team focused on the purpose of the experience. Communication skills are critical and improve with practice. I appreciated the opportunity to refine my leadership skills, and I look forward to more growth.
- The coherent sequence used stair-stepped activities to accomplish the objectives. Just as K-12 teachers scaffold learning for students, for better understanding and reinforcement of learned behavior, these sequenced practicum activities met the same purpose. The team building and communication skills required to review data,

and address campus needs, prepared us to complete a real-time project. This was a real-life, real-time opportunity to improve our leadership skills.

Conclusions and Discussion

Below are the conclusions of this study. The conclusions also share comments from campus principals who served as mentors to principal candidates. The emailed comments from the mentors bolster the conclusions.

Conclusion #1

The coherent sequence of practicum observations and related processes enhanced opportunities for principal candidates to build collaboration skills and professional relationships with their field supervisors and faculty members at their campuses. Principal candidates and field supervisors asserted the collaboration enhanced their working relationships which resulted in a mentoring process that allowed for up close monitoring filled with quality feedback and professional coaching. The coaching process was a catalyst for the candidates to learn how to leverage the strength of others to identify common goals to improve student achievement, and to identify solutions that promoted student growth.

This conclusion was supported by the following email sent to university leaders from a campus principal regarding the impact of the coherent sequence of observations:

While in her capstone course for Education Administration, C.G. excelled and performed exceptionally when she led, facilitated, and made decisions that impacted our students at *Conclusion #1 High School*. She displayed characteristics of a leader when she collaborated with other English II teachers to not only help the teachers to gain confidence in themselves in their performance as an instructional leader, but she also strengthened their roles as collaborative leaders. By using the program's coherently sequenced observation process and through facilitating, Ms. G. built teacher capacity by helping teachers build an awareness of our economically disadvantaged student population as well, the barriers that could be impacting our students. By doing so, the team was able to collaborate to identify common goals to improve student achievement as well as identify solutions that promoted student growth. Through the final stage of the program, teachers monitored and adjusted instruction as they reflected on their instructional delivery and impact on students. Overall, our 2022 STAAR English II scores show significant longitudinal growth for our economically disadvantaged students and our overall student populations. Additionally, the increase in scores, in comparison to our sister high school, shows a significant difference. Last, individual student growth from 9th to 10th grade is also seen. We are excited about the process, and we encourage Ms. G. to lead other grades in her department through the same process next school year.

Conclusion #2

It was obvious from the findings that the candidates became more confident with communicating about data that addressed student achievement gaps and to improve instruction in the

classroom. Team building activities required to effectively review data, and required in the coherent sequence of observations, created real-world opportunities for the principal candidates to lead a campus effort. These teaming activities helped the candidates grow professionally and impacted the 323 campuses where practicum activities were undertaken.

This conclusion was supported by the following email sent to university leaders from a campus principal regarding the impact of the coherent sequence of observations:

It is a great pleasure to write you regarding Mr. L. We are from a magnet school in *Conclusion #2 ISD*. During the practicum course, Mr. L. scheduled multiple collaborative work sessions with our teachers that were interactive and enlightening. Using campus data on our targeted students, Mr. L. led sessions that allowed the teachers to explore and dig into the data of each of their at-risk students. Over a period of time, the discussions with the teachers went from being a little reluctant to very open conversations and having a willingness to discuss their vulnerabilities and areas they could improve. The outcome of these discussions has been very successful, as the teachers have discovered areas they can work on to close the achievement gaps of these identified students. The work Mr. L.

committed to is not over, in fact, it has just begun. The collaborative sessions were so successful that the teachers have expressed a desire to continue the work next school year. Mr. L. has grown tremendously and has made a great impact on the success of our students and campus.

Conclusion #3

The activities and personalized feedback in the coherently sequenced practicum observations helped to enlarge the mindset of the principal candidates. Shifting the professional lenses of candidates from that of classroom teachers, to lenses of collaborative instructional principals, took practice. The sequential application of learned leadership skills during practicum observations provided the time and space for that practice to transpire.

This conclusion was supported by the following email sent to university leaders from a campus principal regarding the impact of the coherent sequence of observations:

I am writing regarding G.F., who completed her principal preparation practicum this past school year. Throughout the practicum, she took part in many activities specifically aimed at improving the achievement of our Economically Disadvantaged students. G.F. started these activities using the lens of a classroom teacher. As she continued to grow, that lens widened. These field-experiences, and her leadership classes, enabled her to grow students, grow her peers, shape her opinion, and successfully assist our community - which will have a lasting impact.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1

The coherent sequence of observations appears to have positively affected the candidates in the principal preparation program. The authors recommend the consideration of a coherent

sequence of observations approach at other universities and in other professional internships. For example, it would be interesting to see if this approach would enhance the superintendent internship.

Recommendation #2

The coherent sequence of observations in this study focused on the achievement or instruction of at-risk and/or socio-economically disadvantaged students. For possible future use, the authors recommend the consideration of other topics within a principal's sphere of influence. For example, the focus topics could center around school safety, the achievement of other sub-populations, the achievement of students within a specific subject, or improving school community partnerships.

Limitations, Funding Disclosure, and Future Research

Limitations

This study examined qualitative data from the first attempt at implementing a coherent sequence of practicum observations. As with any first attempt, there will be amendments to the process when the practicum is offered in the future.

Funding Disclosure

It should be noted that the research and findings presented were funded by a grant sponsored by Academic Partnerships.

Future Research Opportunities

- This study garnered data from principal candidates and field supervisors. The addition of data from site supervisors would further inform educator preparation programs.
- Analyzing the impact of each principal candidate's work would be insightful. The coherent sequence of observations in the spring of 2022 had principal candidates leading efforts to improve the achievement of economically disadvantaged or at-risk students at 323 campuses. That seedbed of data could provide educators with innovative and relevant practices that address achievement gaps in those identified sub-populations thereby contributing to best instructional practices.

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