# BLAZING NEW TRAILS:
## Preparing Leaders to Improve Access and Equity in Today's Schools

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**Blazing New Trails**

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Serving as an assistant editor in 2009, as associate editor in 2010, and as editor in 2011 of the *National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) Yearbook* provided wonderful opportunities for me to read outstanding submissions by colleagues in NCPEA. With each submission, I was provided an opportunity to reflect on the many changes as well as quality research endeavors taking place in our profession. Chapters detailed the efforts of professors of educational leadership in their continual quest to provide improvements in learning and academic achievement. These goals were clearly reflected as authors explored the transition from instructional to transformational leadership to integrated leadership as constructs guiding our practice. Topics of collaboration, shared leadership, and moral purpose were also investigated with the intent to illuminate practices that impact equity and excellence in our schools. As we join together as educational leaders in "Blazing New Trails" by addressing the needs of today's schools, the issues and research provided in this *NCPEA Yearbook* can serve as a catalyst for actions and continued improvement.

As an editorial team, we thank the chapter authors for their submissions and their explorations of important topics impacting educational leadership. As editor, I particularly, thank our associate editors, George Perrault and Luana Zellner, and our assistant editor, Julia W. Ballenger, for their tireless assistance in preparation of this publication. Their contributions were greatly appreciated throughout the process of chapter selection and editing. I also offer my sincere appreciation to Daniel Vogt, a graduate assistant in the Department of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership at Stephen. F. Austin State University. His conscientious work and willingness "to go the extra mile" not only with the 2010 *NCPEA Yearbook*, but the 2011 *NCPEA Yearbook*, provided immeasurable help in the production of these publications.

A special thanks is also extended to the many NCPEA members who provided their time and expertise in reviewing the many submissions for this *Yearbook*. All that was needed was a simple call for reviewers, and members of NCPEA accepted the role without hesitation. Shortly after Ted's message had been emailed to NCPEA members requesting help, I started receiving replies. Although it was late December, and many professors were already on semester break, the offers to help were phenomenal. This responsiveness exemplifies the commitment that characterizes members of NCPEA and reminded me again of one of the many reasons that this organization means so much to me.

Learning should always be a continual process as we seek to strengthen our processes and practices in preparing educational leaders who will create the conditions to ensure a quality education for all students. As an editorial team, we hope the concepts, issues, and research identified in the chapters that follow will be beneficial in your work as together we embark on "Blazing New Trails: Preparing Leaders to Improve Access and Equity in Today's Schools"—a goal worthy of our highest efforts.

Betty J. Alford, *Stephen F. Austin State University*

# INVITED CHAPTERS

# NCPEA President's Message, 2011

Gary W. Kinsey

This year's conference theme—*Blazing New Trails: Preparing Leaders to Improve Access and Equity in Today's Schools*—emanated from a suggestion by the NCPEA 2010–2011 Summer Conference planning group that consists largely of member representatives from the Oregon Council for Professors of Educational Administration (OCPEA) and their universities. As this nation's early westward expansion extended to the part of the country that will serve as our summer conference site, it occurred primarily via the "Oregon Trail." Monumental challenges and much adversity faced those pioneers who were daring and persistent enough to make the journey to a frontier where their hopes and dreams could be realized. Our 2011 conference theme reflects the desire to explore new trails and not just the well-traveled paths in respect to how we currently view and support our public schools. We need to be pioneers who will challenge the present day assumptions about how students best achieve and also prepare our leaders with this same mindset.

We are currently on a trail in this great country, that I fear is taking us completely the wrong direction as a means to improve access and equity for all children. There is indisputable evidence about the effects of poverty on both family life and student motivation that is completely contrary to what policymakers and the public have been hearing so pervasively. As presented by Diane Ravitch (2011) in her recent writings, there is a clear "need to reverse the increasingly narrow focus on testing and accountability" (p. 1). What is remarkable is that Ravitch was once a proponent and key player in the current accountability movement that we are so caught up in. She points to several suggestions as policymakers look to Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization:

> (1) Given the remarkable progress in math that schools serving poor and disadvantaged children have made, we should *use data collection as a tool to figure out what has worked well—such as improved curricula and class size—and to help schools and teachers improve, rather than as a weapon to punish schools and fire teachers*, which further destabilizes already fragile communities.

> (2) The current system forbids us to say openly what we all know: Students who live in poverty and isolation face tremendous hurdles to learning, and they bring those problems with them to school every day. *If schools are to succeed, and students to reach their full potential, teachers, principals, and parents need to have the necessary resources to help them do so.* This means helping all students arrive at the kindergarten door ready to learn through quality early childhood education, parent education, targeting scarce resources of money, small classes, and the best teachers to at-risk students to maintain those early gains, and linking schools to the range of community supports, such as after-school and summer programs and mentoring opportunities that middle-class children already enjoy.

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Gary W. Kinsey, California State University at Channel Islands

(3) The federal mandates in No Child Left Behind that require schools to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress in reading and math embody a utopian goal that no state or nation has ever met: 100% proficiency on state tests. This has resulted in accountability measures that narrow the curriculum, especially for poor children, and game the system rather than helping students learn more. Measures that help schools, teachers, and administrators determine how well they are serving their at-risk students require: *enhancements to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)* that will allow it to provide disaggregated data in more nuanced ways and to assess a much broader range of subjects; *additional tools to assess children's health, values, civic engagement, and other curricular and societal goals;* and *state flexibility in designing accountability systems* so that a range of models can be tested to meet district needs. (pp. 1–2)

In order to put us on a different trail that will allow all children to achieve their hopes and dreams in our present day and for the future, we need to be the new pioneers tenaciously blazing the trail to a strategy of building a strong education profession and attending to the conditions of young people's lives. Our efforts should be changed from the current punitive approach of rankings, score comparisons and "races to the top." We should instead be taking steps to recruit, support and respect those who work in our nation's schools. Rather than ignoring poverty and its negative consequences, we should be designing programs to help families and children achieve social justice in education. As McKerrow and Shockley-Lee (2005) so adeptly pointed out, "Social justice is defined not only by what it is but also by what it is not, namely injustice. By seeking justice, we anticipate the ideal. By questioning injustice we approach it. Integrating both, we achieve it" (p. 1).

In our leadership programs, we have an obligation to equip school leaders to pursue social justice and undertake a change of direction from the trail we are now on in respect to the overemphasis on assessment and accountability. As Marshall and Oliva (2006) stated, "…educational leaders are the people who must deliver some version of social justice and equity" (p.1). As stated in her message to the NCPEA membership in 2007, Past-President, Linda Morford, commented, "Critics of school leadership preparation contend that many of our programs have failed to produce credible leaders capable of addressing the complex demands placed on contemporary schools" (p. 3). In fact, as Morford (2007 stressed, we

have a clear choice. We can continue to defend ourselves against detractors such as Arthur Levine (2005), the business community, government and others, or we can . . . create an epidemic in our profession where we summon the will to work with others to address issues facing schools and, thus, improve our preparation programs. (p. 3)

I encourage you to pursue the latter and be among the new pioneers and "voices of reason" pursuing a change of direction in achieving a new frontier of equity and access for all our nation's schools.

The 2011 edition of the *Yearbook of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration* is an exceptional collection of manuscripts focused on issues impacting leadership preparation. I would like to thank an extraordinary group of NCPEA members who served in a variety of capacities to make this particular publication happen. Under the very capable leadership of Betty Alford, editor; George Perrault and Luana Zellner, associate editors; and Julia Ballenger, assistant editor, this year's work is another outstanding publication for our organization. Additionally, special thanks must be extended to Ted

Creighton and Rosemary Papa for their exceptional vision and ongoing work to continually expand, elevate and broaden our organization's publications. NCPEA Press is indeed a reality due to their hard work and unending energy. Thanks also to the many authors who have contributed their work to this yearbook edition and to our publisher Joe Eckenrode of ProActive. Acknowledgements must also be extended to the NCPEA Board of Directors, NCPEA Executive Director Jim Berry, and the NCPEA Summer Conference Planning Committee under the leadership of Marc Shelton. I am humbled and honored to have served as this organization's President and privileged to work with such a wonderful group of trusted friends and colleagues.

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# Shadows and Images II

Lloyd Duvall

At the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) conference in Chadron, Nebraska, I presented a paper, co-authored with Professor Bill Wayson, to a general session at that conference. That paper, in draft form, was never completed and languished on Bill's and my computers for these 20 plus years. With Bill's permission, I would like to revisit the metaphor that we used as the basis of that paper with the "wisdom" gained over the ensuing years. Although the metaphor for both papers is the same, the content is very different. Thus, the title of my remarks today is "Shadows and Images II," recognizing the unfinished draft labeled "Shadows and Images."

In the opening of Book VII of the *Republic*, Plato recounts a discussion between Socrates and Gluacon as they walk the road to Piraeus. Socrates speaks:

> Imagine a number of men living in an underground cavernous chamber, with an entrance open to the light, extending along the entire length of the cavern, in which they have been confined, from their childhood, with their legs and necks so shackled, that they are obliged to sit still and look straight forward, because their chains render it impossible for them to turn their heads round: and imagine a bright fire burning somewhere off, above and behind them, and an elevated roadway passing between the fire and the prisoners, with a low wall built along it, like the screens which conjurors put up in front of their audience, and above which they exhibit their wonders.
>
> I have it, he replied.
>
> Also figure to yourself a number of persons walking behind this wall, and carrying with them statues of men, and images of animals, wrought in wood and stone and all kinds of materials, together with various other articles, which overtop the wall; and, as you might expect, let some of the passers-by be talking, and others silent.
>
> You are describing a strange scene, and strange prisoners.
>
> They resemble us, I replied. For let me ask you, in the first place, whether persons so confined could have seen anything of themselves or of each other, beyond the shadows thrown by the fire upon the part of the cavern facing them?
>
> Certainly not, if you suppose them to have been compelled all of their lifetime to keep their heads unmoved.
>
> And is not their knowledge of things carried past them equally limited?
>
> Unquestionably it is.
>
> And if they were able to converse with one another, do you not think that they would be in the habit of giving names to the objects which they saw before them?
>
> Doubtless they would.
>
> Again: if their prison-house retuned an echo from the part facing them, whenever one of the passers-by opened his lips, to what, let me ask you, could they refer the voice, if not to the shadow which was passing?
>
> Unquestionably they would refer it to that.

Lloyd Duvall, Retired, Living Legend

Then surely such persons would hold the shadows of those manufactured articles to be the only realities.

Without a doubt they would.

Now consider what would happen if the course of nature brought them a release from their fetters, and a remedy for their foolishness, in the following manner. Let us suppose that one of them has been released, and compelled suddenly to stand up, and turn his neck round and walk with open eyes towards the light; and let us suppose that he goes through all these actions with pain, and that the dazzling splendor renders him incapable of discerning those objects of which he used formerly to see the shadows. What answer should you expect him to make, if some one were to tell him that in those days he was watching foolish phantoms, but that now he is somewhat nearer to reality, and is turned towards things more real, and sees more correctly; above all, if he were to point out to him the several objects that are passing by, and question him, and compel him to answer what they are? Should you not expect him to be puzzled, and to regard his old visions as truer than the objects now forced upon his notice? (Davies & Vaughan, 1910, pp. 235–236)

Socrates continues with his questions. In doing so, he describes a set of perceptions and beliefs that derive from the narrow experiences of the prisoners. Those perceptions define their conceptions of reality. Plato's recounting of this conversation provides a metaphor that can be useful to us in examining ourselves, our field, and our work in that field today.

Based on my years of experience as an administrator and professor, I want to cite examples of what I believe many educators see as shadows and images and perceive them as realities. In keeping with the theme of this conference, it is leadership that must bear the responsibility for identifying the real nature of the shadows and images and illuminating the realities we, too often, ignore.

Also, let me address my own involvement. I am a product of our field in the 1960s. I was a member of the cave that dominated that era. In the remarks that follow, I am not throwing stones, because if I did, I would probably hit myself.

I believe that our profession has not had much success in changing American education. Thus, I see the need for critical reexamination of some of the basic tenets held by educators, particularly professors, both past and present. There are many of these "shadow" tenets that one might identify. But in the interest of time, I will suggest three of those tenets that I believe to be shadows or images: The culture of American higher education, the certification/competence of our graduates, and the proliferation of market-based school enrollment efforts in America. Hopefully, by doing so, I can stimulate you to enter into your own examination of shadows that you see in our profession.

**Shadow/Image Number 1**

We, as professors of education administration, work within a culture of American higher education that provides benefits to its members and sets boundaries for our professional activities. The first of the images that I want to mention is the prevailing reward system in academe.

Education, by definition, is an applied field. Put simply, there is no formal education unless somebody does something. The current media, declarations by public figures, and legislative bodies' actions about education all chastise our schools for what they are not doing. Yet, those whose expertise could be most beneficial to improvement efforts (that's us)

see little professional compensation within the higher education culture to work with schools. Rather, rewards derive from criteria long in use by units of academe that are not applied, practice-related disciplines—the liberal arts. Indeed, if the publish or perish paradigm is applied rigorously, I doubt that God Him/Herself could get promoted. After all, He/She published only one book, it was written in multiple languages, it had no references, and it was not used as a text for generations.

In many cases, membership into the brotherhood/sisterhood of the professorship is guarded by peers who rationalize and reward isolation from the "dirty hands" of working in the field. The culture of the university often separates its members from the world outside its walls. Despite that the worlds inside and outside the university are conceptually separate, they are phenomenologically inseparable. This culture has led to the distortion of our purpose and our responsibility. Speaking of distortion, I am reminded of the admonition that persons seeking plastic surgery should never seek the services of a physician who has works of Picasso hanging on his/her office walls.

To bridge this gap, some departments have appointed what they have called a "clinical professor." That professor has the responsibility for being the department's contact person with the field. Typically, this professor is a retired or displaced former K-12 superintendent or principal. In some cases, these people are valuable additions to a department. However, it has been my observation that these "professors" are often second class citizens, and serve as an excuse for other professors to pursue their own academic pursuits without getting actively involved with the real world issues extant in real schools.

Other professional schools have found ways to reward faculty members in applied fields while maintaining academic integrity. Schools of architecture, medicine, and law, to cite just three, have all found ways to strengthen their critical involvement with the applied nature of their disciplines while maintaining the highest levels of academic integrity. We, too, can and should do the same. As professor Kathy Canfield-Davis (2010) noted in a recent article in *The School Administrator*:

> How can higher education advance meaningful and sustainable change to ensure every school-aged youngster is afforded the best possible education? Perhaps the answer begins with professors of educational leadership routinely leaving the ivory tower and directing our collective energies not only at what *should* be, but at what is. (p. 37)

**Shadow/Image Number Two**

There appears to be a prevailing belief that certification and competence are synonymous concepts. As you well know, most states require certificates of completion in order for school districts to employ administrators. Those certificates are awarded upon completion of a set of courses and sometimes an internship. Parenthetically, those internships often are experiences in "what is" rather than "what should be." They reinforce the status quo rather than probe avenues for real school improvement. Further, in most states, administrators must accumulate additional course credits to maintain those certificates. So, what do the certificates certify? Only one thing: the recipient has completed a specified set of coursework. Is the recipient competent? Who knows?

Administrative competence requires not only the knowledge base provided by university coursework, but also the skills that accompany the application of that knowledge. Consider the following metaphor. You want to become a pianist. You enroll in a university to attend courses in music history, music theory, acoustics, piano construction, and even studies

of the physiology of the hand and fingers. You graduate with honors in all of these studies. But, are you a pianist?  No! You haven't touched a piano! No! Practice is required before competence can be acquired. It is required with a real, physical piano. The bottom line is that you know *about* the piano, but you are no pianist.

Similarly, why should we assume that a person completing a set of courses, who knows about Talcott Parsons and who has read and passed courses that include Campbell, Corbally and Ramseyer is a competent administrator? These certified graduates know *about* education administration. Wouldn't some sort of administrative practice be a reasonable step toward assuring competence?

Yes, many programs include an experience sometimes called "field studies" in which groups of students work together to collect data and provide evaluative information to schools and school districts. These experiences are generally valuable in leading students to know more *about* administration. As valuable as they are, they cannot substitute for hands-on experience.

At the pre-service level, it is obviously impossible to provide real-life experiences in the classroom. But at the in-service level, I think there is much that can be done to more closely link didactic and experiential learning.

As an attempt to bridge the gap between classroom and the school administrator's office, professors under the auspices of the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) devoted substantial efforts in the 1950s and 1960s toward creating simulated training exercises. Although impossible to duplicate real world experience, the simulations provided one way to provide students with an experience-based perspective.

Let me digress to share a personal experience. I was teaching a course required for certification in my state called "The Principalship." Throughout the semester, I employed several simulations in an attempt to bring reality into the classroom and to focus on operational issues, dynamics of change, and leadership. At the end of the semester, students completed course evaluation forms that were subsequently reviewed by the department chair and the dean. After reading the responses, the dean called me into his office to inquire about the response of one student. One question asked if the professor had stimulated interest in continuing to study the topic of the course. In response, the student wrote something to the effect "I never, ever want to take another course like this, and I never want to be a principal."

The dean asked me to explain, and explain I did! I told the dean that I was extremely pleased with the response. Obviously, the course had made an impact on the student. It had helped him make a career choice. Further, I believe that I had made a contribution to education by helping to avoid a problematic match between a person's interest and competence and a role for which he was preparing. The dean thought a bit, said, "Ok," and dismissed me.

Having seen the potential for simulations to help bring practice into the classroom, I was keenly aware that paper and pencil simulations had become out of date and largely out of use by the 1980s. Reflecting on the knowledge that simulations were being employed in other areas of professional preparation, most notably in the space program, I began talking about the possibility of developing a computer based simulation of a school or school district that could be employed in administrator preparation programs. To make a long story shorter, I could get no support from professors nor from potential funders. Perhaps, my idea was not viable. But, the need for real, hands-on experience for aspiring administrators is ongoing.

At the in-service level, for practicing administrators who are seeking additional credentials or degrees, their schools or areas of responsibility are potential real, living laboratories for learning. Why not ask these students to apply classroom concepts to their

settings, implement ideas, monitor and evaluate them, all with the assistance of classmates and the professor? By removing an administrator to the sterile environment of the university classroom, we ignore a rich, available resource for providing first-hand experience that can help develop competence.

Finally, what would it hurt if every professor adopted a school each year and served as a mentor, an observer, and a helpful critic?  Not as a consultant, I hasten to add, but as a portion of his/her regular set of assignments. Hard work? You bet. Important work? Without question. But, this sort of involvement with the real life of schools, students, and administrators is what we as professors should be about.

## Shadow/Image Number Three

The popular notion that competition for students between and among schools, the so-called market-based approach, is the solution to education's problems, to my way of thinking, to be charitable, is short sighted and untenable. First, applying the free enterprise model of business is naïve. Education is not a business. We are not working with widgets of identical characteristics. We don't have a singular, specified outcome for our "products." Our customers don't want the same identity for all of our "products." I could go on, but I suspect I am preaching to the choir.

Second, our measures of "success" and "quality" are rudimentary at best. Judging the effectiveness of educational output with a few tests of cognitive prowess is simplistic. Successful, educated human beings are more than an answering machine on foot. Remember, everything that can be counted doesn't necessarily count, and everything that counts can't necessarily be counted.

Third, I believe that we as a society have confused *education* and *schooling*. Our critics focus on schooling but hold us accountable for education. That is an impossible task! To be sure, we as school people have a critical role in the education of students. But, think of the other educational forces at work in our society. Family, church, community, sports, and media are all important actors in the education process. Think of your own background. How much of your educational attainment is attributable to schooling alone?

So, when competition among schools is introduced as the "answer" to education's problems, I become somewhat paranoid. I smell a sinister effort to dismantle the current public education system in order to institute a non-system that caters to special interests of specific ideologies in the ever growing fractiousness of our society. I fear that the public schools will become the pauper schools with charter and private schools educating the children of those families able to afford alternatives, thus furthering fractioning our society.

Competition among schools for students has resulted in a plethora of charter schools that have sprung up all over the nation. The media, public school critics, and the political establishment appear to have all boarded the bandwagon of charters as the cure-all solution for American education's problems. But, what are the results?

The results are mixed at best, and often conflicting. Admittedly, I have not read all of the charter school studies and reports. However, it appears to me that most of the studies focus on one or a small number of schools. Supporters often cite the records of the successful, individual schools as evidence of the movement's success. Using these reports as examples of the success of charter schools, in general, is poor scholarship at best, or political manipulation at worst. There have been a few national studies of charter school results. Let me cite two such studies. One was a national study conducted early in the life of the movement and addressed inputs extant in the schools. In 2003, Policy Analysis for California Education

(PACE) issued a scathing report based on a national study of charter schools. The study found:

> The nation's ballooning number of charter schools rely heavily on uncredentialed teachers, fail to acquire federal monies intended to aid low-achieving or disabled children, and display the same finance disparities that beset public schools… .
> Charter schools display Spartan staff mixes, where the average teacher instructs more than 20 percent more students each day than teachers in regular schools. (PACE, 2003, p. 1)

Despite the deficiencies in charter schools found by this study, the movement continued to grow. I have seen no study to indicate that the results of the 2003 study made a difference.

The Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (CREDO) issued a report in June 2009 of a study of charter schools in 16 states and the District of Columbia. This study focused on results and outcomes.

> The study reveals that a decent fraction of charter schools, 17 percent, provide superior opportunities for their students. Nearly half of the charter schools have results that are no different from the local public schools and over a third, 37 percent, deliver learning results that are significantly worse than their students would have realized had they remained in traditional public schools. (CREDO, 2009, p. 1)

Clearly these data do not provide compelling evidence that charter schools are the "answer." Still, that the charter schools apparently ignore information like this adds to my paranoia and fuels my suspicion of sinister motives among many of our education policy makers.

Clearly, the competition model is not "the" solution to America's education problems. Simply changing the legal basis for providing schooling is not a reasonable answer. If it were, then we should change the legal basis for all schools. I am reminded of an observation attributed to H.L. Mencken, "For every human problem, there is a solution which is simple, neat and wrong."  From my perspective, the market-based "solution" to American education is just such a solution.

## CONCLUSION

We work in academic departments with the title of "leadership" attached to them. It is my observation that we talk a lot *about* leadership, but as individuals we could do a lot more leading. I suggest that leadership is inherent in each of our specific assignments—not only to talk about it, but also to *do* it. So, let's exert leadership by pushing for changes in institutional culture that recognizes the value of work with schools. Let's exert leadership in developing programs that not only entail completion of coursework, but also help to assure competence among our graduates. Let's exert leadership in exposing bankrupt notions like market-based enrollment for what they really are—bankrupt notions!

I began these remarks by referring to Plato. Let me conclude in the same manner. Socrates speaks:

> …we cannot avoid adopting the belief, that the real nature of education is at variance with the account given by certain of its professors, who pretend, I believe, to infuse

into the mind a knowledge of which it was destitute, just as sight might be instilled into blind eyes. (Davies & Vaughn, 1910, pp. 239–240)

Let's recognize shadows and images for what they really are and not confuse them with reality.

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# Micropolitics in the School: Teacher Leaders' Use of Political Skill and Influence Tactics

Donald J. Brosky

## INTRODUCTION

The school building is a place where constant tactical power struggles occur in an effort to obtain control over real or symbolic resources. Educational organizations are seen as political entities that shape and are shaped by environmental and organizational contexts (Owen, 2006). Each group within the organization has a different view of who has the formal power (authority), who has the informal power (influence), or who should have the power to make organizational decisions. Participants were considered "political actors with their own needs, objectives, and strategies to achieve these objectives" (Bacharach, 1983, p. 10). Owen observed, "Power, conflict, coalitions and policy are alive and well in schools and make up the fabric of educational politics. Much of the time, education is not about what is best for children; it is about the adult issues of power and control" (p. 103). Iannaccone (1991) found that schools displayed their own lives, social climate, organizational culture, and subsystems in pursuit of their own interests. Iannaccone (1991) further stated, "Schools are so different that professionals visiting two of them in the same neighborhood of the same system can quickly sense and even describe the differences" (p. 466).

This study focused upon the micropolitics of teacher leadership, namely the knowledge of tactics, influencing factors, and consequences of teacher leaders' daily political interactions with others within the school setting. Blase (1990) and Blase and Anderson (1995) acknowledged that teachers are not passive actors in the politics of schools, but also use political strategies to increase their bargaining power through the deployment of influence tactics.

### The Research Problem

A facet of school organizational contexts that has received little attention in micropolitical studies is the political aspect of teacher leadership, especially the knowledge of strategies, influencing factors, and consequences of teacher leaders' political interactions with principals and colleagues. Although the initial development of micropolitical theories in education (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Hoyle, 1986; Iannaccone, 1975) have brought about significant studies on organizational life, the micropolitical perspective in education is seldom used to study individual and group interactions and behaviors in school settings (Blase, 1991; Du, 2005; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). Only a few studies of cooperative and/or consensual political relationships between teachers and school principals have appeared in the micropolitical literature (Blase, 1990; Du, 2005).

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**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to provide a profile of power by examining teacher leaders' use of political skill and influence in the organizational context of the school environment. This was accomplished by examining the micropolitical perspectives of teacher leaders to the degree they utilized political skill and influence tactics in their interactions with other faculty to achieve their outcomes. It was proposed that political skill is inherent in teacher leaders and that they are effective in the implementation of political behaviors, especially when interacting with principals and with colleagues.

A major tenet of teacher leadership is the ability to influence and engage colleagues toward improved practice (Wasley, 1991). Strong relationships are teacher leaders' most powerful asset because they are the most powerful influence, next to students, on other teachers' practice (Donaldson, 2007). Wasley referred to teacher leadership as "the ability to encourage colleagues to change, to do things they wouldn't ordinarily consider without the influence of the leader" (p. 23). Teacher culture based on relationships is particularly influential in schools, often overshadowing administrative and legislative influence (Spillane, 2006).

By providing a profile of power and influence as it is exercised by teacher leaders, this study builds upon the relevant literature in the areas of organizational politics, micropolitics, political skill, and influence tactics as well as research on teacher leadership. The results of this study will be valuable to future teacher leaders, school administrators, teacher preparation programs, and teacher leadership training programs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of relevant literature on both micropolitical theory and teacher leadership built a foundation for the study of the use of political behaviors by teacher leaders. The aim of this research review was to critically examine existing practice-based and empirically-based literature concerning the concepts of organization theory, micropolitics, teacher leadership, political skill, and influence.

**Organization Theory**

A perspective shared by political theorists is that organizations are inherently political. Over twenty-five years ago, Mintzberg's (1985) study of organizations as decision-making systems introduced into organizational theory the metaphor of the organization as a "political arena." Organizational analysis from a political focus seeks to explain issues in terms of how political power processes are used by people to protect and increase their power in an organization. It is concerned with how individuals and groups compete and cooperate to achieve their goals (Blase, 1991; Bonner, Koch, & Langmeyer, 2004).

Organizational power and politics are important dimensions of many organizational processes and structures and frequently comprise "the central mechanism, the drive train, and account for significant organizational outcomes and phenomena" (Blase & Blase, 2002, p. 10). Organizational politics consist of decisions that assign values for a social organization and apply ideas about deciding who gets what, when, and how.

**Micropolitical Theory**

Micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power and influence by individuals and groups to further their interests to achieve their goals in organizations (Blase, 1991; Hoyle, 1986). The focus of micropolitics is on the use of power by individuals in organizations for two general purposes: to influence others and to protect themselves. Micropolitics is about conflict and how people compete with each other to get what they want by using cooperation and building support among members of the organization to achieve their ends (Blase, 1991). Micropolitics is also concerned with hidden agendas, with the implicit rather than the explicit, and with those activities that occur among individuals and groups outside rather than inside the formal structures of an organization (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992).

**Micropolitics in Schools**

In schools, intraorganizational politics are a daily occurrence. There are political forces within schools that dictate how things have been done, how things are done, and how things will be done. Schools are places where individuals and groups seek to capitalize on their values and goals by exerting power in formal and informal arenas. Hargreaves (1991) spoke of schools as "…intensely political places where power is everywhere. Teachers exercise power over their students, principals exercise power over teachers, the smarter teachers know how to manipulate or maneuver around administrators" (p. 5).

The micropolitics of education--human behavior, power and how people use it to influence others and to protect themselves, and how people compete with each other to get what they want—shape the tone of the organization (Acker-Hocevar & Touchton, 1999; Blase & Anderson, 1995). Micropolitics encompasses the daily interactions, negotiations and bargains of any school (Lindle, 1999). Mawhinney (1999) posited, "Micropolitical research has emerged as one of the new thrusts in understanding the complexities of organizational life in schools" (p. 161).

A gap exists between the organizational world which is presented in theory and research and the organizational world we all experience. The study of micropolitics provides educators and researchers with opportunities to explore a theory of leadership based upon the realities of everyday school life and daily decision-making. Micropolitics is an "organizational underworld which we all recognize and in which we participate" (Patrick, 1995, p. 68). Educators acknowledge it when they speak of hidden agendas, wheeling and dealing, playing the game, playing politics, and power struggles. Some consider it the dark side of organizational life. The micropolitical perspective provides a valuable and powerful approach to understanding the fundamentals of day-to-day life in schools. According to Lindle (1999), the study of micropolitics is a not only unavoidable, it is an "occupational requirement" for school leaders (p. 176).

**Teacher Leadership**

Educators readily can identify colleagues who they describe as leaders: "individuals to whom they look for professional advice and guidance, and whose views matter to others in the school" (Danielson, 2006, p. 12). However, in the field of education, a struggle continues with the basic definition of teacher leadership that should be fundamental in educators' professional vocabulary. Many administrators, boards of education, parents and even teachers

do not recognize or understand teacher leadership. This lack of understanding adds to the obstacles teacher leaders face (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006: Donaldson, 2007). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) contended, "We are a long way from a common understanding of teacher leadership. Confusion about definitions and expectations of teacher leaders abound" (pp. 4-5). York-Barr and Duke's (2004) meta-analysis on 20 years of research on teacher leadership stated, "The lack of definition may be due, in part, to the expansive territory encompassed under the umbrella term 'teacher leadership'" (p. 260).

The evolution of teacher leadership has been slow because the system has not been organized to treat teachers as leaders. Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann (2002) found a "striking lack of recognition of teachers as either potential or actual leaders in schools" (p. 23). Teachers are reluctant to accept the title of teacher leader because their colleagues may interpret it as an administrative role. Furthermore, some teachers avoid formal leadership positions on the grounds that these positions will interfere with their teaching and take them away from their students (Boles & Troen, 1996; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1998). Through their discussions with teachers, Crowther et al. (2002) found, "I just want to teach, I don't want to be a leader" (p. 35) was heard frequently.

## Political Skill

Researchers have stated that an important way to be effective in organizational settings is to develop and use one's social and political competence and to build on the ability to persuade, influence, and control others (Kolodinsky, 2002; Mintzberg, 1983, Pfeffer, 1981). While performance, effectiveness, and career success are determined in part by hard work and intelligence, other factors such as social astuteness, networking, positioning, and savvy also have important roles in organizations (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewe, 2005; Haag, 1995; Kolodinsky, 2002; Marshall & Scribner, 1991).

Organizational researchers Pfeffer (1981) and Mintzberg (1983) suggested that to be effective in political environments, individuals need to possess *political skill*. Political skill refers to the exercise of influence through persuasion, manipulation, and negotiation (Mintzberg, 1983). Political skill is defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ahern, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas & Ammeter, 2004, p. 311).

The four dimensions of political skill are: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability and apparent sincerity (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005). Social astuteness is the ability to read and understand people. Socially astute individuals are often seen as resourceful in dealing with others and can accurately perceive and understand social situations as well as the personal interactions that occur in these settings (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004). Individuals high in interpersonal influence appear to colleagues as being pleasant and productive to associate with, using such behaviors to control their environments. They have a "subtle and convincing style that exerts a powerful influence on those around them" (Ferris, Davidson et al., 2005, p. 10). Networking ability is the capacity to build connections, friendships, alliances and coalitions. Those highly proficient in networking ability are able to position themselves well in order to create and take advantage of opportunities. Their subtle style allows politically skilled individuals to easily develop strong and beneficial alliances and coalitions (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004). Apparent sincerity is carrying out influence attempts in apparently sincere and genuine ways. This facet of political skill determines the success or

failure of influence attempts because it focuses on perceived intentions of the person attempting to influence others.

## Influence

Literature on the subject of influence indicates that people use different tactics depending upon the target of their request, and tactic use is based upon the object or goal of their request (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980). Six influence tactics were the subject of Schriesheim and Hinkin's (1990) study on influence strategies used by subordinates and reflect the influence subscales used in this study: ingratiation, exchange, rationality, assertiveness, upward appeal and coalitions. Individuals utilizing ingratiation make attempts to get the subject of the influence attempt to think favorably of them or get them in a good mood before requesting something (Blickle, 2000). Stengel (2000) characterized ingratiation as "…strategic praise, praise with a purpose" (p. 14). The exchange strategy entails the use of implied or overt promises that the subject of the influence attempt will receive rewards or benefits if a request is granted or reminds them of a past favor that will be given in return (Yukl & Falbe, 1990). Individuals utilizing rationality use logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade the subject they are attempting to influence. Assertiveness is influencing others "by using demands and direct requests in a forceful manner to persuade the subject of the influence attempt to comply with the requests" (Blickle, 2000, p. 143). Upward appeal describes attempts to persuade the subject to comply by relying on the chain of command or appealing to higher management for assistance (Kipnis et al., 1980). The use of the coalitions strategy is to seek the aid of others to persuade or use others' support to aid in the influence attempt (Yukl & Falbe, 1990).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Questions

Through preliminary research on how teacher leaders function effectively in the micropolitical environment of the school, the following research questions emerged:

1. How do politics within a school environment affect teacher leadership?
2. How do teacher leaders perceive their role in the exercise of power and influence in school-based politics?
3. To what extent do teacher leaders deliberately utilize political skill and influence tactics when interacting with principals and colleagues?

These research questions were examined by using a mixed methods approach that utilized both quantitative and qualitative strategies. By responding to the *Teacher Leader Questionnaire*, teacher leaders identified the degree they made use of political skill and influence strategies during their interaction with principals and with colleagues. Through open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews, teacher leaders' perceptions on how micropolitics within a school environment affected teacher leadership and how they viewed their role in the exercise of power and influence in school-based politics were explored. The quantitative data identified the areas of focus, namely four dimensions of political skill and six influence strategies, while the qualitative data substantiated those areas of focus.

**Research Procedures**

Data were collected from past and present K-12 teacher leaders involved in a program designed to develop leadership skills. The program provided teacher leadership development for K-12 and community college educators from 19 public school districts, two intermediate school districts/regional educational service agencies, and two community colleges. Members of the program also had the opportunity to enroll in courses in teacher leadership to attain Education Specialist certification at a participating university. For this study, I focused on the 400 teacher leaders from K-12 institutions involved in the program since its inception in 1997. A total of 149 teacher leaders completed the *Teacher Leader Questionnaire* for a response rate of 37%.

Purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998), sometimes referred to as *purposive* or *judgment* sampling, guided the selection of the participants in this study. In this type of sampling, the decision is made on the purpose the researcher wants informants to serve, and then the researcher seeks those candidates most likely to provide the required information. Individuals were selected based on specific questions/purposes of research in lieu of random sampling and on the basis of information available about these individuals (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). For this study, I considered where I could reach acknowledged practicing teacher leaders. Therefore, participants in the teacher leader program were chosen based on the criterion that they could provide the broadest range of information possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I developed the *Teacher Leader Questionnaire* by incorporating the 18-item *Political Skill Inventory (PSI)* (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005; Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky et al., 2005) that identified four key dimensions of political skill: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. Schreisheim and Hinkin's (1990) *Influence Subscales* instrument was used to measure six influence tactics: ingratiation, rationality, assertiveness, exchange, upward appeal, and coalitions. Substantiation for the validity of these subscales has been reported in previous studies (Farmer & Maslyn, 1999; Kolodinsky, 2002). The subscales consisted of 34 items in which teacher leaders indicated the frequency they utilized influence tactics with principals and with colleagues.

The *Teacher Leader Questionnaire* concluded with a series of eight open-ended questions which allowed teachers to reflect and respond. The reflective responses focused on teacher leaders' perceptions of school culture, political relationships among teachers, political relationships with principals, influence tactics, and insight on political behavior in the workplace.

Participants in the study were given the option to volunteer to be interviewed by providing contact information at the end of the questionnaire. Through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), nine teacher leaders were chosen for standardized open-ended interviews.

**Data Analysis**

The data for this study were analyzed with both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (open-ended responses and interviews) methods. Through a process called *complementarity*, qualitative and quantitative methods were used to measure overlapping but distinct facets of the phenomenon under investigation. Results from one method type enhanced, illustrated, and clarified results from the other (Caracelli & Greene, 1993).

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS$^{TM}$). Descriptive statistics, variable means, and standard deviations were computed for

teacher leaders' utilization of the four dimensions of political skill and six influence subscales. Additional tests were conducted including correlations of political skill dimensions when influencing principals and colleagues. A paired samples t-test was computed to determine whether a difference existed when influence tactics were used with principals or with colleagues. Multiple linear regression analyses were performed to determine whether the four dimensions of political skill (predictor) were significantly related to the six influence subscales (outcome). Interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses were coded and combined with the questionnaire data in what is termed, *intermethod mixing* (Johnson & Turner, 2003). Intermethod mixing allowed the researcher to gain insight into content that would not have been available in a stand-alone closed-ended questionnaire.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

### Micropolitics and Teacher Leadership

Teacher leaders related their perceptions of school-based politics and the effects on their efficacy as leaders. A review of these perspectives provided rich data on teacher leaders' views of the micropolitics within the political arena of the school. Analysis of the data indicated that a dichotomy existed within schools whereas the very sources of support for teacher leadership, colleagues and principals, also created barriers to their success.

Support from colleagues took the forms of collaborative group interaction, encouraging teacher leadership, and embracing those teachers who chose to lead by creating a collegial school culture. Support from principals included practicing effective servant leadership, providing funding for professional development, and encouraging teachers to take on leadership roles without repercussions for risk taking. An additional area of support instrumental to their success was their participation in a formal teacher leader program. Respondents pointed to their colleagues in the program as means of support in terms of resources and as contacts for input. One teacher related that involvement in the teacher leader program provided her with the courage to be a leader within the school.

In contrast to the factors that were viewed as supports to teacher leadership, teacher leaders identified factors they perceived as barriers that discouraged teacher leadership. Although instrumental in supporting teacher leaders, colleagues and principals were also identified as prime contributors to the factors that negatively impacted teacher leadership. Teacher leaders related how they encountered resistance from other teachers in their daily interactions. Resistance took the form of non-support from colleagues who blocked progress of those who took on leadership roles or who attempted to present new ideas. Taking on leadership roles sometimes resulted in being ostracized by colleagues. The egalitarian nature of teaching was identified as an impediment to teacher leaders' abilities to step forward to lead because of the idea that teachers were all equal, and those who tried to lead challenged teacher solidarity. Similarly, teacher leaders attempting to lead were interpreted as trying to get ahead for personal gain and position.

Resentment from colleagues was another difficulty teacher leaders faced. Resentment occurred when other teachers perceived the use of undue influence over the principal. Participants in the study described the tense relationships and opposition they felt from colleagues as a result of having a close working relationship with the principal. If the perception that teacher leaders were appointed by the principal, they immediately lost credibility as leaders (Wasley, 1991).

Political maneuvering and playing politics were also identified as factors that negatively affected teacher leadership. According to participants in the study, these political behaviors are inherent in organizations. Ulterior motives included the advancement of hidden agendas and keeping others down while trying to advance personal agendas. Respondents expressed frustration with hidden politics because the politics were sometimes hard to identify and to address. It was acknowledged that the person working the hardest may not be recognized, but the individual playing the political game the best "wins." Finally, the presence of alliances, factions and cliques of teachers were identified by teacher leaders as groups that discouraged teacher leadership by attempting to negate or sabotage the advancement of teacher leadership.

Principals acting in political ways were also identified by teacher leaders as negatively impacting teacher leadership. Respondents observed that a principals' inability to give up power had a direct effect on whether teacher leadership emerged and was sustained within the schools. The traditional hierarchical structure of the school where initiatives were solely dictated by the principal adversely affected teacher leadership. Finally, the lack of recognition and encouragement of teacher leaders by principals were seen as negatively affecting leadership.

## Power and Influence in School-Based Politics

The results of this study addressed the micropolitical issues of power and influence within the school and teacher leaders' roles in school-based politics. Teacher leaders described the positive and negative forms that power and influence in the school take. They identified positive influencing behaviors such as providing advice, developing confidence and trust, understanding and interpreting the school's culture, developing relationships, and counteracting negative influences. Negative influencing behaviors included informal leaders who influence negatively, teachers that are part of alliances who influence each other with negativity, bullies, and those who use influence to advance personal agendas.

## Teacher Leaders' Utilization of Political Skill and Influence Tactics

*Political skill.* Teacher leaders' responses to the Political Skill Inventory (PSI) items and reflective responses on the *Teacher Leadership Questionnaire* and in open-ended interviews revealed that teacher leaders were politically astute as they regularly utilized the four dimensions of political skill when interacting with others within the school environment. The combined data indicated that teacher leaders perceived that they had above average political skill, utilizing the four political skill dimensions with regularity in the workplace: apparent sincerity, interpersonal influence, networking ability and social astuteness.

Teacher leaders were asked to respond to a 6-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). The combined mean among all 149 teacher leaders that responded to the PSI reported a mean rating of at least 4.73 indicating that even the least used political skill dimension, "networking ability" was also well above average.

Another important finding in this study was that teacher leaders utilized multiple dimensions of political skill to achieve their desired outcomes. The coding process identified a number of reflective responses from the *Teacher Leader Questionnaire* that included combinations of political skill dimensions in which teacher leaders utilized more than one at a given time. Specifically, teachers described skills that were identified as combinations of the "interpersonal influence" and "apparent sincerity" dimensions. The reflective responses also

provided data that the political skill dimensions "interpersonal influence" and "networking ability" were used in combination by teacher leaders. These findings indicated that teacher leaders who were adept at political skill did not compartmentalize individual dimensions. They combined political skill dimensions to navigate the micropolitical landscape of the school.

   ***Influence.*** Micropolitical theory suggests influence can be very pervasive in organizations, and the use of influence tactics determines the success of people in their attempts to influence others. The data analysis for this portion of the study was two-fold. Both the frequency of the influence attempt and comparisons of the means of upward and lateral influence attempts were identified. This study also employed a paired samples t-test to determine whether a difference existed when the means of teacher leaders' use of upward influence strategies (with administrators) were compared with the means of lateral influence attempts (with colleagues).

   The influence subscales data identified that teacher leaders used "rationality" and "ingratiation" more frequently than the other tactics when attempting upward and lateral influence. Although the tactics "exchange," "assertiveness," and "upward appeal" had higher mean scores for influence attempts with colleagues than with principals, respondents reported on the influence subscales instrument that they rarely or never attempted these influence strategies with either group.

   T-test scores for upward and lateral influence attempts were identical for "rationality" (m = 4.31, t = .000), indicating non-significance when the influence strategy was used with both colleagues and principals. Research on influence by Charbonneau (2004) and Yukl and Falbe (1990) revealed that "rationality" is a widely used and effective influence strategy regardless of the direction of the influence attempt. The t-test data revealed significance in the ways teacher leaders delivered both upward and lateral "ingratiation," "exchange," "assertiveness" and "upward appeal" tactics.

   Respondents to open-ended items and interviewees spoke about the skills they used to achieve desired outcomes with either lateral or upward influence attempts. They relied on "ingratiation," "rationality," and "assertiveness" strategies during upward and lateral interactions. The "rationality" tactic was the most frequently mentioned. A noteworthy finding was that the teacher leaders did not identify "upward appeal," "coalitions," or "exchange" as influencing tactics they utilized.

   Interviewees identified the approaches they used with both principals and colleagues. The approaches were then coded and categorized into the six influence tactics that were studied. Respondents to the reflective responses identified the use of five of the six influence tactics with "upward appeal" as the influence tactic they rarely used. Finally, the interview and open-response data in this study identified "ingratiation" and "rationality" as the influence strategies most frequently utilized.

   The data showed that politically skilled teacher leaders tended to avoid influence attempts that involved confrontation (assertiveness), circumventing the chain of command (upward appeal), seeking the aid of others to persuade (coalitions), or quid pro quo arrangements (exchange) when attempting upward and lateral influence. Research by Yukl and Falbe (1990) supported these findings on the uses of "assertiveness" and "coalitions" stating, "These tactics are likely to be viewed as socially undesirable forms of influence behavior. . . . The target may become resentful or angry with the agent for trying to coerce or manipulate him or her" (p. 533).

**CONCLUSION**

This study examined teacher leaders' utilization of political skill dimensions and influence tactics during their daily interactions with colleagues and principals. Micropolitical studies of political skill and influence in the context of educational organizations are uncommon, so this facet of research provided the potential for additional studies in the fields of educational and organizational research.

The findings from this study suggested that school-based politics affect teacher leadership in both positive and negative ways. Through analysis, the researcher determined that acceptance of teacher leadership needs to take place through concerted efforts by faculties as a whole. In political organizations such as schools, traditional hierarchical perspectives of leadership must give way to the concept of shared leadership between principals and teacher leaders.

Teacher leaders acknowledged that their involvement in the formal teacher leadership program cohorts allowed them to develop both the skills and the support networks necessary to successfully function as leaders within their individual buildings and at the district level. Relevant findings in teacher leadership and micropolitical studies in the area of school-based politics support these results (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Zinn, 1997).

Teacher leadership programs and school districts may benefit from the findings of this study. By administering the PSI and influence subscales to teachers and analyzing the data, teacher leader programs and school districts will have the capability to identify individuals who possess the capacity to assess complex social situations within the micropolitical context of the school and to know what to do to exert positive influence in those situations. Those teachers who show a propensity to lead may enhance their strengths and develop their areas of weaknesses in the political skill dimensions through professional development such as drama-based training, coaching, and mentoring programs (Ferris et al., 2005).

Research on influence by Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980) over thirty years ago asserted that everyone influences everyone else in organizations, regardless of his or her job title or position in the organization. These assertions are relevant today. Politically skilled teacher leaders acknowledged that they utilized influence tactics in upward and lateral ways to achieve their outcomes. It is worth noting that individuals did not necessarily use the same influence strategy in every situation. Similarly, different individuals chose different influence strategies when faced with similar situations. Higgins, Judge, and Ferris (1993) stated that politically skilled individuals tended to avoid certain tactics in favor of others, thereby, demonstrating that political skill use depends on the situation coupled with the flexibility to carry out influencing behaviors that are inherent in its components. A respondent to the reflective response portion of the Teacher Leader Questionnaire succinctly summarized these assertions, "I look at politics in the school setting as having a 'tool box' of strategies used to influence peers and supervisors. You need to know which tool to use at a given time."

Initially, it was proposed that teacher leaders are effective in the implementation of political skill when interacting with principals and with colleagues. The data acquired from this study supported this assumption regarding teacher leaders' use of political skill dimensions and influence tactics. These data indicated that teacher leaders were motivated to use political skill and influence tactics and had the capability to utilize these political behaviors to attain their outcomes. Despite the political factors presented to discourage them, teacher leaders continued to emerge in leadership roles. They possessed both the *political will* and the *political skill* (Mintzberg, 1985; Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar, & Ferris, 2005) to be effective in the micropolitical environment of the school.

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# CRITICAL ISSUES IN SHARED LEADERSHIP

# Complexities in the Workload of Principals: Implications for Teacher Leadership

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Across America, school districts are facing profound challenges, casting the bright light of attention on its leaders. Principals are listed as central to the increased improvement, development of learning communities, and teacher leadership for their schools (Capers, 2004; Fleming, 2004; Fullan, 2001, 2008; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Hord, 2004; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Smylie & Denny, 1990; York-Barr, 2004). While principals are engaged in the managerial tasks of the school, securing the building for safety, ensuring bus routes, student schedules, and the day-to-day management tasks, the instructional needs of the faculty and students compete for attention. In the era of *No Child Left Behind* (2001) Public Law 107-110, accountability for test scores, improved student achievement, and public outcry for teacher improvements, the expectation for instructional leadership results in demands that building principals take on new and demanding roles (Ash, & Pearsall, 2000; Cooley & Shen, 2003; Hess & Kelly, 2007, Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

It has long been recognized that principals are involved with expectations that make their jobs ones that are full of interactions that are fragmented, brief, and unrelenting (Hallinger, 1992, Kafka, 2009, Louis et al., 2010). A review of recent research revealed that principals are under new pressures and enormous stress as they juggle demands for quality while responding to changes in demographics, parental involvement, curricular and technological changes, and instructional improvements (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cooley & Shen, 2003; Griffith, 1999; Marks & Printy, 2003; Petzko, 2008; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Kafka (2009) indicated that the role of the principal has always been complex and multifaceted, and she concluded, "What is new is the degree to which schools are expected to resolve society's social and educational inequities in a market-based environment" (p.328).

While principals deal with the increased and continued pressures, teacher leadership offers possibilities for growth and change in schools. Teacher leadership shows promise for the potential contributions to teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2000; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000; Smylie & Denny, 1990; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As teachers expand their leadership in the schools, the balance of leadership with the principal undergoes change (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leadership includes the use of teacher talent to bring about improvements in teaching effectiveness and student achievement (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Spillane, 2006). In this chapter, we investigate the relationship of contemporary principal workload pressures with the intricacies involved with teacher leadership. It is a story told through the eyes of principals who are busy completing the tasks that have been delineated in this introduction.

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Three questions framed this study:

1. What leadership roles do teachers currently perform in the school aside from their principal job of teaching?
2. How do principals rate the stress in their professional work life, and is that stress more related to integrated forms of leadership or managerial aspects of the job?
3. To alleviate stress, what leadership roles would principals prefer teachers to perform?

## Leadership and the Context of the World of the Principal

Principals are understandably at the center of all reform efforts of the schools. A synthesis of research on the relationship between school leadership and student practices revealed the importance of the principal with regard to school improvement. Supovitz, Sirinides, and May (2009) reported:

> In summary, the accumulated literature on the relationship between principal practice and student learning indicates two things. First is a confirmation that principals can have a detectable effect on student learning outcomes. And second, those effects are more likely to be mediated by other school and classroom factors than directly by principal actions. (pp. 33–34)

Principals influence the instructional practices of the teachers, and in doing so, are able to change the culture of the schools, while teachers play an essential role in advancing the achievement of students (Fullan, 2001). The research base on effective leadership of the principal points to the complexity of the various roles that they play in their daily work (Hallinger, 1992; Kafka, 2009; Louis et al., 2010; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). Griffith (1999) reported, "Thus, previous research on effective principal leadership espouses the principal as a curriculum leader, on one hand, and as a manager of interpersonal relations and resources on the other" (p. 269). Fullan (2001) summarized the expectations of the principalship as follows:

> With the move toward the self-management of schools, the principal appears to have the worst of both worlds. The old world is still around with expectations to run a smooth school, and to be responsive to all; simultaneously, the new world rains down on schools with disconnected demands, expecting that at the end of the day the school should be constantly showing better test results, and ideally become a learning organization. (pp. 138-139)

Principals are now being asked to account for the students who are failing in their schools, while working with the teacher unions to find acceptable work expectations to accomplish these new goals (Kafka, 2009; Louis et al., 2010; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). Cooley and Shen (2003) reported that secondary principals were more heavily involved in traditional management roles as opposed to working with the evaluation of curriculum and instruction or professional development. Their study revealed that principals self-reported that they were doing more in their roles to improve student learning, although more time was actually spent on management than leadership activities.

Principals face stress that can cause them to consider the benefits and limitations of their career choice. For example, Pounder and Merrill (2001) reported:

> How much can I afford to sacrifice in terms of my personal life and overall quality of life to fulfill my desire to achieve or influence education and to make more money? Or similarly, how much more money do I need to make to be worth the loss of personal life time? (p. 47)

As principal candidates consider these workload-associated issues, the decision to pursue the principalship increases in difficulty.

Lashway (2003) listed the complexity of the job, the isolation, the lonely work, with the particulars of the entrenched culture of each individual school, and the endemic sources of conflict as leading stressors that principals face. The complexity of the job of principal and the variety of internal and external demands on the principals' performance reveal a mosaic of one that is challenging, fast-paced, and isolating.

Teacher leadership provides interesting insights for understanding the work of principals (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). A number of researchers, such as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann (2008), Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), Muijs and Harris (2003), Reeves, (2008), Rogus (1988), and York-Barr and Duke (2004) have noted that teacher leadership is associated with the hope for the continuously evolving professionalism of teachers. Thus, teacher leadership can change the culture of the school, especially if principals recognize and respect teachers as partners in important, instructional decision making in the school. In this way, teacher leadership provides interesting insights for understanding the work of principals.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Instructional leadership and transformational leadership are two models that have dominated educational leadership literature (Hallinger, 1992). Instructional leadership appeared in the literature in the 1980s as research about the effectiveness of principals who had a focus and expectation for instructional effectiveness permeated the literature (Lashway, 2002).

Transformational leadership utilizes stakeholders to improve student achievement by means of problem analysis and resolution, resulting in educational change (Hallinger, 1992). In transformational leadership, principals emphasize improvement of the skill level of teachers; in doing so, they challenge teachers to think about pedagogical practices and the professional growth of teachers (Hallinger, 1992). Despite the emphasis on educational change, the use of transformational leadership is not a guarantee for instructional leadership (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998).

Marks and Printy (2003) introduced a third model of leadership, *integrated leadership*, which embodies the concepts of instructional and transformational leadership. Since principals are responsible for improved student achievement, teaching effectiveness, and capacity building in the organization, we chose the *integrated leadership* model to explain the roles we were envisioning for educational leaders. Marks and Printy stated, "When principals who are transformational leaders accept their instructional role and exercise it in collaboration with teachers, they practice an integrated form of leadership" (p. 376). Therefore, in this study, we use *integrated leadership* as a construct to measure the new expectations of

principals, a combination of instructional leadership with the principles of transformational leadership in which principals would create the vision for growth and change while more fully utilizing teachers as partners.

Another theoretical framework which guided this study was *managerial.* The management construct used in this study to measure principal workload pressure was taken from the literature about the stressful factors that principals encounter (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Kafka, 2009; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). These stressful factors could include political, managerial, or personal factors. We collapsed the variables of the managerial, political, and personal issues and labeled these as *managerial*, since the principal's role demands management of each of these areas and because these managerial issues have long dominated the research base (Hallinger, 1992).

## METHOD OF THE STUDY

This quantitative study was structured to systematically examine the beliefs of K-12 principals regarding their workload expectations and stressors. Additionally, we sought to examine principals' beliefs regarding teacher involvement in minimizing principal workload as measured by a modified Likert inventory consisting of questions which asked the respondents about the stressors principals encounter, the roles teachers assume in their buildings and principals' preferences regarding which responsibilities teachers could assume to alleviate the stress of the principalship (see Appendix A).

While the data in this study might appear to be ordinal in nature, the researchers have converted the words on the Likert scale in a meaningful way to an interval scale treating it as nominal data. This gives the researchers the ability to use totals or to calculate numerical averages in order to facilitate analysis.

The data in this study supported the notion that the workload of the principal could be classified as *managerial* or *integrated leadership*. Building on the premise that principals must effectively work with the instructional and managerial issues of the school, we developed a list of tasks and behaviors that engage principals for purposes of identifying and clarifying which of those variables were stressful to the principals. We chose these two constructs to guide the investigation of this study and subsequently developed variables from the literature that would fully define each of the constructs.

The *integrated leadership* variables related to instruction, curriculum, and the behaviors that a principal must navigate to successfully engage in transformational leadership. The *managerial* variables related to the roles traditionally associated with the workload of the principal and may include supervision, political or personal stressors. In addition, data in this study also identified which roles these principals preferred to delegate and which roles were already being performed by teachers.

### Participants

Data for this study were collected through an electronic questionnaire distributed to all principals working in K-12 school districts in a Midwestern state (n = 3084). The data from the survey focused on the responses of 907 practicing principals who volunteered to complete the online questionnaire administered through Survey Monkey®. The sample size supports a 99% confidence level as ascertained by the 933 responses received by the researchers.

Principals representing elementary (N = 511), middle school (N = 228) and high school (N = 273) levels responded to the questionnaire. Approximately 20% of the participants had

more than 15 years of teaching experience while approximately 80% had 15 or fewer years of teaching experience. The principals were nearly evenly distributed by gender with 49% female and 51% male respondents. The responding principals represented urban (15%), rural (40%) and suburban (45%) school districts.

## Data Collection

Principals were asked about their backgrounds in education, and demographic information about their school and district. Respondents rated the frequency that teachers perform certain task associated roles in their schools with response choices ranging from *almost never* (1) to s*ometimes* (2), *often* (3), and almost *daily* (4). Principals were asked their perceptions regarding their workload, rating the incidence of stress associated with 26 identified stressors with response choices of *almost never* (1), s*ometimes* (2), *often* (3), and *almost daily* (4). Moreover, respondents had the option of indicating *does not apply* to all questions in this survey. Finally, principals identified the stressors that would be reduced if teachers performed certain task-associated roles with response choices of *strongly agree* (4), *agree* (3), *disagree (*2), and *strongly disagree* (1).

## Validity

The questionnaire was designed to measure principals' perceptions of their workload and their attitudes about teacher leaders providing assistance. The questionnaire was pilot tested to a group of seven principals. This field test generated satisfactory results with respondents expressing that the questions in the survey were clearly written and easily understood. The participants also reviewed the survey for response formatting. As a result of their feedback, minor changes were made to the survey, and four additional variables were added to the list of possible stressors of principals. Construct validity of the survey was established by aligning the variables in the survey with the research base of instructional and transformational leadership, the stress of the work load of principals as defined in the literature, and the descriptors based on the experiences that we had as researchers and former building principals. In the judgment of the reviewers, the instrument appeared to measure the theoretical constructs for which it was designed to measure—principals' beliefs regarding their workload and the extent to which teacher leaders can alleviate the associated stress.

In subsequent examinations, we analyzed the data using a principal component factor analysis and multiple regression analysis. This study examined the data in relation to the two overarching constructs, *integrated leadership* and *managerial.* These constructs were defined largely by the knowledge base regarding the principalship, and informed by the factor analyses performed.

## Data Analysis

In the data analysis, we initially analyzed frequencies and means to identify systematic patterns. The research team examined: (a) what roles teachers currently assume in the respective schools; (b) workplace stressors identified by principals and (c) principals' views of how teachers could alleviate these stressors with means calculated for each research question.

While it was important to consider the rank ordering of principals' perceptions of stress, we were also interested in empirical evidence of what items were associated in the survey. Thus, we performed a factor analysis to examine what items the principals viewed in common, testing the theoretical constructs against empirical responses. We chose factor analysis as a technique to reduce the number of disparate variables without a loss of information (Punch, 2009). The factor analysis allowed us to see how the variables could be grouped together in interesting ways. As a result, we were able to ascertain four variables that had common factors: *personal task management, instructional demands, professional task management,* and *dealing with conflict.*

We were interested in a further analysis of the four factors that were identified when the factor analysis was performed and subsequently ran a multiple regression analysis to ascertain which of the variables were related with the other factors. Separate factor analyses were run to test two separate domains, *stressors* and *teacher behaviors*, each including four factors. The *stressors* were the predictor variables, and the *teacher behaviors* were the outcome variables. Thus, each factor was separately tested as a criterion listed as the dependent variable, run against all of the other factors, and entered as independent variables.

## RESULTS

### Factor Analysis I

From the survey, principal component factor analysis revealed four distinct divisions regarding workplace stressors. Table 1 shows the specific components for each factor.

**Table 1.** Workplace Stressors Identified through Principal Component Analysis.

| | Component Matrix | Mean | S.D. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Personal Task Management** | | **2.82** | **.69** |
| Feelings of being overwhelmed with job demands | .768 | 2.90 | .970 |
| Job expectations of the principalship | .752 | 2.98 | .966 |
| Loss of Personal Time | .741 | 3.02 | .962 |
| Work-Life Balance | .740 | 3.03 | .966 |
| Insufficient time to get the job done | .736 | 3.29 | .847 |
| Constant Interruptions | .706 | 3.18 | .957 |
| Personal goals and expectations to excel in this job | .697 | 2.88 | .964 |
| My own ability to manage time efficiently | .686 | 2.50 | .999 |
| Knowing how to prioritize tasks | .668 | 2.30 | .997 |
| Keeping up with email communications | .662 | 3.04 | 1.022 |
| Concerns regarding personal health and fitness | .650 | 2.63 | 1.062 |
| General loss of joy in doing this work | .598 | 2.12 | 1.046 |

**Table 1 (continued).** Workplace Stressors Identified through Principal Component Analysis.

| Demands | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Instructional Demands** | | **2.47** | **.66** |
| Providing instructional leadership for faculty | .814 | 2.64 | .968 |
| Providing a vision for school improvement | .787 | 2.39 | .962 |
| Planning quality professional development activities. | .754 | 2.53 | .815 |
| Responding to new demands of the curriculum | .718 | 2.78 | .872 |
| Responding to student test score results | .715 | 2.48 | .858 |
| Conducting teacher evaluations | .682 | 2.53 | .883 |
| Sharing leadership with teachers | .653 | 1.95 | .902 |
| **Professional Task Management** | | **2.57** | **.65** |
| Dealing with parent complaints | .730 | 2.59 | .916 |
| Student discipline | .720 | 2.65 | 1.008 |
| Lunchroom and building supervision | .718 | 2.65 | 1.062 |
| Volume of paperwork | .678 | 3.21 | .863 |
| Dealing with changing demographics | .677 | 2.19 | .961 |
| Working with parent groups such as PTA | .654 | 1.92 | .866 |
| Evening and weekend responsibilities | .648 | 2.62 | .943 |
| Increased performance expectations from cent. office | .636 | 2.71 | .966 |
| **Handling Conflict** | | **2.13** | **.68** |
| Dealing with staff disputes | .809 | 1.82 | .861 |
| Conflict within the staff | .808 | 1.81 | .870 |
| Teachers' resistance to change | .749 | 2.61 | .931 |
| Issues with unions | .748 | 1.95 | .899 |
| Working with ineffective or struggling teachers | .690 | 2.38 | .917 |

1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often,  4 = Almost Daily

Interestingly, when the means were reviewed within the four factors, the highest areas of stress reported by principals were within the *personal task management* factor. The means in this factor ranged from 3.29 for *insufficient time to get the job done* to 2.12 for *general loss of joy in doing this work*.

Seven variables were listed under the *instructional demands* factor with the means ranging from 2.78 for *responding to new demands of the curriculum* to 1.95 for *sharing leadership with teachers*. The instructional variables signified a relatively low incidence of stress for the principals (occurring between *sometimes* and *often*), especially when compared to the tasks associated with personal task management.

In the *professional task management* factor, the means ranged from *student discipline* (M=2.65), *lunchroom and building supervision* (M=2.65), to *working with parent groups* (M=1.92). Finally, the fourth factor, labeled as *handling conflict* produced the lowest mean scores for stress of the principal, with 2.38 for *working with struggling with ineffective or struggling teachers*, to a 1.81 for *conflict within the staff*, an indicator of stress occurring between *seldom* and *sometimes*.

**Factor Analysis II**

A second principal component factor analysis revealed four distinct constructs held by principals regarding assignable teacher roles that would alleviate their stress. Table 2 shows the specific components making up each construct.

**Table 2.** Assignable Roles Identified through Principal Component Analysis.

|  | Component Matrix | Mean | S.D. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Instructional Issues** |  |  |  |
|  |  | **3.08** | **.514** |
| Providing instructional leadership for the staff | .749 | 3.11 | .711 |
| Holding formal or assigned leadership positions in this school | .748 | 3.05 | .706 |
| Creating a vision for school improvement | .744 | 3.05 | .733 |
| Influencing building-wide instructional practices | .740 | 3.24 | .657 |
| Mentoring new teachers | .740 | 3.11 | .730 |
| Analyzing test score data to improve instructional practice | .719 | 3.33 | .683 |
| Chairing school committees | .714 | 3.16 | .687 |
| Providing professional development training for teachers in this school | .693 | 3.16 | .648 |
| Holding formal or assigned leadership positions in our school | .668 | 2.94 | .738 |
| Working with ineffective, struggling teachers | .616 | 3.05 | .794 |
| Developing plans of action for changing demographics | .607 | 2.76 | .766 |
| **Professional Service** |  | **2.46** | **.555** |
| Presenting to the Board of Education | .724 | 2.54 | .813 |
| Handling issues regarding building security other than classroom discipline | .675 | 2.33 | .872 |
| Serving as liaisons to stakeholder groups such as PTA or Band Boosters | .652 | 2.88 | .746 |
| Participating in budget and purchasing decision-making | .640 | 2.43 | .780 |
| Handling communications with media | .639 | 1.81 | .790 |
| Completing reports for the district, state | .610 | 2.72 | .851 |
| **Teacher Contact** |  | **2.98** | **.610** |
| Working with ineffective, struggling teachers | .814 | 3.05 | .794 |
| Working with teachers who are resistant to change | .794 | 3.27 | .717 |
| Conducting peer teaching evaluations | .738 | 2.96 | .787 |
| Participating in a formal process to resolve staff disputes | .727 | 2.68 | .834 |
| **Problem Resolution** |  | **3.05** | **.635** |
| Resolving parent complaints and concerns | .795 | 2.98 | .801 |
| Resolving problems at the classroom level | .794 | 3.39 | .721 |
| Assigning consequences for student misbehavior | .758 | 2.80 | .870 |

1=Strongly Disagree,  2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly agree

Principals identified *instructional issues* (M = 3.08) as holding the most promise for alleviating their workplace stress. The means in this factor ranged from 3.33 for *analyzing test score data to improve instructional practice* to 2.76 for *developing plans of action for changing demographics.*

Seven variables listed under the *professional service* factor (M = 2.46) included the means ranging from this 2.88 for *serving as liaisons to stakeholder groups such as PTA or Band Boosters* to 1.81 for *handling communications with media*.

In the *teacher contact* factor, the groupings ranged from *working with teachers who are resistant to change* (M = 3.27) to *participating in a formal process to resolve staff disputes* (M = 2.68). Finally, the fourth factor, labeled as *problem resolution* (M = 3.05) produced scores ranging from 3.39 for *resolving problems at the classroom level* to 2.80 for *assigning consequences for student misbehavior*. These groupings provided evidence that items on the instrument clustered into appropriate groupings. This pattern of correlation indicated that the measures in each of these groupings were highly correlated and thus it was likely that they were influenced by the same factors.

**Multiple Regression Analyses**

Results from the multiple regression analysis further explained the multivariate relationship between the stressors perceived by the principal (*instructional demands, handling conflict, professional task management,* and *personal task management*) and the potential relief that teachers could offer, should they perform the tasks of dealing with *instructional issues*, offering *professional service*, being involved with *teacher contact*, and active engagement in *problem resolution* within the school. Table 3 reports the results of four separate multiple regression analyses. These tests revealed a moderate effect size with several variables identified as statistically significant. Specifically, the significance explains the probability that the observed relationship between these variables occurred by chance and tells us something about the degree to which the result is representative of the population. We are reporting significance at the borderline acceptable error level with a p-value of .05, statistically significant level of $p < .01$ and the highly significant level of $p < .001$. The potential relief in the form of teacher contact produced the most highly significant results when considering three of the four stressors identified by principals.

**Table 3.** Results of Multiple Regressions Assessing the Impact of Different Principal Workload Stressors on Level of Teacher Response and Involvement.

| Stressors | Problem Resolution | Teacher Contact | Professional Service | Instructional Issues |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instructional Demands | .053 NS | .135** | .12* | .13* |
| Handling Conflict | .184*** | .34*** | .11** | .21*** |
| Professional Task Management | .125* | - .12* | .08 NS | -.01 NS |
| Personal Task Management | .04 NS | .14** | .05 NS | .17** |
| R-square | .112 | .192 | .086 | .163 |

NS $p > .05$;  * $p < .05$;  ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

In the *personal task management* factor category, principals reported being overwhelmed by the job with subsequent loss of joy of all it included, and a sense of not being able to keep up with the job demands or the work life balance, similar to the descriptions by

Pounder and Merrill (2001). These descriptions were also much like those recorded by other analysts who described the frenetic pace with which principals operate in their schools (Fullan, 2001; Grubb & Flessa, 2006). The majority of the mean scores of *professional task management* and *instructional demands* of the principal stressors were halfway marked between *seldom* and *often*. The less frequent incidence of stress associated with *professional task management* and *instructional demands* suggested that the roles of the principal were clearly delineated, elevating the prospect for targeted stress relief.

Additional statistical tests revealed a deeper and more critical view of what principals were reporting; multiple regressions allowed us to understand the relationships of the independent variables of principals' stressors with the dependent variables of relief the principals felt was possible with teacher assistance. These tests revealed that as principals felt more stress in *handling conflict*, they expressed that teachers would relieve their stress if they were more involved with *problem resolution* where teachers would resolve parent complaints and concerns and deal with student misbehavior; deal with *teacher contact* where teachers would work with the ineffective and struggling teachers; deal with *professional service* where teachers would deal with everything from completing reports to the state and serving as liaisons to the stakeholder groups; and *instructional issues* where teachers would provide instructional leadership for the staff.

As principals reported higher levels of stress with regard to meeting *instructional demands,* they indicated that they would feel less stress if teachers were more involved with *teacher contact* where they would deal with ineffective or struggling teachers; *professional service* where the teachers would be involved with the reports to the state to serving as liaisons to stakeholder groups; and *instructional issues* where they would provide instructional leadership for the staff.

When principals reported a high degree of stress for *professional task management* issues, they indicated that they would feel less stress if teachers were more involved with *problem resolution*, where teachers would deal with everything from completing reports to the state and serving as liaisons to the stakeholder groups; both *teacher contact* and *instructional issues* were negatively correlated with principals who felt stress in *professional task management* areas.

The category of *personal task management* had the highest mean scores for stress for principals. The principals who reported the most stress in *personal task management* indicated that they would feel less stress if teachers were more involved with *teacher contact* where teachers would work with struggling, ineffective teachers to working with *instructional issues* where teachers would provide instructional leadership for the staff.

## DISCUSSION

Our initial interest in this study was to further the investigation into the world of principals, seeking to understand the complexities of their work with regard to how principals view the stressors they face. Underlying that line of inquiry was the interest in principals' perceptions of how teachers currently function in a variety of *managerial* or *integrated leadership* capacities, and, in particular, if principals felt that teachers could alleviate their primary forms of stress.

What we learned from this study can be summarized in five observations:

1. This research provided confirmation of what is known about the world of work of principals, that it is a world of constant demands and stressful situations.

2.  This research provided empirical evidence that the principal stressors that were originally conceptualized as *integrated leadership* or *managerial* can be further divided into four distinct factors: *personal task management, instructional demands, professional task management*, and *handling conflict,* all understood by confirmatory factor analysis. Additionally, stress relief desired from principals, originally defined as *integrated leadership* or *managerial*, can be further divided into four distinct factors: *problem resolution, teacher contact, professional service,* and *instructional issues*, all understood by confirmatory factor analysis.

3.  This research provided new information in understanding the stressors facing principals by delineating between *personal* and *professional task management* factors, with *personal task management* issues such as *insufficient time to get the job done, constant interruptions* and *keeping up with e-mail correspondence* being more stressful than *professional task management, handling conflict* or *instructional demands* that deal with the human relations and instructional responsibilities of the principalship.

4.  This research provided new insights in understanding how principals view stress on the job. In reporting all means of 3.0 or higher to signify that principals often feel stress in this area, the following was observed. Principals in this study reported the most stress in the factor of *personal task management* for insufficient time to get the job done, constant interruptions, keeping up with email, work-life balance, and loss of personal time; and, in dealing with *professional task management issues* for the volume of paperwork.

5.  This study provided empirical evidence that principals wanted stress relief from four distinct areas, determined by the factor analysis: *instructional issues, professional service, teacher contact,* and *problem resolution.* The highest means in the area of *instructional issues* (all rank ordered means of 3.0 or higher) indicated that principals sought relief from stress by hoping that teachers would: influence building-wide instructional practices, provide professional development training for teachers in the school, chair school committees, analyze test score data to improve instructional practice, provide instructional leadership for the staff, and work with ineffective, struggling teachers. In the area of *teacher contact*, principals wanted teachers to work with teachers who are resistant to change, and work with struggling, ineffective teachers; and in the area of *problem resolution*, principals wanted teachers to resolve problems at the classroom level.

From our analyses, we learned that principals wanted teachers to be more involved in the areas that they did not list as being most stressful. This was an interesting finding, and this leads us to wonder about other questions as they relate to principals:

1.  While the survey list of stressors for principals and areas that teachers could provide relief from stressors were not identical, they were closely referenced in order to facilitate a meaningful examination of relationships. It was interesting to note that principals reported higher means in wanting teachers to provide help in *instructional areas* than they reported as being stressful in the same area. Did the principals feel that the relief teachers could provide with *instructional issues* might reduce their stress in *personal task management* areas?

2.  Did the principals feel that if teachers confronted the most difficult and pressing problems of the staff such as *instructional issues* and *handling conflict*, that they would be free to deal with other issues?  Would those other issues be more likely related to traditional management?

3.  Did these principals want the teachers to perform more of the roles conversant with the literature of teacher leadership with teachers being more involved in influencing the culture of the school to increase teacher effectiveness and student achievement?

4.  How would principals provide support for teachers who have not been specifically trained to deal with the issues of conflict, resistant staff, and problems?

The work of teacher leaders was examined in this chapter, not only for the contributions that they bring to the benefit of student achievement, but for the possibilities of how they might provide a new sense of balance to the world of work of the principal. It was clear from the perceptions of the principals in this study, that they felt stress in completing the tasks expected of them. It is hoped that our future line of inquiry will provide insights into ways to alleviate that stress.

Teacher leaders could be part of the formula that provides a primary effect in school improvement and a secondary effect of improving the quality of the work life as experienced by the principal. If teacher leaders begin to work with ineffective or struggling teachers, areas for which they have not been trained, and they depart from the roles more traditionally performed by teacher leaders, it seems reasonable to ask:

1.  What roles will teacher leaders perform when the school is being asked to undergo significant, transformational change?
2.  To what extent do systems and structures have to change to include teachers to become leaders who are empowered to work with instructional issues like creating vision for school improvement, using data to improve instruction, as well as responding to the *tougher issues* involving ineffective or struggling teachers?

While teacher leadership has not typically been associated with working with ineffective staff, it is clear that teacher leaders are faced with similar challenges as they work in more traditional roles of department chairs, grade level leaders, literacy coaches, etc. As such, teacher leaders are confronted with tensions within the schools (Smylie & Denny, 1990). This type of tension is one that resonates for principals as well.

The principals in this study indicated that if teachers performed expanded roles, principals would feel less stress. It seems reasonable to suggest that principals, superintendents, and teachers are key people in redefining the roles of teachers, with university professors who teach the concepts of educational and teacher leadership as active partners in the reconceptualization of teacher leadership. Teacher leaders, like administrators can be part of the maintenance of the status quo of the school; there is nothing inherently automatic about change in the school based on a job title.

The research base has tracked the evolution of the roles of principals from managerial, to instructional, to transformational (Hallinger, 1992). Perhaps, the same will be true for the evolution of the roles of teacher leaders. Further research can assist us in understanding the

workload of the principal and how the targeted expansion of teacher leadership roles might change that equation.

When principals more fully utilize the human capital of teachers as partners, it is hoped that the resulting relief from job stress could free principals to more effectively manage their political, personal and professional work life balance while simultaneously leading the school to become more effective. The demands of this "job too big for one" (Grubb & Flessa, 2006, p. 518) can be moderated by the actions of teacher leaders as the emerging role of the principal is more effectively described as a job performed by many.

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APPENDIX A

## A Study of Principal Perceptions of Workload Issues

### *Consent to Participate*

*We are asking you to participate in a research study regarding the workload of principals. The purpose of this study is two-fold. First is the interest in the perceptions of principals concerning the various roles they play and the related stressors they experience. Second are the roles teachers play in the building and how they are utilized with regard to supporting their principals. Your participation in this research study is limited to responding to this online survey that should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The benefit of this research is to add to the knowledge base about the stressors of the workload and possible relief as reported by principals. Currently, little is known as to how principals view teachers with regard to problem resolution and leadership within the schools.*

*There is minimal possible harm foreseen in participating in this research. This survey is voluntary, and you may discontinue participation at any time. Choosing not to participate or to discontinue participation will not affect your relationship with your school district, Oakland University, or The Galileo Institute for Teacher Leadership. Your privacy will be protected and your identity will not be used in any sort of report that is published. We will not name individuals nor schools participating, and the collection of IP addresses through this Survey Monkey survey will be disabled. Please do not provide your name or personal information within your survey responses. Your survey information will be kept strictly confidential and only viewed by the researchers involved in this study. After publication of this study, all survey information will be destroyed.*

1. **If you are willing to participate in this study, please indicate below:**
   □   YES. I agree to participate.
   □   NO. I do not wish to participate.

### *Leadership Profile*

**2. What is your gender?**
   □   Male
   □   Female
3. **How many years have you served as a principal?**
   □   More than 20 years
   □   15-19 years
   □   10-14 years
   □   5-9 years
   □   Fewer than 5 years
4. **What level best describes the students in your building? (Check all that apply)**
   □   Elementary
   □   Middle School
   □   High School
5. **Describe your school district:**
   □   Rural
   □   Urban
   □   Suburban
6. **What is the approximate size of your school district?**
   □   More than 20,000 students
   □   8,000 to 19,999 students
   □   4,000 to 7,999 students
   □   1,000 to 3,999 students
   □   Fewer than 1000 students

### *Roles of Teachers*

**7.   At our school teachers:**

| | Almost Daily (4) | Often (3) | Sometimes (2) | Rarely (1) | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Handle building security issues. | | | | | |
| Assist with master scheduling. | | | | | |
| Make presentations to the Board of Education. | | | | | |
| Participate in budget and purchasing decision-making. | | | | | |
| Work with other teachers to develop curriculum. | | | | | |
| Handle communications with media. | | | | | |
| Provide peer feedback for teacher evaluations. | | | | | |
| Mentor new teachers. | | | | | |
| Supervise evening and weekend events. | | | | | |
| Develop action plans for changing demographics. | | | | | |
| Engage in formal processes to resolve teacher disputes. | | | | | |
| Assign consequences for student misbehavior. | | | | | |
| Create a vision for school improvement. | | | | | |
| Provide instructional leadership for the staff. | | | | | |
| Resolve disputes within the staff. | | | | | |
| Analyze and apply test score data to improve teaching and learning. | | | | | |
| Coach other teachers | | | | | |
| Influence grading and instructional practices. | | | | | |
| Resolve parent complaints | | | | | |
| Chair school improvement committees | | | | | |
| Serve as liaisons to stakeholder groups such as PTA or Band Boosters. | | | | | |
| Hold formal leadership positions in this school. | | | | | |
| Hold formal leadership positions in our district. | | | | | |
| Plan and present professional development. | | | | | |
| Observe teaching and give feedback to other teachers. | | | | | |

## *Workload of the Principal*

**8.  As a building principal, how often do you feel stress regarding the following issues:**

| | Almost Daily (4) | Often (3) | Sometimes (2) | Rarely (1) | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My own ability to manage time efficiently | | | | | |
| Evening and weekend responsibilities | | | | | |
| Constant interruptions | | | | | |
| Sharing leadership with teachers | | | | | |
| Work-life balance | | | | | |
| Being called away from the building for meetings | | | | | |
| Working with parent groups such as PTA, Band Boosters, etc. | | | | | |
| Diminished revenues | | | | | |
| Concerns regarding personal health and fitness | | | | | |
| Providing instructional leadership to faculty | | | | | |
| Providing a vision for school improvement | | | | | |
| General loss of joy in doing this work | | | | | |
| Job expectations of the principalship | | | | | |
| Planning quality professional development activities | | | | | |
| Teachers' resistance to change | | | | | |
| Knowing how to prioritize tasks | | | | | |
| Board of education presentations | | | | | |
| Conflict within the staff | | | | | |
| Feelings of being overwhelmed with job demands | | | | | |
| Student discipline | | | | | |
| Loss of personal time | | | | | |
| Issues with unions | | | | | |
| Insufficient time to "get the job done" | | | | | |
| Working with ineffective or struggling teachers | | | | | |
| Volume of paperwork | | | | | |
| Dealing with parent complaints | | | | | |
| Lunchroom and building supervision | | | | | |
| Responding to student test score results | | | | | |
| Reports to district and state | | | | | |
| Responding to new demands of the curriculum | | | | | |
| Personal goals and expectations to excel in this job | | | | | |
| Dealing with changing demographics | | | | | |
| Keeping up with email communications | | | | | |
| Dealing with staff disputes | | | | | |
| Increased performance expectations from central office | | | | | |
| Conducting teacher evaluations | | | | | |

**9. What do you see as the most realistic solution to the workload pressures you face?**

## *Teacher Participation*

**10. I would feel less stress as a principal if teachers performed these functions:**

| | Strongly Agree (4) | Agree (3) | Disagree (2) | Strongly Disagree (1) | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assigning consequences for student misbehavior | | | | | |
| Working with teacher teams to develop curriculum | | | | | |
| Working with teachers who are resistant to change | | | | | |
| Chairing school committees | | | | | |
| Handling issues regarding building security other than classroom discipline | | | | | |
| Serving as liaisons to stakeholder groups such as PTA or Band Boosters, etc. | | | | | |
| Holding formal or assigned leadership positions in this school | | | | | |
| Conducting peer teaching evaluations | | | | | |
| Completing reports for the district or state | | | | | |
| Handling communications with media | | | | | |
| Providing instructional leadership for the staff | | | | | |
| Influencing building-wide instructional practices | | | | | |
| Supervising evening and weekend events | | | | | |
| Developing plans of action for changing demographics | | | | | |
| Mentoring new teachers | | | | | |
| Presenting to the Board of Education | | | | | |
| Providing professional development training for teachers in this school | | | | | |
| Holding formal or assigned leadership positions in our district | | | | | |
| Analyzing test score data to improve instructional practice | | | | | |
| Resolving parent complaints and concerns | | | | | |
| Resolving problems at the classroom level | | | | | |
| Participating in budget and purchasing decision-making | | | | | |
| Participating in a formal process to resolve staff disputes | | | | | |
| Creating a vision for school improvement | | | | | |
| Working with ineffective, struggling teachers | | | | | |

**11. How can teachers provide support to you as principal?**

**12. What changes would be required in schools to allow teachers to provide support to you as principal?**

# Professional Learning Communities: A Feasible Reality or a Chimera?

Ronald A. Lindahl

Many proponents of school improvement and reform look to changes in the governance structures of schools, and even to the very culture of schools for lasting reform. Today's typical school structure is a hierarchical bureaucracy with top-down leadership and considerable teacher isolation (Williams, Cate, & O'Hair, 2009). This is precisely why Sarason (1996) termed the failure of school reform as "predictable." Sarason stated that without changing the hierarchical power relationships in schools, termed "heroic" or "focused" leadership by Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon, and Yashkina (2009, p. 223), large scale improvement would be unlikely to occur. There is some limited evidence that schools that break this traditional structure and create new relationships among the adults in the school can produce better student performance in math, science, and reading, as well as lower dropout, truancy, and absenteeism rates (Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008).

Advocates for less hierarchical, more distributed leadership have long existed (e.g., Follett, 1940). However, it is only relatively recently that this concept has gained increased attention in schools. This attention has manifested itself in the literature related to *teacher leadership, collaborative leadership, distributed leadership,* and *shared leadership.* To many authors, these terms are relatively interchangeable, whereas to others (e.g., Spillane, 2006) each connotes a specific leadership structure. Because there is not general agreement on the specificity of these terms (Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009b), for purposes of this chapter, they are treated more or less as synonyms.

However, one model of such schools that create new governance structures and cultures in schools is referred to as *communities of practice* (Printy, 2008; Sergiovanni, 2000), *learning organizations* (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000; Wells & Feun, 2007), *professional communities* (Williams et al., 2009), or, most recently, *professional learning communities* (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008; Sparks, 2005). The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2004) considered these arrangements so crucial that their *Standards* mandate that teachers must be members of such learning communities. The purpose of this chapter, then, was to examine the potential benefits and challenges of professional learning communities for pre-K through 12 education.

## DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The concept of professional learning communities arises from the teacher leadership movement. Pounder (2006) captured the essence of teacher leadership by defining it as a process rather than an issue of position, as an array of behaviors and characteristics rather than of duties. Muijs and Harris (2007) agreed, describing it as a fluid, emerging form of leadership rather than a fixed phenomenon. York-Barr and Duke (2004) added to this, positing that active involvement by individuals at all levels of an organization is needed if organizational change is to take hold. This involvement may be at the instructional, professional

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or organizational level, as long as those involved grow and learn. Leithwood et al. (2009b) added that hierarchy, influence, and followership remain crucial components of distributed leadership, in any of its forms.

However, such reconfiguration of authority in schools is not without its critics. Although generally in favor of professional learning communities, Fitzgerald and Gunter (2008) questioned whether they are "a seductive functionalist way in which teacher commitment to no-liberal reform has been secured" (p. 331). In other words, teachers may be most effective when they teach, not when they attempt to lead or to share in school-level decisions. Nevertheless, interest in professional learning communities continues to rise.

It is important to note that all professional learning communities are not alike, and not all even lead to positive outcomes (Mayrowetz, Murphy, Louis, & Smylie, 2009; Timperley, 2009; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). In fact, Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss (2009a) speculated that beyond some optimal amount, distributed leadership may obscure the purpose, mission, and needed actions in schools. They also suggested that "such leadership may simply be used as a subtle strategy for inculcating among staff the values and goals of more powerful members of the organization" (p. 4). Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss (2009b) concluded that the knowledge base on distributed leadership is still in such an undeveloped state that examining the relationship between it and student learning is premature.

Spillane, Camburn, and Pareja's (2009) and Park and Datnow's (2009) research revealed various patterns of co-leadership with the principal, including such participants as classroom teachers, other professional staff members, formal teacher leaders, assistant principals, non-teaching staff, students, and subject area specialists. They found that these patterns varied from activity to activity. For example, principals in their study tended to be the lone leader more often in the social studies and writing areas and to share leadership more in reading and math. Anderson, Moore, and Sun (2009) and Printy (2010) also found that leadership structures varied for different tasks and initiatives within the same school. This was most likely when the principal claimed expertise for certain tasks or when the principal wanted to increase teacher motivation for certain initiatives. However, these authors concluded that their findings were too inconclusive to provide any guidelines for practice.

Distributed leadership may involve the entire school (generally a relatively small school) or smaller groups of teachers, e.g., departments, grade levels, or interdisciplinary teams of teachers serving particular groups of students (McEwan, 2009). It may be formal or informal, but it should be designed "to encourage collective solving of specific problems of practice and the sharing of knowledge" (Printy, 2008, p. 189).

MacBeath (2009) discussed six forms of distributed leadership in schools: formal roles, pragmatic distribution based on necessity, strategic, incremental, cultural, and opportunistic. However, MacBeath's study of six schools revealed that no leaders "fitted neatly" into any of these six categories (p. 53). Rather, they drew on a broader repertoire of leadership structures, as situations and needs presented themselves, based on their personality and experience.

Spillane (2006) discussed three major structures: different leaders separately performing different tasks, multiple leaders performing tasks jointly, and multiple leaders performing the same tasks in different contexts, but supporting the same goal. Harris (2009) identified four types of distributed leadership patterns in schools: ad hoc, autocratic, additive, and autonomous. These provided a sampling of the ways leadership can be shared in professional learning communities.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Harris and Muijs (2005) stated that professional learning communities "configure themselves differently according to context, phase, size, and external plus internal conditions" (p. 49). However, they should all present certain key traits. These include sharing best practice, building a positive school culture, improving student learning, taking collective responsibility, using data wisely, providing shared leadership, effecting planned change, and creating supportive structures (Wells & Feun, 2007). They involve teams that are open to critical thinking, reflective dialogue, self-examination, and resolving issues that might restrict student learning (Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008). Sparks (2005) summarized this by stating, "Everyone is both a teacher and a student" (p. 164).

Although each professional learning community may be somewhat unique, probably the most crucial characteristic is the existence of peer collaboration in making shared decisions. For this to be successful, there must be a climate of trust, trust among the faculty members and trust between the faculty members and the principal (DuFour et al., 2005; Eilers & Camacho, 2007; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Harris & Muijs, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Rasberry, with Majahan, 2008; Silins & Mulford, 2004; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

Accompanying this shared decision making must be widespread leadership (DuFour et al., 2005; Eilers & Camacho, 2007; Little, 2000; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008; Printy, 2008; Silins & Mulford, 2004; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Faculty members all bring unique sets of knowledge, dispositions, and skills; as such, as situations and needs change, leadership needs to flow fluidly to the faculty member (or principal) best equipped to meet that challenge. Leadership becomes a process, rather than a role. For this to occur, faculty members must be acutely aware of their skills and of their colleagues' skills, and must feel that their leadership is needed and appreciated.

For shared decision making and widespread leadership to result in actions beneficial to the school and to its students, everyone (teachers, principals, staff, students, parents, and community members) must have shared expectations, a common mission and goals, and a shared value system regarding teaching, learning, and relating to others (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Little, 2000; Rasberry, with Majahan, 2008; Reeves, 2005; Silins & Mulford, 2004; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). These characteristics define the culture of the school; in the presence of widespread leadership and shared decision making, only when these beliefs are widely shared and deeply held will the school move in consistent directions.

Crucial to this shared culture is a need for shared adult accountability (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Reeves, 2005). With teachers sharing decision making and leadership, student success is no longer just the responsibility of that student's teacher(s); everyone in the school bears shared responsibility. A teacher's success is no longer a matter strictly between the teacher and the principal; the teacher's colleagues must now accept responsibility for helping the teacher to succeed—or to help that teacher to leave the school if success is not forthcoming.

For this to happen, other characteristics of professional learning communities are essential: shared practice and peer observations (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Little, 2000; McEwan, 2009; Rasberry, with Majahan, 2008; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Teachers have traditionally been isolated within their own classrooms. Other than the mentors of neophyte teachers, very few teachers have conducted formal observations of their

peers with the purpose of helping that teacher to improve his or her teaching. In professional learning communities, this must be commonplace and welcomed. Teachers must be far more open with their colleagues in discussions which classroom practices seem to function well and which do not, and in sharing teaching materials and strategies. Conversations among teachers must be highly professional and must be focused on improving student performance (DuFour et al., 2005; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Gregory & Kuznich, 2007). Teachers should join in collective, reflective dialogue about their teaching and in collective inquiry into how their knowledge and skills could be improved (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; McEwan, 2009; Silins & Mulford, 2004; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

One important element of professional learning communities that supports reflective dialogue and collective inquiry is a constant focus on learning assessments (DuFour et al, 2005; Eilers & Camacho, 2007; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; McEwan, 2009; Park & Datnow, 2009; Printy, 2008; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008; Reeves, 2005; Silins & Mulford, 2004). This involves not only careful examination of disaggregated data (including data on each individual student), but continual formative assessment of each student's performance on teacher-designed assessments related to the daily curriculum being covered in each classroom. Collaboratively, teachers must examine these data, determine which learning goals must be set, and decide how best to pursue those goals. This process may involve risk-taking (Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008; Silins & Mulford, 2004) and should benefit from collective creativity (Little, 2000; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008).

However, for these characteristics to flourish in professional learning communities, several prerequisites must exist. First, the principal must be proactive and supportive (Eilers & Camacho, 2007; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Little, 2000). He or she must be willing to, and understand how to, share leadership while still providing leadership him or herself. The principal must be able to, and choose to, shape the school culture so as to allow a professional learning community to develop and to become inculcated as a key part of that culture. The principal must ensure the presence of conditions supportive of professional learning communities (Eilers & Camacho, 2007; Little, 2000; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008). Prime among these conditions is sufficient time available to teachers during the school day to collaborate fully (Park & Datnow, 2009). The school reward system must be aligned with professional learning community practices rather than with the individual, competitive model. Shared professional development focused on team building and on improving student performance must be ongoing and ample (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Printy, 2008; Silins & Mulford, 2004). In short, professional learning communities do not develop spontaneously; they must be carefully and intensively nurtured (Printy, 2010).

Evidence of such nurturing is found in Chenoweth's (2009) case studies of nine schools serving high-minority populations. This study illuminated the existence of many practices of professional learning communities in these schools, including:

- Veteran teachers have never stopped learning, learning from colleagues exists (p. 182);
- Time for teachers to collaborate during the school day (pp. 184–185);
- Ineffective teachers have to leave (p. 187);
- Teachers rely on each other to help examine data, build lesson plans, develop curriculum (p. 188)
- Have common, meaningful goals (p. 190);
- Focus on what they want students to learn (p. 190);

- Establish common, ambitious standards (p. 194);
- Develop and implement formative assessments of student learning (p. 197);
- Use data to identify individual students' strengths and weaknesses (p. 200); and
- Develop positive relations with students and peers. (pp. 201–205)

## PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

If it is so difficult to build professional learning communities, why should principals and teachers move from the traditional leadership structures, practices, and cultures? The perceived potential benefits of professional learning communities are many; they include benefits for students, teachers, and for the school, itself. Clearly, the most important benefits hoped for from professional learning communities are increased student learning (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008), decreased student dropout and absenteeism rates (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008), and smaller achievement gaps among students (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007).

For teachers, the potential for increased efficacy (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008) is viewed as the major benefit. This is projected to occur due to increased teacher understanding of content (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Hord, 1997; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008) and reduction of teacher isolation (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Hord, 1997; Muijs & Harris, 2008). Furthermore, through open, shared reflection and dialogue, teachers are seen as being more open to modifying their teaching strategies (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Hord, 1997; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008). Teachers are anticipated to be renewed and inspired by participation in a professional learning community (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Hord, 1997). Harris (2009) concluded that distributed leadership can support the creation of knowledge in a school and across schools.

For the school, the perceived benefits center around an improved school culture (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008). This improved culture includes increased teacher commitment to the school's mission and values (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Hord, 1997; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008), higher teacher commitment to change (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Hord, 1997; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008), shared responsibility for student success (Gregory & Kuznich, 2007; Hord, 1997), shared norms for teaching and assessment (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008), and improved institutionalization of organizational improvements (Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009a). A by-product of professional learning communities should be improved leadership succession planning (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). However, empirical evidence as to the benefits of distributed leadership, including professional learning communities, is in short supply (Leithwood et al., 2009a; Timperley, 2009).

## BARRIERS TO ESTABLISHING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

As with any major change, establishing professional learning communities is a difficult, time-demanding process. The hierarchical, bureaucratic structures of schools are deeply entrenched (Muijs & Harris, 2003, 2007; Murphy, 2005; Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Louis, 2009; Printy, 2008; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). These structures benefit some people; also, most people in the school only know this one type of structure. Consequently, structures strongly resist change (Murphy et al., 2009). Not only must structures be changed, but the entire culture of the school must be changed. Strong cultures strongly resist change

(Lindahl, 2006). Cultural norms among teachers such as the privacy, egalitarianism, civility, and not taking time away from the classroom permeate schools (Murphy et al., 2009). Faculty are tightly bound to these shared values, rather than being open to inspection by their peers and modification of their teaching practices (Printy, 2008). Similarly, professional learning communities require vast changes for most school leaders (Muijs & Harris, 2007; Sparks, 2005). They, too, may resist these changes strongly.

Consequently, professional learning communities are often perceived by teachers and administrators as "unlike real schools" (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006, p. 125; see also, MacBeath, 2009, p. 41). As with many large-scale organizational changes, attempts to establish communities often follow the predictable pattern of creativity and experimentation leading to overreaching and entropy, followed by a lack of institutionalization and decline (Giles & Hargreaves). Finally, as noted by Landeau, VanDorn, and Freely (2009), professional learning communities often fail simply because the more people who are involved in decisions, the harder it is to reach consensus.

Among the barriers encountered in the process of establishing professional learning communities is the lack of clarity among teachers and principals concerning their new roles (Murphy, 2005; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). How should shared leadership manifest itself in that particular school? This question is part of the overall lack of clarity in the values, beliefs, and expectations teachers have regarding professional learning communities in general (Muijs & Harris, 2007; Murphy, 2005; Sparks, 2005; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). It can lead to, or at least expose, conflicts and a lack of trust among all involved (Grubb & Flessa, 2009; Muijs & Harris, 2003, 2007). Part of these conflicts and of this lack of trust is attributable to the lack of communication structures and communication experience among teachers and principals (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In part, lack of clarity may also arise simply because some teachers lack the self-confidence to lead (Muijs & Harris, 2003, 2007).

Timperley (2009) noted that teacher leaders do not automatically command respect, especially because they lack formal authority. Also, teacher leaders may be nominated by their colleagues for factors not related to their expertise. Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon, and Yashkina's 2009 study found that these factors were most often *personal qualities* (e.g., openness, care, and extraversion), *commitment to the initiative,* and *interpersonal skills* (p. 245).

However, there are also inherent structural barriers to establishing professional learning communities. Prime among these is an inadequate amount of time during the school day for teachers to collaborate, lead, and learn (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Park & Datnow, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Professional learning communities require continuous professional development (Muijs & Harris, 2003, 2007; Murphy, 2005). They also require resources and support systems that districts are hesitant, or unable, to provide (Grubb & Flessa, 2009; Murphy, 2005). Among these are incentives and recognition for teachers (Murphy, 2005; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Combined, these obstacles are daunting, if not virtually insurmountable.

Grubb and Flessa (2009) noted the key role that district support for distributed or shared leadership can play in allowing the school to move away from the traditional hierarchical model of leadership. They also noted the need for great stability at the district and school levels, as a change of this magnitude would require considerable time for teachers, administrators, parents, and students to adjust (see also, Mayrowetz et al., 2009, p. 190).

People naturally resist change (Black & Gregersen, 2008; Evans, 2001; Fullan, with Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hall & Hord, 2001; Rogers, 2003); yet, unless individuals change, there is no lasting organizational change (Black & Gregersen, 2008). However, as the North Central

Educational Laboratory (NCEL, 2010) pointed out, some common maps of change are faulty; as such, they impede change. Among these, NCEL listed, "Resistance is inevitable," "Every school is unique," and "Schools are essentially conservative institutions, harder to change than other institutions." These may possibly be misconceptions, yet the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (1991) was not exaggerating when it concluded, "Schools are doing a very good job of what they were designed to do—decades ago" (para. 1). This remains equally true today, decades later.

Another issue related to the difficulty of maintaining professional learning communities in schools is that of sustainability. It would take a considerable number of years to modify the culture of almost any school to become a professional learning community and then to establish the relationship between this community and improved student performance. Over this time period, teachers and administrators are likely to change. Newcomers would have to be acculturated into the community, generally coming from more hierarchical, isolated backgrounds. They would also require extensive professional development; yet, the same professional development would no longer be necessary for the majority of the teachers in the school. It would take a highly gifted, visionary principal to share the leadership and to support the development of a professional learning community. Before the results of the change process can come to fruition and before the community becomes institutionalized within the school culture, such a principal is likely to be promoted into central office, recruited by a more attractive district, or to be removed from an improving school to take over the leadership of a school of much greater concern within the district. The development of professional learning communities requires the vision, commitment, and financial support of the district superintendent; however, the average tenure of superintendents is well less than the time needed for such communities to demonstrate consistent results. Because incoming superintendents tend to want to establish their own agendas and to move away from projects perceived to be foci of their predecessors, such support for professional learning communities may not be forthcoming.

Moving schools toward becoming professional learning communities would require huge investments of time, energy, and resources. The general public remains increasingly resistant to making such investments. Certainly, in this era of accountability, the public would require considerably more research-based evidence that professional learning communities can produce significantly better student learning outcomes; such evidence is currently not available. As Schlecty (2005) questioned, moving more decisions to teachers may increase their commitment to those decisions, but does it necessarily improve the quality of those decisions?

Teachers and administrators are used to the ongoing, often counterproductive, cycles of school improvement and reform. Consequently, many may view the push for professional learning communities through the cynical lens described by Fitzgerald and Gunter (2008), a disguised form of exploitation to obtain more work from, and force greater responsibility upon teachers, without compensation in money or time.

## THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Because the leadership schema of the school must change from a hierarchical, bureaucratic model to a shared leadership model if professional learning communities are to develop and succeed, the principal occupies a central, pivotal role in the creation and development of such communities. To begin with, principals must acquire a solid conceptual

understanding of professional learning communities and internalize their potential benefits. Then, the principal must lead the staff through the change process (Williams et al., 2009). Wetherill and Applefield (2005) described in detail how that role shifts across the *premature change state,* the *hesitant change state*, the *developing change state,* and, finally, in the *established change state.* In large measure, their descriptions of the principal's role closely parallel Hersey and Blanchard's (2000) situational leadership model.

To move to the development of professional learning communities, principals must be open to large-scale change (Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002), but must limit the number of change initiatives being undertaken at a given time (Rasberry, with Majahan, 2008). The most difficult adjustment principals are called upon to make is the distribution of responsibility, power, and leadership among the staff, in a fully shared, non-hierarchical model (Leithwood, Thomlinson, & Genge, 1996; Murphy et al., 2002; Silins & Mulford, 2004; Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002). This adjustment involves giving staff the authority to manage their own problem-solving meetings and committees in an autonomous manner. To enable this to happen effectively, the principal must alter the working conditions to facilitate collaborative planning time (Leithwood et al., 1996; Rasberry, with Mahajan, 2008). For the problem solving to be effective, the principal must understand the learning needs of individuals and groups (Printy, 2008) and help to create professional development opportunities for the full staff (Leithwood et al., 1996). The principal must also ensure that other needed resources are available (Printy, 2008).

However, as discussed in the previous section, moving to professional learning communities not only calls for new school structures, it calls for a new school culture. Consequently, the principal must foster a democratic culture (Williams et al., 2009), help to establish organizational harmony and shared commitment (Wetherill & Applefield, 2005), seek staff consensus on vision and goals by encouraging staff to reflect on what they are trying to accomplish with students and how to accomplish it (Silins & Mulford, 2004), acknowledge changes made (Wetherill & Applefield, 2005), promote an atmosphere of caring, trust, and respect (Silins et al., 2002), and provide a proper mix of incentives and sanctions (Printy, 2008). These roles represent a monumental change and a marked effort for most principals.

## CONCLUSIONS

On the surface, professional learning communities appear to offer potential for improving schools, both for the students and for the adults who work there. They hold potential for improving student performance and for helping to meet the social needs (Maslow, 1943, 1970), achievement needs (Herzberg, 1966; McClelland, 1961), relationship needs (Herzberg), and growth needs (Alderfer, 1972) of teachers. However, because they are a second-order change (Cuban, 1988), they represent such a significant level of change in the status quo as to threaten teachers' and principals' security (Maslow, 1943, 1970) or existence (Alderfer, 1972) needs. They call for changes in the individuals, the formal organization, the informal organization, and in the very culture of schools. Such changes will not come easily. This chapter has attempted to provide a synopsis of the knowledge base on professional learning communities, including their definition, characteristics, potential benefits, potential barriers, and the principal's role in helping to establish and maintain them. Hopefully, this will help to guide schools moving in the direction of becoming professional learning communities.

Lambert (2003) described small steps in the direction of professional learning communities, e.g., study groups, research groups, and vision teams, but little evidence exists in the knowledge base regarding large scale implementation. So, the question remains: Are professional learning communities a feasible governance structure for tomorrow's schools, or are they merely a tantalizing chimera?  Because they are so contextualized to the history and culture of the organization, as well as to the dispositions of the members of that organization, professional learning communities are not a model that is readily scalable from one school to another. As Gronn (2009) pointed out, distributed leadership may replace traditional hierarchical structures, may co-exist with them, or may disappear in favor of a re-assertion of individualistic leadership. The jury is still out!

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# Superintendent Leadership as the Catalyst for Organizational Learning: Implications for Closing the Achievement Gap

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## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In an effort to respond to the multiple and competing pressures placed upon schools, district level leaders are persuaded to reexamine traditional organizational structures and managerial practices. They are required to reconsider their roles and responsibilities in articulating and modeling leadership behaviors that focus on the core technology of curriculum and instruction and improved student learning.

The extant literature has highlighted the significant challenges created by social, political, and economic trends and their influence on American schooling. While these difficulties are understood and recognized as part of the changing landscape of education, a body of literature has demonstrated that the implementation of successful instructional reform depends on the leadership of the district superintendent (Fullan, 1993; Petersen, 1999, 2002; Petersen, Sayre, & Kelly, 2007; Sergiovanni, 1990; Seashore, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Research in this area has shown that superintendents who focus on the core-technology and academic achievement of students exhibit specific behaviors, traits, and practices, which influence classroom achievement (Bredeson, 1995; Herman, 1990; Morgan & Petersen, 2002; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Petersen, 1999, 2002). Building on this body of empirical work, this investigation concentrated on instructionally focused superintendents' strategic linkage of their vision and instructional leadership practices and their efforts to foster an organizational culture of learning in an effort to improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement.

The data presented in this chapter were part of a larger and comprehensive investigation of the transformational and instructional practices of the district leader to create the capacity for organizational learning and those elements most influenced by these practices. In this chapter, we illuminate the role and practices of the district leader in strengthening interorganizational relationships through social networks. Our intention was to learn as much as possible of superintendent leadership practices in relation to organizational learning, not to develop a theoretical framework to generalize to other cases (Yin & Campbell, 2003).

## BACKGROUND

Heavily laden accountability systems have readjusted the lens of responsibility and focused the academic achievement of students on the shoulders of district leaders. Although conventional wisdom would have us view district superintendents as *harried managers of* complex bureaucracies (Crane, 1989; Zigarelli, 1996), the move toward instructional leader-

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ship and accountability has become a critical aspect of the role. Of course, these expectations are not without merit or empirical evidence. Literature has shown that superintendents have influence on the academic achievement of students (Morgan & Petersen, 2002; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Petersen, 1999, 2000; Petersen, Sayre, & Kelly, 2007). Other research has demonstrated that superintendents are the most important individuals in setting expectations and patterns of change in such reform efforts (Browne-Ferrigno & Glass, 2005; Cuban, 1989; Fullan, 1993). These bodies of work also suggested that the effectiveness of an instructional leader is dependent on his or her ability to develop an organizational environment that addresses the complex and often conflicting demands of educational reforms and policies geared toward improving student achievement. The vulnerability of the superintendent's role to internal and external forces continuously presents obstacles; yet, his or her leadership is key to successful implementation of reforms that positively impact student achievement (Fullan, 1993; Kowalski, 2005; Morgan & Petersen, 2002; Petersen, 1999, 2002; Seashore Louis et al., 2010; Sergiovanni, 1990).The duress of accountability measures has created a turbulent and uncertain organizational environment. As a result, superintendents are required to rethink and react in different modalities than traditional managerial and political roles (Björk & Keedy, 2001; Johnson & Fauske, 2000; Kowalski, 2005; Petersen, & Barnett, 2005; Petersen & Dlugosh, 2009).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Transformational Leadership, Instructional Leadership, and the Superintendent

Leadership in organizations has been examined from multiple perspectives. Numerous investigations have established that an effective and dynamic leader can be a key and influential agent of reform as well as contribute to the success of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Elmore & Burney, 1998, 1999; Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Among the most repeated characteristic of effective leaders is a clear and public vision (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Chrispeels, 2002; Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004; Togneri & Anderson, 2003), coupled with fostering an organizational environment of inspiration and collaboration directed in achieving that vision (Chrispeels, 2002; Chrispeels & González, 2006; Louis & Miles, 1990; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Work in the area of superintendent leadership has also shown that central offices that are weak in these factors demonstrated very limited capacity or progress in their efforts for academic reform (Bryk, Sebring, KerBow, Rollow, & Easton, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003a; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010).

Meeting the demands of external accountability systems and reform initiatives and creating dramatic change in an institutionalized educational system require a certain blend of responsibility and leadership styles. While there are many dimensions and theories regarding leadership, inherent in a leader's role is a focus on pedagogy and advancement of teacher development while transforming the environment conducive to learning for all members of the organization (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Seashore Louis et al., 2010; Sergiovanni, 1990). Instructional and transformational practices that initiate, develop, and carry out significant changes in organizations are required to meet the established expectations of present accountability systems (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999).

Two educational leadership models have primarily been promoted in educational literature over the past twenty-five years: transformational and instructional leadership.

Instructional leaders examine all practices in light of their impact on learning. High levels of learning for all students become the fundamental purpose of the school. Instructionally oriented superintendents emphasize the importance of an instructional vision, coordination and socialization of the individuals and groups responsible for teaching and learning, the importance of maintaining a high level of visibility, clear communication, and monitoring and evaluating instructional and curriculum program implementation at the district level (Bredeson 1995; Coleman & LaRocque, 1990; Herman, 1990; Morgan & Petersen, 2002; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Petersen, 1999, 2002; Petersen, Sayre, & Kelly, 2007; Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger, 1987).

Transformational leaders influence teacher practices through district change, concentrating on individual consideration and intellectual stimulation (Geijsel, Sleegers, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2002; Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992). Although much of this work has focused on the building level leader, these studies' findings can also be applied to district level leaders. Intellectual stimulation requires superintendents to be keenly aware of classroom issues, the continual pressures for greater change, and the importance of providing resources necessary to allow organizational members to create solutions. Teacher expertise and judgment to resolve issues on instruction and programs are sought out and valued by the superintendent (Kirby et al, 1992; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). A network extending to all levels of the organization allows for continuous dialogue between the administration and classroom. These practices increase the level of commitment for change within a district. Providing feedback on job performance, modeling expectations and giving positive feedback and support to promote a capacity for change result in a significant impact on teachers' beliefs in their ability and capacity to change (Geijsel et al., 2002; Mullin & Keedy, 1998).

Individually, these models address the relationship of a leader with members of the organization; yet, contemporary work has shown that effective leaders utilize both transformational and instructional practices (Hallinger, 2007). Building organizational capacity and instructional purpose create the conditions that support individuals in the development of personal goals that match the mission of the school. Leaders who utilize transforming practices establish an ethos of renewal throughout the organization while practices associated with instructional leadership emphasize mission and climate of the school (Hallinger, 2007).

Marks and Printy (2003) asserted that instructional leadership is not sufficient for academic improvement. Instructional leadership provides the focus and direction of daily activities on curriculum and instruction, while individual and collective capacity is developed. When transformational leaders realize their instructional role, interacting and collaborating with teachers to attain organizational goals, they practice an integrated form of leadership. Marks and Printy (2003) further clarified, "Integrated leadership then, reflects the transformational influence of the principal and the shared leadership of the principal and teacher" (p. 377).

The integration of transformational and instructional leadership resolves issues alluded to by critics that instructional leadership requires one individual (the leader) to carry the burden of expertise and authority. Integration of these two models allows for shared instructional leadership among all members of the organization (Lambert, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Southworth, 2002).

Hallinger (2007), in an effort to understand "learner centered leadership" (p. 2), identified substantive similarities in transformational and instructional leadership models. In fact, he realized more similarities than differences. Leaders in both models:

- Create a shared sense of purpose in the school;
- Develop a climate of high expectations and a school culture focused on innovation and improvement of teaching and learning;
- Shape the reward structure of the school's mission as well as goals set for staff and students;
- Organize and provide a wide range of activities aimed at intellectual stimulation and the continuous development of staff;
- Are a visible presence in the school, modeling the desired values of the school's culture. (p. 4)

Reflecting on differences, Hallinger (2007) noted that the transforming leaders emphasize individualized support and development of goals that involve personal and professional goals, and community membership rather than top down directives emphasized in the instructional model. Differences that were identified included the:

- Target of change (i.e., first order or second order effects)
- Extent to which the principal emphasizes a coordination and control strategy vs. an 'empowerment' strategy for change in school. (p. 4)

Transformational and instructional leadership practices emphasize elements of change through ideas and innovation working in a clear direction.

Hallinger (2007) further concluded that leadership studies should reference school context. Student background, community, organizational structure, school culture, teacher experience, fiscal resources, school size, etc., are all variables that affect leadership behavior and practice. As Hallinger (2007) emphasized, "Leadership must be conceptualized as a mutual influence rather than as a one-way process in which leaders influence others" (p. 5).

## Organizational Learning and the Superintendent

Leaders of complex social systems are aware that successfully addressing the goals of school reform and adjusting to a turbulent policy and financial environment require strategic actions. Organization members must be provided with the opportunity to continuously learn and adapt behavior through self organization and reflection. Schein (2004) indicated that the effectiveness of an organization lies in the ability of the organization to develop a culture of learning. This ability demands that the resources of individual organizational members be employed, processes and relations rather than structure and rules are practiced, and conversations are understood to be imperative for creating meaning and change.

Organizational learning is not about an individual's ability to process information (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) learning in organizations has been defined as a group process and occurs through communication among members of an organization (Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Garvin, 1993; Hanson, 2001; Leithwood & Aitken, 1995; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). When information takes on a "social life," it becomes knowledge. As Fullan (2001) stressed, "If you remember one thing about information, it is that it only becomes valuable in a social context" (p. 80). The result of this group learning process is the creation of knowledge among individual members of an organization. As personal insights and knowledge of individuals are shared and made available to others, knowledge is created (Nonaka, 2007). Changes in practices, new understanding, and increased commitment occur

as an outcome of organizational learning (Leithwood & Leonard, 1998). Provided the internal and external forces facing schools, what becomes evident is the fact that district leaders must create and foster the organizational conditions that stimulate the learning process. The responsibility of leaders resides in their ability to set up mechanisms and practices that establish organizational knowledge as a cultural value (Fullan, 2001).

Although it is a commonly held belief that organizations will learn and adapt in order to survive, confusion exists in distinguishing learning from random change. Learning in an educational environment is typically structured as an individual endeavor (Collinson, Cook, & Conley, 2006). However, the most common, consistent feature of a successful learning organization identified in literature is one that focuses on collective capacity through expanding opportunities for continuous learning. The emphasis is placed on the importance of teams engaged in collective problem solving resulting in actions of individuals and teams (Leithwood & Aitken, 1995; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Silins, Mulford, Zarins, & Bishop, 2000. As Fullan (2001) explained, "Their success is found in the intricate interaction inside and outside the organization-interaction that converts tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge on an ongoing basis" (p. 80).

An environment of uncertainty requires organizational members to address the demands placed upon it through innovation and distribution of knowledge. Problems require clear articulation, and new knowledge must be sought to resolve them. The ability of the organization to "create new knowledge, disseminate it widely throughout the organization, and quickly embody it in new technologies and products" determines success (Nonaka, 2007, p. 162). This process of continuous innovation for learning requires the application of two types of knowledge: tacit and explicit knowledge, which is shared among members of the organization (Nonaka, 2007; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

It is an understatement to say that the superintendency is a complex and multifaceted role. Modern superintendents clearly understand the need to focus greater amounts of their professional attention on the technical core of curriculum and instruction and organizational learning; however, they are prohibited from doing so because they are confronted with multiple competing demands on a daily basis. Transformational and instructional leadership have been presented as an integrated process that provides intellectual direction and aims at innovation within the organization. This process empowers teachers to become partners in decision making on matters specific to curriculum and instruction (Marks & Printy, 2003). Studies have also revealed that transformational forms of leadership foster learning in an organization with elements of change that include ideas, innovation, influence, and consideration for the individual process (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Leithwood & Poplin, 1992; Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharratt, 1998; Marks & Printy, 2003). Transformational practices associated with transformation leadership align with restructuring expectations that require learning to take place among teachers and administrators. The role of the superintendent has evolved to include team building and collaboration with all stakeholders. This is a shift from an emphasis on management to collaboration, community, and relationship building. District leaders must build the capacity for change through social arenas in order to move their schools toward improvement. As Petersen and Barnett (2005) emphasized, "Exemplary leaders encourage and enlist the support of everyone needed to make the system work. All who have a stake in the vision of a successful school district must be involved in some way" (p. 122).

A review of extant literature to explore the extent an instructionally focused superintendent fosters elements of organizational learning directed toward improved instructional effectiveness and academic achievement of students provided a multifaceted lens

from which to view the district superintendency. Improving outcomes requires leadership practices that focus on changing reticent cultures through group interaction and reflection. These practices ultimately result in an increase in the level of commitment to improve the capacity to address the demands placed upon the organization. District superintendents who focus on both transformational and instructional practices build this organizational capacity and innovation to reframe problems and create solutions to improve daily instructional practices in curriculum and instruction (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992; Marks & Printy, 2003; Mullin & Keedy, 1998).

We have made substantial gains in our knowledge base in the area of organizational learning, instructional leadership, and transformational leadership. Taking this knowledge and moving from a bureaucratic system of managing people to a shared problem solving, decision making, and learning system is a notable challenge. The degree that organizational learning takes place in an organization is affected by practices associated with the coexistence of transformational and instructional models of leadership. The intricate network of relationships across roles coupled with purposefully planned opportunities for dialogue and application of ideas becomes the responsibility of leaders as they transform and redesign communities of practice focusing on improving instruction leading to improved academic achievement.

## METHODS

### Study Design

In this chapter, we focused on the qualitative aspects of our investigation in order to provide a rich and detailed narrative of the efforts of this superintendent in fostering organizational learning. Data were collected to determine: (a) the relationship between the teachers' and building administrators' perceptions regarding the extent of the superintendent's influence in fostering learning at the organizational level; (b) the superintendent's influence in the social processes that encourage learning at the organizational level; and (c) the relationship between superintendent leadership characteristics and organizational learning. Data collection consisted of an individual interview with the district superintendent and focus group interviews with principals, teachers, and a school board member in a school district in the state of California.

### Procedures

The superintendent for this investigation was selected from the 989 school districts in the state of California. Selection of a district was based on established criteria used to identify characteristics and performance measures associated with high achieving school districts. Use of these criterion were purposeful in an effort to select a school district that had been presented with significant challenges; yet, in spite of these social and economic issues, the district was able to exhibit high and sustained levels of student academic success. The following selection criteria employed in this investigation are presented below:

- District must have a grade span of K-12;
- The superintendent must have at least five years experience as a superintendent and at least three years in the current post;

- District has been recognized at the state level as fully accredited and met the district annual yearly progress (AYP) for language arts and math for at least three consecutive years;
- Graduation rates of the district must exceed the California state average;
- District must be characterized as having low per pupil expenditure, high to very high percentage of students in the free and reduced lunch program compared to the state average, and the percentage of English Language Learners (ELL) must exceed the California average.

Using data from the California Department of Education (CDE), a list of districts that met the selection criteria was generated. Using the selection criteria and parameters, the list narrowed from 989 districts to six school districts.

In order to obtain meaningful data regarding the influence of district superintendent leadership, a second level of criteria was employed when selecting from the list of the six remaining districts. The authors concluded that building administrators and faculty should have experience and tenure in the district. Therefore the following criteria were also employed in selecting the district. Principals and a majority (over 50%) of teachers must:

- Have worked in the school district for more than five years and had witnessed the effects of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as a part of the reality of daily work in the schools and
- Have worked with more than one superintendent over their tenure, thereby ensuring the ability to ascertain change in leadership practices, organizational norms, beliefs and routines.

The lead author contacted superintendents and inquired about their willingness to participate. At the conclusion of these contacts, one superintendent agreed to participate, noted here as District A.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of the Participating District.

| | Student Enrollment | Free and Reduced Lunch % | English Lang. Learners % | Minority Students % | Largest Ethnic Group | PPE | API Base Score | Drop out Rate[1] (2007-2008) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| District A | 9,688 | 70.2 | 26.2 | 81.9 | Hispanic | $8,394 | 754 | 2.6 |
| California Average | | 39.0 | 25.0 | | Hispanic[2] | $8,486 | | 3.5 |

Note: [1] the one-year drop out percentage is calculated during a single year using actual data submitted to the California Department of Education/Dataquest

[2] The population of Hispanic students in CA is 3,026,956 (47%) followed by White students who number 1,849,078 (29%). These statistics are taken from the *Closing the Achievement Gap* 2008-2009 report of State Superintendent Jack O'Connell and the California Department of Education.

**Data Collection**

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured ethnographic qualitative interviews with faculty and administrators and were consistent with qualitative data collection techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2003). Because this study focused on experiences and perceptions of people at the classroom, school and district level, as well as school board member perceptions, focus groups were ideal for uncovering factors that influenced opinions, behaviors, motivations, and organizational outcomes (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Additionally, the type and depth needed to explore superintendent influence on learning in an organization could easily be revealed with this technique. Focus groups promote self disclosure that is achieved when participants feel comfortable among peers. Common experiences elicit comments that disclose crucial information in nonjudgmental environments (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

District A participants included three principals, three teachers, one school board member, and the superintendent. Protocols were used with all classroom teachers, principals, school board member and the superintendent. Questions for the interview protocol were derived from previous studies that have examined superintendent leadership (Sayre, 2007; Petersen, Sayre & Kelly, 2009) in organizational and instructional leadership. Questions were also reviewed by current and former school leaders for clarity and wording.

Interviews were conducted by the lead author. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim to allow for triangulation and a convergence of findings. Transcripts and field notes were analyzed by both authors separately for themes and concepts. The data were then collectively analyzed. Representative samples of interview questions included (a) "How involved are school personnel in the decision-making processes of the school?" (b) "How do you talk about student learning?" (c) "Where do ideas for change come from, and are these ideas valued by the superintendent?" and (d) "What practices demonstrate leader expectations for excellence and quality on the part of school personnel?"

**Analysis**

Perceptions of the superintendent and of focus group participants were gathered to assist in the development of codes and themes for qualitative data analysis. By focusing on teachers' ways of thinking and their personal experiences in relation to the superintendent's influence (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), data analysis focused on categorizing participants' responses in ways of thinking about the superintendent and the organization in order to gain further insight into how a superintendent influences learning at the organizational level. To accomplish the qualitative data analysis, the focus group data were analyzed in three separate stages.

First, the data were analyzed by creating coding categories focused on the ways teachers and principals assessed their superintendent's influence on learning at the organizational level (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The advantage of this type of data analysis was the emergence of common meanings over broad phenomena, such as, superintendent influence and capacity of an organization to create knowledge. Next, the coded categories were submitted to analysis focusing on the common themes that generated cover terms (Spradley, 1979). The cover terms specifically focused on narrowing the qualitative data to examine primary areas of a superintendent's leadership and organizational learning. Cover terms such as vision and leadership practices, analyzing, storing-retrieving, use, receiving-disseminating and seeking information created clear boundaries for coded categories to focus

on the three primary areas of superintendent's influence—organizational learning, instructional leadership, and transformational leadership.

Last, the qualitative data were submitted to a domain analysis (Spradley, 1979). The domain analysis consisted of analyzing the cover terms for a semantic relationship to each of the focus areas. In the domain analysis, the researchers specifically considered perceptions of attributes demonstrated by instructionally focused superintendents, functions that superintendents used to influence organizational learning and the rationale of the superintendent focusing on organizational learning.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

### Superintendent's Influence on Organizational Learning

Organizational learning is distinct from the traditional educational environment where learning is typically structured as an individual endeavor. The capacity of an organization to change, grow and "learn" is a continuous cycle of four conversations among all members: socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Employing themes that emerged in the superintendent and focus group interviews, the investigation examined the extent of the superintendent's influence in creating an organization that reflected the social processes and principles of organizational learning.

*Socialization.* The socialization mode usually starts with the building of a team for interaction and is typically associated with group process and organizational culture (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Data from District A revealed multiple opportunities for staff to share experiences and model technical skills through observation, imitation, and practice. Routines were created to provide informal and formal meetings for discussions to solve problems associated with students' lack of achievement. These routines, deliberately built by the superintendent and school board, supported the team process of collaboration while staff meetings were refocused on student learning and innovations for student success. Socialization with a focused vision occurred among and across district level administrators, school site administrators, and teachers. The district's administrative team had ongoing meetings where ideas were shared and expected to be brought back to their individual sites. As the superintendent explained:

> I believe to be successful, it requires collaboration amongst your administrators as well. They've got to be willing to share with and support one another, and so, that is the culture within which we function.

Not only did the continuous dialogue provide new ideas for intervention, it also provided the opportunity to establish relationships and build mutual trust among staff. As teacher C elaborated,

> I think that the idea of collaboration is alone you'll do what you can, but if you link with other people's strengths, then what you weren't able to get for that student is available from somebody else in your team, whether it's your grade level or above you or below you in terms of people on your staff or even in the trainings. Our network becomes bigger but the common language and the purpose is the same.

The establishment of district wide professional learning communities was noted by principals and teachers as the vehicle for carrying out the vision. The superintendent associated these socialization practices as support for the vision that he articulated:

> I think what you'll find is growing evidence of shared vision, shared purpose when teams of teachers sit down and collaboratively determine what the essential learnings are, and develop common assessments. While the actual instruction from class to class will vary because each teacher controls the magic of learning, if you would, the substance will be the same.

There was a continuous commitment and motivation by all district members to seek opportunities to interact and share practices. The superintendent expressed that the most powerful form of interaction that resulted in the growth of an individual occurred through peer professional development. The superintendent described peer professional development in the following way:

> [One team] came together after an assessment, and one of the teachers realized that her students had just bombed the lesson . . . and another teacher said, 'You know what, how about tomorrow I'll give up my prep, and I'll come cover your class, and you go watch her teach because she just nailed this' . . . Well you know, when you get those levels of conversations going on and teachers beginning to support one another because the data shows, 'Hey, I'm struggling.' It's that peer professional development that may become the strongest vehicle in the district.

There was a climate of accountability reported by the superintendent and the staff. The superintendent provided the parameters while the principals and teachers charted the course. Principal A explained:

> . . . so I think that other piece that's important is accountability because without that, you can say you're working together, but when I shut the door, I do what I want. But there is accountability at different levels, and I think that's pretty crucial.

This practice of sharing personal knowledge can be transformed, becoming a part of the knowledge between two teachers. If this new knowledge is not shared beyond two teachers, the organization as a whole does not grow. Principal B commented:

> We were always getting other people to come in, and the superintendent would say, you know, we've got such great employees here, let them share . . . What better way to do that [professional development] than to use your own people? . . . [We] focused primarily on the learning that's already in the district.

*Externalization.* Externalization is the process of articulating tacit knowledge into explicit concepts. When we try to convey an idea or an image, we often refer to symbols, metaphors, and models (Nonaka, & Takeuchi 1995). Externalization is triggered by successive rounds of meaningful dialogue around a shared mental model, such as a district vision, that guides school behavior. The vision in District A served as a guide to determine information that should be retained, used or discarded. Interactions shaped each individual's mental models to align with the mental model of the district. The meaning of the vision was

conveyed to district members by the superintendent in District A the following way. As teacher A described:

> The superintendent goes around to every classroom and he says . . . . 'Together we can.' Last year it was 'Every child, every day, whatever it takes.' That's the way he shared his vision and what his expectation was for all of us  . . . . The vision lasts longer than a year . . . . There's continuity. It keeps building . . . . That purpose we're working towards is consistent. We're not going different directions each year so that it would be hard for somebody to figure out what's really our purpose.

The metaphor or slogan supported the vision and reinforced the focus of the district ensuring no discrepancies in meaning. Conversations with District A teachers and principals suggested that these metaphors were effective in establishing commitment. Labeling collaborative practices with the term "professional learning communities" was intended to signify change throughout the district. "Assigning this label became the catalyst for driving district wide change," according to the superintendent.

*Internalization.* Through the socialization process and discussion, staff members shared personal experiences that became new knowledge for other staff members. As staff listened and participated in the discussion, they began the internalization of this new knowledge. They used it to broaden their own knowledge, embedding this new knowledge into everyday behaviors and routines. "Learning by doing" assisted the process of internalization. The superintendent utilized a direct approach to incorporate and begin a process of internalizing these social practices into the daily routines at the school sites. Expanding the scope of actual experiences (i.e. "let's give it a try" to encourage members) was critical to internalization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The superintendent described this process:

> That first year we simply told them [administrative staff], 'We are now a professional learning community.' And they were, 'Oh, what's that?' Well, let's talk about the basic tenets of a professional learning community. And their question was, 'Well, have you got a binder or something that we can follow?' And, 'Well, no, here's a book . . . [It] is going to chart your journey, guys. We are going to learn by doing this. These are the basic tenets. These are the things you are going to have to begin to focus on.' And admittedly, we put them out there. You know, we just kind of shoved them into the pool and said 'Swim,' and we've got a good swim team. You know, it's amazing.

The response from teacher C in the focus group indicated that learning both professionally and personally was presently a continuous process among teachers:

> You hear that, you know, 'I'll never go back to teaching the way I used to teach . . . because that student that didn't get it is now getting it, and I'm able to reach and engage students in learning.' When they get that, it's powerful, and then they share that at their PLC meetings, and that's what we're seeing, and it's exciting to watch.

*Combination.* Combination is a process that makes use of various sources of information such as documents, emails, data bases, informal meetings, and casual conversations. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) explained that information technology is most

useful in the combination phase of knowledge creation among members of an organization. Combination contributes to the district's ability to create and disseminate knowledge and learning, transferring it across groups in an organization. District A assessment data were utilized at the administrative and classroom levels to reflect on past practices and create new ones. Principal Summits, meetings of all school site and district administrators, were powerful venues for district-wide knowledge creation and dissemination. Principal B explained the process at Summits:

> We're expected to present [data] and look very specifically at certain things that are common between all of us over a course of time, and it's not just we get to get up and show it, the group is going to ask questions on any part of it to make sure it's understood.

The superintendent stated that during Summit meetings every district support person who provided support to school site staff was in the room because they needed to hear about the strengths and weaknesses at every site and understand what the needs were so they could better support them. The superintendent elaborated on the benefits of the Summits,

> The principals have learned so much from one another . . . . We have done this for three consecutive years . . . . These guys are good . . . . The depth [of learning] has developed because of that.

Technology was recently utilized in District A as an avenue to disseminate and share information. The principal and teachers agreed that it would open the doors and engage people in discussion across the district. According to the focus group's response, the common language within the district of the common direction and vision provided by the superintendent ensured its successful implementation.

Table 2 provides the depth of the four conversations of organizational learning revealed in interview and survey data suggesting an influence by the superintendent.

**Table 2.** District A Superintendent Influence on Organizational Learning.

District A Superintendent Influence on Organizational Learning

Socialization-deliberate structure built for socialization; learning as a shared experience; group processing and focus on culture; knowledge shared beyond two teachers through modeling, imitation, and demonstration

Externalization-superintendent establishes metaphor to support meaning of vision; "professional learning community" label is "catalyst for change"

Internalization-"learn by doing" approach; incorporating beliefs and practices into daily routines and beliefs; emphasis on a culture of collaboration

Combination-dissemination of new knowledge and opportunities for critique through meetings, casual conversations, assessment data analysis, principal summits, and technology.

**Instructional and Transformational Leadership of the Superintendent**

Overall, the data from District A highlighted the important influence the superintendent has on organizational learning. O'Day, Goertz, and Floden (1995) discussed how superintendents must not only recognize, but also utilize the entire organization to increase commitment and capacity. By focusing on his or her vision and leadership, the development of a collective commitment, utilization of organizational structures, development of the knowledge of faculty, and provision of adequate resources, the superintendent has a significant influence within the classroom.

Leadership practices associated with transformational and instructional leadership models focus exclusively on practices that bring about improvement in school conditions and educational outcomes. Analysis of data provided the following perspective of the actions and behaviors of the district superintendent as they aligned to instructional and transformational practices.

Focus group participants, specifically principals, recognized the influence the superintendent had on each administrator in developing effective practices at their school site. They discussed how the superintendent provided written, clearly articulated expectations of excellence and established a vision and created a culture focused on a common purpose of improving students' academic achievement. Through open and transparent communication among all departments in the district, the superintendent was able to shape the culture and promote the district's vision for student success. The superintendent shared the following to demonstrate this point:

> [The chief operations officer] said to me, 'Let me tell you one of the first things I want to do. I want to sit down with the Grounds Department, and I want to explain to them, we don't mow the lawn because the grass grew. We mow the lawn because a well-kept facility improves school culture, sets a climate and expectations for student achievement and performance, and every one of us needs to understand that our only purpose and function is to support student learning.'

The superintendent communicated the importance of the vision reaching into the classroom recognizing support for instructional improvement by the superintendent, along with allocation of resources for professional development opportunities to improve their practices, and increased teacher participation and confidence in classroom practice leading to a shared purpose of instructional effectiveness. This communication increased morale and perpetuated a cycle of trust between the school site level staff and district administration. Teacher B was able to address this in the following statement:

> I just thought of something right now that I need to tell. Because of his vision and because of the person that he is, the professional development that he gives us not only lets us grow professionally but also on a personal basis.

Providing opportunities for teachers to come together to address a common purpose of instructionally related issues pertaining to student achievement became a source of inspiration for changes in the organization. As they become experts in teaching and learning, instructional change became easier. The superintendent's deliberate efforts to shape the culture of the organization, focusing on collaboration and knowledge creation among staff, had a dramatic influence within the classroom.

The superintendent went further than just getting resources for the classroom. Principals reported that they were expected to maintain a strong instructional focus, supporting the teacher who was closest to the student. Specifically, focus group participants expressed that it was an effective decision on the part of the superintendent to provide intense training to principals on instructional leadership practices. Principals were also directed by the superintendent to attend professional opportunities on instructional strategies along-side teachers to be knowledgeable and bridge the superintendent's vision for student improvement. This attendance not only focused teachers' efforts on instructionally related issues, but it also provided principals a better understanding of what effective instruction looked like and how the practices aligned to the superintendent's vision of improved student learning for all. Principal A described the process:

> Not only is it, 'Hey, you have to be an instructional leader; this is what we want you to do,' but we also were given training. We went through the same training that the teachers went through . . . . Four years ago I'd be going into observations, and for the so-so teacher, I could give them great suggestions, but for my really good teachers, how do I get them to get better? And then [after the trainings], it was obvious where they needed work . . . . He gave me the tools to be able to be an instructional leader by giving me those strategies and that professional development.

The instructional capacity to sustain academic achievement levels in District A was evidence of the superintendent's extension of resources to train teachers, showing how to incorporate new curriculum and research based instructional strategies in the classroom. The superintendent provided the direction for professional development that strengthened the instructional practices and existing culture to align with the instructional purpose of the district vision.

Leadership practices of the superintendent are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Instructional and Transformational Leadership Practices of the Superintendent.

| District A Superintendent |
| --- |
| Creating a shared sense of purpose in schools-establishment of a vision reinforced at all levels of the district, clear expectations, aligned resources to vision |
| Developing a climate of high expectations and a school culture focused on innovation and improvement of teaching and learning-deliberate strategies by the superintendent to shape a culture of collaboration, expectations of excellence, establishment of norms, values and beliefs |
| Shaping the reward structure of the school to reflect the school's mission as well as goals set for staff and students-superintendent's message was learning is a "journey not a destination" |
| Organizing and providing a wide range of activities aimed at intellectual stimulation and the continuous development of staff-allocation of resources for professional development opportunities provided to meet superintendents expectations, structured routines for reflective conversations among administrators; personal and professional growth of staff |

**Table 3 (continued).** Instructional and Transformational Leadership
Practices of the Superintendent.

Being a visible presence in the school while modeling the desired values of the school's culture-visibility on school sites and in staff development; informed on standards and instruction, caring, dedicated

First order changes-incorporation of new curriculum and research based strategies, collaboration time provided to focus on development of instructional implementation
Second order change-integration of vision throughout all levels of the district, collaboration for focus, commitment

Extent to which the superintendent emphasized a coordination and control strategy vs. and empowerment for change in school-balanced decision making practices referred to as "loose or tight", monitoring of resources by superintendent vs. decision making on instructional materials by staff based on district vision

## SUMMARY

Organizational learning can be depicted as a multifaceted construct. The findings from District A revealed the perceptions of teachers, principals, and a school board member about the superintendent's actions and behaviors aligned with those practices conducive to the establishment of knowledge creation or learning at the organizational level. Organizational learning, in this study, emerged as a social process, constructed through social interactions. Data triangulation of participants' responses also suggested that the superintendent had a distinct influence on the depth to which organizational learning took place by exercising instructional and transformational leadership practices. The integration of these two leadership models contributed to a coordinated effort to organize and focus the school instructionally while building a climate that promoted networking across the district to share innovations and sustain change.

The superintendent was influential in creating structures for socialization and team building to promote new knowledge through innovation. Restructuring school personnel by the establishment of peer mentors and leadership teams among teachers secured an additional mechanism that provided a means for new knowledge to permeate the district. While we understand that information is a necessary medium for eliciting and constructing knowledge, it is a passive process. Knowledge for a sustained change is created by accumulating multiple sources of information and incorporating this in our belief system and skills (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Through socialization processes, staff members from this district were able to share experiences that became new knowledge to other staff members through team meetings and professional development opportunities provided by district staff. As staff listened to new ideas and brought them back to their own classrooms, they were able to apply this new knowledge. District A was able to combine various sources to capture, share, interpret and retrieve learning to continue the spiral of knowledge creation through various mechanisms, such as, meetings, casual conversations, assessment data analysis, principal summits and most recently, technology. These sources provided multiple opportunities for new knowledge to become widely disseminated, discussed, critiqued and modified before once again applying this new knowledge. This wide distribution through a variety of mediums ensured that all

stakeholders were involved and contributed to conversation, thus ensuring the cycle continued to filter throughout the district.

Internalizing and accommodating the belief in the vision in daily behaviors and routines sustained change efforts. Focus group and superintendent responses continually centered on day to day practices directly impacting student learning: instructional strategies, collaboration for problem solving, sharing of instructional strategies, seeking additional sources of funding, and aligning resources to academic achievement, therefore demonstrating that the meaning of the vision was embedded in daily practices. They embodied the spirit of "Whatever it takes, we will make it happen," rather than perseverating on barriers to overcome.

What emerged in this district was the presence of a clear, articulated vision, understood by every stakeholder, that was focused on improved academic achievement for all students. Without a clear vision, the stakeholders had no collective purpose or motivation. Without a collective purpose, schools function in isolation and keep innovations within the walls of the school, thus preventing growth of knowledge at the organizational level.

The superintendent effectively addressed the belief systems and skills of district personnel by modeling and articulating his own belief in the vision for the district. This ensured a deeper understanding of expectations for all staff members and helped them to maintain a clear focus and direction. The superintendent promoted the spiral of knowledge creation by creating themes to communicate the vision and establish a common meaning. The extensive use of a metaphor, served as a reminder and commitment to the goal of achievement for all students. Utilizing practices associated with models of transformational and instructional leadership, superintendents influence organizational environments to create a learning organization by establishing an environment that supports continuous conversations through structures that allow for socialization across all levels of the organization. They provide opportunities to share experiences, a vision that is accessible to all stakeholders, and use multiple mediums to disseminate, reflect and critique knowledge learned and practices employed, and support to incorporate the learning into daily practices and routines and belief systems of the stakeholders.

## DISCUSSION

External accountability systems and reform initiatives have changed the focus of district superintendents. The lens of superintendent responsibility is focused on the improved academic achievement of all students. Addressing the complex educational reforms and policies requires reexamination of traditional structures and practices and strengthening of the intricate relationships within the district. However, the highly institutionalized structure and inflexible nature of the traditional educational bureaucracy increases the vulnerability of schools to environmental pressures (e.g. legislation, public perception). Schools are continually criticized for the way they are organized and are accused of having an inability or an unwillingness to make schools more productive to meet the demands of reform (Sarason, 1996). The organizational configuration acts as a barrier to innovation and systemic change in organizational practices that are required in order to meet the demands placed upon it (Hanson, 2001). Improving teaching and learning must involve the whole system rather than individual classrooms. Leaders must utilize the expertise of all levels within the school organization.

Addressing goals of reform requires the district superintendent to overcome these barriers and act as a change agent, fostering an environment where learning can occur at the

organizational level while also promoting, facilitating, and strengthening interactions and relationships among district staff to transform the core technology of curriculum and instruction (Leithwood & Aitken, 1995; Morgan & Petersen, 2002; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Petersen, 1999). These interactions result in the sharing of ideas to solve problems in groups and networking that foster high levels of personal growth and commitment to the organization (Elmore, 2000; Leithwood & Aitken, 1995; Leithwood et al., 1998; Marzano et al., 2005; Seashore Louis et al., 2010). For schools to successfully address the demands of the myriad of external pressures emphasizing improved academic outcomes requires a model of leadership that capitalizes on social influence and transforms school practices and beliefs leading to instructional effectiveness.

This study depicts leadership for organizational learning as a process that expands the capability of an organization by integrating the vision, communication, routines, and context within an environment of external pressures. District leadership emerged in this study as the catalyst to create and sustain a climate conducive to organizational learning by linking curriculum and instruction, personal motivation, and structural elements to create norms and collective practices leading to improved academic achievement. However, in order to promote this process in an educational environment, and to ensure the academic improvement of students, this study demonstrated that the superintendent must have the ability to transform members' beliefs and strengthen interorganizational relationships. Relational communication was evident and required for organizational learning, and organizational learning is essential to school effectiveness (Kowalski, 2005).

Evidence from this district demonstrated an ability to sustain improved academic achievement and suggested the superintendent's utilization of the entire organization to increase commitment and shared purpose influenced the degree in which learning occurred at the organizational level. The actions and behaviors of the superintendent focused on strengthening the network of relationships across and within the organizational levels of the district rather than the typical organization's communication structure, intentionally establishing a line of authority. District personnel worked together toward the same goal to collaborate for problem solving and self reflection on practices and to maintain open communication among all levels of the organization. The implication of these findings as they relate to organizational learning suggested that a leader's focus on the interplay between followers and less on the role of leader and follower builds the capacity for organizational learning. The result of the superintendent's actions established effective lines of communication where stakeholders realized the benefits and were motivated to meet both informally and in the districts formally established routines. This environment promoted two-way communications to perpetuate a change toward academic achievement where all staff members became change agents. Leadership effectiveness was dependent on the superintendent's capacity to establish a sense of community throughout the district by encouraging and supporting horizontal communicative interactions through dialogue focused on the vision.

Based on the findings of this study, public accountability discussions through a shared practice of problem solving would strengthen the expectation of school improvement. Discussions served as a tool for reflection, problem solving, and development of an action plan based on shared experiences and expertise within a collaborative team among teachers as well as principals. While it was not explicitly stated, public accountability resulted in a shared practice of problem solving and a deeper understanding of issues impacting their school site. There was a shared norm of accountability among all levels of the district, and no single administrator was left to resolve issues alone. The strength of this communication network

was a result of information distributed, received, and exchanged increasing the knowledge of all members of the organization. The superintendent and principals viewed the social interaction as a distinct component in increasing teacher commitment, professionalism, and respect among stakeholders. These same shared practices of problem solving with peers occurred at the classroom level as well. The findings from this study indicated the means to attain the vision could be addressed through multiple opportunities for dialogue.

Interdependence among organizational members engaged in dialogue strengthened the member's commitment and instructional capacity leading to student success. As Teacher A stressed, "You link with other people's strengths." The organizational learning process emerged in the findings of this study as group interaction with a collective purpose and intentional focus on improved academic achievement and reflection on instructional practices directly impacted students. Individual learning was extended among all levels of the district, as they were a part of discussions and adapted to the response of the players. Therefore, the group became a "collective mind," not just the sum of individual learning.

As a result of the diversity in schools, the educational system has evolved into a complex organizational system. Reforms have established an urgency to create an environment of relational networks focused on meeting the needs of children. Regular routines established to provide opportunities for networking to address instructionally related issues pertaining to student achievement became a source of inspiration for change. Deliberate efforts to shape the organization, focusing on ongoing dialogue and knowledge creation among staff, promoting the process of organizational learning, became embedded in the daily operations of the schools. Creative routines of practice continually emerged as these routines of collaboration and discussion became a "way of doing things."

Meeting the needs of students does not reside in the individuals working within the district. It is revealed in the teams working together and the context in which conversations take place. Changing practices requires establishment of a collaborative culture across the district where each individual's contribution is recognized and valued as it adds to the group's collective knowledge. A key element that emerged in the findings was the interdependent nature of district personnel as they focused on the vision of student success. Conversations focused on student learning, analysis of data, and collective problem solving occurred across and within all levels of the district. This conversation supported and strengthened the norms, values, and beliefs of the organization.

## CONCLUSION

This investigation began in order to determine the extent of a district superintendent's influence on conditions that foster organizational learning. A deliberate decision and focused ongoing effort by the superintendent in this academically achieving district changed the behavior of staff and shaped the culture of the organization. Capitalizing on the capacity of teams working together, establishing a common language through a vision for school improvement, and reinforcing that vision through his own actions and expectations provided an important direction for staff. District-wide professional development focused on instructional effectiveness utilizing mentor teachers and peers provided the staff with a common language for discussion, a common purpose, and the means to attain the vision.

District level leadership practices, specifically instructional and transformational practices, had a positive influence on learning at the organizational level, leading to improved academic achievement of students. The responsibility of the district superintendent is to lead by strengthening the knowledge capacity of those closest to the classroom. While this

responsibility includes consistent professional development opportunities focused on instructional effectiveness and modifying practices based on analysis of data, district leadership must also provide the opportunities for networking across all levels of the organization of staff members to receive and disseminate professional changes and innovations.

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# Special Education Director Burnout in Montana

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The interaction between two major federal education policies, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), has been described as *the perfect storm* producing unique challenges for American educators (Barbour, 2005). Increased standards for student achievement based on standardized assessments that explicitly conflict with eligibility parameters and requirements for individualized instruction for students with disabilities underscore the fact that special educators work within the center of this storm. Smith and Leonard (2005) in exploring these challenges found that both special education and general education teachers experienced value conflicts in seeking educational equity within a culture focused on school accountability. For example, general education teachers tend to focus their goals and approach on achieving grade-level curriculum standards, while special education teachers tend to focus their goals and approach to the Individual Education Plan which may or may not be aligned well with the curriculum standards. Skilled leaders with a deep understanding of the needs of children with disabilities and expertise necessary to implement effective instructional processes responsive to these needs are essential for creating and sustaining educational systems able to bridge the conflict between educational equity and excellence. Yet, job-related burnout for special education administrators remains high thus constraining the potential of achieving both equity and excellence in educating children with disabilities (Edmonson, 2001). This study explored the level and some parameters of job related burnout among special education administrators in Montana.

Special education administrators work in school districts or cooperatives serving several school districts. Their role is to identify children with disabilities throughout the community and ensure a free and appropriate public education is provided to each child qualifying for special education or related services (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). To be effective, special education administrators must advocate for the children with special needs to educators, other administrators and community members and align the appropriate instructional resources necessary for each student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Public education has changed significantly in how special education services are administered and delivered to students with disabilities (Stevenson-Jacobson, Jacobson, & Hilton, 2006). Due to these changes, special education administrators face significant leadership challenges. Often pressured by interest groups with differing goals and intentions, the continuous demand for demonstrating program efficiency, increasing budgetary concerns of special education services by district school boards and superintendents, and the dominant litigious climate that is prevalent in special education, a significant degree of stress is associated with the job of Special Education Administrator (Burrello & Zadnik,1986; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). Additionally, there is considerable role ambiguity concerning the functions and tasks to be

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performed by the special education administrator. On the one hand, there is the expectation to advocate for the resources needed to provide services to individual children; yet, on the other hand, there is an expectation for the prudent management of district resources. This ambiguity often has potential for creating conflict in a school district thereby reducing the effectiveness in the delivery of services to students with disabilities (Sullivan, 1996). It is not surprising that job-related burnout occurs at a high rate in those administering special education programs.

Maslach (1982) described burnout as "a response to the chronic emotional strain of dealing extensively with other human beings, particularly when they are troubled or having problems" (p.3). Torelli and Gmelch (1992) wrote, "Burnout appears to be related to a response of interpersonal job actions and intense contact with people" (p. 4). Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, (1996) further defined burnout as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity" (p. 4).

Emotional exhaustion is a component of job related burnout characterized by "a lack of energy and a feeling that one's emotional resources are used up" and manifests itself through "feelings of frustration and tension" and "dread at the prospect of returning to work for another day" (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993, p. 623). Feelings of tiredness and fatigue overwhelm the individual such that he or she can no longer perform at the same level as he or she previously had (Maslach et. al., 1996). A second component of burnout, depersonalization, is characterized by treating students as objects rather than people. This may be displayed through behaviors such as a "detached and an emotional callousness" or "strict compartmentalization of professional lives" (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993, p. 623). Educators who are experiencing depersonalization often display indifferent or negative attitudes about their work as well as their students. The final component, diminished personal accomplishment, is characterized "by a tendency to evaluate oneself negatively" and "a decline in feelings of job competence and successful achievement in their work or interactions with people" (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993, pp. 623–624). If educators feel they are not contributing to students' learning and growth, which is the focus of their personal accomplishment, they can experience profound disappointment and may relinquish their dedication to teaching. People with low personal accomplishments feel they no longer make a difference and give up trying (Torelli & Gmelch, 1992). Employee burnout has the potential for serious consequences: deterioration in the quality of service provided, job turnover, absenteeism, and low morale as well as the psychological and physical health of the individual (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Edmonson, 2001; Maslach et. al., 1996).

Several studies have explored stress and burnout in regular education teachers, special education teachers, and school district administrators (Gmelch & Torelli, 1993; Torelli & Gmelch, 1992). As Cordes and Dougherty (1993) stated, "Empirical evidence has shown that burnout has important dysfunctional ramifications, implying substantial costs for both organizations and individuals" (p. 621). Among the most comprehensive studies on the subject was a meta-analysis conducted by Edmonson in 2001. Her analysis synthesized the findings of 46 studies addressing burnout in special educators, but only five of these studies focused on special education administrators. These five studies indicated that job burnout is related to role ambiguity, role tensions, including role expectations, role overload, personal inadequacy, self role concept, and resource inadequacy. Edmonson (2001) emphasized, "Because of the importance of administrators in special education, the study of burnout among these professionals should be of primary concern of future research studies" (p. 19–20).

Several studies have explored the impact job-related burnout in special education administrators has on the health and well-being of the individual as well as the school or district where the individual works (Kohlman, 1991; Swagger, 2010). Yet, research is still needed in exploring the level of burnout experienced by special education administrators and the variables that contribute to the burnout. From such research, a greater awareness of the potential for job-related burnout in special education administrators may develop producing strategies to reduce the potential impact of job-related burnout at the organizational, professional and personal levels.

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived levels of job-related burnout experienced by special education administrators and the relationship of certain variables to perceived levels of burnout. Specifically, the questions focusing the inquiry were:

1. Is there a difference in the burnout level of special education administrators between district directors and cooperative directors?
2. Is there a difference in burnout levels based on gender difference?
3. Is there a relationship between burnout levels and education level?
4. Is there a relationship between burnout level and years of experience in the current position?
5. Is there a relationship between burnout level and years of experience as an educator?

## METHODOLOGY

The participants for this study were special education administrators in the state of Montana listed in the *School Administrators of Montana Administrators Directory* (2006). The Directory listed 57 special education administrators serving Montana schools. Although job titles varied between director and coordinator, each person listed directed the special education program in either a school district or special education cooperative providing special education services to multiple rural school districts. Specifically, 36 (63%) potential participants were employed at individual school districts, and 21 (37%) worked in special education cooperatives. The entire population of administrators directing special education programs in Montana was sampled.

Each participant was asked to complete a *Maslach Burnout Inventory—Educators Survey* (MBI-ES). The MBI-ES consists of 22 questions assessing three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Each participant also completed a Demographic Data Sheet documenting work environment (district or cooperative), education level, gender, number of students enrolled in their special education program, years of administrative experience, and years of experience as an educator.

A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and inviting their participation was sent to each of the 57 special administrators along with an informed consent agreement, the MBI-ES, and the demographic data collection sheet. In the cover letter, each potential participant was requested to complete and return all three documents within seven days. Each package was coded in order to follow-up on the instruments not returned. The information from returned surveys was coded and analyzed using an SPSS program. Statistical analysis attempted to disprove the null hypothesis for each research question.

The MBI-ES is a reliable, valid measure of three dimensions of professional burnout—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment—that has

been widely used by researchers in education and other fields to measure professional burnout (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Zabel & Zabel 2002). According to Maslach et al. (1996),

> The Emotional Exhaustion (EE) subscale assesses feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work. The Depersonalization (Dp) subscale measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service, care, treatment, or instruction. The Personal Accomplishment (PA) subscale assesses feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people. (p. 4)

The MBI-ES is self-administered and takes about 10 to 15 minutes to complete with easy to follow, straight-forward instructions. There is no indication on the cover letter, consent form, or MBI-ES survey that this is a burnout measure. According to Maslach et al. (1996), "The scale should be presented as a survey of job-related attitudes and not be linked to burnout in any way" (p. 7). The participants must remain unaware that the MBI-ES measures degree of burnout to minimize the reactive effect of personal beliefs or expectations regarding burnout. Each respondent's test form was scored with a scoring key and a frequency table indicating high, moderate, and low levels of burnout. There are no cut-off scores. Burnout was conceptualized as a continuous variable where the scores on the EE, Dp, and PA subscales reflected points along a continuum ranging from moderate to high degrees of experienced feelings (Maslach et al., 1996; Torelli & Gmelch, 1992; Zabel & Zabel 2002). Higher scores on the Emotional Exhaustion subscale (>26) and Depersonalization subscale (>13) and lower scores on the Personal Accomplishment subscale (>37) reflected a higher degree of burnout. Lower scores on the EE (<16) and Dp (<8) subscales and in higher scores on the PA (<30) subscale reflected a lower degree of burnout (Maslach et. al., 1996; Zabel & Zabel 2002). Composite scores on the EE and Dp subscales were positively correlated with one another and both were negatively correlated with PA subscale scores (Maslach et al., 1996).

Two studies have substantiated the validity and reliability of the MBI-ES. Factor analytic studies by Iwanicki and Schwab (1981), with 469 Massachusetts teachers, and by Gold (1984), with 462 California students, supported the three-factor structure of the MBI-ES. Iwanicki and Schwab reported Cronbach alpha estimates of .90 for Emotional Exhaustion, .76 for Depersonalization, and .76 for Personal Accomplishment. Gold reported reliability estimates of .88, .74, and .72 respectively. These reliability coefficients parallel those of the MBI-HSS [MBI-Human Services Survey].

A limitation exists with the *Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey* (MBI-ES). The MBI-ES has group subscales classified and normed for teaching, other education, social services, medicine, mental health, and other service area. National norms have not been developed for educational administrators. Therefore, the teacher subscales will be used to analyze the burnout level of special education directors. Because the teacher subscales have been used for a variety of educator positions including research on educational administrator burnout (see Cordes & Dougherty, 1993), it seemed a reasonable measurement instrument for measuring special education administrator burnout.

## RESULTS

Of the 57 special education directors in the state of Montana, 40 participants returned completed surveys. This response rate produced an error rate of +/-8.5% with a 95% confidence level that the sample obtained was representative of the population. Of the 40

surveys returned by the participants, 24 (67% of population) were special education directors for school districts, and 16 (76% of population) were special education directors of cooperatives. Additionally, 23 of the respondents were female and 17 male. One of the surveys from a cooperative director was not usable due to excessive unanswered responses on the MBI-ES survey.

Given the generally accepted definition of burnout based on the use of the MBI-ES survey, high scores on the EE and Dp dimensions and low scores on PA, five of the 39 Montana directors completing the survey could be categorized as having job-related burnout, with another four directors being considered at-risk due to high scores in both EE and Dp and moderate scores on the PA dimension. Of particular note, 28 of the remaining 29 special education directors sampled scored high on all three levels of the MBI-ES—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

To investigate whether special education directors of a school district and special education directors of a cooperative differed on perceived levels of burnout, a chi-square statistic was used. Table 1 shows the Pearson chi-square results and indicates that directors of a school district and directors of cooperatives were not significantly different on their perceived levels of burnout in the dimension emotional exhaustion ($x^2 = .64$, $df = 1$, $N = 39$, $p > .05$), the dimension personal accomplishment ($x^2 = .98$, $df = 2$, $N = 39$, $p > .05$), nor the dimension of depersonalization (no variability between groups). Phi, which indicates the strength of the association between the two variables, was .128 for EE and .158 for PA, and thus, the effect size was small or smaller than typical based on the work of Cohen and Manion (1994). There does not seem to be a difference in job-related burnout between directors working in Montana school districts and directors of special education cooperatives.

**Table 1.** Chi-square Analysis of Levels of Burnout Between Special Education Directors in School Districts Verses Cooperatives.

| Variable | $n$ | District | Cooperative | $x^2$ | $p$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EE Level | | | | .64 | > .05 |
|     Moderate | 1 | 1 | 0 | | |
|     High | 38 | 23 | 15 | | |
| Totals | 39 | 24 | 15 | | |
| | | | | | |
| Dp Level | | | | .(a) | -- |
|     High | 39 | 24 | 15 | | |
| Totals | 39 | 24 | 15 | | |
| | | | | | |
| PA Level | | | | .975 | > .05 |
|     Low | 5 | 4 | 1 | | |
|     Moderate | 4 | 2 | 2 | | |
|     High | 30 | 18 | 12 | | |
| Totals | 39 | 24 | 15 | | |

(a)    No statistics are computed because Dp Level is a constant

To investigate whether the educational degree attainment of a special education director differed on perceived levels of burnout, a chi-square statistic was used. Table 2 shows the Pearson chi-square results and indicates that the level of educational attainment of special education directors was not significantly different on their perceived levels of burnout for emotional exhaustion ($x^2 = .64$, $df = 2$, $N = 39$, $p > .05$) and for personal achievement ($x^2 =$

.524, $df = 4$, $N = 39$, $p > .05$). Again, depersonalization (the Dp level) was constant. Phi was .128 for emotional exhaustion and .116 for personal achievement, again a small or smaller than typical effect size. Job-related burnout does not seem to be related to differences in educational level.

**Table 2.** Chi-square Analysis of Levels of Burnout and Educational Degree Attainment.

| Variable | $n$ | Master's | Master's +30 | Doctorate | $x^2$ | $p$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EE Level | | | | | .641 | > .05 |
|     Moderate | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | | |
|     High | 38 | 9 | 23 | 6 | | |
| Totals | 39 | 9 | 24 | 6 | | |
| Dp Level | | | | | .(a) | -- |
|     High | 39 | 9 | 24 | 6 | | |
| Totals | 39 | 9 | 24 | 6 | | |
| PA Level | | | | | .524 | > .05 |
|     Low | 5 | 1 | 3 | 1 | | |
|     Moderate | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | | |
|     High | 30 | 7 | 19 | 4 | | |
| Totals | 39 | 9 | 24 | 6 | | |

(a) No statistics are computed because DP Level is a constant

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze the correlations between the dimensions of burnout emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (Dp), and personal accomplishment (PA) with the number of years in their current position as a special education director. Table 3 shows the correlation coefficients between each of the job-burnout dimensions and the number of years in their current position as a special education director. None of the variables were significantly correlated and all of the variables had a small or smaller than typical effect size. Job-related burnout does not seem to be related to years of service in the current position as a special education director.

**Table 3.** Inter-correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for EE Level, DP Level, PA Level, and Years in Position (N = 39).

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | $M$ | $SD$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. EE Level | -- | .(a) | -.08 | .15 | 2.97 | .16 |
| 2. Dp Level | -- | -- | .(a) | (a) | 3.00 | .00 |
| 3. PA Level | -- | -- | -- | .20 | 2.64 | .71 |
| 4. Years in Position | -- | -- | -- | -- | 1.85 | .90 |

(a) Cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant

A Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was used to analyze the relationship between the dimensions of burnout emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (Dp), and personal accomplishment (PA) with the total number of years experience working in education by the special education directors. The total number of years of experience in education was placed in ordered levels to facilitate analysis. Table 4 shows that two of the variables were

significantly correlated. The strongest positive correlation, considered to be a medium effect size, was between personal accomplishment and total number of years in education ($r$ (37) = .35, $p$ = .027). Special education directors with more years of experience in education were more likely to have higher levels of personal accomplishment.

**Table 4.** Inter-correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for EE Level, DP Level, PA Level, and Total Number of Years in Education (N = 39).

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. EE Level | -- | .(a) | -.09 | -.04 | 2.97 | .16 |
| 2. Dp Level | -- | -- | .(a) | .(a) | 3.00 | .00 |
| 3. PA Level | -- | -- | -- | .35* | 2.64 | .71 |
| 4. Total Years in Education | -- | -- | -- | -- | 2.72 | .97 |

*$p < 0.05$
(a) Cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant

To investigate whether perceived levels of burnout differed based on the gender of a special education director, a chi-square analysis was used. Table 5 shows the Pearson chi-square results. The gender of a special education director was not demonstrated to be significantly different on perceived levels of burnout for emotional exhaustion ($x^2$ = .71, $df$ = 21 $N$ = 39, $p$ > .05), nor for personal achievement ($x^2$ = 1.73, $df$ = 2, $N$ = 39, $p$ > .05). Depersonalization was constant. Phi was .135 for emotional exhaustion and .211 for personal achievement, thus the effect size was considered to be small or smaller than typical based on work of Cohen and Manion (1994).

**Table 5.** Chi-square Analysis of Levels of Burnout and Gender.

| Variable | *n* | Male | Female | $x^2$ | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EE Level | | | | .71 > | .05 |
|     Moderate | 1 | 0 | 1 | | |
|     High | 38 | 16 | 22 | | |
| Totals | 39 | 16 | 23 | | |
| | | | | | |
| Dp Level | | | | .(a) | -- |
|     High | 39 | 16 | 23 | | |
| Totals | 39 | 16 | 23 | | |
| | | | | | |
| PA Level | | | | 1.73 | >.05 |
|     Low | 5 | 1 | 4 | | |
|     Moderate | 4 | 1 | 3 | | |
|     High | 30 | 14 | 16 | | |
| Totals | 39 | 16 | 23 | | |

(a) No statistics are computed because Dp Level was a constant

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze any correlations between the dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Two sets of variables were significantly correlated (see Table 6). The strongest positive correlation, which would be considered a much larger than typical effect size, was between depersonalization and personal accomplishment ($r$ (37) = .80, $p$ < .001). Depersonalization levels were also positively correlated to levels of emotional

exhaustion ($r$ (37) = .57, $p < .001$). This was also a large or larger than typical effect size. This result demonstrated that a positive relationship seems to exist in the levels of depersonalization and both emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment as perceived by Montana special education directors.

**Table 6.** Inter-correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment (N = 39).

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Emotional Exhaustion | -- | .50** | .23 | 43.67 | 6.66 |
| 2. Depersonalization | .50** | -- | .86** | 56.18 | 10.54 |
| 3. Personal Accomplishment | .23 | .86** | -- | 21.08 | 13.23 |

**$p < 0.001$

## DISCUSSION

Four primary findings emerged from the results of this study. First, although levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were high for almost all special education directors sampled, two-thirds of those sampled also reported high levels of personal accomplishment. Those directors experiencing low personal accomplishment, therefore meeting the definitions of burnout (Maslach et. al., 1996), comprised only 12.8%. Secondly, special education directors in Montana with more years of experience in education were likely to have higher levels of personal accomplishment. Third, the dimension of depersonalization, the detachment from others or objectification of students, was demonstrated to have a positive relationship with the other two dimensions, emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. In fact, the effect size of these relationships was larger than a typical effect size. Finally, no other differences or relationships were found with any of the three dimensions of burnout in considering a district versus cooperative working environment, educational degree attainment, number of years in the position, or gender.

Almost all respondents (97%) held perceptions of emotional exhaustion, feelings of frustration, tension, and dread. Articulating and implementing a common vision across the organization is an essential element of leadership (Sergiovanni, 2007). Currently, special education directors must articulate and implement a vision that focuses instruction for children with disabilities on their individual needs—individual needs with a range that far exceeds the scale of mainstream classroom differentiation—and must focus this instruction in a climate of accountability governed by high stakes, standardized testing. To further add to their frustration and tension, special education directors must bridge educational excellence and equity for children with disabilities without the direct supervisory authority of the teachers providing the instruction. As noted by Edmonson (2001), "When special education administrators are not sure what is expected of them … burnout is often a consequence" (p.16). This leads to a discussion of the next dimension: depersonalization.

Depersonalization occurs when individuals compartmentalize their work, separating their feelings from their actions (Edmonson, 2001). When affect does occur, it is expressed negatively. Without exception, all special education directors participating in this study had high levels of depersonalization. Relationships with other administrators, teachers, and parents are often a key and essential source of professional stimulation. Yet, when such relationships are strained by competition for limited resources, ambiguity in the exercise of instructional leadership, or a litigious climate, limiting self-involvement or severing relationships occurs to prevent overwhelming negative stimulation (Wisniewski & Gargiulo,

1997). Although special education directors are called on to support the teachers and staff working with exceptional children, the support they receive is often limited because of the limited range of experience many superintendents and school board trustees have in the field of special education.

The relationship between years of experience in education and higher levels of personal accomplishment substantiated research findings noted by Cordes and Dougherty (1993), "…older, more experienced, employees tend to experience lower levels of burnout than younger employees" (p. 636). Yet, this relationship appeared in a context where many of the special education directors (77%) scored high on the personal achievement dimension as well as the other two dimensions. Thus, feelings of confidence and job-related achievement seemed to prevent their being considered to have job-related burnout. Bandura (1977) suggested that expectations impact human performance and organizational commitment. Special education leaders are often experienced special education teachers. As they have gained experience in education, it is likely that they have integrated their initial hope with a truer understanding of the capabilities of their staff and students. This sense of realistic understanding possibly inoculated the majority of special education directors in Montana to prevent burnout. Furthermore, those rising to leadership positions are more likely to exhibit self-efficacy in creating and sustaining positive, realistic expectations resulting in perceptions that progress can and will occur. As one gains experience, he or she is able to better anticipate the likely results and better understand the likely impact of each set of actions with other employees, students and parents. Self-efficacy combined with the skill to accurately anticipate consequences creates an internal locus of control. In establishing and maintaining this internal locus of control, perceptions of personal accomplishment and responsibility seem to be driven to high levels through a reciprocity reinforcing an internal locus of control and positive self-efficacy in an upward spiraling system. Such a spiraling system may provide an explanation for the third finding.

Depersonalization has been found in several studies to be positively correlated with emotional exhaustion (Edmonson, 2001; Maslach et. al., 1996). The same finding in this study with a larger than typical effect size was unremarkable; however, the positive relationship found between depersonalization and personal accomplishment with a larger than typical effect size was contrary to previous research findings. Cordes and Dougherty (1993) reported, "Diminished personal accomplishment results in part from high levels of depersonalization" (p. 646). Maslach et al. (1996) noted composite scores on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization subscales are positively correlated with one another and both are typically negatively correlated with personal accomplishment subscale scores. A possible explanation for the positive relationship between depersonalization and personal accomplishment found in this study could lie in a mutual reinforcing spiral of self efficacy and an internal locus of control. Depersonalization often results as a consequence of a perceived lack of control over environmental factors, so in response, the individual exercises what little control he or she has by limiting engagement with the environment or severing relationships that seem overwhelmingly negative (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Now, consider perceptions of depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment as a system where each dimension of burnout impacts the other two dimensions. The perceived lack of control combined with a limited ability for self-efficacy resulted in disengagement (a definition of depersonalization). Yet, the individual must persist in *going through the motions* of the job on a daily basis. The emotional disengagement makes the required daily actions more difficult to perform creating a sense of mental and physical weariness (a definition of emotional exhaustion). In this way, depersonalization is connected to emotional exhaustion in a positive

relationship. In looking at the relationship between depersonalization and personal accomplishment, disengagement because of a perceived lack of control and an inability for self-efficacy could hamper decision making and problem solving ability resulting in lowering perceived levels of personal accomplishment. With the emergence of a strong sense of an internal locus of control and a strong internal moral compass, sense of self-efficacy, one could still feel disengaged, thus scoring high on the depersonalization scores. Yet through a positive and reciprocal interaction of the internal locus of control and self efficacy, a strong sense of responsibility could emerge forcing relationships to be maintained despite the emotional disengagement remaining. Similarly, a strong sense of responsibility would not lower the degree of emotional exhaustion and, in fact, taking responsibility could easily increase tensions among people raising perceptions of emotional exhaustion higher. Yet, this same strong sense of responsibility would also raise personal accomplishment perceptions in the pride of fulfilling one's responsibilities.

A positive, spiraling, reciprocal interaction between self-efficacy and an internal locus of control is one possible way of explaining the findings in this study. Further research is needed to explore the viability of this explanation. However, should this explanation be supported through more rigorous and controlled studies, such a model could provide the means for reducing or preventing burnout in special educators. Specifically, rather than attempting to reduce emotional exhaustion or depersonalization that are produced by difficult to control, complex environmental and organizational factors, the findings of this study support the notion that raising personal accomplishment perceptions could reduce burnout experienced by special education directors and is a more realistic possibility than shifting complex environmental and organizational factors. The finding that two-thirds of special education directors in Montana are not suffering from burnout solely because of perceptions of high personal accomplishment supports the implication that raising personal accomplishment perceptions could reduce burnout. More research is necessary to establish the effective methods and strategies for elevating the personal accomplishment perceptions held by special educators.

Finally, this study found no differences based on gender or work environment (school district vs. special education cooperative) and no relationships among any of the burnout dimensions and educational level or experience in the current position. Some previous research studies have found differences or relationships among these variables; however, others demonstrate no differences (Edmonson, 2001; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). A possible reason for such variability among the studies on special education administrator burnout could be attributed to a lack of sensitivity in the instrument used in many of the studies. The MBI-ES survey was developed and normed for educators rather than educational administrators, although it has been used for administrators in past research studies. Developing and using an instrument generated for administrators could yield more precise and pertinent information. Additionally, the fact that this instrument was not normed for educational administrators was a limitation of this study and a potential source of error.

In conclusion, it appears that approximately one-sixth of special education directors in Montana were suffering from job-related burnout with another one-sixth currently at risk for job-related burnout. Most importantly, for the remaining two-thirds of special education directors in Montana, perceptions of high levels of personal accomplishment separated them from those experiencing job-related burnout. This finding was important in that it suggested a possible and obtainable means of preventing burnout among individual special educators and curtailing the epidemic of job-related burnout experienced by practitioners throughout the field of special education. As noted in the introduction, special education administrators

provide a means of connecting educational excellence and equity for children with disabilities. The complex environmental conditions, such as role ambiguity and litigious conflict, and organizational climates focusing limited resources on standardized achievement are not likely to change. Yet, as suggested by the findings here, they may not need to change in order to curtail job-related burnout. Given a system of three dimensions of burnout, personal accomplishment may be the leverage point. Specifically, rather than attempting to change complex environmental and organizational factors decreasing the perceived levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, it may be effective to raise the perceived level of personal accomplishment, and in doing so, prevent burnout by strengthening self-efficacy and purpose.

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# Superintendent Decision-making and Problem-solving:
## Living on the Horns of Dilemmas

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## INTRODUCTION

The general subject population for this comprehensive mixed-methods research study consisted of public school superintendents throughout the United States. Teams of researchers were established in various regions of the country to conduct research using the same survey instrument and methodology. Each team of researchers was responsible for survey packet distribution, completed survey collection and data analysis as well as for interviewing those superintendents in their region who volunteered to participate in the qualitative component of this research project.

However, the major focus of this manuscript is the quantitative research conducted by two different teams of researchers: one team from Niagara University who originally designed the study and surveyed New York superintendents and the other team from Loyola University in Maryland who replicated the study with superintendents in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The two teams merged their respective quantitative data resulting in a substantial sample of 259 school superintendents. The findings about the decision-making and problem-solving approaches used by those superintendents as well as their perspectives regarding the frequency and stressful impact of resolving school leadership dilemmas are presented to further expand the contemporary educational leadership knowledge base.

There is acute interest in this topic based on the fact that 670 surveys were sent to superintendents of K-12 school districts in New York State and 178 useable surveys were returned (26.7%). In addition, 205 surveys were sent to superintendents of K-12 school districts in the following Mid-Atlantic states: Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania and 80 useable surveys were returned (39%). The combined return rate for purposes of this review was 29.6%, and the combined number of useable surveys equaled 258 (N=258). In addition, it should be noted that 100 superintendents or 38.8% of those who returned the survey indicated their willingness to participate in the qualitative "face-to-face" interviews. Thus, practicing superintendents were willing to tell their stories and share their concerns about "living on the horns of dilemmas" as they lead their school districts in this age of intensive accountability.

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The intended outcome of this chapter is for educational policy makers, professors, and practitioners to comprehensively examine the extent and degree of various dilemmas confronting the Mid-Atlantic Region contemporary school superintendent sample and to evaluate the decision-making and problem-solving approaches used by them. The study results presented will serve as valuable references to not only individual superintendents but also to university administrator preparation professors and to state administrator licensure agencies because it is important for all aspiring superintendents to know the various issues associated with educational leadership and the personal and professional dilemmas that they need to be prepared to face as they embark on a career to improve schooling in America.

## The Quantitative Instrument

The survey instrument that was developed by the researchers after conducting a series of focus group experiences and evaluation sessions consisted of the following four parts:

- *Part A. Demographic Data*
- *Part B. Decision-making/Problem-solving Approaches*
- *Part C. Personal and Professional Dilemmas*
- *Part D. Opportunity to Reflect About Dilemmas*

The *Demographic Data* component (Part A) of the survey instrument was designed to identify relationships between the independent variables associated with the individual background and experiences of the respondents and the dependent variables associated with the survey questions or statements. The following 10 independent variables were specifically enumerated in this part to solicit information from each participant: (1) gender, (2) years of total educational experience, (3) years of administrative experience, (4) years in current position, (5) number of superintendencies held (including this one), (6) school district setting, (7) school district student population, (8) number of administrators in the district, (9) number of schools in the district, and (10) number of schools currently on NCLB "needs improvement" list.

The *Decision-making/Problem-solving Approaches* (Part B) consisted of 35 statements gleaned from the research of Hoy and Tarter (2008) and designed to gather information about the frequency of the following seven approaches used by educational leaders when confronting problems and making decisions associated with school administration: *Classical, Incremental, Garbage Can, Shared Decision-making, Satisficing, Mixed Scanning, and Political*. It was decided by the researchers that instead of the eight categories as referenced in Hoy and Tarter (2008), there would be seven used for the survey. The two categories associated with shared decision-making in the text were combined into one to streamline the survey and make the survey user-friendly.

The *classical approach* consists of a rational systematic means-ends analysis focused on optimizing organizational goals. The *incremental approach* consists of a successive search for reasonable alternatives to facilitate good decision-making. The *garbage can approach* involves scanning and using previously identified solutions to solve emerging problems. The *shared decision-making* approach includes empowering others to assist in finding solutions to problems meaningful to them. The *satisficing approach* involves making decisions that are acceptable to most of those impacted. The *mixed scanning approach* involves broad ends and tentative means that focus on adapting decisions to policy guidelines. The *political approach*

involves objectives that emerge spontaneously but are personally driven by the leader's need for power (Hoy & Tarter, p.85, 2008).

There are five statements from each of the above seven categories to which each participant is expected to respond based on their frequency of use according to the following 10 point Likert-type scale:

| *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* | *6* | *7* | *8* | *9* | *10* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Almost Never* | | *Rarely* | | *Occasionally* | | *Frequently* | | *Almost Always* | |

Thus, the *Polka-Denig DM/PS Survey* component (Part B) of this research instrument provided respondents with the opportunity to identify the frequency with which they employed the various decision-making and problem-solving approaches categorically articulated by Hoy and Tarter (2008). The reliability of the 35 questions in this Part B of the survey is .816 according to Cronbach's Alpha measurement. Therefore, this part of the instrument has construct validity and reliability in relationship to the decision-making and problem-solving approaches of contemporary superintendents.

The Part C *Personal and Professional Dilemmas (Calzi-Polka Dilemma Survey)* of this instrument was designed to capture the frequency with which contemporary superintendents confront various dilemmas associated with school district leadership. Twelve prominent dilemmas, developed from the leadership literature and research of the past 90 years, were enumerated in the survey instrument and articulated to the participants using the descriptive questioning technique. Each of those 12 dilemmas with their respective descriptive questions and leadership construct validity references are as follows:

> **1. *Centralized vs. Decentralized Decision-making:* *Is it better to centralize and ultimately control the decision-making process rather than to decentralize and empower others to assume responsibility?* (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Burns, 1978; Dlott, 2007; Duffy, 2006; Friedman, 2005; Gardner, 1990; Goleman, 2002; Handy, 1995; Hersey Blanchard,1988; Klimek, Rizenhiem, & Sullivan, 2008; Morgan, 1997; Peters & Waterman, 1984; Reavis & Polka, 2006)

> **2. *Personal Life vs. Professional Life:* *Is the personal cost too high in terms of the dilemma of dealing with one's own family issues while trying to meet the time and stress demands of leadership?* (Bennis, 1989; Cashamn, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Fullan, 2001; Goleman, 2002; Handy, 1996; Houston & Sokolow, 2006; Litchka, Fenzel, & Polka, 2009; Polka & Litchka, 2008; Polka, Litchka, & Davis, 2008; Sharma, 1998)

> **3. *Truth vs. Varnished Truth:* *Is it sometimes better and more humane to tell a half-truth rather than the whole truth to protect faculty interests and school building leadership as well as the school district one represents?* (Collins, 2001; Erikson, 1970; Goleman, 2002; Giulianni, 2002; Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Loth, 1929; Marcu, 1939; Maxwell, 2003; Nyberg,1992; Sonneberg, 1993)

> **4. *Creativity vs. Discipline of Thought:* *Is it possible to provide greater latitude of freedom for some school building leaders and still maintain structure for others who need it within a climate of collegiality?* (Axelrod, 2004; Bennis, 1989; Collins, 2001;

Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2008; Handy, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Peters & Austin, 1985)

**5.** *Trust vs. Change: Does implementing even the smallest change result in suspicion of your motives as a leader?* (Axelrod, 2008; Block, 1987; Conner, 1993; Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Duck, 2001; Fullan, 2003, 2008; Iacocca, 1984; Goodwin Kearns, 2005)

**6.** *Leadership vs. Management: Is it critical to understand the difference between leadership and management and be able to put into practice one or the other when necessary?* (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Calzi, 1974; DePree, 1989; Drucker, 1974; Fayol, 1949; Gardner,1990; Greenleaf, 1977; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Marzano, 2003; Senge, 1990; Snow, 1951)

**7.** *Long-term goals vs. Short-term results: Is it critical for superintendent job security to focus on short-term improvements in areas like student achievement test scores rather than implementing comprehensive quality student-centered programs?* (Blanchard & Waghorn,1997; Collins, 2001; Duck, 2001; Kaufman, Herman, & Watters, 2002; Klimek, Ritzenhein, & Sullivan, 2008; Schlechty, 2001)

**8.** *Motivation vs. Manipulation: As superintendent are you authentically motivating your teams to accomplish district goals rather than manipulating people to get the results you deem most appropriate for your own survival?* (Chance, 2009; Drucker, 1974; Fullan,  2008; Greene, 1998; Goodwin Kearns, 2005; Krass, 1998; McGregor, 1966, 1996; Maslow, 1970).

**9.** *Independence vs. Dependence: Do you readily, and too often, accept the role of district problem-solver and decision-maker rather than facilitate others to solve their own problems so as to foster more dependence on you as the district decider?* (Hall & Hord, 2006; Hoy & Tarter, 2008; Reavis & Polka, 2006; Tichy & Bennis, 2007)

**10.** *Conflict vs. Consensus: Is it best for the superintendent to promote consensus decision-making on the part of district teams rather than to create dynamic tension that results in conflict but more meaningful problem resolutions?* (Bennis, 1989; Burns,  1978; Goleman, 2002; Goodwin Kearns, 2005; Morgan, 1997)

**11.** *Commitment vs. Compliance: Is it possible to achieve commitment during times of change that foster compliance given the bureaucratic nature and hierarchical chain of command of contemporary school systems?* (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Duffy, 2006; Goleman, 2002; Hall & Hord, 2006; Norton, 2005; Tichy & Bennis, 2007)

**12.** *Problems vs. Predicaments: Is the public we serve able to understand that several contemporary educational problems are really systemic predicaments that are more universal in nature than easily solved at the local level?* (Duffy, 2006; Handy, 1994;  Hoy & Miskel, 2007; Norton, 2005; Schlechty, 2001)

Therefore, the *Calzi-Polka Dilemma Survey* (Part C) of this research instrument provided the respondent with opportunities to reflect about the frequency with which they each confronted various leadership dilemmas. The researchers employed the same 10 point Likert-type scale used in Part B of the instrument for consistency.

In addition, *Opportunity to Reflect About Top the Three or More Dilemmas*, Part D of the survey instrument provided superintendents with the opportunity to reflect and comment about three or more dilemmas that caused them the most stress during their respective experiences as a superintendent of schools. Therefore, the *Living on the Horns of Dilemmas: A National Study of Superintendent Decision-making and Problem-solving* survey instrument is a comprehensive research tool that is designed to provide acute insight about the contemporary American school superintendency and "living on the horns of dilemmas."

## FINDINGS

### Part A: Demographics of the Sample

Once the quantitative data were collected and tabulated, the researchers concluded that this sample was a fairly representative sample of contemporary superintendents. For example:

- 64% of this superintendent sample were male, and 36% were female.
- 98.1% of the sample had over 11 years of total experience in education, whereas, 77.4% had over 25 years of experience, and 54.1% had over 32 years.
- Most of the superintendents in this sample had between 11 and 31 years of administrative experiences (72.9%), and 9.7% of the sample had over 32 or more years of administrative experiences.
- Most of the superintendents (88.8%) had 10 or fewer years in their current position, whereas, 11.2% had 11 to 24 years of experience in their current position.
- Most of the superintendents held only this current Superintendency (65.1%) whereas, 21.3% had one other Superintendency besides their current one, and 7.4% had two other superintendencies while only 6.1% of the sample identified that they had experienced three or more other superintendencies.
- Almost half of the sample consisted of rural superintendents (48.4%), whereas a similar percentage (45.7%) consisted of suburban superintendents. Only 15 superintendents or 5.8 % of the sample responding were urban superintendents.
- Most of the superintendents (62.6%) worked in school districts with a student population of 3000 or fewer with 26.8% of them serving in school districts with 1000 or fewer students, and 31.9% worked in school districts with a student population of 3001-10,000 students, whereas, only 5.5% of this sample were superintendents of school districts with a student population over 10,000 students.
- Most of the superintendents (81.7%) worked in districts with 25 or fewer administrators including the superintendent, and almost half of the sample (49.4%) reported that they worked in districts with 10 or fewer administrators including themselves.
- Most of the sample (87.6%) reported that there were 10 or fewer schools in their district, whereas, about half of the sample (48.5%) reported that there were three or fewer schools in their respective district, and 12.4% of the sample had more than 10 schools in their district.
- 53 superintendents or 20.9% of the sample had one or more of the schools in their districts on the NCLB "Needs Improvement" list.

Therefore, this sample was fairly representative of the general population of school superintendents in contemporary America (Pennsylvania School Board Association, 2010). The proportion of females to males was slightly higher but the experience factors were very similar in terms of their total years of educational experiences, administrative experiences, number of years in their current position and number of superintendencies held during their career. Their school district demographics are similar to other national trends in that the typical school district is more rural or suburban than urban with student populations of fewer than 3000 students and consists of limited number of schools and few other administrators. Although about 20% of school districts were classified as having schools in "need of improvement" according to the NCLB factors, the accountability concern promulgated by that legislation is a prominent factor for school superintendents.

**Findings of Part B of the Survey Instrument (Polka-Denig PS/DM Survey)**

The researchers applied SPSS statistical treatments to the Part B data of this survey instrument and identified various levels of significance and correlation between and among the data. The following Tables 1 and 2 reflect the results of those findings:

**Table 1.** Rank Order of Category Mean Scores of Part B (Polka-Denig PS/DM Survey).

| Rank Order | Category | Mean Score | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Incremental | 29.29 | 14.83 |
| 2 | Classical | 29.27 | 14.95 |
| 3 | Shared Decision-making | 27.11 | 13.70 |
| 4 | Mixed Scanning | 26.49 | 12.77 |
| 5 | Satisficing | 24.86 | 12.65 |
| 6 | Garbage Can | 23.37 | 12.91 |
| 7 | Political | 21.75 | 11.16 |

The above mean scores represent the aggregate mean score of the five items in each of the seven categories of decision-making and problem-solving. A series of independent-sample t-tests, with gender as the independent variable and the frequency of use of the decision-making and problem-solving approach as the dependent variable revealed no statistical difference between the genders.

An ANOVA, with years in education as the independent variable and the frequency of use of the decision-making and problem-solving approach as the dependent variable, also revealed no significant differences by years of educational experience. However, an ANOVA (see Table 2), with years in administration, school district setting, school district student population, and number of administrators in the district as the independent variables and the frequency of use of the decision-making and problem-solving approaches as the dependent variable revealed several significant findings.

**Table 2.** ANOVA Results for Administrative Experience, School-district Setting, Student Population of the District, and Number of Administrators in the District.

| Independent Variable Category | Administrative Experience | | School District Setting | | Student Population | | Number of Administrators | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | p | F | p | F | p | F | p |
| Classical | 2.237 | .011 | 10.358 | <.001 | 10.219 | <.001 | 10.865 | <.001 |
| Shared Decision-Making | 3.066 | .011 | 9.249 | <.001 | 8.838 | <.001 | 10.259 | <.001 |
| Mixed Scanning | 2.810 | .017 | 9.784 | <.001 | 9.291 | <.001 | 10.057 | <.001 |
| Satisficing | 2.837 | .016 | 9.226 | <.001 | 8.990 | <.001 | 10.268 | <.001 |
| Garbage Can | | n. s. | 9.536 | <.001 | 7.958 | <.001 | 9.062 | <.001 |
| Political | 3.718 | <.001 | 12.029 | <.001 | 10.357 | <.001 | 11.535 | <.001 |
| Incremental | 2.495 | .032 | 9.267 | <.001 | 9.158 | <.001 | 10.857 | <.001 |

Where a significant difference was detected, a Scheffe post-hoc analysis was conducted. Surprisingly, even though the ANOVA indicated that for all of the approaches except Satisficing and Political, the Scheffe failed to determine where those differences were. For Satisficing, the difference (p = .049) was between those with 11–17 years (m = 28.27) of experience and those with more than 32 years (m = 18.30) of experience. For Political, the difference (p = .034) was between those with 11–17 years (m = 25.35) of experience and those with more than 32 years (m = 20.19) of experience.

There were no significant differences in this sample based on years in current position. There also were no significant differences in the decision-making and problem-solving approaches employed by this sample based on the number of superintendencies held. However, there were significant differences in each of the decision-making and problem-solving approaches based on the school district setting (see Table 2). According to the post hoc Scheffe test, rural superintendents differed significantly (p < .001 in their application of each of the seven decision-making approaches from their suburban counterparts. Rural superintendents in this sample used more of each approach more frequently than suburban superintendents. There were no differences between the rural and urban superintendents nor between the suburban and urban superintendents.

There were, in addition, significant differences in this sample's approach to problem-solving and decision-making based on the student population of the school district (see Table 2). The Scheffe post-hoc test revealed that those superintendents of school districts with 1,000 or fewer students employed each of the seven approaches more frequently than did their counterparts in school districts with 3,001–6,000 students. In addition, there were significant differences between school districts with a student population of 1,001-3,000 and those districts with a student population of 3,001–6,000 in terms of each of the seven approaches at least at the Scheffe post-hoc level of .025 or less. Superintendents in those districts with a student population of between 1001–3000 employed a greater variety of decision-making and problem-solving approaches more frequently than did their colleagues in schools with larger student populations. These significant differences further reinforced that superintendents with smaller school student populations were more inclined to implement a variety of different

problem-solving and decision-making approaches than their colleagues in school districts with larger student populations.

Disaggregating the data by the number of administrators in the district (see Table 2) revealed data patterns similar to those previously described regarding school district student population. There were significant differences between superintendents who worked in school districts with ten or less administrators, including themselves, and those who worked in larger school districts in each of the seven categories of decision-making and problem-solving. Superintendents in the districts with ten or less administrators employed a greater variety of decision-making and problem-solving approaches more frequently than did their colleagues in school districts with eleven or more administrators. This was significant according to the Scheffe post-hoc test at least at the .019 level or lower. This was consistent with the patterns analyzed previously regarding school district population and rural school districts. Superintendents in schools with small student populations and fewer administrators employed a greater variety of decision-making and problem-solving approaches more frequently to provide leadership in such a limited population context.

There were no significant differences identified in terms of the number of schools in the district and the number of schools on the federal No Child Left Behind "Needs Improvement List."

**Findings for Part C of the Survey Instrument (Calzi-Polka Dilemmas Survey)**

The researchers reviewed the data collected in Part C of the survey (Calzi-Polka Dilemmas Survey) and the findings are reported in Table 3 that specifically identifies this sample's rank listing hierarchy of dilemmas and corresponding mean scores.

**Table 3.** Ranking of Dilemmas by Mean Score.

| RANK | DILEMMA | Mean Score | Standard Deviation |
|------|---------|------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Leadership vs. Management | 8.48 | 1.445 |
| 2 | Motivation vs. Manipulation | 7.68 | 2.158 |
| 3 | Creativity vs. Discipline of Thought | 7.24 | 1.600 |
| 4 | Conflict vs. Consensus | 6.77 | 1.858 |
| 5 | Commitment vs. Compliance | 6.70 | 1.465 |
| 6 | Personal Life vs. Professional Life | 5.79 | 1.974 |
| 7 | Independence vs. Dependence | 5.53 | 1.790 |
| 8 | Long-term Goals vs. Short-term Results | 5.11 | 1.878 |
| 9 | Centralized vs. Decentralized Decision-making | 4.97 | 1.765 |
| 10 | Trust vs. Change | 4.96 | 2.084 |
| 11 | Problems vs. Predicaments | 4.91 | 1.805 |
| 12 | Truth vs. Varnished Truth | 3.36 | 1.894 |

Therefore, this sample of Mid-Atlantic School Superintendents identified that most frequent decision-making and problem-solving dilemmas they faced related to the issue of leadership versus management (m = 8.48). Specifically, it is critical for superintendents to understand the difference between leadership and management and be able to put into practice one or the other when necessary. The second most frequent dilemma related to motivation versus manipulation (m = 7.68). Specifically, it is very important for superintendents to realize the significance of authentically motivating teams to accomplish district goals rather

than be perceived as manipulating people to get the results deemed most appropriate for personal survival. The third most frequent dilemma (m = 7.24) that this sample faced related to creativity versus discipline of thought and balancing the freedom for some school building leaders to make their own decisions while still maintaining structure for others who need it within a climate of collegiality. The fourth most frequent dilemma (m = 6.77) faced by this sample related to the superintendent promoting consensus decision-making on the part of district teams rather than creating dynamic tension that resulted in conflict but more meaningful problem resolutions. Superintendents need to determine when it is best to promote consensus and when it is best to create dynamic tensions. The fifth most frequently faced dilemma, according to this sample, related to commitment versus compliance (m = 6.70) and trying to achieve commitment during times of change that fostered compliance given the bureaucratic nature and hierarchical chain of command of contemporary school systems. The sixth most frequently faced dilemma confronting this sample was personal life versus professional life (m = 5.79) and resolving the personal costs of dealing with one's own family issues while trying to meet the time and stress demands of leadership.

This sample also identified that as superintendents they dealt less frequently with dilemma issues dealing with independence versus dependence (m = 5.53) or accepting the role of district problem-solver and decision-maker rather than facilitating others to solve their own problems so as to foster more dependence on the superintendent as the district decider. They also dealt less frequently with issues related to the dilemma of long-term goals versus short-term results (m = 5.11) or focusing on short-term improvements in areas like student achievement test scores rather than implementing comprehensive quality student-centered programs. The superintendents of this sample also identified that they dealt less frequently with the dilemma relating to centralized versus decentralized decision-making (m = 4.97) or issues of centralizing and ultimately controlling decision-making processes rather than decentralizing and empowering others to assume responsibility than they do on any of the above cited dilemmas.

One of the least frequent dilemmas faced by this sample was trust versus change (m = 4.96), or implementing even the smallest change may result in suspicion of your motives as a leader. Another least frequently faced dilemma of this sample related to problems versus predicaments (m = 4.91) or does the public understand that several contemporary educational problems are really systemic predicaments that are more universal in nature than easily solved at the local level? The dilemma identified as least frequently faced by this superintendent sample of the 12 listed was truth versus varnished truth (m = 3.36) or is it sometimes better and more humane to tell a half-truth rather than the whole truth to protect faculty interests and school building leadership as well as well as the school district one represents.

Therefore, according to this sample, there existed a hierarchy of dilemma frequency for these superintendents. Those most frequently faced dilemmas related to school management issues such as: leadership versus management; motivation versus manipulation; creativity versus discipline of thought; conflict versus consensus decision-making; and commitment versus compliance. These issues were often the basis of educational leadership programs and most of the superintendents were prepared to deal with these dilemmas from a cognitive, rational, and academic perspective. However, the dilemmas ranked lower in frequency by this sample may be those that impacted them more personally than professionally as they provided leadership to their school districts such as: personal life versus professional life; independence versus dependence; centralized versus decentralized decision-making; trust versus change; problems versus predicaments; and truth versus varnished truth. The researchers also applied SPSS statistical treatments to the Part C data of this survey instrument and identified various levels of significance and correlation between and among the data as identified in Tables 4 and 5:

**Table 4.** ANOVA Results for Educational Experience, Administrative Experience, and Number of Superintendencies.

| Dilemmas | Years of Total Educational Experience | | Years of Administrative Experience | | Number of Superintendencies Held | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | p | F | p | F | p |
| Centralized vs. Decentralized | | n.s. | | n.s | | n.s |
| Personal Life vs. Professional Life | | n.s. | | n.s | | n.s |
| Truth vs. Varnished Truth | | n.s. | | n.s | 2.452 | .034 |
| Creativity vs. Discipline of Thought | | n.s. | | n.s | 2.441 | .047 |
| Trust vs. Change | 3.109 | .010 | | n.s | | n.s |
| Leadership vs. Management | | n.s. | | n.s | | n.s |
| Long-term goals vs. Short-term results | | n.s. | | n.s | | n.s |
| Motivation vs. Manipulation | 3.571 | .004 | 3.324 | .006 | 2.499 | .043 |
| Independence vs. Dependence | 2.593 | .026 | | n.s | | n.s |
| Conflict vs. Consensus | | n.s. | | n.s | | n.s |
| Commitment vs. Compliance | | n.s. | | n.s | | n.s |
| Problems vs. Predicaments | 4.770 | .000 | 4.634 | $p<.001$ | | n.s |

**Table 5.** ANOVA Results for School District Setting, Student Population, Number of Administrators in District and Number of Schools in District.

| Dilemmas | School District Setting | | School District Student Population | | Number of Administrators in District | | Number of Schools in District | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | p | F | p | F | p | F | p |
| Centralized vs. Decentralized | | n.s | 2.445 | .035 | | n.s | | n.s |
| Personal Life vs. Professional Life | | n.s | | n.s | | n.s | 2.364 | .031 |
| Truth vs. Varnished Truth | | n.s | 2.446 | .035 | 2.499 | .043 | | n.s |
| Creativity vs. Discipline of Thought | | n.s | | n.s | 2.441 | .047 | | n.s |
| Trust vs. Change | | n.s | 3.736 | .003 | | n.s | | n.s |
| Leadership vs. Management | 3.498 | .032 | | n.s | | n.s | 3.634 | .007 |
| Long-term goals vs. Short-term results | | n.s | | n.s | | n.s | | n.s |
| Motivation vs. Manipulation | 5.363 | .005 | | n.s | 2.499 | .043 | | n.s |
| Independence vs. Dependence | | n.s | | n.s | | n.s | | n.s |
| Conflict vs. Consensus | | n.s | | n.s | | n.s | | n.s |
| Commitment vs. Compliance | 3.441 | .034 | | n.s | | n.s | | n.s |
| Problems vs. Predicaments | | n.s | | n.s | | n.s | | n.s |

Further analysis, applying both independent-samples t-test where applicable (Gender) and Scheffe post-hoc tests, identified significance at the .034 level or less between the variables and, subsequently, resulted in the following findings:

- An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the twelve dilemmas among female and male superintendents. There was a significant difference in encountering the *Motivation vs. Manipulation* dilemma; $t(255) = 2.46$, $p = .001$. Female superintendents in this sample more frequently encountered the *Motivation vs. Manipulation* dilemma than their male colleagues. The mean responses were 8.14 and 7.47 for female and male superintendents, respectively.
- Superintendents with 32+ years of administrative experience (M = 4.93) more frequently experienced the *Problems vs. Predicaments* dilemma more than superintendents with 4–10 years of administrative experience (M = 4.0). The effect of administrative experience was significant on the specified dilemma, $F(5, 250) = 4.634$, $p = < .001$).
- There was a significant relationship found between school district setting and *Leadership vs. Management* $F(2, 254) = 3.498$, $p = .032$ among rural (M = 8.52), suburban (M= 8.56) and urban (M = 7.53) school district settings. A significant relationship was also shown between school district setting and *Motivation vs. Manipulation*, $F(2, 254) = 5.363$, $p = .005$, among rural (M = 7.77), suburban (M = 7.86) and urban (M = 6.00) school district settings. Superintendents in a rural or suburban school district setting more frequently faced the dilemmas of *Leadership vs. Management* and *Motivation vs. Manipulation* than their colleagues in urban school district settings. In addition, superintendents within a rural school district setting (M = 6.84) were more likely to experience the *Commitment vs. Compliance* dilemma than their urban counterparts (M= 5.80), $F(2, 247) = 3.441$, $p = .034$.
- There were significant differences between school districts with a student population of 1,000 or fewer (M = 5.64) and those districts with a student population of between 6,001-10,000 (M = 3.53). A one-way ANOVA found a significant relationship between school district population and *Trust vs. Change*, $F(5, 251) = 3.736$, $p = .003$). Superintendents in districts with a student population of 1,000 or fewer more frequently encountered the *Trust vs. Change* dilemma than their colleagues in school districts with larger student populations.

**Findings for Part D of the Research Study (Opportunity to Reflect)**

In addition, researchers applied SPSS statistical treatments to the Part D data of this survey instrument and identified various levels of significance and correlation between and among the data. Table 6 reflects the results of those findings and provides a comparison between the rankings of dilemmas according to this sample's frequency of experience with the dilemma versus this sample's perspective of the degree of stress that each of those dilemmas caused them. It is interesting to reflect about the differences in those rankings and the significance to practicing superintendents, aspiring superintendents and those who prepare them at universities and in state organizations.

**Table 6.** Ranking of Dilemmas According to Part C and Part D Responses.

| Dilemma | Part C Ranking | Part C Raw Score | Part D Ranking | Part D Raw Score | Ranking Difference Between Part C and D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Centralized vs. Decentralized | 9 | 258 | 9 | 213 | 0 |
| Personal Life vs. Professional Life | 6 | 516 | 1 | 426 | 5 |
| Truth vs. Varnished Truth | 12 | 774 | 7 | 639 | 5 |
| Creativity vs. Discipline of Thought | 3 | 1032 | 11 | 852 | 8 |
| Trust vs. Change | 10 | 1290 | 3 | 1065 | 7 |
| Leadership vs. Management | 1 | 1548 | 2 | 1276 | 1 |
| Long-term goals vs. Short-term results | 8 | 1806 | 5 | 1491 | 3 |
| Motivation vs. Manipulation | 2 | 2064 | 8 | 1704 | 6 |
| Independence vs. Dependence | 7 | 2322 | 6 | 1917 | 1 |
| Conflict vs. Consensus | 4 | 2580 | 9 | 2130 | 5 |
| Commitment vs. Compliance | 5 | 2838 | 12 | 2343 | 7 |
| Problems vs. Predicaments | 11 | 3096 | 4 | 2556 | 7 |

*Raw scores were based on a reverse scoring method whereby those ranked 1 received 12 points, those ranked 2 received 11 points, those ranked 3 received 10 points and so on to those ranked twelve received 1 point; then the score was multiplied by either 258 (N for Part C) or 211 (N for Part D).

The researchers then applied Spearman's rho procedures to the raw scores and found a significant difference ($p < .01$) between the two rankings. Subsequently, it was determined that the superintendents of this sample did not rank their frequency of experiences with the personal versus professional dilemma very high but the stress impact upon them personally was the highest of all of the dilemmas. Leadership versus management was still a highly ranked dilemma in both frequency and stressful impact but trust versus change had more of a stressful impact than other dilemmas although it was less frequently experienced by this

sample. The dilemma of problems versus predicaments was one of the least experienced dilemmas but according to the superintendents of this sample it was one that caused them more stress than most of those more frequently experienced dilemmas. The sample respondents identified that although they confronted the dilemmas of: creativity versus discipline of thought; commitment versus compliance; and motivation versus manipulation; frequently in their leadership roles, those dilemmas did not cause them as much personal stress as some of the other less frequently experienced dilemmas. These issues may not often be addressed in educational leadership programs, but they need to be as most of these superintendents dealt with them, and they do cause leadership stress.

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 258 superintendents of this sample from Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania provided valuable insight into the decision-making and problem-solving approaches that they used in leading their respective school districts as well as the dilemmas that they frequently confronted and those dilemmas that caused them the most stress. This sample identified the significance of the Hoy and Tarter (2008) decision-making and problem-solving approaches for educational leaders. Specifically, the incremental and classical approaches were those approaches most frequently used by superintendents to make decisions and solve problems related to school administration. However, the shared decision-making model and mixed scanning were also approaches frequently used by superintendents to resolve issues in their respective districts. The satisficing approach and the garbage can approach were both employed by superintendents but not to the same level of frequency as the incremental, classical, shared decision-making, and mixed scanning. Most superintendents also employed the political approach to make decisions and solve problems but not to the degree of frequency as the other six approaches. There were significant differences in the approaches used based on administrative experiences, school district setting, and student population. Generally, the smaller the school district in terms of student population, the more rural the school district and the fewer the number of other administrators in the district, the more frequently, the superintendent employed more of the seven categories of decision-making and problem-solving to resolve issues in the district. The context of the school district influenced the decision-making approaches more than the background and experiences of the superintendent according to the findings of this sample.

The superintendents of this sample also reported that they were faced with the 12 dilemmas as articulated in educational leadership and literature of the past 90 years. However, the frequency of facing those dilemmas occurred in hierarchal fashion with leadership versus management, motivation versus manipulation, creativity versus discipline of thought, conflict versus consensus and commitment versus compliance as the top five dilemmas with a mean score of at least 6.7 out of a possible score of 10. However, when asked to identify those dilemmas that caused them the most stress, the sample superintendents identified that personal life versus professional life was the most stressful dilemma, followed by leadership versus management, trust versus change, and problems versus predicaments. However, there were significant differences between female superintendents and male superintendents in terms of the motivation versus manipulation dilemma as females faced this dilemma significantly more than did their male counterparts. In addition, superintendents with the most years of experience faced the problems versus predicaments dilemma more frequently, perhaps, because of their interest in addressing this dilemma more than their less experienced colleagues. There were also significant differences between based on school setting with rural

and suburban superintendents facing more issues related to leadership versus management and motivation versus manipulation than their urban colleagues. Also, rural superintendents were more likely to experience the commitment versus compliance dilemma more than their urban counterparts. Superintendents in districts with fewer than 1,000 students faced the trust versus change dilemma more frequently than did their colleagues in school districts with larger student populations. The context of the school district was a factor in the frequency of dilemmas facing their respective school leaders. Subsequently, superintendents and those aspiring to the position need to be aware of these twelve dilemmas and be prepared to deal with them both professionally and personally.

Thus, this regional study ascertained the extent and intensity of various issues (dilemmas) confronting contemporary school superintendents and analyzed the decision-making and problem-solving approaches used by them. The quantitative component (survey instrument) identified correlations between some of the demographic data (independent variables) and the responses (dependent variables) and determined patterns of data relationships. The conclusions and recommendations are presented to assist professors of educational leadership, school superintendents and those aspiring to be superintendents about decision-making, problem-solving, and dilemma resolutions.

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# The Administration of Special Education Programs in Rural Schools: The Roles and Responsibilities of Educational Administrators

Michael K. Redburn
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Superintendents and principals are responsible to ensure the learning of all students within school districts and schools including meeting the educational requirements of special needs students (Hansen, 2007; Patterson, 2001). Such responsibility requires administrators to be knowledgeable in effective instructional practices which facilitate the achievement of a diverse student population. Patterson, Bowling, and Marshall (2000) identified special education program implementation challenges, such as appropriate Individual Education Plan (IEP) committee compositions, inconsistent service delivery decisions across schools, interschool isolation, deflection of advocates, and policy guidance problems. Both Osborne (1993) and DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2006) described effective management practices for special education programs. Yet, such research on the administrator's role in the administration of special education programs focuses on generic practices in urban contexts more extensively than the role in rural settings (Lamkin, 2006; Wilson, 1982). Wilson (1982) found a paucity of resource material specifically for rural principals. While Hesbol (2005) confirmed the consistent role conflict that is inherent in dual role positions as found in superintendent/principalships, Lochry (1998) found that multi-role rural school administrators saw themselves predominantly involved in overlapping district and site duties and responsibilities. Lamkin (2006) reported the challenges to rural superintendents in five areas: school law, finance, personnel, government mandates, and district/board policy. Dunlop (2006) found that small school superintendents participated in a wide range of responsibilities that, in larger districts, were handled by specialized personnel.

Finally, other research has focused on the need for increased preparation of school administrators specifically in the area of providing full educational access to special needs students (Caddell, 2007; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Rodriquez, 2007). Caddell (2007) called for more training for principals in the administration of Section 504, whereas Rodriquez (2007) and Lasky and Karge (2006) noted the need for increased training in pre-service administrative programs in the area of special education. However, beyond these studies and the many references in the research literature to the lack of qualified teachers, especially special education teachers (Hutchinson-Page, 2004; Hodge, 2007; United States Department of Labor, 2010), little is written about the administration of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in America's rural or small schools. An early exception was found in Helge's (1981) report, *The State of the Art of Rural Special Education.* She noted, "Little data collection occurred concerning rural education or rural special education until the late 1970s" (p. 9). This status report was limited to reporting statistics on numbers of special needs students and teachers and the need for greater teacher training and did not look at the administrative functions of rural school special education programs nor the circumstances and

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needs of the administrators who administered them. A more recent contribution to the state of rural special education administration came from Bays (2001). He asserted that in rural school districts, the supervision of instruction in special education classrooms was assigned to principals who balanced competing priorities such as management and supervision, monitoring for legal compliance and supervision of instruction for students with disabilities, and evaluation of teachers and supervision of instruction. Bays (2001) suggested that this may be placing compliance and management aspects of IDEA over actual instructional support.

The dearth of research about the role of rural school administrators and the administration of special education programs limits the understanding about how special education programs are administered in rural and often isolated schools in states such as Montana, Wyoming and Alaska. Concurrently, we know little about who does the specific tasks necessary in administering effective special education programs in rural schools. This study was designed to establish a descriptive understanding about the tasks associated with leadership in small rural school districts. From the preliminary descriptive data gathered in this study, we were able to contribute to baseline information necessary to improve rural education leadership and leadership preparation.

## METHODOLOGY

The participants in this study included 30 small school district superintendents, superintendent/principals, and principals whose districts were members of the Montana Rural Education Association (MREA). The superintendents of the 150 MREA member districts received a request to complete the special education functions survey. They were further asked to forward the survey request to the principals in their districts. Of the 30 respondents completing surveys, 19 were superintendents, three were superintendent/principals, and eight were principals. More than 70% of the respondents had more than 7 years of experience and only 7 % had less than 3 years of experience in their current position. More than half of those sampled had more than 25 years of experience as educators.

Most (73.3%) of the respondents worked in K-12 school districts, and the remaining respondents worked in K-8 school districts. The mean enrollment in the districts was 353 students with a range of 56 students to 1200 students.

This study piloted a survey created by the researchers. The 49 survey items listed in Table 1 collectively described the administrative special education functions in schools that the participants were asked to answer by indicating one of the following four forced-choice responses:

1. Not Delegated = You address this task yourself.
2. Partially Delegated to Subordinate = You substantially address this task with some delegation to a subordinate (a district employee) in your district or school.
3. Substantially Delegated to Subordinate = You delegate this task to someone else (a district employee) in your district or school.
4. Substantially Delegated Outside District = This task is fully or substantially addressed by someone (NOT a district employee) in a consortium, cooperative, or some other entity acting on the district's behalf.

**Table 1.** Special Education Administrative Functions.

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Administrative Functions

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1.  Provides professional development training for teachers to increase their effectiveness
2.  Addresses policy issues regarding the processes for student, teacher, parent involvement in determining Individual Education Plans
3.  Regularly participates in IEP meetings
4.  Participates in IEP meetings to resolve conflict or difficult issue
5.  Organizes community members to lobby for support for programs
6.  Meets with various parties (parents, teachers, staff, consultants, legal counsel) to interpret legal requirements
7.  Communicates with the public concerning the nature and rationale of special education programs
8.   Participates in organizing systems for dealing with student discipline issues
9.  Exercises leadership in developing methods for integration of special education services and supports within the general curriculum
10. Plays key role in selecting and assigning Special Education teachers
11. Establishes communication lines with school principals and other district administrators
12. Encourages special education teachers to develop innovative teaching methods
13. Monitors disciplinary actions involving students with disabilities to ensure due process is followed
14. Develops standards, objectives and procedures to establish and maintain a continuum of appropriate special education services
15. Seeks to know the parents and interpret special education programs to them
16. Provides supervision for related service providers (such as school psychologists and speech pathologists) in most cases
17. Provides work space for related service providers
18. Participates in arranging transportation for students with disabilities
19. Provides training for ALL teachers and other instructional staff members regarding special education programs and policies
20. Budgets and identifies funding sources providing resources for special education programs
21. Writes grants to establish and conduct various special education programs
22. Determines, communicates and maintains standards to insure the inclusion of all students in student activities including curricular and extra curricular
23. Coordinates programs with various agencies facilitating individual post-school transition
24. Ensures budget monies are received and appropriately disbursed
25. Recruits for staff positions
26. Plans, develops and establishes methods to ensure the identification of all children with special needs
27. Communicates with school nurses, health officials, IEP teams where appropriate, and parents so that student special health needs are recognized and met
28. Determines methods of assessment for students with disabilities (such as district and state assessments)
29. Develops strategies to implement activities, priorities and programs required by local, state, and federal mandates
30. Maintains accessibility to students, parents, teachers, and other groups interested in school activities
31. Helps staff members and special education teachers set professional goals
32. Seeks resource alternatives within and outside the district to meet the special needs of students
33. Provides feedback to teachers concerning their performance
34. Deals with conflicts that arise among teacher/parent/support staff relationships
35. Implements and refines methods for student performance assessment
36. Monitors special education teachers to determine the extent to which curriculum goals and objectives are being met.
37. Schedules work hours of support staff

**Table 1 (continued).** Special Education Administrative Functions.

| Administrative Functions |
| --- |

38. Encourages and secures parent involvement in individual education planning activities
39. Coordinates with the district to procure equipment, services, and transportation to meet the needs of students
40. Confers with principals and other district administrators to coordinate educational programs within the schools
41. Establishes procedures to use paraeducators and to evaluate them
42. Keeps informed about new techniques and how they might affect various program elements and encourage appropriate educational effort especially in areas of innovative and promising new practices
43. Disseminates information to various community groups upon request
44. Requests and follows up on requests for maintenance, repair, equipment, and manpower
45. Plans, develops, and implements procedures that promote the use of assistive technology
46. Reviews use of instructional materials in special education classrooms
47. Evaluates curriculum in terms of objectives set by IEP Committee
48. Works with the community to develop improved student transition programs
49. Defends the budget needs to Board of Education and other district offices

Additionally, the survey contained 10 demographic questions asking respondents about their experiences as an educator and as an administrator as well as questions about the context of their school and district.

     The instrument was conceptually developed based on the survey used by Smith and Andrews (1989) in their seminal work in inventorying the instructional leadership tasks of principals. The researchers developed the items based upon informal observations of special education administration found in the small school districts throughout Montana. The demographic items and the 49 special education functions contained in the survey were field tested for validity in two phases. First, the survey was given to three special education specialists, including a state Office of Public Instruction specialist, a special education cooperative director, and a district level special education director. Each of these specialists provided expert validity to the 49 items, made suggestions for item revisions for greater clarity, and suggested how the survey's item response scale might be worded to reflect current practice in the field. Second, a revised survey was administered to seven small school superintendents and superintendent/ principals. In addition to responding to each item on the survey, these administrators provided comments on items regarding appropriateness and/or clarity. Subsequent to this field test, demographic items and the response scale were revised to achieve a high level of exclusivity between each category. Both the specialists and field test administrators confirmed the appropriateness of including each of the 49 special education functions used in the survey. Reliability data were not established prior to the survey's administration. As such, the reliability that was found appears in the results section of this chapter.

     The survey was distributed using a web-based survey system, Survey Monkey, to 150 administrators working in districts that are members of the Montana Rural Education Association. An e-mail was sent to each potential respondent with a request to complete the survey with a link to the survey. Additionally, the Executive Director of the Montana Rural Education Association emailed the organization's membership to facilitate responses. A reminder e-mail was sent approximately six weeks following the initial e-mail request. This resulted in 30 respondents to the survey.

The descriptive statistics derived from the survey data were analyzed to identify trends, commonalities, and discrepancies among the respondents' answers. The researchers critically analyzed the data to discern, specifically, which special education administrative functions were least often (low rates of partial and substantial delegation) and most often (high rates of substantial delegation) delegated, which functions were most often shared with subordinates (partial delegation), and whether there was commonality among the type of functions that fell within any of these categories. To accomplish the analysis, the survey items were grouped into one of five function type categories based on their primary focus: (1) student focused, (2) teacher focused, (3) instructional related, (4) general support, and (5) legal and policy related functions. These function type categories were developed based on themes emerging from the literature review. A factor analysis was not performed due to the low number of responses.

The percentages under each response for all items were analyzed to identify which functions fell into one or more of the following data analysis categories:

1. Not Delegated—For this category, response data were analyzed for inclusion into two sub-groups. The first group included the functions that were not delegated by 50% or more of the respondents. The second group that was identified included the functions that were not delegated by 70% or more of the respondents.
2. Partially Delegated –Included in this group were the functions that were partially delegated by 40% to 60% of the respondents.
3. Substantially Delegated In and Out—This category combined the survey items that were delegated to subordinates inside the district or delegated to entities outside of the district by 30% or more of the respondents.

For data analysis purposes, the Not Delegated and Partially Delegated response data were combined, as were the response data for Substantially Delegated In and Substantially Delegated Out, creating two general levels of delegation. The function types and data analysis categories were used as lenses through which to view the survey responses for identifying trends, commonalities, and discrepancies among the respondents' answers and to facilitate the discussion of the results.

**RESULTS**

The internal consistency reliability for the survey used was found to be .97 using Chronbach's alpha. The special education administrative functions that were delegated the least by the rural school superintendents and principals in this study were functions that could be described as general support and traditional personnel administrative functions. When cross-referenced with Table 1, Table 2 showed that these items included the following tasks: selection and assignment of staff members, establishing communication lines with other administrators, budgeting and funding activities, conflict resolution between and among adults inside and outside the school, and scheduling. These functions were not delegated by 70% or more of the respondents. When expanding consideration to items not delegated by at least 50% of the respondents, the same type of administrative activities emerged. The additional tasks were also common to the general administration of a school, for example by the role of establishing various procedures within a school or assisting staff members in setting professional goals. Also included in the group functions that were delegated more than half the time were tasks where the Individuals with Disabilities Act requirements mandated administrative representation. One example was participation in Individual Education Plan meetings.

**Table 2.** Percentage of Respondents Selecting Item

| Survey Items | Not Delegated | Partially Delegated | Substantially Delegated – In | Substantially Delegated – Out |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 26.7 (8) | 43.3 (13) | 20.0 (6) | 10.0 (3) |
| 2 | 30.0 (9) | 30.0 (9) | 30.0 (9) | 10.0 (3) |
| 3 | 50.0 (15) | 23.3 (7) | 26.7 (8) | 0.0 (0) |
| 4 | 66.7 (20) | 23.3 (7) | 6.7 (2) | 3.3 (1) |
| 5 | 53.3 (16) | 26.7 (8) | 13.3 (4) | 6.7 (2) |
| 6 | 63.3 (19) | 16.7 (5) | 6.7 (2) | 13.3 (4) |
| 7 | 56.7 (17) | 26.7 (8) | 13.3 (4) | 3.3 (1) |
| 8 | 50.0 (15) | 26.7 (8) | 23.3 (7) | 0.0 (0) |
| 9 | 43.3 (13) | 26.7 (8) | 26.7 (8) | 0.0 (0) |
| 10 | 80.0 (24) | 13.3 (4) | 6.7 (2) | 0.0 (0) |
| 11 | 90.0 (27) | 6.7 (2) | 3.3 (1) | 0.0 (0) |
| 12 | 50.0 (15) | 20.0 (6) | 26.7 (8) | 3.3 (1) |
| 13 | 56.7 (17) | 26.7 (8) | 16.7 (5) | 0.0 (0) |
| 14 | 30.0 (9) | 26.7 (8) | 33.3 (10) | 10.0 (3) |
| 15 | 40.0 (12) | 26.7 (8) | 30.0 (9) | 3.3 (1) |
| 16 | 13.3 (4) | 36.7 (11) | 20.0 (6) | 30.0 (9) |
| 17 | 56.7 (17) | 26.7 (8) | 13.3 (4) | 3.3 (1) |
| 18 | 53.3 (16) | 33.0 (9) | 13.3 (4) | 0.0 (0) |
| 19 | 40.0 (12) | 36.7 (11) | 16.7 (5) | 6.7 (2) |
| 20 | 73.3 (22) | 10.0 (3) | 16.& (5) | 0.0 (0) |
| 21 | 56.7 (17) | 23.3 (7) | 13.3 (4) | 3.3 (1) |
| 22 | 53.3 (16) | 36.7 (11) | 10.0 (3) | 0.0 (0) |
| 23 | 26.7 (8) | 23.3 (7) | 36.7 (11) | 3.3 (10 |
| 24 | 63.3 (19) | 16.7 (5) | 16.7 (5) | 0.0 (0) |
| 25 | 76.7 (23) | 23.3 (7) | 0.0 (0) | 0.0 (0) |
| 26 | 33.3 (10) | 23.3. (7) | 40.0 (12) | 0.0 (0) |
| 27 | 36.7 (11) | 50.0 (15) | 13.3 (4) | 0.0 (0) |
| 28 | 23.3 (7) | 23.3 (7) | 50.0 (15) | 3.3 (1) |
| 29 | 26.7 (8) | 36.7 (11) | 33.3 (10) | 0.0 (0) |
| 30 | 43.3 (13) | 50.0 (15) | 6.7 (2) | 0.0 (0) |
| 31 | 53.3 (16) | 20.0 (6) | 26.7 (8) | 0.0 (0) |
| 32 | 40.0 (12) | 40.0 (12) | 13.3 (4) | 6.7 (2) |
| 33 | 56.7 (17) | 16.7 (5) | 26.7 (8) | 0.0 (0) |
| 34 | 70.0 (21) | 23.3 (7) | 6.7 (2) | 0.0 (0) |
| 35 | 23.3 (7) | 43l3 (13) | 33.3 (10) | 0.0 (0) |
| 36 | 53.3 (16) | 20.0 (6) | 23.3 (7) | 0.0 (0) |
| 37 | 70.0 (21) | 13.3 (4) | 16.7 (5) | 0.0 (0) |
| 38 | 26.7 (8) | 36.7 (11) | 37.7 (11) | 0.0 (0) |
| 39 | 43.3 (13) | 43.3 (13) | 6.7 (2) | 6.7 (2) |
| 40 | 70.0 (21) | 23.3 (7) | 3.3 (1) | 3.3 (1) |
| 41 | 50.0 (15) | 30.0 (9) | 20.0 (6) | 0.0 (0) |
| 42 | 30.0 (9) | 60.0 (18) | 6.7 (2) | 3.3 (1) |
| 43 | 50.0 (15) | 50.0 (15) | 0.0 (0) | 0.0 (0) |
| 44 | 66.7 (20) | 30.0 (9) | 3.3 (1) | 0.0 (0) |
| 45 | 33.3 (10) | 40.0 (12) | 26.7 (8) | 0.0 (0) |
| 46 | 26.7 (8) | 40.0 (12) | 30.0 (9) | 3.3 (1) |
| 47 | 20.0 (6) | 50.0 (15) | 30.0 (9) | 0.0 (0) |
| 48 | 26.7 (8) | 46.7 (14) | 20.0 (6) | 6.7 (2) |
| 49 | 83.3 (25) | 10.0 (3) | 3.3 (1) | 0.0 (0) |

The category of functions where items were partially delegated by 40% to 60% of the respondents, combined with the items identified as Not Delegated/Partially Delegated by 70% or more of respondents, included 40 of the 49 items on the survey. All data analysis types (students, teachers, instructional, general support, legal and policy, and processes) were represented in these Not Delegated/Partially Delegated survey items. Table 3 reports the survey items associated with each function type and the percentage of items contained at the two general delegation levels. All items designated as instructionally focused were either not delegated or partially delegated.

**Table 3.** Survey Item Numbers by Function Type.

| Function Type Delegation Level | Survey Items (%)[a] |
|---|---|
| **Student** | |
| Not/Partial | 3, 4, 8, 13, 18, 27, 35, 45, 48  (75%) |
| Substantial | 23, 26, 28  (25%) |
| **Teacher** | |
| Not/Partial | 1, 10, 17, 25, 31, 33, 37 (87%) |
| Substantial | 16  (13%) |
| **Instructional** | |
| Not/Partial | 9, 12, 36, 42, 46, 47 (100%) |
| Substantial | None  (0%) |
| **General Support** | |
| Not/Partial | 5, 7, 11, 20, 21, 24, 32, 34, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 49 (93%) |
| Substantial | 14  (7%) |
| **Legal/Policy** | |
| Not/Partial | 6, 19, 22, 30  (50%) |
| Substantial | 2, 15, 29, 38  (50%) |
| **Process** | |
| Not/Partial | 8, 9, 11, 27, 41, 45  (75%) |
| Substantial | 26. 29  (25%) |

[a]Note. Indicates percent of function type items at each delegation level

Nine of the survey items were categorized as substantially delegated functions inside or outside the district and are listed in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Substantially Delegated Functions.

| Functions |
|---|
| 2. Addresses policy issues regarding the processes for student, teacher, parent involvement in determining Individual Education Plans |
| 14. Develops standards, objectives, and procedures to establish and maintain a continuum of appropriate special education services |
| 15. Seeks to know the parents and interpret special education programs to them |
| 16. Provides supervision for related service providers (such as school psychologists and speech pathologists) in most cases |
| 23. Coordinates programs with various agencies facilitating individual post-school transition |
| 26. Plans, develops and establishes methods to ensure the identification of all children with special needs |
| 28. Determines methods of assessment for students with disabilities (such as district and state assessments) |
| 29. Develops strategies to implement activities, priorities and programs required by local, state, and federal mandates |
| 38. Encourages and secures parent involvement in individual education planning activities |

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

While the sample size in this study is admittedly low (20%), preliminary conclusions can be drawn about rural Montana administrators' delegation of special education administrative functions. As reported, the least delegated functions were general support and personnel activities, which are not specific to special education, but align well with a school leader's general education tasks. While there is little surprise in this finding, it is noted that DiPaola and Walther-Thomas's research supported a broad approach by school leaders in meeting student needs. DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) observed, "Effective leaders are committed to the success of all students and collaborate with others to achieve this aim" (p. 9). It was also clear from the perspectives of the respondents that the majority of administrative functions included in the survey were being fulfilled either fully or substantially by the superintendent and principal.

Only nine of the 49 special education administrative tasks included in the survey were reported by small school principals and superintendents as being substantially delegated. Of the remaining 40 functions (82%), no item scored 100% in the not delegated column. This finding suggested a substantial level of collaboration on the part of these school administrators, which is a hallmark of effective leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). This circumstance may have practical origins as well. While the rural school administrators in this study reported that they take full or partial responsibility for 82% of the special education tasks, they may also be utilizing the experience and expertise of teachers and support staff members as support. It is reasonable to expect the superintendent or principal to ensure that each function is accomplished effectively; yet, there is no corresponding expectation that the administrator conducts all of the activities associated with the functions by him or herself. These results may be an example of administrators who "work collaboratively with others to increase their school's capacity" (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 16). The challenges facing rural school administrators are nonetheless apparent. Superintendents in smaller districts often find themselves engaged in a broad spectrum of responsibilities that are most often handled by specialized personnel in larger districts (Dunlop, 2006).

As shown in Table 4, the items that respondents substantially delegated were few in number. Conversely, with the exception of the Legal and Policy functions, 75% or more of the items included in all other function type categories were either not delegated or only partially delegated, suggesting a substantial level of involvement by the administrator in addressing the special education functions. This finding further suggested that the participating administrators were not limiting their attention to one or two narrow areas of special education administrative responsibility. Interpretation of the relatively high rate of delegation rate for the Legal and Policy items will be addressed below.

By referring again to Table 4, it is reasonable to propose that the majority of this study's respondents found it practically or procedurally necessary to delegate substantially the supervision of related service providers. For instance, few administrators had the expertise necessary to evaluate the appropriateness of services provided by a speech clinician. Additionally, it is often the case in rural areas, where the number of students requiring related services is low, that these services are provided through a special education cooperative or consortium to provide services. In these cases, it is likely that the supervision of related services professionals lies contractually with the employing agency. Similarly, since 19 of the 30 respondents were superintendents, either the principal or the teachers in these schools may have performed functions such as encouraging and ensuring parent involvement in IEP planning activities. Conversely, in the comments made by principals on the survey, they often explained their substantial delegation as being a task that fell within the purview of the superintendent. One can also speculate about the influence of the principal responses to the Legal and Policy items on the overall rate of substantial delegation (50% of the items) in this area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Although making assumptions about superintendents delegating to principals and principals deferring to superintendents may be rational, the act of doing so suggested a need for revisions to the survey. Such revisions should seek to gather more descriptive and discrete information at both the superintendent and principal levels. Further research should provide more in-depth investigation into each of these nine functions. In order to understand fully what rural administrators in Montana are and are not doing, and why they are administering their special education programs as they are, interviews and/or focus groups need to be conducted. Specific inquiry into the functions identified in survey items 2, 15, 29 and 38 will provide a greater understanding of why the respondents for these Legal and Policy items substantially delegated these functions. Additionally, such interviews or focus groups could identify the specific challenges rural administrators face in fulfilling these functions helping to understand not only what is performed and what is delegated, but also how the decisions to delegate or perform the tasks are decided. Another recommendation for research would be to survey other groups regarding what special education tasks are being addressed by small rural school district leaders from the perspective of other groups working with children that have special needs. A limitation in this study was that it relied on self-reporting from small rural schools and school districts by the leaders about the tasks they perform. Providing a 360-degree view of the phenomena would provide a clearer picture of the tasks performed.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study was an initial foray into research terrain that currently has a dearth of information—the nexus among special education administration, small rural school districts and the roles and responsibilities of small district educational leaders. Rodriquez (2007) suggested a need for increased special education training in pre-service administrative programs. Until we begin to understand what special education functions are addressed by school leaders in rural states, such as Montana, where districts that have spare populations and serve large areas of geography, we can only speculate about what students need to know. Similarly, we need to know which functions are performed by the school administrators and to what extent. We need to know why rural school administrators are delegating the functions, in order to effectively revise or design educational leadership preparation programs that adequately prepare future administrators for assuming leadership roles and provide support for those already serving in the field within these small and geographically isolated school districts. Although the conclusions are limited by the size of the sample and the reliance of self-reports, this study does provide a contribution to the literature of the field by suggesting that small rural school and school district leaders are attending to the administration of special education programs in their schools and assuring primary leadership roles with multiple responsibilities. Further studies are needed to substantiate this finding and to continue to build our understanding regarding the needs of rural school leaders in administering special education programs.

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# CRITICAL ISSUES IN PROMOTING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

# The Effective Practices and Beliefs of School Principals in High Achieving Hispanic Majority Mid-Level Schools

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Closing the achievement gap is important not just for the education system but for our economy, our social stability, and our moral health as a nation (Evans, 2005). According to the Pew Hispanic Center, as the Hispanic school-age population in the United States continues to grow and is expected to reach 28 million by 2050 (Fry & Gonzales, 2008), a 166% increase is projected from the 2006 Hispanic school-age population of 11 million. With the Hispanic population increasing at a substantial rate, state and federal accountability reforms are asserting pressure on schools to close the achievement gap of this historically low performing group of students (Kim, Zabel, Stiefel, & Schwartz, 2006).

Meeting the challenge to close the achievement gap is particularly evident in states, such as Texas, where in all but rural areas Hispanic enrollments are surpassing that of White students according to Scharrer and Lacoste-Caputo (2010). They noted that Hispanic children are slightly less than half of the pre-K through 12th grade enrollment of the 4.8 million children in Texas. The student enrollment gap grows every year and is wider in the early elementary grades where Hispanic children are now a small majority, with White children 32% of the 2010 kindergarten class enrollment. Scharrer and Lacoste-Caputo (2010) emphasized that experts argue that Texas is not "adequately or intelligently funding education in ways that can teach a growing population that's generally poorer and less proficient in English" (p. 1A).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the beliefs and effective practices of Texas school principals in high achieving majority Hispanic middle schools. In this study, middle schools are defined as schools that serve 7th and 8th grade students. In addition, Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably throughout this study. This paper is part of a larger study that explored five research questions related to the beliefs and effective practices of high achieving majority Hispanic middle schools. This chapter reports on three of those questions:

1. What beliefs do principals have that influence their practice with Hispanic students?
2. What principal actions have a direct impact on Hispanic academic achievement?
3. What strategies do principals of high achieving majority Hispanic schools use to establish a culture of success?

## LITERATURE FRAMEWORK

Suro and Passel (2003) reported that the rise of second generation Hispanics in the U.S. was the result of births and legal and illegal immigration that has already taken place and can now be stated as a demographic fact. These second generation Latinos are U.S. citizens by birth and will be educated in U.S. schools which means that they will have a different impact on the nation than their immigrant parents. Additionally, the majority of second generation Latinos are overwhelmingly young—nearly two-thirds are under the age of 18 years; therefore, the generation's ultimate educational profile, and resultant economic status, will be determined largely by the course of an educational system that is facing demands for change at almost every level. Given the number of Hispanic students coming into the United States, the future of the next generation is a matter of national interest.

The changing demands of an unpredictable world require an educational system capable of delivering world-class learning to students of all races (Altshuler & Schmautz, 2006). Yet, the issue of race has continued to be pervasive in American culture (Hawley & Nieto, 2010; Kuykendall, 2004). Educators must assess their own feelings about students who are ethnically and culturally different from their own ethnic group and culture in order to support teachers to adequately plan and implement appropriate strategies for improved achievement in culturally diverse communities (Hawley & Nieto, 2010; Kuykendall, 2004).

As immigrant and English language learner students become a growing segment of the Latino student population, educational gaps between Hispanics and other students have become increasingly apparent according to Kohler and Lazarin (2007). They noted that data continue to show that Hispanic educational attainment does not match that of non-Hispanics. Participation in all levels of education continues to be low for Hispanic students while dropout and retention rates are still high. Thus, insufficient financial aid and inadequate access to rigorous courses and educational resources are among the challenges to improving the educational status of Hispanics (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007).

Researchers have identified various achievement gaps in the academic progress of United States students based on race, class, and language (Levine & Marcus, 2007). With the Hispanic population as the fastest growing ethnic minority in the United States, this group is rapidly changing the face of public schools as it presents a unique set of challenges to public education (League of United Latin American Citizens, 2010).

Accommodating the needs of multicultural and multilingual learners is one of the biggest challenges facing today's educators (Hodges, 2001; Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbell Jones, 2005). While the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students has increased, most teachers report that they have had little or no preparation for working with diverse students, especially English language learners (Carrier, 2005). In addition to the lack of training received by the teachers in dealing with diverse learners, the majority of teachers in diverse school settings are White, which means that they are attempting to meet the needs of students who do not share the same language, culture, or national origin (Crandall, Jaramillo, Olsen, & Peyton, 2001).

Effective school principals share similar approaches to influencing student success: developing strong teachers and implementing effective organizational procedures (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) reported that school leadership has a significant impact on student performance. In a meta-analysis of 70 studies on education, they identified 21 traits of campus leaders that resulted in better performance among the student body. Waters and colleagues (2003) also noted that the correlation between effective leadership and high student success was positive while schools

with a weak administration exhibited lower rates of student academic achievement. No Child Left Behind has seriously impacted the role of the campus principal by increasing the pressure on administration to demand increased rates of student achievement measured by standardized tests (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005).

## DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The research design of this study was a qualitative narrative. Creswell (2007) stated that qualitative research investigates problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human condition. To study this problem, researchers used an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that was inductive and established patterns or themes. Credibility of the current study was enhanced by utilizing the concept of researcher positionality based on the work of Banks (1998). This theoretical orientation supports understanding research when discussing typology of cross-cultural researchers. Banks referred to four types of *knowers* (researchers): (a) the indigenous-insider, (b) the indigenous-outsider, (c) the external-insider and (d) the external-outsider. The primary researcher in this study acknowledged his position as an *indigenous-insider*.

### Participants

The selection of the 10 participants was purposive in order to include the stories of principals who met the following criteria for effectiveness: (a) the principals had been on the same campus for at least two years; (b) 51% or more Hispanic students were enrolled on the campus; and (c) the schools in which these principals served had achieved a Texas state rating of Exemplary or Recognized in the previous two years. The Just4Kids website (http://www.nc4ea.org/) was utilized for identifying schools with high achieving mid-level schools with a majority of 51% Hispanic student enrollment. Once the list of qualifying schools was created, the Texas Education Association (TEA) website (http://www.tea.state.tx.us/) was then used to provide the schools' ratings for the previous two years. Only 15 middle school principals in Texas met the stated criteria, and 10 agreed to participate in the study. Participants included seven males and three females of whom three were Black, five were White, and two were Hispanic. Principals' experiences at the schools ranged from three years to 22 years. Additionally, the school sizes ranged from 225 to 1300 students, and all had over 50% population of students with low socioeconomic status.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Following suggestions by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the researcher collected data by audio recording the interviews as well as scripting the answers given by the participants. Each participant was initially contacted by e-mail and telephone and later interviewed in person. Participants were given the research questions that were asked in the face-to-face interviews in advance. The face-to-face interview lasted approximately 45 minutes with an additional 15 minutes for asking clarifying questions.

Creswell (2007) recommended several steps for data analysis which were followed in this study. The researcher began by creating an epoche to better understand the researcher's life experiences as a Hispanic student, teacher, and administrator. In this way, researcher bias was also bracketed. Next, the researcher developed a list of significant statements. Every

significant statement in this study was listed and given equal worth. The statements were then analyzed for common themes. Once all themes were identified, repetitive and overlapping statements were deleted and significant statements were grouped into larger units of information. Textural description or verbatim examples of what happened were given followed by structural description when the researcher reflected on the setting and context. Peer review and member checks were utilized as participants were solicited to provide their views on the credibility of the findings and interpretations.

## FINDINGS

This study gave voice to the beliefs and effective practices of 10 principals who have been successful at high-achieving middle schools which had 51% majority Hispanic students. In response to each question, principals were asked to reflect on those beliefs and strategies that were especially effective with the Hispanic population that contributed to their successful school rating. A central finding that framed all responses was an underlying belief that what was best for all students was to identify individual needs and then meet those needs, regardless of ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic status (SES). In this way, principals effectively met the needs of Hispanic students as well as all students on their campuses. Specific findings are reported by research questions.

### Research Question 1

Research Question 1 investigated the beliefs that principals of high-achieving schools have that influence their practice with Hispanic students. Emergent themes included having the right teachers, caring for all students, teaching all students, and planning for success.

***Having the right teachers.*** Every principal in this study noted that they have the best teaching staff. Principals elaborated on the importance of having the right teachers with the right students in order to close the achievement gap. One principal emphasized, "The staff makes all the difference in the world, and I have the greatest teachers ever." He further mentioned that having all the technology in the world will never replace an effective teacher. Teachers are what matters. Along the same lines, another stated, "If you get the right teachers with the right students, they will be successful."

Having the right teachers was so important that several principals pointed out that they expected their teachers to teach their students as if they were their own children. A female principal explained:

> When I walk into a classroom and I am observing my teachers, the first question that I ask myself is whether or not I would want my son or daughter in this class. If the answer is 'yes,' then I know I have a good teacher. If the answer is 'no,' then I know that I need to do something about it. The doing something about it means I have to do what I have to do to fix the problem or get rid of the teacher. You have to treat each girl and boy as if they were your own. Unfortunately, there are a lot of teachers who slip through the cracks, and they just get shuffled around. This is not acceptable to me. A principal needs to be the bad guy and not renew the contract. Somebody has to do the work and do the documentation. So, our basic philosophy here is that we want teachers in all of our classrooms that would be good enough for our own children.

***Caring for all students.*** All ten principals in this study commented on the need for school employees to truly believe in and care for their students. Three principals specifically noted that they would not hire teachers or keep teachers that did not care for students as if they were their own. Further, one commented that he has personally worked with struggling students just by checking on them. Whenever progress reports or report cards were completed, he found the time to locate certain students and ask them about their grades. These students were often not participating in special programs, but when he took the time to ask about their grades, "those students know that someone cares about them."

A male principal related the importance of caring for students with this story of a student with whom he had worked during his years in education:

> When I was teaching AP Psychology, I took a young man under my wing. This student was from a single parent home and right from the beginning, I knew that there was something special about this student. After he graduated from high school, I lost contact with him. Many years after the student's graduation, I received a letter from him telling me that he was now a Clinical Psychiatrist. The letter went on to say that much of his success as a student was attributed to my being a teacher who deeply cared about him as a student. The student wrote 'All because of you, I have the title of Doctor.'

***Teaching all students.*** Believing that all teachers were committed to teaching all students was an important belief that principals of high achieving schools had that influenced their practice with Hispanic students. All principals noted that they wanted teachers who truly believed that all students could learn. One commented, "As administrators or teachers, we need to say one thing. All students can learn, we expect all students to learn, and they all need to be treated the same [as potential learners]." Ensuring that all students are successful in the classroom was the minimum expectation for principals. Regardless of race, all students were expected to be academically successful. Another stated his challenge, "This year I challenged our students to be the first school in our area to reach Exemplary by having a 100% passing rate on Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)."

***Planning for success***. The belief in planning for success emerged as influencing the principal's practice with Hispanic students. Every principal in this study commented on the importance of having a plan in place for students to be successful. Principals elaborated on planning time and the importance of working together as a campus to achieve goals. In creating campus goals, principals utilized data from both formal and informal assessments to identify campus strengths and weaknesses. Once needs were identified, principals along with staff members created a plan to address those needs.

At one school, teachers took great pride in ensuring their students were academically successful. Their commitment to students' success was evident in the story that this principal shared:

> If you were to see the building, it is old and rundown, but it shows you that it doesn't matter. When it rained, all the teachers had buckets in their classroom that they would put out in the areas where the roof would leak. What is amazing is that teachers will put out the mop buckets while teaching their class. They don't allow those types of things to be distractions. They always continued teaching. I also remember having power outages. Lights would go out, and as I am going room to room, every teacher would still be teaching with their whole class engaged in the lesson. Even though the lights were out for 30 minutes, teachers would not allow it to be a distraction.

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 investigated the principals' actions that had a direct impact on Hispanic students' academic achievement. Emergent themes included communicating effectively, being visible, staying focused on goals, relating to students, and scheduling.

***Communicating effectively.*** Communicating effectively emerged as a theme regarding actions of the principals that had a direct impact on Hispanic students' academic achievement. All ten principals in this study noted that communicating effectively with their staff was vital to their school's success. Principals indicated they communicated with their staff at least once a week regarding instructional strategies and practices that were taking place in their classrooms. For example, one principal and his vice principal had conferences with their teachers every Monday. At these conferences, teachers were expected to discuss the good things taking place in their classroom, students who are struggling, and instructional strategies. The principal emphasized that his purpose for having these meetings was to hold teachers accountable.

Nine of ten principals reported their preference in communicating with their staff was through department meetings. They noted that the small group setting as well as the ability to have a more focused agenda made department meetings ideal for discussing instruction-related issues. For example, one stated, "I am a firm believer in department meetings. Department meetings are more personal, and the information shared at those meetings is much more geared to their concerns than the information shared at faculty meetings." Another also noted the significance of meeting with teachers in small group settings as an effective mode of communication because the conversation is often more relevant to the teachers and administrators involved.

Two principals specifically mentioned Monday memos as an effective tool for communication. The Monday memo has information about the coming week as well as any thoughts that the principal has to offer for his or her staff. One principal mentioned that his staff has come to expect the Monday memo, and every time he has forgotten to send it out, a staff member would stop by his office and ask him for it. Another also utilized the Monday memo as an effective tool for communication. In his Monday memo, he shared his thoughts on the previous week as well as his expectations for the coming week. He also stated, "Sometimes I will include a quote, a poem, or just something for them to think about. So, the Monday memo has been a great communication tool for me to share my vision and direction for this campus."

***Being visible.*** Being visible emerged as an important action having a direct impact on Hispanic students' academic achievement. Four of the ten principals stated the importance of their visibility on their campuses. Principals noted that their visibility on campus had been highly appreciated by teachers and staff. One principal mentioned that over the last couple of years, his teachers and staff told him that he was not visible enough. Having been told of his lack of visibility, he made it a priority to be more visible and used every opportunity to find time to visit in classrooms. Another shared similar thoughts and stated:

> I am big on visibility. I am visible in the hallway as much as I possibly can. If I am on campus, I will make every effort not to miss an opportunity to walk the hallways and say hello to teachers and students. If I am on campus, I will usually make four out of five class exchanges. Many times that I am out in the hallways, teachers will stop me

and say, 'Hey, I am having trouble with this student,' or 'I can't get this parent,' and so I address their concerns right there and then. I feel that that is an easy way to communicate with teachers.

***Staying focused on campus goals.*** Staying focused on campus goals emerged as a theme which described the actions of the principals that had a direct impact on Hispanic academic achievement. Eight of the ten principals noted the importance of keeping their staff focused on their campus goals of educating all students. Principals stated most of their communication was being directed towards keeping everyone "on the same page." One female principal noted that throughout her career, 97% of problems have come from lack of communication. To keep everyone focused and on track with campus initiatives, she met with her leadership team once a week.

Another principal emphasized that his staff worked very hard on educating all students they serve. He stated:

> Our work ethic is never in question; however, I believe that sometimes we work or focus on the wrong thing. For example, we may spend a lot of energy on things that are not on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test because we are thinking that it is. Our classroom instruction is something that we are constantly reviewing. In order to ensure that we are all focused on the right things, I came up with the Monday Memo. The Monday Memo has been an extremely valuable tool of communication that has kept our campus personnel on the same page.

Seven of the ten principals commented on the importance of identifying student needs through disaggregating various assessment data. During planning periods, principals noted that they met with their departments, teams, or teachers individually to discuss instructional strategies that would meet the needs of their students. Principals found data driven meetings to be very effective in identifying student needs and interventions. For example, a principal stated:

> I have always been very big on target students. After each benchmark, I meet with each teacher and review the data and identify the target students that I think they should focus on. While sharing my list with my teachers, they will tell me if they agree or disagree with my list. Teachers will let me know which students had a good day of testing but should be a target student, regardless. Sometimes, students would just not try on a test, and I had them as target students when they were just not giving the benchmark any effort. The big part of reviewing the benchmark data with our teachers is that we are communicating and getting on the same page.

***Building relationships with students.*** Nine of the ten principals noted the most important thing that principals, teachers, and staff could do to directly impact student achievement was to build positive relationships with the students. According to one principal, students needed to know that their teachers cared about them. When students know that a teacher truly cares about them, those students will do anything for that teacher. He gave the example of students who were behaving badly in one class but were great students in another. The difference was not the classes but the teachers teaching those classes. He emphasized that teachers who cared about students and held them accountable made all the difference in the world regarding teaching.

Teachers need to understand the students that they serve, and they must be willing to build relationships. Because of this, four of the ten principals noted their practice in hiring teachers who focus on building relationships as being a key to student achievement. The four principals focused on hiring teachers who would build relationships with students and realize that students have various learning styles. In addition, they looked for teachers who best fit the culture of their campuses. Three principals stated that they wanted teachers who would be good enough to teach their own children. If they were not good enough to teach their own children, then they were not good enough to work on their campus.

One principal emphasized that relationships built when students were at his school could last a lifetime. He commented:

> I see former students all the time. They come by and visit. To me, it shows that I succeeded in building those relationships that we talk about. Those students don't have to come back and visit with me, but they do, and that means a great deal to me and our staff who have been here as long as I have. I have students who I haven't seen for 20 years, and they ask me, 'Do you remember me?' They tell me what company they work for. I think that, even though they were not the nicest student in school, they know that I gave them respect, and they come back and say they are sorry that they had acted like a jerk. It is that respect and relationship piece and having high expectations for all students that is important. All students can learn. You hear people say that, but it is [difficult to make it happen without building relationships].

*Scheduling.* Five of ten principals referred to scheduling as an important aspect to student academic achievement. The five principals allotted time during the day for teachers to meet with one another and discuss instructional issues. Teachers were able to see best practices from teachers in the same building. Not only did teachers observe one another, they were able to see their students in different settings. This helped with discipline, as one principal stated, "If I am a science teacher on a team and I am having trouble with Juan or Johnny but he's not having any trouble in other classes, I want to see what they are doing to keep him engaged so that I don't continue having the same problem in mine." A few of the campuses had an extra planning period built into the schedule which allowed principals to have in-depth conversations with teachers and staff about instruction and interventions for struggling students.

## Research Question 3

Research Question 3 investigated strategies that principals of high achieving majority Hispanic schools used to establish a culture of success. Emergent themes included knowing school history, committing to success, supporting teachers, and embracing student cultures.

*Knowing school history.* Nine of ten principals acknowledged their school's culture as important, thus it was important to know and share the school's history of success. A principal commented that he had started every school year with students by sharing with them the school's history. He further stated that knowing the history of a school was important because it allowed students to see how far they have come. When one principal first became principal at this school, he understood how successful they had been. Having known the school's history and its success, he intentionally did not implement major changes during his first year

as principal. He expected his teachers to continue doing what they had been doing, and his job for that first year was to observe.

Another principal had been principal in his building for the last 22 years. He noted that many of his students' parents were his students at one point in his career. This facilitated communication between him, parents, and the community. Another principal knew the students on his campus well enough that he recognized their love of competition. By knowing his campus, he utilized competition as a way to engage students. The motivating force behind their competition has been and continues to be the middle school that is located on the other side of their parking lot. Students on this campus worked hard not to be surpassed by their competition, and that has proven to be all the motivation that they have needed to be successful.

*Committing to success.* A strategy that principals utilized to establish a culture of success was that of principals committing to success. Eight of the ten principals elaborated on the high expectations that their staff have  for all of their students regardless of race or ethnicity. Principals also stated that commitment from their teachers played a big role in students meeting the campus expectations of academic success. For example, one principal acknowledged that his teachers' commitment to student success has allowed them to be considered a successful school. Commitment to this vision was not something that teachers always expressed in words, but rather was demonstrated through their actions. Monday through Thursday, from four to six, teachers were on campus tutoring students. Though this may seem normal, it was quite interesting to find that his teachers did not get paid for tutoring. It was the teacher's drive for student success that motivated the teachers to stay.

Several principals noted their culture of success began with high expectations. One of the female principals explained that her school has achieved the rating of Recognized for the last 13 of 14 years. The generations of children who come through her doors are made aware of the history of success that has endured, and most students want to be a part of that success. From the day that students are enrolled on her campus, they understand that they are expected to be successful in the classroom.

*Motivating teachers.* All of the principals noted that the act of motivating teachers was an intentional strategy to establish a culture of success. One principal stated that his leadership team understood, "If we keep teachers motivated, they will keep students motivated."  Principals commented on various ways they keep their teachers motivated and engaged in teaching students. The most common and effective way this was done was by acknowledging their hard work. Beyond everyday praise, a few principals offered teachers snacks on Fridays as they left for the day. On other days, principals took the time to personally cook or serve their teachers lunch. The importance of motivating and supporting teachers could be summarized in the words of one of the principals who stated that he, as a principal, could not be successful unless his teachers were successful. Because of that, he ensured that teachers had all the resources and support that they needed to effectively teach their students.

*Embracing student cultures.* Three of the ten principals shared stories demonstrating how they have handled perceived student cultural issues. Each of them mentioned that he or she must first understand the issue before being able to move forward to resolution. For example, one stated that when he was made aware of certain issues, he discussed them with his administrative team. One of his team members told him that she would have to handle the

issue because he was "too White" to understand. This team member was correct; she was able to address that issue and changed the whole mindset of the students. He noted that the students this team member was working with related to her not because she was of the same ethnic group, but because she understood the underlying issues that these students brought with them to school.

This same principal acknowledged that there are many cultural stereotypes that need to be overcome. He gave the following example:

> We have many stereotypes that we need to overcome. For example, I do something special for some of our girls. We have found that the Hispanic families who come straight from Mexico have the mindset that the girls do not need to finish school. To try to change that mindset, we provide them with a preventive class that allows them to talk about sex and self-esteem. By better informing them of the options that they have, it is our hope that they will break their families' stereotype and graduate from school.

Another principal emphasized that educators should understand cultural differences. According to him, principals should acknowledge, celebrate, and embrace those cultural differences. All of the principals in this study agreed that all students should be treated with the same care and respect regardless of culture or race. The only reason for treating students differently was because of their different learning needs.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The Hispanic student population in public schools continues to increase while, at the same time, the achievement gap between Hispanic and non-Hispanic students continues to exist. To close the achievement gap, educational leaders must come together and share best practices on how to best meet the challenge of educating all students.

For principals to identify ways to better meet the needs of their Hispanic students, the findings in this study provide them with proven instructional practices from principals in high- achieving majority Hispanic mid-level schools. Principals in this study elaborated on effective practices that have allowed them to be successful in educating all of their students. These effective practices must be student-centered and simple to implement. Recommendations for practice include the following:

1. Provide staff development that identifies ways for educators to build relationships with students.
2. Provide staff development that explores cultural understanding.
3. Hire staff with care to ensure that individuals are committed to respect, understand their students, and hold themselves as well as their students accountable.
4. Engage students and staff in understanding the legacy of the community school.
5. Involve faculty and staff in book studies that emphasize best teaching practices with diverse student populations.
6. Implement and follow through on a schedule that allows principals to meet with students and staff on a regular basis.

7.   Hold themselves and teachers accountable to meeting the needs of all their students.

8.   Create campus goals based on student needs identified by data; clearly communicate the goals to students, staff, and community; and also make clear the plan for meeting those goals.

9.   Be visible in the process of meeting the needs of all students on the campus.

## CONCLUSION

This qualitative study investigated the critical issue of effective practices and beliefs of principals in high-achieving majority Hispanic mid-level schools. Thus, principals who participated in the study were queried about their beliefs and strategies for Hispanic students which resulted in their schools being successful. Principals rarely noted that they did anything "unique" for the Hispanic students alone. Instead, they each voiced a commitment to do what was best for all students. Thus, they first identified individual needs, and then met those needs. In this way, principals effectively met the needs of Hispanic students as well as all students on their campuses. In essence, they established a culture where the Hispanic students were successful and noted that these beliefs and strategies helped them be successful with students who represented other races and cultures also. This did not mean that they treated all students alike. Instead, students were, as one principal said, "supported as they needed to be supported whatever their race, ethnicity, or SES."

Hawley and Nieto (2010) challenged educators to establish a school culture that promotes supportive school conditions. This "race- and ethnicity-responsive school culture" is a "belief shared by teachers, administrators, and the school staff that they have both the ability and the responsibility to significantly influence student learning, regardless of students' backgrounds" (p. 68). These ten principals adhered to this challenge. They valued the importance of communication with all stakeholders, including the students themselves, a core component of the successful principals (Arnold, Perry, Watson, Minatra, & Swartz, 2006). These ten principals invested time and effort to recruit, retain and motivate strong teachers which influenced student academic success (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005). The importance of building relationships with the students and recognizing and then meeting their needs was addressed by every principal (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). They were committed to the belief that all students could achieve which allowed the principals and teachers to explore strategies to help underachieving students become more successful (Burke, Baca, Picus, & Jones, 2002; Hawley & Nieto, 2010).

Further, principals in this study emphasized the importance of keeping "the main thing, the main thing" for everyone (Covey, Merrill, & Merrill, 1995, p. 75). In other words, these principals supported teachers and students in focusing on the importance of academic success in school for all students. These ten passionate principals were involved, engaged, and led by example. Thus, they were able to transcend educational, cultural and socioeconomic barriers to support the students in achieving academic success.

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# Creating Shared Meaning in High Performing, Low Socioeconomic Urban Elementary Schools: Going Extra, Above, and Beyond

JoAnn Danelo Barbour
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The evidence has been clear for many years that the majority of low-income, urban children of color rank at the bottom of almost every measure of academic achievement (Olson & Jerald, 1998). Among 17,000 U.S. schools sustaining high performance as measured by test scores, success occurred most often in more affluent schools; not one school out of 2,100 with a poverty rate above 75%, and hardly any of the 7,000 additional schools with poverty rates above 25% were able to show consistent improvement over more than a two-year period (Bracey, 2004). Additionally, considering the data from award-winning Chicago public school principals between 1996–1998, "... schools of outstanding principals have a higher percentage of white students, a lower percentage of black students, a lower percentage of low-income students, lower mobility rates and higher attendance rates than the schools of Chicago principals who have not won the award" (Erbe & Holloway, 2000, p. 6). Recently, however, scholars have indicated that some schools in low socioeconomic status (SES) urban areas perform much higher than what the national studies suggest; and, contrary to the evidence of the bottom ranking of low-income urban children, there are schools in low SES urban areas that are performing at high levels and have shown improvements from previously poor ratings on state assessment tests (Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991; Wolf, Borko, Elliot, & McIver, 2000; Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002).

School principals may be a key factor in making a difference in high performing schools in low SES urban areas. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss findings from a study in which we examined the behaviors and values of two high-achieving low-SES urban elementary school principals. We highlight several effective principal behaviors and values shared by the principals and their teachers. The following four questions guided this study:

1. Based on extant scholarship, what are principals' leadership behaviors that appear to contribute to high-achieving, low socioeconomic urban elementary schools?
2. What decision making practices are in place in two high-achieving, low socioeconomic urban elementary schools?
3. What types of human interactions occur between the principal and teachers/staff of two high-achieving, low socioeconomic urban elementary schools?
4. What educational beliefs and values are held by the two principals in high-achieving low socioeconomic urban elementary schools?

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the extant scholarship, we found a variety of leadership behaviors affect and impact school performance in high-achieving schools (Halawah, 2005; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2008). From the literature, there emerged three themes that also provide the conceptual framework for this discussion: (a) behaviors of effective school principals, (b) principals as instructional leaders, and (c) behaviors and beliefs of effective principals in low SES inner-city urban schools.

### Effective Principal Leadership Behaviors

School performance is associated with school leadership, and principals directly influence learning and academic achievement by engaging in certain instructionally focused behaviors; their role in school effectiveness is important, and the effect and impact of their leadership is significant (Egley & Jones, 2005; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Lindahl, 2009; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995). A principal's actions, for example, the way a principal organizes and runs a school, can make a difference in teachers' confidence in the possibility of students' academic success (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006).

In effective schools literature, principals are central figures whose behaviors are collaborative and respectful of each individual's contributions (Egley & Jones), who provide strong leadership (Gaziel, 1995; Leithwood, Jantzi, Silins, & Dart, 1992; Southworth, 1990), and whose communication behaviors are an integral part of effective principal leadership behavior (Egley & Jones; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Heck, 1992; Mangin, 2007). Leadership behavior is displayed in the principals' interactions with both teachers and students (Eglely & Jones, 2005; Mangin, 2007; Gentilucci, & Muto, 2007; Towns, Cole-Henderson, & Serpell, 2001). Effective principals are great communicators within the school (Mangin, 2007). They gain an understanding of their community and outside agencies as they use their skills of communication to dialogue clearly and eloquently about their schools' visions and plans with all stakeholders in a manner that will influence and mobilize them to take action and make commitments (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Heck. 1992).

Principals who show energy and stamina in their jobs provide teachers with the example to model the same (Towns et al., 2001). Effective principals "communicate expectations for high academic performance from students" (Egley & Jones, 2005, p. 18), spend a significant amount of time in classrooms where they provide feedback to teachers (Heck, 1992; Mangin, 2007), and interact with students on matters related to what they are learning during classroom visits (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

### Principal as an Instructional Leader

The role of the principal as instructional leader is a dominant and key theme in the effective schools literature (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Heck, 1992; Marks & Printy, 2003). While strong leadership is needed to mobilize teachers to work together to produce high-quality teaching and learning that result in strong school performance (Marks & Printy. 2003), principals who exhibited both teacher and administrator behaviors, compared with principals who only exhibited administrator behaviors, are perceived to be more effective instructional leaders.

Developing a culture of care (Noddings, 1984) seems to be important to high performing principals. Students are motivated about their studies when they think that their principal cares about what they are learning (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Teachers and students perceived principals who care about instruction (not solely administrative duties) to be more effective in helping them improve their school performance.

Principals who are instructional leaders have high expectations for all learners and teachers (Egley & Jones, 2005; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Towns et al., 2001). They truly believe that students can succeed regardless of background; because of this belief, they make student success their number one priority (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006).

## Principals of High Performing Low SES Urban Schools

One consistent finding in the literature was that principals in effective low SES urban schools seem to devote much extra time as well as effort toward building their cultures. The leaders in these schools seem to understand the extra challenges their teachers face within a low-SES environment: scarce school resources; gang activity; illegal drugs; broken homes and families; and students distracted by the burden of poverty, hunger, and poor housing or no housing conditions, for example. Additionally, as referenced from a recent news article:

> A girl in [a teacher's] third-grade class has trouble doing homework because six relatives have moved into her family's rusted trailer, and she has no private space. A boy has worn his school uniform for two weeks straight because his parents are busy with harvest season. ... [a]nd while [the teacher] patiently explains the intricacies of fractions, he is attuned to the student who confides, 'Teacher, on Saturday the cops came and took my brother.' (Brown, 2011, p. 10A)

These schools and teachers struggle against family mobility, neighborhood violence, and the mentality of low academic expectations (Brown, 2011). Despite these challenges, however, educators within high-performing, low-SES situations are strong leaders who promote a collegial climate, a clear school mission statement, and an ongoing effort and commitment to improve, and, as a result, retain and ensure high quality staff (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Rosenholtz, 1991).

Principals in low-SES high-performing schools are able to ameliorate the demands of teaching students who live in difficult environments by being supportive and providing systemic practices that lead to effective classroom teaching. To the extent possible, these high-performing principals make certain that teachers are compensated for the extra time they volunteer. They also provide opportunities for teachers to have additional "breathing time" as necessary, such as needed time off and time for academic tasks. Principals in these high-performing schools are concerned with the problems school teachers face daily and respond to the problems according to the teachers' point of view, rather than only from an administrator's point of view (Levine & Stark, 1982; Towns et al., 2001; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Additionally, these principals take risks in interpreting rules and regulations in a manner that will enhance effectiveness; they are politically savvy (Levine & Stark, 1982); and, principals in high-performing low-SES schools may ignore regulations that are not in the student's best interest (Towns et al., 2001).

High-performing low-SES urban schools have academic programs that are well coordinated (Wang et al., 1997) and have accomplished this mainly by involving staff with instructional decision making. Principals in these schools provide resources to improve

instruction and to assist their teachers in acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed (Levine & Stark, 1982; Towns et al., 2001; Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002). They provide campus-based professional development programs that target overall instructional weaknesses and target individual teachers for improvement employing facilitators and full-time resident trainers. They attend to student performance on a class-by-class basis using quantitative data such as test scores and assessments and then use that data for decision making.

Effective inner-city schools have additional characteristics consistent with the general literature on effective schools: the leaders promote strong and substantial parental involvement, and parents are accorded great respect by the principals. They are encouraged to come any time to sit in or assist with classroom lessons. As a result, there is a presence of parents on a daily basis (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Towns et al., 2001; Wang et al., 1997). Such involvement can be partly attributable to a pleasant school climate and attractive physical facilities in these schools (Wang et al., 1997). There is also evidence that leaders are going the extra mile to make their school facilities attractive (Towns et al., 2001; Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002). Additionally, effective inner-city schools are friendly and protective of their teachers (Wang et al., 1997).

Principals in high-achieving low-SES schools do not accept the idea of barriers to their students' success (Towns et al., 2001). They set high expectations and goals for students and teachers and expect everyone to achieve those goals (Egley & Jones, 2005; Mangin, 2007; Towns et al., 2001). These principals seem to have unlimited energy, political savvy, and courage to be creative. They visit classrooms on a daily basis, tend to know every student in their school by name, and have a great understanding of their students' home lives through daily news, student report letters and calls home. Some principals even teach classes. Finally, principals in high-achieving low-SES schools believe that every student can learn, that they can succeed, and that the students will meet whatever level of standard set for them (Erbe & Holloway, 2000; Towns et al., 2001; Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002).

In summary, a strong principal-leader is needed to plan and implement the changes to improve school performance. In any school, a principal must have effective leadership traits and skills, such as the ability to cultivate trust with the teachers to facilitate collaboration, the values that will drive the principal's decisions and actions toward the desired results, and communication skills to effectively communicate with teachers, parents, students, and the community a vision of what must be accomplished to effectively educate children.

Evidence is clear (Johnston, 2002; Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2007; Taik, 2010) that affecting and sustaining improvement in low-SES urban schools seems to require more coordinated effort, above and beyond what is typically needed to improve an affluent suburban school. The purpose of our study was to discover what leaders in low-SES, high-performing schools are doing to raise achievement scores. In addition to searching the extant scholarship on leadership behaviors of high-performing principals, we sought answers in four areas: the behaviors that seemed to contribute to successful principals in high-achieving low-SES schools, their decision making practices, their interactions, and the educational beliefs and values they held. To answer our guiding questions, we used primarily a qualitative strategy to collect and analyze data with quantitative methods playing a secondary, supportive role.

## METHODS

Referred to as naturalistic research or inquiry (Taylor, 1977), qualitative research is primarily concerned with non-statistical methods of inquiry and analysis of social phenomena

from the field and draws on an inductive process in which themes and categories emerge through analysis of data collected by techniques such as interviews, observations, videotapes or audiotapes. Samples are usually small and are often purposively selected. From direct observations of human behavior in everyday life, qualitative researchers use detailed descriptions from the perspective of the research participants themselves as a means of examining specific issues and problems under study.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that some qualitative researchers do not think of generalizability in the conventional way; they are concerned not with the question of whether the findings of their study are generalizable, but rather with the question of to which other settings and subjects they are generalizable. Additionally, as with our study, qualitative researchers are more interested in "deriving universal statements of general social processes than statements of commonality between similar settings" (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 36). Our study was descriptive in nature, primarily using one of the three methodological approaches noted by Yin (1994): exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. Secondarily, from a quantitative perspective, we used simple, descriptive statistics to describe and compare survey findings, test data, and other pertinent information.

## Participants

The volunteer participant principals and schools were from two North Texas elementary schools and were chosen because they met four criteria. First, the principals had led their schools for at least three years. Second, according to data from the state, they improved their schools' reading and math state assessment test scores after they assumed the position of principal and continued to maintain the high performance levels for at least two years. Third, they improved their schools' performance by at least 5 percent (School A) or maintained and improved their state assessment test passing rates to above 90% (School B) in the last three years in reading and math. Finally, they allowed access to their schools and staff. The schools were named A and B, and the principals were named Alpha and Beta respectively. Five participating teachers from School A were coded A1 through A5; similarly, the five teachers from School B were coded B1, B2, and so on.

Both principals are females. In her first assignment as principal, Alpha was in her fifth year as principal of School A. She was an assistant principal for six years before assuming her current position, and, shortly before this study began, her area superintendent appointed Alpha to lead coordination efforts to help six underperforming elementary schools in her learning area. Principal Beta was in her seventh year as principal of School B. Prior to her stint as principal of School B, she was principal for two years in another elementary school, and before that, she was a crisis specialist on the district's crisis team. During the course of this research, Principal Beta's school was designated an Exemplary school (the state's highest academic ranking) for the first time and was in the top 20% of all schools in the school district. Recommended by her faculty and staff, Beta was one of the district's top three finalists for the district-wide Principal of the Year competition in the school year of 2008. Both participating principals indicated they did not enter the educator profession desiring to be school principals; they were offered the opportunity to pursue a school administrator career.

Both principals enthusiastically and fully agreed to participate in this study. In fact, they gave permission to interview any staff and faculty member, and they encouraged community conversations as part of this research study. (It is important to note that one author teaches in School A, thus, working with Principal Alpha, while the principal from School B is

someone who was recommended by Principal Alpha.) All participants and their schools have remained anonymous through all aspects of this study.

To select participating teachers, we placed in a bag the names, written on small slips of paper, of all classroom and special (music, special education, talented and gifted, and computer) teachers. Then, we randomly drew names from the bag. A goal was to select each participant from a different grade level and one from special classes. If more than one potential participant was drawn from the same grade level, names were replaced and another name drawn. Potential participants from both schools were contacted in person and recruited with a conversation from a prepared script. If a teacher agreed to participate in the study, a date and time for an interview and survey were scheduled. That recruitment process was repeated until the five teachers from both schools were confirmed.

**School Context**

Both Schools A and B had approximately 750 students and were Pre-Kindergarten through 6th grade campuses located in an inner city urban setting. Student enrollment for both schools has shown a dramatic shift in the last four years. The White student population decreased by 59%; the African American student population decreased by 40%; and there was a net increase in Hispanic student population of 16%. The demographics of both schools were similar: Hispanics (86%), African Americans (12%), and White students (3%). More than 90% of the student population was classified as economically disadvantaged, and over 37% of the students were limited English proficient students. The teacher composition at both schools, conversely, did not reflect student demographics. About 50% of the teachers in both schools were White, followed by 30% Hispanics and about 20% African Americans. Overall, the teacher gender distribution of both schools was about 70% female and 30% male.

Data from published state Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) academic performance reports from the time the school principals began working in their particular schools were compared to the district and state averages for the same period. As noted in Table 1, both schools' reading and math TAKS passing rates in the last three years were high and in an upward trend compared to the State and district passing rates for the same period. Both Schools A and B showed higher passing rates in Reading and Math in 2008 and significantly higher three-year improvements than the State and district from 2006 to 2008.

**Table 1.** Passing Rates: Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

| TAKS Passing Rates Grades 3-6* *Figures are rounded. | STATE | DISTRICT | SCHOOL A | SCHOOL B |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading 2008 | 86% | 82% | 87% | 93% |
| Reading 2006 | 86% | 81 % | 82% | 91% |
| Math 2008 | 83% | 78% | 86% | 94% |
| Math 2006 | 81% | 77% | 81% | 89% |

## DATA COLLECTION

Three research methods form the basis for qualitative research: examination of artifacts, materials made by others; observations of individuals or groups as a participant or non-participant observer; and interviewing others either individually or in small groups (Miles

& Huberman, 1984; Wolcott, 1995, 2001). We collected and analyzed data using all three methods. Principals were observed (shadowed) by one author, and the principals and teachers in each school were interviewed; data from a values survey submitted by all participants were studied; and related artifacts and published historical data of the two schools were collected and analyzed.

*Interviews.* We conducted four Expressive Autographic Interviews (EAI): two interviews for each principal lasting 30-minutes each. With this technique, the interviewer first asked a general question critical to his or her interests (for example early schooling, leadership experience, family influence, educational values, and so on). Then, perhaps in a later interview and mainly to get information that might not be asked for directly, the interviewer interrupted with questions at critical points while the interviewee continued to relate his or her life events (Spindler, n.d.). There were also 20-minute, semi-structured interviews for the ten participating teachers which were audio-recorded, then transcribed, and later analyzed.

*Observations.* Five informal shadow observations of each principal were completed. Each observation averaged about 1.5 hours. Handwritten notes of the observations were then typed and later analyzed.

*Artifacts.* In addition to what they say and how they behave, educators who work with children make and use items. As evidence, artifacts are material manifestations of cultural beliefs and behaviors. Once accumulated, they provide resources for analysis and comparisons. Documents or artifacts generated by the principals, such as grade level meeting minutes, agendas, campus improvement plans, e-mails to the faculty and staff, and flyers, were collected and analyzed. As LeCompte and Preissle (1993) explained, "The resulting artifacts constitute data indicating people's sensations, experiences, and knowledge and which connote opinions, values, and feelings. Artifacts include symbolic materials such as writing and signs and nonsymbolic materials such as tools and furnishings" (p. 216).

*Values survey.* Additionally, all participants (two principals and ten teachers) completed a survey of values (Barbour, 2008). See Appendix A for the survey. Because "... administration is a value-laden, even value-saturated enterprise" (Hodgkinson, 1978, p. 122), school administrators ought to possess a knowledge of value, in part, because of the large component of value judgments in administrative practice and because administrative action affects the quality of organizational and extra-organizational life, including the ability to change. All participants were asked to fill out the Rokeach Values Survey before an audio recorded interview. The Rokeach Value Survey (RVS; Rokeach, 1973, 1979) is a 36-item questionnaire designed to measure specific personal or social value orientations or belief systems that relate to a set of end states of existence or ultimate modes of living (delineated in the survey as terminal or end values) and a set of modes of conduct (delineated as instrumental values) reflecting behavioral characteristics viewed as socially desirable.

## DATA ANALYSIS

In analyzing qualitative data, the first most important step is to establish categories "within which data are organized" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 237). To aid in finding data for each category, a word processor's search feature was used to find keywords

mentioned in the interviews, artifacts (letters, e-mails, and flyers) that were digitized and converted into searchable electronic documents. Findings were organized into a data matrix. Data were then organized by categories, which grew and developed as findings unfolded.

*Data matrix.* To determine coding reliability of data, we constructed a data matrix in which we tabulated and identified the number of occurrences (at least three times) of a concept/idea under a data source column (for example, interviews) to determine validity. The headings on the horizontal axis of the table were: principal interviews, teacher interviews, artifacts/documents, and observations. In the vertical axis, we listed emerging concepts, beliefs, and principal behaviors as they occurred in the datasets. We looked for an occurrence of a concept, belief, and/or principal behavior across at least three columns to establish a theme and thus determine reliability of a concept or idea.

We used the data matrix as an aid to determine the primary findings, secondary findings and tertiary findings of the study. Three or four data instances common to both principals denoted a primary finding, that is, across the horizontal axis a particular finding (data instance) was discovered in at least three or four data collection events (principal interviews, teacher interviews, observations, and artifacts/documents). A concept or idea was counted as a finding or data instance only if it occurred at least three times within a data collection event (vertical axis).

*Values survey.* We tabulated responses from the Rokeach Values Survey (RVS) to identify the top five terminal and instrumental values of the principal and participating teachers for each school. To determine shared values from the RVS top five from each participant, the teachers' survey results from Schools A and B were then compared to the survey results of Principals Alpha and Beta respectively. The top five values were then compared with the principals' own teachers' combined top values to identify their common top values. Finally, terminal and instrumental values of the two principals were compared to identify common values between them.

*Triangulation of data.* To deal with possible bias, we triangulated data by using multiple sources (interviews, observations, artifacts, and school data) from which to base conclusions. Only valid, reliable and triangulated data were included in the discussion of findings.[1] In the following section, we isolated the actions that the principals of these high achieving low SES schools were taking to create the desired changes resulting in high student achievement.

## FINDINGS

In Table 2, we have summarized findings from five data sources: principal interviews, teacher interviews, principal observations, artifacts, and a values survey. The primary findings are presented in six columns: (a) inspirational/collaborative leadership style, (b) actively involved in classroom instructions, (c) makes extra effort in support of teachers/staff, (d) approachable to students, (e) sets high performance expectation, and (f) uses a variety of

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[1]The authors note that while one author worked with one of the principals, the other probed for biases in questions, notes, findings, and so on; thus, we made several efforts to be aware of researcher bias in findings and conclusions.

means to communicate often. The secondary findings are presented in four columns: (a) provides teacher leadership opportunities, (b) collaborates with teachers' teams, (c) uses a variety of decision making practices, and (d) implements new campus and district policies.

**Table 2.** Findings Summary: Principals' Behaviors.

| | Primary Findings | | | | | | Secondary Findings | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Inspirational / collaborative leadership style | Actively involved in classroom instruction | Makes extra effort in support of Teachers/Staff | Approachable to Students | Sets high performance expectations | Communicates often/ Uses a variety of means | Provides teacher leadership opportunities | Principal-teacher collaboration/ collaboration with teacher teams | Uses a variety of decision-making practices | Implements new campus and district policies |
| Principal Alpha | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip |
| | It | It | It | It | It | It | It | It | It | It |
| | A | A | A | | A | A | | | | |
| | O | O | | O | O | O | | | | |
| Principal Beta | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip | Ip |
| | It | It | It | It | It | It | It | It | It | It |
| | A | A | A | | A | A | | | | |
| | O | O | O | O | O | O | | | | |

*Note.* Data Sources Codes: Ip--Interview with Principal; It--Interview with Teachers; O--Observation; A--Artifacts.

## Leadership Style

Both principals shared several leadership qualities; however, they demonstrated different styles due, in part, to different personalities, evident in their daily activities as school administrators and leaders. While Principal Alpha considered herself "a very shy person," her teachers concurred that she is able easily to influence people. Reflecting on her early years in education as a teacher's aide, Alpha noted that she "was able to help people out and people sought her." As she mentioned during the interview, "I am a teacher," meaning she knows by heart the curriculum, effective instruction delivery methods, and assessment techniques. Alpha can quickly assess if the teacher she is observing is on track or not. Although Principal Beta was as equally knowledgeable about classroom activities as Principal Alpha, Beta seemed more a cheerleader, encouraging teachers to do their best. In contrast to Principal

Beta, a more businesslike and serious demeanor was demonstrated by Alpha; she had a very methodical approach when making her rounds. Her focus was on observing how closely the curriculum was followed by teachers when she visited a classroom.

Principal Alpha wanted to give more freedom and more autonomy to her teaching staff. As teacher A1 noted, "We have a curriculum to follow, but we are free to twist the curriculum around as we want." Alpha had, in her own words, "a flexible leadership style that depends on the person, place, and situation" but always "for the benefit of the students." Teacher A3 regarded principal Alpha as "an instructional leader ... who knows what she wants but she would not come right out and direct the teacher to solve the problem her way." Teacher A3 added that Alpha would "put the solution in a way so that the teacher will think it was her/his idea to begin with." She empowered teachers and encouraged them to find their own solutions to their problems. She gave assignments, informed people of the due date, and the job got done.

While shadowing, we noted that Principal Beta purposely and strategically wandered around the campus and engaged in brief conversations with everyone always with a few encouraging words to teachers, students, other staff, and parents whom she met during the day and during classroom walk-through observations. She was quick to acknowledge everyone with a wave of her hand, a quick smile or just a "hello." Principal Beta's responses and discussions with others were usually peppered with jokes and laughter even though discussions may have been about serious matters.

Beta credited her success with staying consistent with her "kind of conciliatory" leadership style. She believes that "peaceful, trusting, and friendly behavior" is what made her an effective principal and a leader of her campus. Principal Beta commented that she is always positive and happy; having fun and laughing a lot during hard work have kept her spirits up and helped her succeed over the years. She claimed that she is not punitive and is very confident that her staff knows her high expectations of them. She will work with anyone who does not meet those expectations to get them where they need to be. If a teacher "does not get there," according to Beta, it means that he/she may not be suited to the teaching profession or not willing to adapt. For a teacher who cannot adapt, Principal Beta's option was to either terminate the employee or assist him/her in resignation, which she admitted to have done to several teachers. She considers herself a servant leader: cooperative, non-threatening, and the one who uses others' input in leading her school. Beta does not think to be the only person who could do anything. Teacher B1 described Principal Beta as open-minded. According to B1, "[Principal Beta] listens to new ideas, allows teachers to try out their plans of action … and empowers employees to find solutions that may not be within the box, the norm." She is very involved with what happens on campus, has an open door policy wherein anyone can come with his or her concerns and questions. As teacher B4 noted, "She has the students' interest at heart," and, according to teacher B3, "She is pretty forthright and … fair."

Both principals displayed their individual personalities: Beta seemed more an extrovert and Alpha more an introvert. They seemed authentic, behaving naturally, and not forcing themselves to be what they were not.

**Classroom Instruction Involvement**

Principal Alpha stated that her position is to be involved one hundred percent in classroom instruction, and believes that classroom instruction is the number one priority of the principal. She is very knowledgeable of what learning objectives are taught in every grade

level. She makes sure that curriculum is applied consistently to all classes and in all grade levels, and she has a professional intervention plan for teachers who are struggling with pedagogy or classroom management. Alpha's enthusiasm for classroom instruction was shared by one teacher who described, "She comes and takes over your class sometimes if you are having a real good discussion with your students; she easily gets involved with it too, and she actually takes over and next thing you know she'll look at you and say, 'Oh, I didn't mean to.'" (Teacher A3).

When Principal Alpha conducts walk-through observations, she not only likes to see how teaching and learning occur but also wants to make sure that teachers have all the materials they need. Principal Alpha believes that teachers have to be accountable for what they teach and for making all students in their classrooms successful. She wants teachers to treat each student in their classrooms as if they are teaching their own children. For Principal Alpha, no excuse is valid for why a student failed to pass the state exam or to get promoted to the next grade.

Principal Beta is in the classrooms daily. She knows the weaker teachers and what she needs to do to bring these teachers up to standard; she works with the teachers who need help and makes certain they get needed assistance when she cannot help. She is consistently checking on instructional rigor. Beta is very confident the teachers are not threatened when she visits their classrooms. Teacher B1 confirmed that Beta visits her classroom about once every six weeks or sometimes twice during the same grading period. Beta herself noted that "[I visit] . . . the classrooms a lot." Teacher B1 mentioned that Beta likes to see how instructions are delivered and wants to make sure teachers have the materials they need, especially for the bilingual class. According to teacher B3, Beta "tries to keep on top of everything and gets involved with what the students are doing."

Both principals had weekly instructional planning meetings where they collaborated with teachers on instructional matters and reviewed lesson plans, student data, and work samples. During these meetings, teachers suggested solutions to meet the needs of individual students and students' active involvement in learning; they also discussed uses of higher order thinking skills.

**Teacher/Staff Support**

Both principal Alpha and Beta channeled their teacher and staff human interactions toward collaboration, team building, and cooperation. Both principals consistently, through e-mails and hand-written notes, expressed their gratitude to teachers who have gone above and beyond what they are expected to do. Both principals inquired about and expressed their concern for teachers and supported them through illness and family emergencies.

In her own words, Principal Alpha discussed how she supports teachers stating, "I'm here as a coach; I facilitate not necessarily as a boss. I try not to be … a dictator, a boss. I'm trying to be there to make their job easier so that we can both work together and achieve our goal." She is available and goes to classrooms consistently. To recognize outstanding teachers and to show her appreciation to teachers in general, Alpha provides a "Teacher of the Year" celebration. Teacher A4 mentioned that Alpha is very hands-off in her management of teachers; for her, it is good not to feel pressured by the principal but to feel trusted. Teacher A3 felt strongly supported because "[Alpha] does seem to know a lot about the curriculum so she knows what I should be teaching ... because she does know the curriculum she knows what to expect when she comes to your room." Teacher A5 appreciates that she can go directly to Alpha for any concerns.

Principal Beta provides a school environment where, she noted, they "do a lot of fun things." Teacher B1 described her school as having a "very positive atmosphere and human support in all programs." Besides the customary birthday celebrations, the teachers and staff might have a banana split ice cream party for any reason or to celebrate the teachers' hard work during a teacher appreciation week. During one of the observation visits, a group of teachers were enjoying a soup dish that principal Beta prepared and was serving them. There was plenty of laughter and friendly conversation in the group while the faculty enjoyed the food. In school B, we observed that school staff members were often smiling and very helpful when parents and other visitors came to see the principal.

## Approachable to Students

Both principals had ample opportunities on a daily basis to communicate directly with students when they made regular campus and classroom walk-throughs. In general, the teachers interviewed for this study stated that their principals always interacted with students. Principal Beta, as teacher B2 observed, "made [an] effort to learn her students' names, not just the students who are in trouble but all students who come her way." The students seemed comfortable with Principal Beta, not afraid to interact with her in the hallways or the classrooms, not afraid or intimidated by her presence. They seemed to respect her authority. By giving each student her full attention when talking to him or her, she displayed an unspoken message to the students: they are the most important people in the building.

Principal Alpha had similar experiences with her students who also, for example, seemed comfortable enough to go to her and discuss classroom lessons that she may have introduced to them while she was visiting their classrooms. According to teacher A3, "It was not unusual to observe students continue to tell [Principal Alpha] answers to questions that she asked them earlier that week or that day." Alpha stated that to be approachable to students, she goes to the classrooms and asks them questions about "what they are learning, how they are learning, and why they are learning it."

## High Performance Expectations

Principal Alpha created a bulletin board, and on that board, she included her letter to the school community. Her letter essentially expressed her commitment to do everything in her power to help the school attain excellence. Also displayed is a vision board that contains philosophy statements and goals for this school year. Teachers also have their own vision boards outside their classrooms where they post (with students) their commitment letters as a pledge to hard work and excellence to reach the school's established goals.

When Alpha walks into a classroom, she expects teachers to have a purpose for every lesson. As teacher A3 stated, "It's not just a class time. We're not killing time here. We are training children to be successful, and she wants you to want that so much that you eat, drink, and sleep it." The expectation of making a difference in academic performance to a student from a low-income family is Alpha's focus. To make high performance happen, she expects a high level of instruction from all teachers.

Principal Beta similarly made it clear that her main mission is to help students attain success. She expressed that she is "very passionate about … doing the right thing for the students," and, as such, has "very high expectations of teachers and students." She clearly communicated her high expectations to teachers and, as a result, they established high expectations for their students. Principal Beta communicated her expectations verbally and in

writing (e-mails, flyers, and during the grade level or faculty meetings). Beta provided statistical data to make everyone aware of where the school is in terms of their performance standing relative to the rest of the schools in their mini-learning community[2] and the district at large (B1). Everyone is expected to perform at the highest level. As teacher B2 noted:

> We go back to the benchmark … [and we] use what [we] know and teach what [the students don't know] and look at the objective and make sure that we are hitting those [objectives] where the students are struggling. She tells them how smart they are; she gives them confidence.

Teacher B3 added, "[Beta] expects … from teachers that the scores will go up, [and] she expects it from students. She has no doubt that the scores will increase …. She pumps the students up in Saturday [tutoring] … always giving them compliments."

High expectations were supported with an action plan that was shared by the grade level teams. All teachers were made aware of which students needed extra help as evidenced by their grade level meeting minutes. School B's grade level meeting minutes showed the attention given to each student who is behind or is low performing. These students are listed in the minutes by name with a description of weaknesses and an action plan to help these students improve their performance. The students become the focus of the grade level team and not just the teacher to whom the students are assigned.

## Communications

There were three categories of communications that involved these two school principals: (a) communication with faculty/staff, (b) communication with parents and community at-large, and (c) communication with students. Together, these three categories encompassed the majority of the communication that the principals performed on a daily basis. The principals communicated often and in many ways. Both principals Alpha and Beta used a variety of media to communicate with their faculty, students, and parents.

There were numerous direct verbal communications, for example, when the principals attended and participated in grade level meetings and school-wide faculty meetings. When needed, such as in the case of unacceptable teacher performance or behavior, both principals held direct private one-on-one meetings with teachers. Additionally, both principals used a public walkie-talkie system and made announcements via the intercom to communicate in real time from their respective offices. Finally, both Alpha and Beta extensively used e-mails and hand-written notes to communicate with their teachers, especially when collaborating on certain projects. Additionally, in most types of communication, both principals frequently included a reminder of their goals for the school year.

Teacher A4 commented that principal Alpha was sometimes "heavy handed" and "redundant," referring to the goals and expectations of the school that are often repeated while addressing teachers in group meetings and through e-mails and flyers. Meanwhile, Principal Alpha described communication of goals thusly, "The goals have to be established. They have

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[2]A district-wide mini-learning community was established by each area superintendent in this large urban school district. The community consists of six elementary schools in the southeast area of the district. This is a collaborative organization of school principals from the six schools for the purpose of sharing ideas and plans for improving school and student performance in their respective schools.

to be noticeable. People have to repeat them over and over again, and I'm there to remind them of these goals."

Beta, as she explained, was always available to talk to individual teachers about their concerns. She talked, for example, to the grade level teams when an issue arose related to academics and instructions. Visiting her teachers individually in their classrooms is her main approach to communicate her goals and expectations for the school. Beta is confident that her visits to her teachers' classrooms are not threatening to them. As she observed, it is rare for her to see a teacher not actively teaching when she walks into a classroom. Thus, the teachers in most cases, according to Beta, know what she wants from them and what their own expectations are for themselves and their students. Finally, she wants her teachers and staff to communicate among themselves. She insisted that if staff or faculty members have a problem with a specific person, they needed to speak with that person first before they started complaining to other staff and faculty members. She expressed that this is simply good practice for everyone.

Communication with parents was evident by the numerous amount of letters from both principals to parents, sent through the students. Averaging one letter per week, these letters were about a myriad of subjects such as the policy regarding uniforms, PTA meetings, student attendance in school, the time children need to be picked up from school, and workshops of interest to parents. There were also letters, for example, about how parents could help teachers with student concerns and letters announcing upcoming state exams and what parents could do to help their children prepare mentally and physically for the exams. In the collection and analysis of artifacts, we discovered several letters announcing opportunities for parents to get involved with school programs that would help their children and the school. Both principals were sensitive to the fact that most of the parents do not speak and read English; thus, they made sure that letters to parents were both in Spanish and English versions. Both principals speak fluent Spanish in their predominantly Hispanic communities.

Principal Alpha required her teachers to schedule additional meetings to the two district-required parent-teacher conferences. To encourage effective communication with parents, Alpha wanted teachers to communicate in person with parents about what is going on in the classroom, how their children are doing, and what their needs are. She also expected her teachers to meet with parents of all students who were in danger of failing, to provide parents with information, and to find ways to improve grades, such as additional training, or tutoring before and after school and on Saturday. Principal Alpha often attended individual parent-teacher meetings. She wanted teachers to have "a lot of face-to-face communication" with parents so they become more comfortable at school as a place that is a safe haven for them to talk with other parents and with teachers. She hoped to reverse the traditional communication pattern wherein parents come to the teachers, and, instead, have teachers going to the parents. Additionally, Alpha wanted to have more positive communication. A call from the principal or from the teachers, for example, could mean a child has done something excellent rather than disappointing or troublesome. Principal Alpha also encouraged parents to initiate communication when they had concerns about their children.

Consistent with her "open door" policy, Principal Beta was available for parents to discuss their concerns with her at any time during the day. Beta wanted her teachers to call parents if a student is absent more than two or three times. She expressed that it is a "terrific asset" when she can directly communicate to parents who can only speak Spanish. In one particular instance, it was noted how effective she was in calming an angry parent by listening to the parent, not judging, staying composed, and maintaining a pleasant and sincere facial expression that communicated confidence to the parent that she will handle the situation fairly

and decisively. By her behavior, Beta also showed that she was glad to see the parent come to her with the problem.

In addition to the primary findings, we found four secondary findings that emerged from our analysis of data collected. All findings, both primary and secondary, are embedded within the value systems and beliefs of principals Alpha and Beta. We found the principals valued: (a) teacher leadership opportunities, (b) collaboration with teachers on instructional matters, (c) a variety of decision making practices, and (d) a fluid, seamless process for implementing new district policies/procedures. We will next discuss their values of leading, their educational values, and the shared personal values between principals and their staffs based on the result of the Rokeach Values Survey (1973, 1979).

**Teacher Leadership Opportunities**

In both schools A and B, teachers were involved in a variety of leadership capacities. One leadership opportunity was with the Campus Instructional Leadership Team (CILT) that consisted of teacher representatives from each grade level. The principals used this team to implement changes to the curriculum or as a forum for new ideas for all teachers. The CILT team had the task of helping formulate and revise the annual Campus Improvement Plan (CIP). Also, master teachers were appointed by their peers or by the principals to be grade level chairs. There was an additional opportunity to be involved in decision making through "operation involvement," a district-wide initiative for teachers to be involved in making important decisions affecting the school. The principals used the CILT and various committees to help in managing instruction, dealing with teacher issues, and advising about operating problems.

Teacher A4 observed that Alpha encouraged team leaders from each grade level to meet and exchange ideas stating, "There are many opportunities for leadership, and … she has done a good job at allowing people to take leadership roles where they are able to take them" (A4). Teacher A1 stated that Alpha had encouraged her to be involved and take a leadership role on campus. With this encouragement, A1 felt that her principal recognized her talents, which inspired her to do even better as a teacher, although her leadership involvement at the time of the interview was minimal. Alpha not only provided opportunity, but also helped one grow as a teacher leader if that is what a teacher wanted to do, according to teacher A2.

Principal Beta encouraged her teachers to volunteer in sport leadership for the children such as coaching intramural volleyball, basketball, and soccer. In school B, there was a drama program where teachers who are interested could donate their time after school. There were leadership opportunities to provide training to other teachers to learn to direct or conduct student plays and choirs. In both schools, leadership roles were filled by volunteers. No one was pressured to take a leadership role. If teachers aspired to leadership roles, however, Principal Beta made sure that her volunteer leaders were sent to workshops and/or leader training to make them more effective as teacher leaders. Teacher B1, for example, was the vertical team leader for a science team (science teachers from all grade levels). He expressed that their team provided real positive impact to students ensuring that they are learning the essentials of science as they progressed to each grade level.

**Teacher Collaboration**

In both schools A and B, approximately 70% of the collaborations between principals and teachers were focused on instructional matters. Collaborations in both schools were

accomplished mostly through grade level chairs with a monthly faculty meeting and weekly grade level meetings. According to Principal Beta, collaboration in her school was rated 10 on a scale of 1 to 10 (highest level of collaboration). Beta "does not like making arbitrary decisions." Principal Beta collaborated all the time, casually with teachers at lunch, in the lounge, or when passing in the hall, and more formally in grade level and faculty meetings and other formats. She met with her teachers at least two to three times monthly to ascertain what is happening in classes and to collaborate on teaching and learning. Teachers were fully involved in setting policies in the school such as what goes into the Campus Improvement Plan.

Collaboration for Principal Alpha was a way to get a "good buy-in" from all people who are involved and to have full support from them. Alpha wanted to make sure that she tapped into the expertise from the most experienced and knowledgeable teachers. She met regularly with her faculty for instructional committee meetings, grade level meetings, and during meetings with combined grade levels. Principal Alpha communicated in one of her weekly bulletins: "Be prepared to be an active participant on the decisions to be made as we move from Acceptable to Recognized [state ratings] this year .... This will happen; it is Non-NEGOTIABLE!" [Emphasis is Alpha's.]

**Decision Making Practices**

In her decision making role, Principal Alpha stressed, "I don't make [decisions] by myself. [Decision making] involves the teacher or grade level chair." Teachers in school A are encouraged and are involved in different capacities in the decision making process in the various leadership roles discussed earlier.

In school A, the principal strived to have all decisions directly align with her goals for the school, one of which is to earn the state rating of "Exemplary." She wanted this goal to be the priority of all teachers. She repeatedly encouraged them to ask how they can improve instruction, how they can make what they are doing now better. She arranged for various committees and grade level teams to get together often. She wanted teachers to understand that meetings are required in order for them to plan and make informed decisions as a team. She believed that if teachers do not get together as a group to find solutions to their problems and make decisions, then decisions would have to come from the principal and become more of a directive from the teachers' perspective. She wanted her teachers to find solutions for their problems and "[do] whatever works … and make the students successful." She encouraged and expected her teachers to think and take ownership of their actions and results. With her leadership style, Alpha aimed to empower each teacher by encouraging, guiding, and providing all the necessary resources in her power so the teachers could help her make decisions that affected their own classrooms. Some teachers were not comfortable with her method. While Principal Alpha worked closely with these teachers in helping them understand and adopt her way of leading, many teachers who were not able or were not willing to fit in have moved on and are no longer at school A.

Principal Beta encouraged her teachers to find new ways to teach their students stating, "I'm willing to empower the teachers …. If a teacher comes to me and wants to do something [new and] … can justify that it's the right thing for students, then it's not a problem" (Principal Beta). According to teacher B1, "She's very open-minded, and whenever we see things that we can work [on] in the classroom, she doesn't hesitate to allow us to implement those changes." Beta added, however, that she would review a decision and reverse it if she finds new information that no longer supports what she thought the decision

would accomplish. She stated that she "involves her teachers in decision making," and she does not like to "make arbitrary decisions when [they affect] the whole school." According to Beta, "[involving her teachers in decision making] is what makes [School B] successful …. The people feel that they have a voice, they are not afraid to speak out, and they are not afraid to give their opinion." Teacher B1 noted:

> We work as a team in 4th grade, and she lets us do whatever scheduling we need to do and she trusts [that] we know what we are doing and we're going to get it done the best we can, and when something doesn't work she's ok with that. She does not make you feel like a failure. If it doesn't work, then [we] are just going to try a different way.

Teacher B2 stated that "[as] part of the site based decision making I keep other teachers aware of what decisions we are making. I feel very much a part of the decisions that were implemented in this school."

## Seamless Policy Implementation

During this study, two new policies were implemented, one in each school. Principal Alpha made a school policy change to spend more time in the classrooms. "[The time I spent in classrooms made] more impact for the teachers ….Nobody likes me to be watching what they are doing, …. That's one of the things I've changed …. The principal is in the classroom, and [I] might not be there long [but I'm] there more often" (Principal Alpha). Teacher A3 mentioned how well a new district policy on "Principles of Learning"[3] was working in her classroom. The policy included "accountable talk [see endnote 3], and [for] me to be quiet and let the students lead the discussion. Instead of me being a big talker, the children have to be the big talkers." This is a district policy that many felt to be counter-intuitive because the students are doing most of the talking. Alpha, however, strongly supported this program and during classroom walk-throughs made certain teachers were properly implementing the principles.

Principal Beta implemented a new program for breakfast delivery to the classrooms. The program allowed students to eat breakfast while getting tutored before the beginning of the regular instructional day. Teacher B1 commented about breakfast in the classroom, "First there was hesitation by staff, but [that changed] once teachers started seeing that students stopped having belly aches, [and] they were able to focus more." It was surprising to these authors that several participating teachers in this research study were unaware of the above policy changes made by the two principals. The policy changes seemed seamless; they flowed within the regular rhythm of a school week; they did not seem disruptive; and teachers did not regard them as policy changes but as part of group buy-in rather than a top-down directive.

## Educational Beliefs and Values

Principal Alpha has a very high value of education that she acquired from her parents who taught her that one needs an education to be able to advance in life. She believes that she

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[3]The Principles of Learning, recently implemented district-wide, are condensed theoretical statements summarizing decades of learning research developed at Learning Research and Development Center - University of Pittsburgh. It has nine principles that include "accountable" talk and clear expectations.

and the teachers are like parents to the students because of the amount of time teachers spend with the students during the school day. She makes the teachers accountable to every single student in their classrooms. Alpha asks the teachers individually if they would be willing to teach their own children in their classrooms and in the school in which they are now teaching. If the answer is no, then the teacher needs to find a way to improve or find another profession. Principal Alpha stressed that the responsibility is on the teacher if a child cannot learn.

Principal Beta's reason to go to work is for the children. She wants her teachers to have the same priority; if they do not, they need to "change their heart or change their location …. If they are going to be here, we're going to work for the students." She considers the students as her own students. Her passion for her students can be summarized below:

> They are just awesome students; they are wonderful students. We have high expectations. We are in the highest crime rate in the city … maybe in Texas … more suicides, more incest, more sexual abuse, more of everything. But that doesn't say that these students can't … be the best [emphasis, Principal Beta], and we just expect it, so, yes, they're wonderful students. They're absolutely awesome.

Generally, the teachers shared the principals' beliefs that all children can learn, that the students are the number one priority, and that being poor or socially disadvantaged is not an excuse for underachievement or failure.

**Shared Values**

Analyzing the results from the values survey, we made some interesting discoveries. From 18 possible terminal values listed in the Rokeach Values Survey, the top five terminal values for principal Alpha and Beta showed two values that they have in common: self respect and true friendship. As for their top five instrumental values from 18 possible choices, Alpha and Beta had one value in common: honest.

Principal Alpha's top five terminal values included wisdom, inner harmony, self respect, salvation and true friendship. Four of five teachers, 80% of the participants, held at least one of the top five values of Principal Alpha, and two participants held two values also in the principal's top five. Only one participant held no top five values similar to Principal Alpha in School A. In comparison, Principal Beta's top five values included self respect, family security, health, true friendship, and equality. Five teachers, 100% of the participants, held at least one of the top five terminal values of Principal Beta, three participants held two values, one teacher held three values, and one teacher held four values in the principal's top five.

Principal Alpha's top five instrumental values included loving, intellectual, family security, health, true friendship, and equality. Four teachers, 80% of the participants, held at least one of the top five instrumental values of the Principal Alpha, four teachers held two values, and one teacher held one value also in the principal's top five. In comparison, to Alpha, Principal Beta's top five instrumental values included honest, loyalty, forgiving, capable, and responsible. Five teachers, 100% of the participants, held at least one of the top five values of the principal, one participant held three values, and one teacher held two values also in the principal's top five.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to discover what leaders in two high-achieving, low-SES schools were doing to raise achievement scores. Analyzed data from principal and teacher interviews, observations, and artifacts revealed findings that are consistent with the literature about effective principal leadership behaviors in high performing schools. These leaders inspired their staffs and collaborated with them in a variety of ways. Principals Alpha and Beta demonstrated faith and trust in their teachers and helped teachers focus more on students by espousing teacher autonomy, sharing leadership responsibilities, clearly communicating goals and expectations, becoming very involved in instructional matters, and keeping consistent the classroom instructions regarding curriculum and lesson plans.

While both principals were actively involved in classroom instruction and believed this involvement is their most important duty, Principals Alpha and Beta promoted teacher autonomy when new teachers have proven that they can produce good results with students. The principals first hired capable, willing, and caring teachers. Starting with a capable set of educators, the principals built trust and initiative in the teachers by encouraging individual and group decision making to solve problems or create solutions to improve students' performance.

While both principals promoted autonomy for their teachers, each principal accomplished the task differently. For Principal Alpha, autonomy was tied to accountability. The teachers in Alpha's school were expected to create solutions to their problems, and each teacher was accountable to every student in his or her classroom. For Principal Beta, autonomy was more related to each teacher having the freedom to find a better way to teach children and prove that the new method, procedure, or policy was beneficial to the students. In school B, responsibility for helping a student pass the state exam was not a burden to one teacher; everyone was responsible. As Beta stated, "I do not hold anyone responsible when students don't pass [the state exam] because I know we know our students …. The students that didn't pass in third grade are students that we had concerns about since kinder."

There is a strong element of shared decision making on both campuses. Both principals, accordingly, provided leadership opportunities for their teachers; they encouraged teachers who showed leadership potential to volunteer in various leadership capacities; and there was active principal-teacher collaboration and collaboration within teacher teams.

With teachers handling classroom matters or solving curricular issues, the principals were able to focus on organizational, inspirational or transformational issues needed for developing a high performing school. The two principals had tremendous energy and stamina, contagious to everyone around them. Alpha and Beta were risk takers who were willing to try new ways suggested by staffs to help school performance. Both principals had high performance expectations for their faculty and students, and provided extra effort, "go the extra miles" to support their teachers and staff with material needs as well as moral care and encouragement.

Students were comfortable interacting with each principal and seemed to look up to the principals, approaching them with concerns and updates about their lives trusting that these women believed in them. Common to the two principals in this study, the sine qua non of their life's work, was the core belief that the students are the most important people in their schools, the reason for principals' efforts to continue school improvement; both principals would have no second thoughts about releasing teachers who do not share this belief.

The principals used a variety of means of communication to help build an effective and cohesive group of educators dedicated to do what it takes to help children in their schools

to learn. In the most challenging environment, where many parents are indifferent or do not have the resources of time and money to be involved in their children's education, Principals Alpha and Beta found ways to keep parents engaged and made certain that teachers contacted and communicated with parents in person.

One finding worthy of note and further discussion was the discovery that both schools A and B did, in fact, contain educators who shared common values; that is, we found substantial common terminal and instrumental values shared between each principal and her own faculty. We refer to the work of anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn (1962) who defined a value as an implicit or explicit conception on one hand as distinctive or unique to an individual, and conversely characteristic or descriptive of a group. Hodgkinson (2002) added, "[O]ne can always average or statistically treat an aggregate of individual values (the only place where values are experiences) in order to characterize the values of a collectivity, organization, or group" (p. 3). Thus, while both schools attained great success in their efforts to educate children, Principals Alpha and Beta themselves seemed to share few terminal and instrumental values in their top five, based solely on the *Rokeach Values Survey* we administered.

What is important, as evidenced by the values survey and other data collected for this study, is that each principal shared similar values as her teachers. When a group has common values, there is strong evidence that a culture that guides the group has been established or in the process of getting established. As Branson (2008) stated:

> Organizations are, in the first instance, a collection of individual people … If there is a need to change organizations, then the first consideration should be to bring about an appropriate change in each person within the organization before turning attention towards changing the non-human parts of the organization …. Moreover, it is through the implementation of a comprehensive values alignment process that it is possible for organizations to properly prepare the individual consciousness of its employees, and the organizational culture as a whole, to be able to constructively cope with the changes needed to ensure the organization's long-term success and viability. (p. 392)

Aligning organizational values may be "... the bedrock, the foundation, upon which all truly successful organizational change depends" (p. 392), concluded Branson.

The findings above having been noted, however, there is one question that emerged from this study that remains: What are these principals doing that IS different from successful schools not in low-SES urban areas? The two principals in this study do not share the defeatist view from a research study that "the overwhelming majority of institutions with comparable demographics claim [that improving performance]…cannot be done" (Towns et al., 2001). We maintain that, in fact, an attitude of low expectations and the shared belief that little can be done to affect student performance may be major reasons that students in low-SES schools located in urban areas continue to under-perform and be resistant to change. One recurring thread that seemed to be woven throughout this study was the working norm and value of time to task, that is, the need to go "extra, above, and beyond." From this study, we discovered both principals with their faculties and staffs spent much time and effort collaboratively devoted to the education of the students attending their schools. Principals Alpha and Beta were slowly and successfully implementing new policies bringing positive change to their schools. They were taking small "wins" daily instead of overwhelming staff with many initiatives and policy changes. We found, therefore, that change for these

principals was more subtle. Change could simply mean daily doing the sheer hard work of building a winning team in a difficult environment.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

It is clear from the literature and the findings of this study that school principals play key leadership roles in creating a culture that enables and promotes academic optimism for the teachers and students. Both principals, moreover, were able to affect positive changes in their respective schools, based most importantly on the fact that there was a set of shared values between principal and teachers. Most noteworthy is that the principals' efforts to increase academic optimism were effective in helping to improve student performance in high poverty schools by skillfully leading stakeholders in the desired direction of going the extra mile and creating a "can do" spirit and a culture of excellence for their students, teachers, and community.

It will take two qualities, a change in mindset and a change in approach to improve a non-performing low SES urban school: two qualities not needed to improve a non-performing affluent suburban school. From our research, we found that both principals worked very hard to break the perception of and pattern of failure that is typical in urban low-SES schools. The two principals truly believed, and acted on the belief, that they could make a difference for their students regardless of their students' background, socioeconomic status, and life experiences. Such accomplishment, however, appeared to require a different mindset and approach and more dedicated and inspired principals. Such principals will need to instill the belief and build the confidence in teachers, students, and parents that excellence can be accomplished if one has focused effort with major time commitments shared by all stakeholders.

Strong principal leaders, who are transformational and who share instructional leadership, truly believe that everyone can learn (regardless of economic status and family background). They are team builders who inspire their teams to go beyond expectations to have a chance of improving school performance in low-SES schools. They courageously confront and influence teachers and staff members who resist pleas to change. Such principal leadership can challenge and excite students about learning, particularly in low socioeconomic urban schools.

Educators of future school leaders are left with the question: How do we teach future leaders to become transformational change agents in low-SES schools? Those involved with principal preparation programs, for example, should require students to visit, shadow, and interview principals in high performing schools, including low-SES schools. Future principals must see what excellence looks like from different grade levels and different perspectives. Observing, coupled with interviewing, would provide students with first-hand knowledge and experiences of excellence on campuses different from their own. Additionally, while future school leaders undergo internships in a school, they often fulfill the academic requirement in the school in which they are working, whether or not that principal is a model of excellence. Often a university system is not designed to place graduate students into situations of excellence; however, we believe that principals of excellence who have developed situations of excellence would provide opportunities for growing and developing future change agents. These high- performing schools would provide aspiring administrators arenas in which they could experience high performance in action, occasions to work with varieties of learners, and opportunities to be mentored by these excellent leaders.

For future study, we suggest possible comparative studies with low performing, low-SES urban schools and affluent suburban schools to ascertain similar and dissimilar data. In our particular study, we found that the principal played a vital role as the agent and leader of change to improve the school. As such, future scholars may need to isolate narrowly what these principals are doing that *is* different from successful principals not in a low-SES area. Also the *Rokeach Values Survey*, in our opinion, could be given to all staff to provide more validity to the finding that the leader seems to instill her values to her team or that she is putting together a team (through new hires and influence) that generally shares the leader's values and, thus, is building a team that is more responsive and trusting of the leader.

In conclusion, we noted in the title of this work that these high-performing low-SES schools are about going *extra, above, and beyond*. We observed and, for one of this study's authors who has lived and performed within a high achieving low-SES school, we have seen (and experienced) the dedication of a group of educators, principals, teachers and staff, who work their hardest and believe their grandest that the children in their care would succeed and succeed at levels of excellence. As our research concluded, the staff at one of the schools in the study nominated one of these authors as their representative for the school district's Teacher of the Year. Among over 11,000 employees and over 250 nominees, this educator became one of only four Teacher of the Year finalists, representing elementary schools in the district. In the words of John Quincy Adams, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." The principals in schools Alpha and Beta are truly leaders, and they have inspired others, in the spirit of John Quincy Adams, to go *extra, above, and beyond*.

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Appendix

## Rokeach Values Survey[4]

**Directions:** Reflectively assess the following lists of end values and instrumental values. Rank order each list separately (1 being your most dearly held value; 18, the value least important to you). Start with the end values; then do the instrumental values. (The end and instrumental values are listed in alphabetical order. There is no one-to-one relationship between end and instrumental values on this list.)

**End Values**
*Beliefs about ultimate goals or desirable states such as happiness or wisdom.*

\_\_\_\_\_ a. *A comfortable* (prosperous) *life*
\_\_\_\_\_ b. *Equality* (equal opportunity for all)
\_\_\_\_\_ c. *An exciting* (stimulating/active) *life*
\_\_\_\_\_ d. *Family security* (taking care of loved ones)
\_\_\_\_\_ e. *Freedom* (independence and free choice)
\_\_\_\_\_ f. *Health* (physical and mental well-being)
\_\_\_\_\_ g. *Inner harmony* (freedom from inner conflict)
\_\_\_\_\_ h. *Mature love* (sexual & spiritual intimacy)
\_\_\_\_\_ i. *National security* (protection from attack)
\_\_\_\_\_ j. *Pleasure* (enjoyable, leisurely life)
\_\_\_\_\_ k. *Salvation* (saved, eternal life)
\_\_\_\_\_ l. *Self-respect* (self-esteem)
\_\_\_\_\_ m. *A sense of accomplishment* (lasting contribution)
\_\_\_\_\_ n. *Social recognition* (respect and admiration)
\_\_\_\_\_ o. *True friendship* (close companionship)
\_\_\_\_\_ p. *Wisdom* (a mature understanding of life)
\_\_\_\_\_ q. *A world at peace* (world free of war & conflict)
\_\_\_\_\_ r. *World of beauty* (beauty of nature and the arts)

**Instrumental Values**
*Beliefs about what we must do to achieve those end values, such as behaving courageously or responsibly.*

\_\_\_\_\_ a. *Ambition* (hardworking and aspiring)
\_\_\_\_\_ b. *Broad-mindedness* (open-minded)
\_\_\_\_\_ c. *Capable* (competent/effective)
\_\_\_\_\_ d. *Cheerful* (light-hearted/joyful)
\_\_\_\_\_ e. *Clean* (neat and tidy)
\_\_\_\_\_ f. *Courageous* (standing up for one's beliefs)
\_\_\_\_\_ g. *Forgiving* (willing to pardon others)
\_\_\_\_\_ h. *Helpfulness* (working for welfare of others)
\_\_\_\_\_ i. *Honest* (sincere and truthful)
\_\_\_\_\_ j. *Imaginative* (daring and creative)
\_\_\_\_\_ k. *Intellectual* (self-reliant, self-sufficient)
\_\_\_\_\_ l. *Logical* (consistent, rational)
\_\_\_\_\_ m. *Loving* (affectionate and tender)
\_\_\_\_\_ n. *Loyalty* (faithful to friends and/or group)
\_\_\_\_\_ o. *Obedient* (dutiful, respectful)
\_\_\_\_\_ p. *Polite* (courteous and well-mannered)
\_\_\_\_\_ q. *Responsible* (dependable and reliable)
\_\_\_\_\_ r. *Self-controlled* (restrained, self-discipline

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[4]Note: This list of end and instrumental values, *The Rokeach Values Survey*, is the work of social scientist Milton Rokeach who studied values and how humans prioritize their values. Reference: Milton Rokeach, *Understanding Human Values*, NY: The Free Press, 1979.

# Increasing Student Success in Rigorous Courses: Promising Practices in Reform Identified by a School-University Partnership

Betty J. Alford

Secondary school students make higher academic gains when enrolled in rigorous courses (Toch, Jerald, & Dillon, 2007). As Toch, Jerald, and Dillon (2007) stated, "Reform, it is increasingly clear, depends on improving both school climate and the quality and rigor of classroom instruction" (p. 435). However, just increasing the rigor in secondary school classes is insufficient in improving student performance. Instead, support systems must be in place to ensure student success (College Board, 2006).

Many schools are in need of reform to increase student participation and success in advanced level courses as part of strengthening preparation for postsecondary education (Robinson, Stempel, & McCree, 2005). Although the last decade has been characterized by school reform, failures of many large-scale reform efforts have also emerged (Cuban, 2010). In one study of school reform, Cuban (2010) identified the cause of such failures as an emphasis on structural rather than instructional changes. The good news is that some schools *have* focused on instructional changes to better meet the needs of preparing students for postsecondary education and to advocate for student success. The result has been school improvement. In these schools, the school leaders understand the importance of meeting each student's needs and of communicating the value of preparation for postsecondary education to parents, students, community members, and faculty. Furthermore, the educational leaders serve as advocates for all students' academic success (Chenoweth, 2009). As Chubb and Lovelace (2002) reported, "Bridging the achievement gap is a national imperative. It can be done" (p. i). For example, Robinson, Stemgel, and McCree (2005) reported that in high impact schools, which were defined as schools with a high percentage of low income students who were achieving exemplary results, students were enrolled in rigorous courses, such as, Advanced Placement (AP) classes, much more frequently than students in comparison schools. Open enrollment to the advanced classes, instead of requiring a specific grade-point average or teacher recommendations, was the policy of these schools, and students were encouraged to participate in the more rigorous classes (Robinson, Stemgel, & McCree, 2005).

Shaping the culture of the school into a culture of high expectations is important in school reform. A culture of high expectations implies that the values, beliefs, norms, policies, processes, and practices of the individuals in the school are aligned with a consistent vision that is communicated clearly and receives broad-based acknowledgement that action is needed (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Recognizing the need for reform wherein greater numbers of students participate in rigorous courses (Adelman, 1999), the identification of successful processes and practices in strengthening students' participation and success in advanced level courses, challenges to participation and success, and ways to overcome the challenges are needed. This qualitative case study was designed to illuminate the successful practices and processes, challenges, and ways to overcome the challenges of increasing student participation

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and success in advanced level classes that were attained by a secondary school-community-university Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) partnership with explicit goals of increasing the number of students accessing and succeeding in dual credit, Pre Advanced Placement (AP), AP, dual credit and other advanced level classes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Systemic reform is achieved through a multi-faceted approach that considers structures for collaboration, implementation of best practices, and ongoing evaluation (Schlechty, 2001). In order to achieve sustained change to a culture of high expectations in schools with curriculum and instruction that supports the increased academic achievement of secondary students, systemic, comprehensive reform is needed. Too often, students express interest in pursuing postsecondary education, but they do not take the steps to meet this goal (Adelman, 1999, Gladieux & Swail, 1998). For example, nationally, 66.2% of low socioeconomic (SES) U.S. tenth-grade students expect to attain a bachelor's degree or higher, 78.7% of middle SES U.S. tenth-grade students, and 92.8% of high SES U.S. tenth-grade students (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). However, for every 100 ninth graders, the number who graduate high school on time is 68, the number who immediately enroll in college is 40, the number who are still enrolled in their sophomore year is 27, and the number who graduate college on time is 18 (Ewell, Jones, & Kelly, 2003). Students who are not prepared for college and careers enter a job market where 90% of the new jobs in the U.S. will require a high school diploma (22%), some postsecondary education (36%), or a bachelor's degree (31%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In addition, a report by ACT (2008) titled *The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students are on Target for College and Career Readiness before High School* stated:

> Today, college readiness also means career readiness. While not every high school graduate plans to attend college, the majority of the fastest-growing jobs that require a high school diploma, pay a salary above the poverty line for a family of four, and provide opportunities for career advancement require knowledge and skills comparable to those expected of the first-year college student. (p. 1)

To meet both college and career readiness standards for students, leaders from the district, campus, and university levels can implement systemic change processes to strengthen a college-going culture and students' success for both college and careers (Toch, Jerald, & Dillon, 2007). One of these systemic changes is analysis of achievement data by teams.

### The Role of Data Analysis in Reform of High Schools

Moving from pockets of excellence in individual classrooms to a school-wide culture of high expectations presents a challenge to school leaders who are seeking to achieve academic excellence and bridge the achievement gap (Elmore, 2004). To achieve this type of reform, the principal leads the way in helping all school personnel to recognize and assess national, state, and local needs through the analysis of relevant data. Chubb and Loveless (2002) emphasized the urgency of overcoming the achievement gap as follows:

Overstating the importance of the achievement gap is not easy. The difference in educational achievement between White students, on the one hand, and African and Hispanic students, on the other, is large and persistent. In the last decade, it's gotten worse. (p. 1)

The differences in enrollment in courses in high school that would prepare the students for college success are significant among the various income levels of students' families. Only 28 % of low income students are enrolled in a college-preparatory program in high school compared to 48% of middle income students and 65% of high income students (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2003). Equity audits by educational leaders for a particular campus can help to illuminate the data supporting needs of the local campus to overcome the achievement gap. The findings of the equity audit can be used to assist in communicating the need for change (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). As stated in a report of the Pathways to College Network (2004), "In a nation where equal opportunity for all is a bedrock democratic value, getting a college degree still depends far too much on one's economic circumstances or ethnic heritage" (p. 5).

Conyers and Ewy (2004) emphasized, "The challenge of teaching all students and closing the gap in student achievement will not go away" (p. 2). Leadership is needed to meet this challenge. In Texas, an initiative of the Texas Education Higher Education Coordinating Board titled *Closing the Gaps* was designed to increase the number of students who are prepared for postsecondary education. As part of this initiative, P-16 councils of university, community college, and district partners have been formed as part of a state-wide emphasis on developing a college going culture (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010). Expanding Advanced Placement programs and expanding dual credit programs have been advocated as ways to increase the rigor of secondary schools and better prepare students for postsecondary education (National Governors Association, 2003). As stated in the executive summary of the ACT Report (2005) titled *Courses Count: Preparing Students for Postsecondary Success*:

> Rigorous college preparatory course sequences—particularly in English, mathematics, and science—are critical to preparing students for postsecondary education and work. Yet, large numbers of students still do not participate in the most beneficial courses, and there is little evidence that the high school curriculum is rigorous enough to ensure that most students are adequately prepared for postsecondary success. (p. v)

For example, in 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics supported that 28% of entering freshmen in postsecondary education enroll in one or more developmental courses.

On a national and state level, the issue of preparing more students for success in postsecondary education has been a focus of the last decade. In 2005, a National Education Summit on High Schools was held to explore needed reforms for high schools in response to the issue of preparing more students for success in postsecondary education (American Diploma Project Network, 2005). In a report of the American Youth Policy Forum and Pathways to College Network titled *The Link between High School Reform and College Access and Success for Low-Income and Minority Youth*, Martinez and Kiopott (2005) reported:

> Although greater numbers of students are enrolling in college today than they were 20 years ago, the rates of college enrollment for African American and Latino students

remain considerably lower than those of White and Asian students. Most disturbing perhaps, is the lack of preparedness or readiness of high school graduates for postsecondary education. (p. 1)

Martinez and Kiopott (2005) reported on promising practices of Equity 2000, Urban Systemic Initiative, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment, Middle College and Early College High Schools, Tech Prep and 2+2 Articulation, Project GRAD, and GEAR UP which are all programs that have worked to improve students' preparation for postsecondary education. Four key practices that emerged were curriculum alignment, academic and social supports, access to rigorous course content, and a structure of personalized learning opportunities for students. Pathways to College (2004) similarly identified the importance of high expectations, rigorous course content and support, social support, data analysis and leadership as key components in strengthening a college going culture. As Adelman (1999) identified in his report titled *Answers in the Toolbox*, a student's participation in advanced level, rigorous courses is a significant determiner of the student's later success in postsecondary education.

## CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The East Texas GEAR UP partnership of nine partner schools, a university, a community college, and business and community partners had been successful each of five years in increasing the number of students accessing and succeeding in advanced level courses. For example, the last three years while the students were in high school, advanced courses that were offered increased from 254 courses to 323 courses, and enrollments in advanced level classes increased from 8,970 to 11,631. In addition, the number of minority student enrollments in advanced level classes increased from 2,886 to 4,151, and the number of low-income student enrollments in advanced level classes increased from 2,916 to 4,294.

The GEAR UP students of this partnership completed their junior year in May 2010, the fifth year of the GEAR UP grant. The direct services of the GEAR UP grant were provided for one grade level of students beginning in seventh grade as they continued to graduation. However, the professional development through Leadership Institutes, Advanced Placement College Board Institutes, vertical alignment and curricular alignment meetings, collaborative meetings between university and secondary faculty members, and subject-specific conferences were open to all teachers on the campus. Also, all students benefitted from enhancements to the College and Career Centers on campuses and changes in practices and policies, such as, open admission to Advanced Placement classes with outreach to students and provision of support through mentoring and tutoring programs as well as an emphasis on personal outreach through advisory groups. Systemic reform to a college going culture was reinforced as campus and district leaders ensured that changes that were implemented through the GEAR UP grant were sustained for subsequent grade levels.

The GEAR UP project focused on achieving goals of increasing student participation and success in advanced level courses to increase students' preparation for postsecondary education. The partnership also implemented activities to demystify college and to ensure that the steps for admission to college were completed. Outreach to parents and the community to develop a college-going culture was strengthened through multiple parent meetings, newsletters mailed to parents, and personal conversations. The following conceptual model illustrates a framework that depicts the overlapping areas of focus of the GEAR UP partnership (see Figure 1).
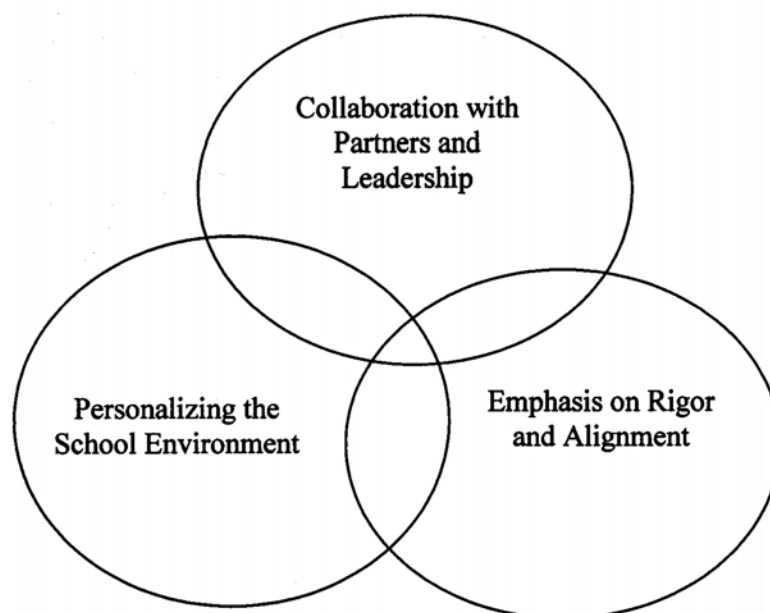
*Figure 1. Framework for the Partnership Project.*

Through collaboration with partners and shared leadership in planning interventions, through an emphasis on rigor and curriculum alignment in courses, and through a focus on personalizing the school environment with personal outreach and support to all GEAR UP students, project objectives were attained in this fifth year of the project.

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify practices and processes that specifically influenced increased student participation and success in advanced level courses and ways the partner schools met identified challenges. Two primary research questions guided the study: (1) To what do you attribute your success in increasing the participation and success of secondary students in rigorous classes? (2) What were your lessons learned in meeting identified challenges?

As Marshall and Rossman (2006) stressed, "A proposal for the conducting of any research represents decisions the researcher has made that a theoretical framework, design, and methodology will generate data appropriate for responding to the research questions and will conform to ethical standards" (p. 24). A qualitative study was selected in order to illuminate the practices, processes, and lessons learned of nine partner school districts that participated in a GEAR UP partnership project which was designed to increase students' participation and success in advanced level classes. Illuminating practices and clarifying understandings are explicit goals in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009).While not intended to identify findings that would generalize to all settings, the researcher sought to provide understanding of practices that were successful in these settings and challenges that were faced in meeting the goal of increasing student participation and success in advanced level courses. Creswell (2007) pointed out, "Qualitative research involves "going out to the setting or field of study, gaining access, and gathering material" (p. 17).

Nine focus group interviews were conducted on partner campuses with GEAR UP

council members that included the principal, assistant principal, counselor, GEAR UP campus coordinator, and two teachers. Two focus groups were conducted at the partner university with six of the GEAR UP college tutors. In all, sixty-six individuals participated in the focus group interviews. Marshall and Rossman (2006) clarified, "The interviewer creates a supportive environment, asking focused questions to encourage discussion and the expression of different opinions and points of view" (p. 114). Semi-structured focus group and individual interviews provided an opportunity to explore the same topics while exploring for differences in the various settings. Nine interviews with the partner school districts' superintendents and ten interviews with campus GEAR UP coordinators also served as data sources. One superintendent declined to be interviewed due to his recent arrival at the district.

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed before being analyzed to discern themes. The transcripts were coded using open coding and axial coding. Careful attention to how the data supported key themes emerged as Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggested through "reading, rereading, and reading the data once more" (p. 158).Trustworthiness of the data analysis was attained through peer debriefing, through maintaining an audit trail, and through providing member checks (Creswell, 2007).

## FINDINGS

### Research Question 1: To what do you attribute your success in increasing the participation and success of secondary students in rigorous classes?

A sustained focus, student support and outreach, professional development, high expectations, demystifying college, and outreach to parents were the primary themes discerned in response to the first research question. Each will be discussed as follows by sharing key representative comments from the respondents.

*Sustained focus.* A key factor contributing to the success of this partnership in increasing students' participation and success in advanced courses was sustained leadership from the university GEAR UP staff, the GEAR UP Advisory Board, and the GEAR UP councils, teachers, counselors, and administrators. The collaborative structure of the project was characterized by the partnership leaders engaging stakeholders in reflecting on practices and ongoing planning of ways to further the work of the GEAR UP project. The GEAR UP university leadership team met weekly; the GEAR UP coordinators met monthly; GEAR UP coordinators, administrators, and counselors attended GEAR UP Leadership Institutes; and biannual steering committee meetings were held to guide planning and implementation of activities. Some schools experienced turnover in leadership although a core leadership team remained with the project from the project's beginning. The project leader, principal investigator, and the community outreach coordinator from the partner university had worked with the GEAR UP partnership for ten years. Five business members of the GEAR UP advisory board and four superintendents had all worked with the GEAR UP partnership from four to ten years. Many of the teachers, counselors, and principals had worked in the GEAR UP partnership from four to ten years. Eight of the GEAR UP coordinators had worked with the GEAR UP partnership for four years. The project leaders maintained a sustained focus on high expectations, on academic rigor, on analysis of data, on P-16 alignment, on student support, and on professional development. Through flexibility in implementation of activities to meet local needs with inclusive leadership of all stakeholders, campuses were able to

implement programs to meet their specific needs. A teacher shared the success being attained through individual encouragement of students by stating:

> One of the things I'm most proud of is pretty basic and structural. It is that we have teachers who are encouraging the students. We have an administration that gets behind the program, and people are always looking for different ways to enhance the program.

Inclusive leadership characterized the East Texas GEAR UP project. As a teacher expressed, "Our coordinator has been a wonderful director and facilitator for our curriculum development, and her leadership has caused our whole department to come together more as a team." A teacher shared:

> I think the GEAR UP program sharpened our focus on advanced course offerings. We have increased our number of courses offered, thus allowing more students to participate. We strongly encourage students to try a Pre-AP or AP class in an area they feel strong in. Our teachers have 'bought in' to increasing the rigor of the courses and to actively recruiting students who show the potential to be successful. The teachers have worked hard to provide support for students who take the risk to be in the classes. We make it fairly difficult for students to get out of the advanced classes once they begin. We have found that most will rise to the occasion. Once they have experienced success, some are willing to try additional advanced coursework. I think this will have a great impact on their being prepared for college and going into college with confidence.

Another teacher added:

> The "buy in" by our campus administrators and counselors has been positive. I have been pleased with how much they are willing to help once they understand the program. Our GEAR UP Student Leadership Team has also been a wonderful asset. This team has done a great job at keeping their classmates informed about different activities as well as serving as encouraging mentors.

An administrator stressed, "The Peer Mentoring Program has also been very successful in reaching those students who did not dream of college before this program." The collaborative framework that has been achieved through the GEAR UP project was cited as a way that a sustained focus was achieved. As a teacher stressed, "The middle school and the elementary school are working hard to try and implement new ideas they gained when our GEAR UP students were in middle school." A GEAR UP coordinator added:

> I've never seen such a group of faculty members pull together and work to do whatever they can to make the students successful. I think that is a big plus, and that's why we're able to accomplish what we do because we are all pulling together for the same goal.

> ***Student support and outreach.*** The strong social support through building positive relationships with students was attributed as having strong impact in each of the partner schools. A teacher emphasized, "For our size school, students get a lot of encouragement from

faculty. I think we really care about our students. That's what's outstanding. They are not just a number here. They're really not." Another success that was mentioned was the individual recruitment of students for the rigorous classes. A teacher expressed:

> I think that seeking students to enroll in the concurrent courses is our biggest success. There is funding to help students. Before GEAR UP, many of our lower SES students had no idea that they could afford the concurrent classes. Being introduced to the classes has planted a seed. Then, they realize that if they take a college class in high school, college becomes something that's very attainable to them, and going to college is just the next thing that they're going to do. To me, as far as college-readiness, that says a lot about the GEAR UP program's success, seeking our students [from low SES groups] and calling them individually and saying, 'Hey, you know what? You need to take the college class.'

Student support has been provided through the recruitment of students for dual credit, concurrent, Pre AP, or AP classes with enrollments increasing markedly in these classes. In addition, campuses are "allowing middle school students to gain high school credits and then bring them to high school." A counselor stressed:

> The students have really bought into taking advanced classes and made it their own. I believe now that is helping them in the process and will continue to help them. I already have parents calling and wanting their children in the advanced classes for this year.

Another GEAR UP coordinator explained:

> One thing that we've done this year is that we've really focused. We've had mentor programs before, and they were somewhat general, but this year, we focused on specific students with needs. I looked for somebody that they already worked well with and had rapport with and I said, 'Listen, I want you to be this student's mom or dad away from home. I want you to have them come to you every day. I want you to check their homework. I want you to do things until these students are succeeding.' The teachers have embraced it completely. The mentoring has made a great difference.

Support has also been provided through extra help in team meetings or tutoring. As a GEAR UP coordinator shared:

> There's a lot of people that are intervening and pulling for these students, and I think that's a huge plus because on a given day, I could pick up the phone and call four or five different people and say, 'Hey, I'm having a problem with this student. I see this student is struggling.' And I've got four or five people immediately trying to figure out, 'OK, what can we do to help this student?' I think that's a huge plus.

The format that was used for tutoring sessions varied among campuses. One campus used one-on-one tutoring in an after-school setting while another used small-group after-school tutoring, and still another campus provided in-class one-on-one assistance to students. The personal rewards to the college tutors as well as for the high school students were noted. As a college tutor expressed, "Seeing the faces of students light up when they began to understand

and realize that they could work problems on their own gave me so much joy." Another college tutor stressed, "Most of my students who came to one-on-one tutoring put forth an effort to learn and were usually very proud of themselves when they left." The college tutors learned also. For example, a college tutor reflected, "I've learned more about what this job is requiring of me and how just my being there and encouraging them has affected the students much more than I realized." Another college tutor commented, "It was a lot more difficult than I expected. The students are expected to learn a lot in a very short amount of time. I was not expecting this much pressure." Another college tutor stressed, "I've definitely learned that you've got to be prepared. I learned to take the book home and do the lesson before I ever got to the tutoring session."

The college tutors helped to emphasize preparation for college while ensuring mastery of the subjects. As a college tutor explained, "I had plenty of opportunities to talk to the students about college." Another college tutor shared, "I addressed the entire class about my experience in college and what the Spanish department is like and what it was like to take classes in college. I thought that really interested some of the students." Another college tutor added, "The GEAR UP program is doing an amazing job." The college tutors also praised their orientation and preparation for tutoring stating, "The orientation went very well. There was amazing communication. The GEAR UP office is always there to help."

A statewide recognized E-mentoring program was implemented with three partner ISDs. The districts are over an hour from the university partner making ongoing contact with college mentors difficult through a face-to-face venue. E-mentoring between College of Education secondary teacher preparation college students and the GEAR UP high school students provided the opportunity for ongoing communication regarding preparation for college. A highlight of the semester was the mentor and mentee meeting during a campus visit by the high school students to the university. The enthusiasm for the process and the college day experience was evident in the words and expressions as students departed the university. Evaluations also supported the benefits of the program.

In increasing student support and outreach, the teachers identified an increased focus on each child's success. A teacher explained:

> We've really improved our staffing meetings in discussing a student's needs. Teachers and principals are in these meetings. There are usually around eight adults with the parent and student, and we talk about our concerns for the student, his or her grades, what's going on, and how we can help.

Additional student support and outreach have been provided through the GEAR UP project through peer tutoring activities for students who were struggling in courses. A teacher stressed, "The peer tutoring has been instrumental to students' success."

***Professional development.*** The GEAR UP grant also afforded the opportunity for quality professional development through specialized professional development to meet identified needs, such as, GEAR UP Leadership Institutes, AP Institutes, vertical team meetings, and P-16 alignment meetings. For example, an administrator stressed:

> The first thing that I think the GEAR UP grant provided us was an opportunity to provide quality staff development in two areas. The first area was the *Capturing Kids' Hearts* Training, where we are trying to change our mindset about how teachers provide instruction in the class room to make sure they are making personal

connections with students in order to see learning take place. The second would be our teachers' participation through the AP training that gave them a taste of what it's like to raise the bar in all classrooms, not just the AP or Pre-AP classrooms.

GEAR UP Leadership Institutes featured principals, counselors, and teachers who were achieving GEAR UP goals in addition to providing the opportunity to study performance data and determine next steps. The collaborative environment that was fostered in the Leadership Institutes of administrators, counselors, and teachers allowed mutual sharing of practices and processes that were contributing to students' success.

Teachers also stressed the benefits of the professional development attained through college visits. As a teacher explained:

> I've learned so much. Every college we go to, I learn something new that I can bring back and tell the students. I think that it is important, too, that we become educated and aware of certain expectations that certain colleges have of students so that we can share that with other students.

The GEAR UP program has provided teachers with additional opportunities for professional development. The primary focus has been to provide experiences that help teachers increase rigor in courses while ensuring student success.

P-16 alignment was emphasized through successful collaborative meetings between teachers from the high school, community college, and the university for the core subjects of math, science, English, and social studies. In the meetings, barriers were identified that needed to be addressed in order for students to have a seamless transition to college. These meetings were highly beneficial as noted in participants' evaluations. P-16 alignment was also attained through a successful emphasis on preparation for college and careers. As a teacher reported:

> In middle school, we had a GEAR UP class focused on researching careers, researching colleges, looking at options that students could have for their lives and what the process of preparation looks like. We followed that with establishing the College Zone Career Center. I think that the success that we've had has already proven to our local district that it's valuable; so I don't think we have any concerns about sustaining it for the future.

The principals also each recognized the importance of vertical team meetings to the improvement process and supported the vertical team's efforts through actions, such as, paying substitutes so the vertical teams could meet all day for planning. Teachers who were not currently teaching AP courses participated on the vertical teams in the professional development activities. This alignment of student expectations ensured a smooth transition from each course. Although all administrators required the vertical team members to attend summer College Board Institutes, administrators assigned both Advanced Placement and regular classes to individual teachers so that the strategies used in the AP program would also be used in the regular-level classes. Each of the partner schools eliminated low-level classes and honors courses. Students either took regular-level courses, Pre-Advanced Placement courses, Advanced Placement courses, or concurrent and dual credit courses. Advocating for student success included ensuring the strategies and materials needed to achieve increased student learning were available for teachers. Teacher buy-in to the Advanced Placement

program was strengthened through ongoing professional development opportunities. As an administrator commented, "It is important to train the staff . . . New teachers coming into the program have to participate in professional development. We work to assist teachers."

*High expectations.* High expectations for students have been fostered through a focus on college for all students. A teacher stressed the GEAR UP project's success in educating students to the steps in preparing for college. As he elaborated:

> I came from, not only a different district, but a different state, and I have never seen a group of students more educated on what's available to them. We're giving them exposure to college now. I am just so impressed with the knowledge that our students have acquired through this grant. I didn't just come from a different district. I came from a different state, and I thought we had it together there. However, the exposure that these students have had to college preparation has been phenomenal, especially the lower income students, who under normal circumstances would have never visited universities and would have never participated in the A++ or been pushed to take the SAT or ACT. The amount of knowledge that our students have of what is possible is great. I am very impressed with this program.

Council members stressed that high expectations were evidenced by greater participation of students in their dual credit courses. A teacher commented:

> Our GEAR UP students are really involved in the dual credit courses that we offer. I think one reason is because the emphasis on college preparation has been ongoing. They've heard, 'college, college, college,' and they are seeking this experience.

Another teacher emphasized, "When we talk about college, we talk to all the students, not just a particular group." The GEAR UP council members were particularly proud of academic opportunities through tutoring and preparation for college admission because of the high expectations. As a teacher explained, "I think one thing that we've been doing is we've been offering the opportunity to take online courses with the university. That's been working well with some students." Another teacher added that they have made the students more aware of the community college admission test, THEA, and are seeing more students taking the dual credit classes. As the teacher commented, "I'll be really excited when their results come in this year, and I can see how many good things have come from this."

Another teacher explained:

> We set higher expectations, and we don't just push for passing on TAKS. We are pushing students to achieve the recommended level. We talk about expectations and say that passing is no longer good enough. We must go for the recommended level. We have raised the expectations. We've also had a real strong push this year as far as SAT and ACT vocabulary and testing strategies in the classroom. Every student in this school district can tell you about the SAT and ACT and are getting prepared for these tests.

Council members were particularly impressed with the number of GEAR UP students taking the concurrent classes. As a teacher explained, "They're being encouraged to sign up for summer classes, and several of them who haven't taken summer classes before have told me,

'I want to start this summer.'" Another teacher added, "Our students are passing the dual credit and concurrent credit courses with grades of As or Bs." Council members also expressed that utilizing Study Island and implementing ACT and SAT questions into class lessons were helping to strengthen students' academic preparation. Council members discussed ways that a college going culture was fostered, such as, placing SAT words on the TV hall monitors, publicizing the opportunities for dual credit courses in high school, showcasing colleges in the halls, and celebrating and posting students' college admission plans through an Admission Accomplished assembly at the end of the school year celebrating all students who have been accepted to college. High expectations for students have been fostered through a focus on preparation for college for all students. A council member stressed the value of rewriting the curriculum and strengthening the rigor to meet higher standards so that students would be prepared for college. The campus leaders worked with biology and specifically Pre-AP and AP biology to raise the standards. The teachers implemented a "Five E" instructional model and worked on raising AP Chemistry scores.

The collaborative partnership has fostered successful interventions, such as a Summer Academy and FISH Camps to foster high expectations. Students enthusiastically participated in these activities that provided an opportunity to start building relationships before school started. Preparation for college through preparation for college admission tests, such as the SAT, ACT, THEA, and ACCUPLACER were cited as additional examples of high expectations as well as the interventions, such as the A++ program. A teacher noted the confidence and experience to be successful in college that students were gaining through exposure to college-level curriculum in the AP courses. A teacher stressed that a primary success of the GEAR UP project was, "We try to include all students. We try to reach out and make the programs available to anyone. We keep the programs open to all GEAR UP students."

Another success of the GEAR UP project that was noted was the district-wide emphasis on planning for the future. As a teacher explained, "One thing I see district-wide is teachers in the lower grades speaking to the students about what they do today making a difference later. I think that's a change, too." A teacher stressed the success of the leadership opportunities that have been provided through the GEAR UP project stating, "You've got to give students a chance to get into leadership roles so they'll be comfortable with the roles later on." She cited the Leadership Team opportunities as a great success of the GEAR UP project in fostering high expectations.

The partner schools implemented GO Centers where college and career information was readily accessible to students. This was an initiative of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's *Closing the Gaps* emphasis and has been described as "a College and Career Center on steroids." The GEAR UP coordinators were able to work with the school counselors to ensure that information about college was shared with students and parents. Motivational speakers were also provided for students to encourage them to work hard in school for graduation and the next steps of postsecondary education. In one school, the Achieving Via Individual Determination (AVID) program was implemented which provided tutoring and college awareness activities for students through a class elective. Partner schools also implemented career awareness activities and mentoring programs to encourage graduation and college. In all these ways, high expectations were reinforced for all students.

*Demystify college.* Students whose parents did not attend college may not have an understanding of postsecondary education. A teacher explained ways that college has been demystified for students:

One of the important things that we do here is we actually take students to colleges and let them tour. You know that really helps. We have taken them to many colleges around this area where they can actually see what it's like, and that opens their eyes a lot. Some of the guest speakers that we bring are also our alumni who are now in college. We're happy that we've brought some excellent guest speakers here to talk to some of these students and open their eyes as to what they can do with their lives.

An administrator emphasized:

College Zone College and Career Center has impacted our program the most. More students are taking time to visit the center on their own to research colleges and careers and to work on scholarship applications. If everything goes as planned, we will expand the Career Center next year to our existing library which is fully glassed in from the hallway. Students will be able to see the College Center as they walk down the hallway.

Another teacher added:

The addition of the Career Center and college visits have motivated students to attempt the more rigorous courses that are within the pathway of their chosen field. The most important addition has been one person designated to supervise the grant, to collaborate with parents and to encourage and guide the students.

A counselor elaborated, "The college visits were the most successful because seeing something makes it more real to the students." A teacher stressed:

I think the GEAR UP program sharpened our focus on advanced course offerings. We have increased our number of courses offered, thus allowing more students to participate. We strongly encourage students to try a Pre-AP or AP class in an area in which they feel strong. Our teachers have 'bought in' to increasing the rigor of the courses and to actively recruiting students who show the potential to be successful. The teachers have worked hard to provide support for students who take the risk to be in the classes. We make it fairly difficult for students to get out of the advanced classes once they begin. We have found that most will rise to the occasion. Once they have experienced success, some are willing to try additional advanced coursework. I think this will have a great impact on their being prepared for college and going into college with confidence.

Another teacher stressed, "I have seen an increase in the number of student participants in events. Also, meeting with students on an individual basis has been beneficial." A counselor added:

Exposure to college campuses has been highly beneficial for students. As of January 8, 2010, students in the GEAR UP cohort have had the opportunity to tour: Texas A&M University at College Station, University of Texas at Austin, Angelina College in Lufkin, Stephen F Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Rice University in Houston, Texas Southern University in Houston, Sam Houston State University in

Huntsville, Tyler Junior College in Tyler, and University of Texas at Tyler. Students have also had the opportunity to hear a panel discussion with former students who are enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

*Outreach to parents.* There have been increased numbers of parent meetings and personal communication with parents and guardians concerning college entrance requirements, testing, and financial aid. Parents' and families' knowledge regarding postsecondary education and financial aid was  enhanced through a GEAR UP newsletter entitled *Turning Points* that was mailed to all GEAR UP parents quarterly. This locally produced newsletter was printed in Spanish and English and featured pertinent articles regarding postsecondary education and financial aid for college. In addition a *Road to College Checklist* for 11th and 12th grade students was developed and mailed to all students' homes. Through the partnership with Top Ladies of Distinction for a College Readiness program, information was further shared with parents. Students and parents participated in Showcase Saturday at the partner university including a special morning institute designed especially for the GEAR UP students and parents. A video on dual credit courses that was prepared by the partner community college was another way that information was shared with parents during parent meetings.

In addition, individual partner schools each developed local initiatives to share information with parents. For example, one partner school provided the magazine *Next Steps: Your Life After High School* to all GEAR UP students. The campus hosted a financial aid workshop for parents this year and a FAFSA completion night for parents and students. Information was provided to students in history class to take home to parents for discussion of steps in preparing for postsecondary education.

Another campus participated in the College Fair, hosted a scholarship and financial aid workshop, and had many students and parents participating in Showcase Saturday. Still another partner campus offered a financial aid night with representatives of the partner community college as presenters. They used their phone call-out system to encourage attendance. Parents were informed of a grant whereby the dual credit courses would not cost the student anything, and a student could graduate with up to 18 college credit hours. One partner campus mailed a monthly newsletter to parents. Discussions of college always included topics, such as, how to finance college. Messages were sent through a Blackboard computer system to parents of scholarship meetings and other pertinent college preparation meetings. Also, on the school website, dates of parent meetings were posted and dates of visits of college representatives. One partner school's GO Center was instrumental in providing information about college and financial aid to parents. Parent nights for all parents as well as targeted parent meetings, such as, Hispanic Parent College Night, where the program was presented in Spanish have been primary ways that information has also been shared. One parent commented that in working with the counselors on preparation for college, "They have become almost part of our family as they have worked with our child." Community College representatives have provided information about financial aid, and university professors have explained steps in preparing for college to parents and students. A GEAR UP coordinator explained, "If parents are not able to attend a meeting, we mail the parents materials about the meeting." The school leaders also communicated with parents through phone calls and in the community in order to share important information about preparation for college with them.

**Research Question 2: What were the lessons learned in meeting identified challenges?**

GEAR UP councils reported challenges of some students not being motivated to take advanced level classes or participate in GEAR UP activities, of students' difficulties in meeting the challenges of the advanced level classes, of engaging all parents in students' preparation for college, and of meeting the needs of all students in a large class.

***Student motivation.*** GEAR UP coordinators emphasized that providing encouragement to students to take the advanced classes was important in that not all recognized the benefits. Teachers explained:

- For some students, there's a reluctance to sign up for the harder classes. For some, there's a lack of confidence or a social stigma.
- Some students are apathetic about education. For the classes on Saturday to prepare for the SAT and ACT, some students have said that they don't want to give up their Saturday for this.

Teachers, counselors, GEAR UP coordinators, and administrators all stressed that personal outreach was important in meeting the challenge of lack of motivation. As a teacher stressed, "We've put in individual interventions with students one-on-one. The principals talk with students to try to increase their goals." Another teacher commented further, "I feel the renewed focus on the individual has really helped students see opportunities that they never would have dreamed of in the past." Some of the partner schools are testing sites for the ACT and SAT making the test more accessible for students. Other partner schools require all students to take the ACCUPLACER, an entrance test required for participation in the dual credit courses. As a teacher commented, "Some students score better than they thought they would, and it boosts their self-esteem." Principals also emphasized that they celebrate success, although they were each quick to stress that they do not look at the percentage taking the AP tests versus the percentage passing as the indicator of the Advanced Placement program's success. As another principal stressed, "We celebrate our 5's, but we also celebrate our 2's, and 3's and 4's. We know students are better off for having taken the advanced classes."

***Student preparation.*** As increased numbers of students accessed the advanced level classes, the level of difficulty of the class posed a challenge for some students. Teachers shared:

- The advanced classes are much more difficult than the regular classes.
- Balancing student work schedules and the demands of the rigorous classes was difficult for some students.

Tutoring, mentoring, AVID class, and curriculum alignment were all ways that the East Texas GEAR UP Project provided support to students in the advanced level classes. For example, a teacher stressed that linking the more advanced students who have already passed the class with students currently struggling was very successful. The university tutors provided assistance in AP and Pre-AP classes. The AVID class served as a support for students, and curriculum alignment activities helped to strengthen the preparation for the classes. Teaching

organizational skills through programs, such as, A++ and Guaranteed 4.0 were also helpful in addressing the challenge.

*Parent involvement.* In a rural area where many parents had not attended college, helping to ensure that all parents received information on ways to navigate the path to college posed difficulties. Teachers described this challenge by stating:

- It's a challenge to get some of the parents involved in college preparation because they don't understand the process and are afraid of it.
- Getting parents involved is difficult. Some parents seem to come for sporting events, but they don't show the same level of interest for academic concerns.
- Some parents are working multiple jobs and have difficulty attending meetings at the school.

GEAR UP newsletters with college information were mailed to parents' homes. Personal calls and outreach to parents were provided. Information meetings were set for various times and included Spanish translators, when needed.

*Meeting students' needs.* In a school with over five hundred students in a class, providing the necessary follow-up for all students presented a challenge. GEAR UP coordinators explained, "I think one of our challenges is that we are the largest school in the area and are addressing a large group of students."

In order to meet individual student's needs, the campus focused on the students with specific needs. The other partner schools also have identified students for targeted services in order to provide outreach and support. Advisory groups were formed to personalize the large high school. Personal outreach to the students and personal conversations and meetings that were conducted in Spanish for parents were ways that students were encouraged to pursue rigorous courses. All students also took ACCUPLACER or THEA to qualify for community college courses. If students can attain college credit while in high school, they can be encouraged to persist. Native Spanish speakers were also given the opportunity to take AP Spanish to earn college credits.

## CONCLUSION

A clear focus on the goals, student support and outreach through locally designed interventions, professional development, high expectations, interventions to demystify college, and parent outreach were the primary factors in these schools' success in increasing students' participation in advanced level courses. Lessons learned of ways to overcome the challenges of student motivation, student preparation, parent involvement and meeting students' needs were shared. The study has implications for the preparation of future administrators in identifying practices and processes that can increase student participation and success in advanced level courses.

For students to be prepared for postsecondary education and careers in the 21st century within our global economy, promoting greater participation and success in rigorous courses by increased numbers of students, particularly those often underrepresented in advanced level courses, is an important leadership role for school principals. This study provided examples of ways that school leaders can foster conditions that promote high academic achievement for all students and increase students' participation and success in rigorous courses, important goals for leaders in today's schools.

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# Principals and Teachers Stated Beliefs as Compared with Their Perceptions of Multiage Implementation

Dean Halverson
Ruth Ann Tobey Brown

Recently educators have been giving increased attention to multiage instruction, a child-centered philosophy of education which fosters the use of best practices in curriculum and instruction (Katz, 1992). An awareness of the benefits of multiage grouping in early childhood programs has steadily increased because of the greater focus on the importance of the early year's development (Katz, 1992; Logue, 2006; Stone, 1995). One of the significant challenges educators face in the 21st century is to redesign schools that nurture the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical needs of all children. The use of multiage classrooms is one way to meet that challenge

Children in multiage settings benefit from cognitive and social growth (Hunter, 1992; Stone, 1998). Their emotional health is also positively affected as older children became more responsible around younger children. Multiage classrooms provide powerful opportunities to model learning and also allow the same instructor to work with students for more than one year. Stone (1998) found that children who feel good about their cognitive and social competencies tended to do better at school and have more friends.

According to Hunter (1992) as schools have prepared to implement multiage classrooms, it was acknowledged that teachers needed time to absorb the academic benefits of the multiage philosophy. Teachers often lacked experience in educating more than one age group in the same classroom. Hunter (1992) suggested that there must be clarification in order to have a clear understanding before implementation of the multiaged model for instructional delivery. In addition to training, teachers needed to reflect upon what they had learned as they shared ideas with other educators on how to maximize multiage benefits (Hunter, 1992).

Miller (1996) indicated that the implementation of multiage instruction and organization should be viewed as an evolving, long-term change. Special consideration needed to be given to teacher preparation and support. Miller also found that specific and practical training in multiage teaching was a necessity. The need for administrative support clearly signaled the need for administrators to be included in those professional development activities. Studies had revealed that teacher preparedness, buy-in, and enthusiasm for multiage education were the deciding factors in a program's success (Farkas & Duffet, 2008; Miller, 1996). However, a comparison of principals' and teachers' beliefs in successful implementation of multiage education is limited. In addition, the identification of factors that promote and limit successful implementation of multiage education is needed.

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**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs of teachers and principals with respect to multiage education and to identify the factors that contributed to the implementation of multiage education, as well as the factors that have limited the acceptance of multiage education as an effective learning environment. *The Principles of Nongraded Education* survey developed by Dr. Barbara Pavan in 1972 and revised and updated by Anderson and Pavan in 1993 was used to gather quantitative information regarding the educational beliefs or assumptions of principals and teachers regarding nongraded or multiage instruction. The instrument consisted of 36 assumptions under which multiage education operated. The respondents were asked to indicate the importance of each assumption on a four point scale which ranged from "not important" to "critical." These assumptions were based on each respondent's educational beliefs. Access information to an online survey through Survey Monkey was emailed to the sample population using *The Principles of Nongraded Education* (Anderson & Pavan, 1993).

Authorities in the area of multiage education reviewed Dr. Pavan's assumptions and agreed with these statements. Prior to Anderson and Pavan's 1993 publication *Nongradedness: Helping it Happen*, this process was completed and resulted in an updated body of research and instrument. *The Principles of Nongradedness Education* survey (Anderson & Paven, 1993) is divided into six areas which include: Goals of Schooling, Organization, Curriculum, Instruction, Materials, and Assessment. Each question was rated from "Not Important" equaling zero to "Crucial" equaling three points. Total scores ranged from 0-108. Any total score of 81 or higher was at least at 75 % of the maximum possible score, as was a category score over 13. This score indicated a very high agreement with the principles of nongradedness (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). Structural and substantive validity of the basic Pavan instrument has been validated by its own inclusion of broad based potential respondents. After the human data base was determined and the issues framed, the study was self-validating. In essence, this is how Pavan prevented unusual skewed results by carefully developing a respondent group. In her case, she sent her instrument to nearly 50 authors in the field as well as active on-site school administrators and active classroom teachers. The online survey was developed by ensuring a large, broad base of respondents. Since Pavan's instrument and findings have proven reliable, this established survey was used.

This mixed methods study examined the principals' and teachers' knowledge and beliefs toward multiage programming to determine if there were philosophical differences in their beliefs. Specifically the research questions were:

1. To what extent do teachers of multiage classrooms agree with Pavan's assumptions about multiage education?
2. To what extent do principals of multiage schools agree with Pavan's assumptions about multiage education?
3. How do teachers and principals vary in their assumptions regarding multiage education?
4. What factors do teachers and principals believe have contributed to the success of multiage programs in their school?
5. What factors do teachers and principals believe have limited the implementation of multiage programs in their schools?
6. How is the institutionalization of multiage programs in the teachers' and principals' schools monitored and evaluated?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The multiage classroom is designed to develop the whole child with a focus on the intellectual, social, emotional, and philosophical domains of development. These concepts are grounded in the philosophy of progressive education which emphasizes child-centered planning and teaching, with the goal of practicing democracy in the classroom (Morrison, 2006).

Benefits for students were increased when they spent more years in multiage classrooms as students created bonds, became more trusting, and gained a sense of belonging (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). Research on multi-age groups also suggested that students developed stronger social ability and interactive skills (Gaustad, 1992; Katz, Evelgelou, & Hartman, 1990; Theilheimer, 1993). The students tended to exhibit greater independence and dependability, more self-confidence, strengthened self-esteem, more self-regulatory behavior as well as more positive attitudes towards school (Grant & Johnson, 1995). Groups that benefited most from multiage programs were: African American students, boys, low socioeconomic level students and underachievers (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Carter, 2005; Melliger, 2005). The emphasis on the child rather than the curriculum may have caused research in multiage education to decrease in recent years (Kappler & Rolke, 2002).

The adoption of a multiage program involves a paradigm shift. A lasting, productive multiage program involves sufficient forethought, planning, and participation of key stakeholders. At least a full year of planning, reading, discussion, and observation of successful multiage program prior to implementing is strongly recommended (Gaustad, 1992; Grant, 1993; Miller, 1996).

An important component of the planning process involves decision making about continuous progress. The teacher needs to investigate alternatives for students who do not achieve. It has been observed that children who appear to be behind at the beginning of a multiage cycle often catch up by the end of the cycle (Grant, 1993; Stone, 1995). A multiage program allows children who are experiencing difficulties an opportunity to revisit a concept more than once, or have the materials differentiated for their needs (Anderson & Pavan, 1993).

If the building or district decides to move forward with a multiage program, teacher preparation and support become priorities. Teachers, principals, and parents must understand and support the multiage program in order for it to be successful (Hunter, 1992; Miller, 1996; Stone, 1998). A professional development plan, practical training in multiage teaching, school visitations, and contact with experienced multiage teachers are all important elements of training for a multiage program (Miller, 1996; Privett, 1996).

The adoption of multiage instruction involves a great deal of thought, planning, and participation by all who will be affected by this change (teachers, parents, administrators, community members, and students). School board members and administrator involvement is essential in creating support and providing ongoing professional development. Professional development is a process involving evaluation, identification of needs, and planned activities for individuals, schools, and the entire district designed to improve elements of professional knowledge and skills that affect student learning (Guskey, 2000). The study of the multiage philosophy can be initiated by a team of volunteers which consists of teachers, parents, administrators and school board members. All stakeholders must be involved from the beginning to ensure a smooth transition from traditional classrooms to multiage classrooms. Miller (1996) noted, "The implementation of multiage instruction and organization is best

viewed as an evolving long-term change at the deepest levels of belief about how humans learn" (p. 17).

Too often, multiage classrooms have been implemented for the wrong reason and without proper planning, training, or commitment. The professional development of teachers who were implementing the multiage educational programs needs to be reviewed, planned, and disciplined in a way that provides the support and resources necessary for the implementation of a second order change which is perceived as a break from the past (Waters & Grubb, 2005). Second order changes are complex; new knowledge and skills are required for implementation; and the change conflicts with current values and norms and is outside the existing paradigms (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). First order change is perceived as an extension of the past, which fits within existing paradigms. It is consistent with prevailing values and norms and can be implemented with existing knowledge and skills (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

## METHODOLOGY

This mixed methods study was designed to examine principals' and teachers' knowledge and beliefs of multiage programming. A survey was provided to 91 participants to discover the factors which principals and teachers believed contributed to the successful or the limited implementation of multiage programs in their schools. After analyzing the data from the survey and discovering areas where the participant did not agree with the beliefs, the researcher utilized the Sequential Explanatory Design (Clark & Creswell, 2007) to determine additional interview questions. The Sequential Explanatory Design is a logic model which uses information from the quantitative data collection in the first phase of the research and after analysis, the researchers discover areas where the subjects did not agree with the stated assumptions and connect that data to the second phase through the development of interview questions to clarify those areas.

### Sample and Procedures

The states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri do not require schools to register their schools as multiage. The multiage schools were identified on their web sites; therefore, the researcher used a search engine, Google, to identify the number of schools in these states which had multiage classrooms. Once this population was identified, a snowball sampling method was used. This strategy involved asking each participant to refer the researchers to other participants (Merriam, 1988). Principals were asked to provide the survey to staff members who were willing to take the survey. This population was used in conjunction with the online survey for the quantitative portion of this mixed method research. Introductory e-mail invitations were sent to the 60 identified schools in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri with a response by 19 principals and 72 teachers.

An introductory e-mail was sent to the elementary principals of multiage schools in the Midwest. Included in the letter was (a) an overview of the study, (b) the importance of the study, (c) an invitation to participate in the survey, (d) the process and timelines for completing the survey, (e) safeguards for confidentiality and privacy, and (f) notice of informed consent. A link to the survey was included in the e-mail and the informed consent was addressed in the introduction to the survey. Anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy of responses were ensured through online participation. Participants provided consent to participate in the study by completing the survey. Once the principals received the e-mail and

survey, they had two weeks to complete the survey. If they chose to have the survey completed in paper form, the researcher forwarded the principal a paper copy of the survey and a return envelope.

For the qualitative portion of the study a random sample was developed by selecting 25 percent of the population of the multiage schools to participate in the interview. The telephone interviews were conducted with principals and teachers in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri. The random sample was developed by selecting 25% of the population. There were 60 in the population; therefore, in order to have 25% of the population, 16 schools were drawn for the qualitative research. Of the 25% that were contacted by telephone, only 62% or 10 principals were willing to be interviewed. Each of the 10 principals invited two teachers to be contacted for interviews which resulted in a sample size of 20 teachers. All of the participants were sent a follow-up email with the interview questions. The sample consisted of one school from Minnesota, one from Wisconsin, two from Iowa and six from Illinois. In order to avoid skewing the responses of the participants, no prompts were suggested. Since prompts were not provided in the questioning, the answers reflected the participants' highest priority, not necessarily all their priorities in answering the interview questions.

## Qualitative Interview Questions

The qualitative portion of the research consisted of three interview questions based on the Multiage Implementation Interview developed by Miller (1994). These interview questions were: (1.) If you have had multiage in your school at least three years, how have you monitored, evaluated, and modified your multiage programs over time? (2.) If you have been doing this for more than three years, to what would you attribute your success? (3.) Please describe difficulties you may have encountered in implementing this approach, in other words, barriers or challenges that you have had to be overcome. After analyzing the quantitative data and discovering areas where the participant had the least agreement with Pavan's assumptions about multiage education, the researcher utilized the Sequential Explanatory Design (Clark & Creswell, 2007) to determine additional open ended interview questions. This process allowed the researcher to determine if the information in the survey was an actual belief or a misinterpretation of the question. After analysis of the data, the researcher indicated areas where the respondents did not imply strong support. The researcher, using this data, developed two additional interview questions which provided a more inclusive synopsis of the participants' assumptions. The two areas that needed further investigation were, "Children formulate their own learning goals with guidance from the teachers," and "Sequences of learning were determined for individual students." Two additional interview questions were then developed which were: (4) How are students assisted in developing their own learning goals? and (5) How are individual students' needs addressed in your multiage classroom or school?

## Qualitative Interview Procedures

Based on the random sampling procedures and participants' willingness to participate, 20 teacher and 10 principal interviews were conducted over the telephone at a time convenient for each participant. Each individual was given an overview of the study methodology and signed an Informed Consent Form prior to beginning the interview. If participants determined they did not want to participate, the interview was not conducted. No

teachers or principals scheduled for an interview opted out of the interview. The researchers completed the interviews by asking a series of scripted open-ended questions which were asked without prompts

The other crucial component was the interview style survey which provided the opportunity for respondents to explain responses in words selected by them. Yin (1989) supports the interview methodology as a valuable source of verification. The interviews were appropriate because they allowed the respondents to select their vocabulary to expand the highly structured questionnaire answers.

The 10 principals and 20 teachers revealed what they believed made their multiage programs successful and what they believed to be challenges of a successful multiage program. All interviews were coded for emergent themes and recoded after two weeks. The codes served as a repository for themes emerging from the data during analysis and helped to ensure consistency  across data sets. The themes were listed on a spread sheet in order to manipulate the qualitative data (Miller, 1994).

**Data Analysis**

Survey Monkey computed all *Principles of Nongraded Education* surveys. Data from teachers and principals were collected and analyzed to determine if they were in agreement with the assumptions of multiage. The survey data were entered by the researchers into SPSS's and statistical analysis was performed to determine the mean value and standard deviation of those assumptions. Descriptive statistics were used to discover the frequencies for each category of Pavan's instrument. The beliefs of teachers and principals responses were compared for similarities and differences.

The interview questions were categorized for both principal and teacher responses and how they related to multiage education, the factors that have contributed to the implementation of multiage education, as well as the factors that have limited the acceptance of multiage education as effective learning environments. The researcher coded the interviews, and after two weeks, they were recoded. The two coded interviews were compared with each other for discrepancies. The quantitative and qualitative data were organized to address the six research questions which formed the basis of this study. A data base was created to record the data from the interviews. The creation of a qualitative data base increased the reliability of the entire study because other investigators can review the evidence (Yin, 1989).

## FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the knowledge and beliefs of teachers and principals and what they considered to have contributed to the success or limited the implementation of multiage practices in their schools**.** Interviews were conducted and surveys were administered to principals and teachers of multiage schools. The survey data were used to determine mean and standard deviation values for each belief for the subgroup of teachers and principals who completed the survey. Qualitative interview data were analyzed using the Emergent Category Designation (Erlandson, 1993). For each question, the data were first reviewed for categories or emergent themes that were titled so as to distinguish one category from another. Once all the themes had been identified, the data were reviewed again to focus on the content of each theme. The survey and interview data were utilized to answer the six research questions.

**Research Question One: To what extent do teachers of multiage classrooms agree with Pavan's assumptions about multiage education?**

Pavin's *Principles of Nongraded Education* survey consists of 36 assumptions which are organized into the six categories of Goals of Schooling, Organization, Curriculum, Instruction, Materials, and Assessment. Each assumption has an individual score of 0-3, and each category has a score range of 0-18 with total scores ranging from 0–108. Anderson and Paven (1993) determined that a category score above 13 and a total score above 81 indicated a high degree (75% or higher) of agreement with the principles of nongradedness.

The results of the 72 teachers' item scores on Pavin's *Principles of Nongradedness Education* survey are listed in Tables 1 through 6. In the category of Goals of Schooling, the assumptions Maximize Individual Potential, Development of the Child, and School Atmosphere had some of the highest levels of agreement of all 36 assumptions on the survey. The total score of 15.23 indicated that this category had one of the highest levels of agreement of the six categories (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Teachers' Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness:  Goals of Schooling.

| A. Goals for Schooling | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.  Self directing individual | 71 | 2.61 | 0.597 |
| 2.  Maximize individual potential | 71 | 2.72 | 0.484 |
| 3.  Variability vs. conformity | 70 | 2.50 | 0.584 |
| 4.  Development of child | 72 | 2.76 | 0.428 |
| 5.  Group skills | 71 | 2.61 | 0.547 |
| 6.  School atmosphere | 72 | 2.72 | 0.478 |
| Total 15.23 | | | |

The mean scores of the assumptions in the Organization category demonstrated a small range of differences. The total score of 14.36 was above the 13.00 which indicated a high degree of agreement with the *Principles of Nongradedness* (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Teacher's Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness: Organization.

| B. Organization | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Individual placement | 72 | 2.31 | 0.725 |
| 2. Change  as needed | 71 | 2.35 | 0.600 |
| 3. Co-learner teams | 72 | 2.47 | 0.649 |
| 4. Flexible groups | 72 | 2.46 | 0.649 |
| 5. Many Sizes | 72 | 2.56 | 0.528 |
| 6. Task, materials, needs | 71 | 2.28 | 0.590 |
| Total 14.36 | | | |

The Curriculum category had the lowest total score of the six on the survey and the assumption Individual Sequence had the lowest mean score of all 36 assumptions (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Teachers' Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness: Curriculum.

| C. Curriculum | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Goals by student with teacher | 72 | 2.10 | 0.735 |
| 2. Individual curriculum | 70 | 2.36 | 0.566 |
| 3. Integrated themes | 71 | 2.31 | 0.074 |
| 4. Individual sequence | 70 | 1.96 | 0.788 |
| 5. Concepts/content | 71 | 2.23 | 0.680 |
| 6. Individual interests | 70 | 2.27 | 0.700 |
| Total 13.23 | | | |

The category of Instruction had the highest total mean score, 15.54, of all the categories and the Different Styles assumption score, 2.80, was the highest for all the assumptions in the survey (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Teachers' Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness: Instruction.

| D. Instruction | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Plan for each children | 72 | 2.53 | 0.556 |
| 2. Teacher role | 71 | 2.58 | 0.552 |
| 3. Different styles | 71 | 2.80 | 0.491 |
| 4. Success/failure | 70 | 2.63 | 0.516 |
| 5. Process/product | 71 | 2.59 | 0.523 |
| 6. Improve/compete | 71 | 2.41 | 0.623 |
| Total 15.54 | | | |

The Materials category had a mean score of 14.52 which indicates a high degree of agreement with the *Principles of Nongradedness* (see Table 5).

**Table 5**. Teachers' Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness: Materials.

| E. Materials | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Variety | 72 | 2.47 | 0.731 |
| 2. Reading range | 72 | 2.67 | 0.605 |
| 3. Alternate method | 72 | 2.46 | 0.604 |
| 4. Stimulating environment | 71 | 2.17 | 0.717 |
| 5. Exploration and experimentation | 71 | 2.25 | 0.788 |
| 6. Appropriate level | 72 | 2.50 | 0.581 |
| Total 14.52 | | | |

The category of Assessment's total scores of 14.40 indicates a high degree of agreement with the *Principles of Nongradedness*. The student involvement score of 2.15 had the lowest mean of the six assumptions in this category and one of the lowest in the entire survey (see Table 6).

**Table 6.** Teachers' Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness: Assessment.

| F. Assessment | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. All areas of child development | 71 | 2.46 | 0.530 |
| 2. Continuous diagnostic | 72 | 2.60 | 0.597 |
| 3. Student Involvement | 72 | 2.15 | 0.705 |
| 4. Potential achievement | 72 | 2.35 | 0.695 |
| 5. Irregular growth | 72 | 2.49 | 0.556 |
| 6. Multiple data sources | 71 | 2.35 | 0.647 |
| Total 14.40 | | | |

        The survey data for the individual item scores for teachers were presented in Tables 1 through 6. Each of the six sections was above the minimum score of 13, which indicated a very high agreement with the principles of nongradedness. The ranges of scores were: Goals of Schooling 15.23; Organization 14.36; Curriculum 13.23; Instruction, 15.54; Materials 14.52; and Assessment 14.4. The sum of 90.28 or 85 percent exceeded the score of 81 or 75 percent which Pavan (1993) indicated as a very high agreement with the *Principles of Nongradedness*. The assumption that had the highest score was in the category of instruction which stated: "Since people learn in different ways, multiple learning alternatives should be available." The assumption that had the lowest scores was under the category of curriculum which stated: "Sequences of learning are determined by the student." The second assumption that had a low score stated: "Children formulate their own learning goals with guidance from their teachers." The data indicated that the teachers in the study had a high level of agreement with Pavan's assumptions about multiage education.

**Research Question Two: To what extent do principals of multiage schools agree with Pavan's assumptions about multiage education?**

        The results of the 19 principals' item scores on Pavin's *Principles of Nongradedness Education* survey are listed in Tables 7 through 12. The Goals for Schooling category had the highest total, 15.57, of the six categories for the principals with all assumptions with means above 2.53 (see Table 7).

**Table 7.** Principals' Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness: Goals of Schooling.

| A. Goals for Schooling | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.  Self directing individual | 19 | 2.53 | 0.513 |
| 2.  Maximize individual potential | 19 | 2.58 | 0.607 |
| 3.  Variability vs. conformity | 19 | 2.53 | 0.612 |
| 4.  Development of child | 18 | 2.67 | 0.686 |
| 5.  Group skills | 19 | 2.58 | 0.067 |
| 6.  School atmosphere | 19 | 2.68 | 0.478 |
| Total 15.57 | | | |

        The assumption with the lowest mean was Individual Placement and the highest was Co-learner teams. The total score of 14.36 was above the 13.00 which indicated a high degree of agreement with the *Principles of Nongradedness* (see Table 8).

**Table 8.** Principals' Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness: Organization.

| B. Organization | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Individual placement | 19 | 2.11 | 0.937 |
| 2. Change as needed | 19 | 2.26 | 0.086 |
| 3. Flexible groups | 19 | 2.63 | 0.597 |
| 4. Many Sizes | 19 | 2.63 | 0.496 |
| 5. Task, materials, needs | 19 | 2.26 | 0.653 |
| 6. Co-learner teams | 19 | 2.47 | 0.697 |
| Total 14.36 | | | |

        The category of Curriculum had the lowest total score for the principals with a total of 13.00 which is the minimum score which indicated a high degree of agreement with the principles of nongradedness. The assumption Individual Sequence had the lowest mean score, 1.94, of all 36 assumptions in the survey (see Table 9).

**Table 9.** Principals' Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness: Curriculum.

| C. Curriculum | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Goals by student with teacher | 19 | 2.11 | 0.937 |
| 2. Individual curriculum | 19 | 2.21 | 0.855 |
| 3. Integrated themes | 19 | 2.37 | 0.895 |
| 4. Individual sequence | 18 | 1.94 | 0.938 |
| 5. Concepts/content | 19 | 2.26 | 0.872 |
| 6. Individual interests | 18 | 2.11 | 8.832 |
| Total 13.00 | | | |

The Instruction category was one of two in which the principals total score exceeded 15.00. The assumption, Different Styles, had the highest mean score of all 36 assumptions in the survey (see Table 10).

**Table 10.** Principals' Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness: Instruction.

| D. Instruction | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Plan for each child | 19 | 2.47 | 0.697 |
| 2. Teacher role | 19 | 2.58 | 0.607 |
| 3. Different styles | 19 | 2.74 | 0.562 |
| 4. Success/failure | 18 | 2.50 | 0.618 |
| 5. Process/product | 19 | 2.53 | 0.612 |
| 6. Improve/compete | 19 | 2.42 | 0.607 |
| Total 15.24 | | | |

The Materials category had next to the lowest total scores for the principals; however, the total of 13.92 was above the 13.00 which indicated a high degree of agreement with the *Principles of Nongradedness.* The Stimulating Environment assumption had next to the lowest mean of the 36 assumptions on the survey (see Table 11).

**Table 11.** Principals' Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness: Materials.

| E. Materials | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Variety | 19 | 2.32 | 0.749 |
| 2, Reading range | 19 | 2.63 | 0.684 |
| 3. Alternate method | 19 | 2.42 | 0.769 |
| 4. Stimulating environment | 18 | 2.00 | 0.970 |
| 5. Exploration and experimentation | 19 | 2.16 | 0.958 |
| 5. Appropriate level | 18 | 2.39 | 0.778 |
| Total 13.92 | | | |

The Assessment category score of 14.35 indicated a high degree of agreement with the *Principles of Nongradedness*. The mean scores of the six assumptions were similar.

**Table 12.** Principals' Item Scores on Principles of Nongradedness: Assessment.

| F. Assessment | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. All areas | 19 | 2.37 | 0.761 |
| 2. Continuous diagnostic | 19 | 2.58 | 0.597 |
| 3. Student involvement | 19 | 2.32 | 0.820 |
| 4. Potential achievement | 19 | 2.37 | 0.895 |
| 5. Irregular growth | 18 | 2.39 | 0.698 |
| 6. Multiple data sources | 19 | 2.32 | 0.671 |
| Total 14.35 | | | |

The survey data for the individual item scores for principals were presented in Tables 7 -12. Each of the six sections was equal to or above 13.00, which indicated a high agreement with the principles of nongradedness. Those ranges of scores were: Goals of Schooling 15.57; Organization 14.36; Curriculum 13.00; Instruction, 15.24; Materials 13.92; and Assessment 14.435. The sum of 86.44 or 80% exceeded the score of 81 or 75% which Anderson and Pavan (1993) indicated as a very high agreement with the principles of nongradedness. The assumption that had the highest score was in the category of instruction which stated: "Since people learn in different ways, multiple learning alternatives should be available." The areas that had the lowest scores were under the category of curriculum. The first belief stated: "Sequences of learning are determined by the student." The second belief that had a low score stated: "Children formulate their own learning goals with guidance from their teachers." The data indicated that the principals in the survey had a high level of agreement with Pavan's assumptions regarding multiage education.

**Research Question 3: How do teachers and principals vary in their assumptions regarding multiage education?**

A comparison of the teachers' and principals' assumptions based on Pavan's *Principles of Nongradedness* (1993) is displayed in Table 13. The figures are the total for each category for teachers and principals. Each category which had a score of 13.00 or greater indicated a strong support for nongradedness (multiage) education. The difference between the teachers and the principals' ratings ranked from 0.0 to .60. The category with the highest agreement was Organization and the least agreement was in Materials.

**Table 13.** Comparison of Teachers' and Principals' Assumption Scores.

| Factors | Teachers | Principals | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Goals of Schooling | 15.23 | 15.57 | 0.34 |
| Organization | 14.36 | 14.36 | 0.00 |
| Curriculum | 13.23 | 13.00 | 0.23 |
| Instruction | 15.54 | 15.24 | 0.30 |
| Materials | 14.52 | 13.92 | 0.60 |
| Assessment | 14.40 | 14.35 | 0.05 |
| | | | |
| Total | 90.28 | 86.44 | |

For both teachers and principals, each of the six sections was above the minimum score of 13, which indicated a very high agreement with the *Principles of Nongradedness*. The scores ranged from 15.54 to 13.23 for the teachers and 15.57 to 13.00 for the principals. The sums of 90.28 and 86.44 both exceeded the score of 81 or 75% which Anderson and Pavan (1993) indicated as a very high agreement with the *Principles of Nongradedness*. There were variations in the category scores with the highest scores for teachers in the Instruction category and for principals in the Goals of Schooling category. For both groups, the lowest score was in the Curriculum category. For both groups, the assumption that had the highest score was in the Instruction category which stated: "Since people learn in different ways, multiple learning alternatives should be available." For both teachers and principals, the assumption that had the lowest score was under the category of Curriculum. The first assumption stated: "Sequences of learning are determined by the student." The second assumption that had a low score stated: "Children formulate their own learning goals with

guidance from their teachers." Qualitative follow-up was done with the assumptions in order to verify that respondents had a clear understanding of the stated assumptions.

The results of the survey of multiage assumptions were very similar for the principals and teachers with both groups in agreement with the assumptions of multiage education. The researchers analyzed several measures of location. Those locations included the means, trimmed means, and median. Trimmed means in SPSS as defined with the upper and lower 2.5% were values deleted. A Spearman RHO and Kendall's Tau-b were run on the item scores. The results revealed that the teachers' and principals' rating of the items were fairly comparable with correlations ranging from close to .70 to .90. There was no statistical significance found between the teachers' assumptions and the principals' assumptions.

**Research Question 3 (Qualitative): How do teachers and principals vary in their assumptions regarding multiage education?**

The teachers and the principals supported the beliefs through their interviews. When asked the open ended question: "How are students assessed in developing their own learning goals?" during telephone interviews, both the principals and teachers supported that belief (see Table 14). The majority of teachers and principals stated that data were used to set goals between the teacher and the student on a quarterly basis. Both groups stated that the goals could be for either academics or behavior. The teachers further explained that these goals were monitored quarterly through the use of data and artifacts. As students grew older, they were able to look at their data and set smart or stretch goals. This information was compiled in a portfolio which the students shared with their parents at student-led conferences. The teachers stated that students worked with their teachers, parents, or peers in developing their goals. Teachers felt that empowering students in the goal setting process, having students monitor their own progress, and revisiting the goals regularly were powerful. The qualitative questioning produced a consistent emphasis on sound parental acceptance and participation in the multiage classroom.

Table 14 represents the six emergent themes from the teachers and principals in responses to the question: "How are students assessed in developing their own learning goals?"

**Table 14.** Goal Setting with Teachers.

| Factors | Teachers (20) | Principals (10) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Quarterly review | 18 | 4 |
| Student participation | 18 | 6 |
| Teacher participation | 18 | 8 |
| Parent participation | 17 | 6 |
| Artifacts | 12 | 2 |
| Behavior goals | 10 | 4 |

This table indicated that principals and teachers agreed that students and teachers should work together to develop learning and behavior goals.

When asked the interview open-ended question (without prompts): "How are individual students' needs addressed in your multiage classroom or school?" the teachers and principals were in agreement with the assertion that individual needs were met through multiage education (see Table 15). Pretests were given to discover the skill level of each child and the child was placed in a group that addressed his or her needs. These groups were

flexible and changed with different skills and interests. Teachers further explained the need for differentiated instruction i.e. "teaching the child where he is." The teachers expressed that ways they could differentiate were through mini-lessons and the use of cooperative learning. The teachers explained that mini-lessons would be administered to a small group or a large group. According to Calkins (1994), mini-lessons were usually 10–15 minutes and were followed by discussion, practice, and application. Cooperative learning is the instructional strategy where students are grouped heterogeneously to work together to produce academic and social gains.

In order to avoid skewing the responses of the participants, no prompts were suggested. Since prompts were not provided in the questioning, the answers reflected the participant's highest priority, not necessarily all their priorities in answering the interview question. Table 15 represents the three emergent themes from the teachers and principals in response to the question: "How are individual students' needs addressed in your multiage classroom or school?"

**Table 15.** Meeting the Needs of Individual Students.

| Factors | Teachers (20) | Principals (10) |
|---|---|---|
| Pretests/Assessments | 20 | 4 |
| Differentiated instruction | 20 | 10 |
| Flexible grouping | 18 | 4 |

The principals and teachers agreed that teachers differentiated instruction in order to meet all students' needs. A larger percentage of the teachers than principals expressed their beliefs that in order to meet those needs, assessments and flexible groupings must also be implemented.

The focus of these two qualitative questions was to clarify the practices in the school setting for the two assumptions that that had the lowest scores on the *Principles of Nongradedness Survey* (Anderson & Paven, 1993). The data from the interviews indicated that the areas of Goal Setting with Teachers and Meeting the Needs of Individual Students were perceived as important by both teachers and principals and were reflected in classroom practices.

**Research Question 4: What factors do teachers and principals believe have contributed to the success of multiage programs in their school?**

The following data were collected from the 10 principals and the 20 teachers when asked the open-ended question about the factors that have had a positive influence on their multiage program. In order to avoid skewing the responses of the participants, no prompts were suggested. Since prompts were not provided in the questioning, the answers reflected the participants' highest priority, not necessarily all their priorities in answering the interview question. Table 16 represents the six emergent themes from the teachers and principals in response to the open-ended question: "What do you believe has contributed to your success with multiage instruction?"

At least 80% of the principals who were interviewed agreed with two areas they believed contributed to a successful multiage program. The two areas were "teacher buy-in to multiage instruction" and "the need for professional development for new teachers." The principals believed that a teacher must understand the multiage philosophy and how instruction in a multiage classroom should occur. All 10 of the principals referred to professional development at the beginning of a new multiage program or for new teachers who

**Table 16.** Success of Multiage Programs.

| Factor | Teacher (20) | Principal (10) |
|---|---|---|
| Differentiating instruction | 20 | 5 |
| Curriculum understanding | 19 | 2 |
| Collaboration with team | 18 | 1 |
| Professional development | 15 | 10 |
| Balanced (social and academic) classroom | 12 | 0 |
| Understanding multiage instruction (buy-in) | 5 | 8 |

had not taught in multiage classrooms. Areas they discussed were the need for classroom management, how to handle more than one grade in a classroom, and how to differentiate learning.

Teachers also believed that professional development was needed in order to learn how to develop good instructional practices in a multiage classroom. The teachers and the principals believed that a multiage program was successful because they could more easily address individual student's needs through differentiated instruction. The teachers believed that in order to be successful in understanding and implementing differentiated instruction, they needed to have a good understanding of the curriculum and state standards. They thought that without this understanding, they would not know what the child needed to learn and would not be able to develop goals to meet their students' needs.

Eighty percent of the teachers recognized the need to collaborate with their peers. They believed that in order to be successful, it was crucial to plan with each other, meet in data teams, or have professional learning communities. The teachers discussed the need for networking and developing plans for students. The teachers expressed strong agreement that a multiage classroom is a community where relationships are almost as important as academics. Balanced classrooms were also discussed by the teachers. They stated that classrooms need to be balanced both socially and academically in order to provide the best instruction in a multiage classroom.

The major themes that emerged from this question for the teachers were differentiated instruction, the need to understand curriculum, the need to collaborate and plan with colleagues and the need to have a classroom that was balanced socially and academically. The themes that the principals supported were professional development, the teachers' understanding of the concept of multiage instruction, and the teacher's ability to differentiate instruction.

In conclusion, the teachers and principals were in agreement about many areas that make a successful program. Those included professional development to educate teachers about multiage instruction and the expectations of a multiage program, an understanding of the curriculum, and the ability to differentiate that curriculum in order to meet the needs of diverse learners.

**Research Question 5: What factors do teachers and principals believe have limited the implementation of multiage programs in their schools?**

The principals and teachers were interviewed with an open ended question which asked them to describe any difficulties they had encountered in implementing multiage programs. Table 17 lists those barriers as stated by the teachers and principals. The data were collected from ten principals and twenty teachers. In order to avoid skewing the responses of

the participants, no prompts were suggested. Since prompts were not provided in the questioning, the answers reflected the participants' highest priority, not necessarily all their priorities in answering the interview question. Table17 represents the eight emergent themes from the teachers and principals in response to the open-ended question: "Please describe any difficulties you have encountered in implementing multiage; in other words, barriers or challenges that your school has had to overcome?"

**Table 17.** Barriers in the Implementation of Multiage.

| Focus | Teacher (20) | Principal (10) |
|---|---|---|
| Differentiated Instruction (lack of) | 20 | 03 |
| Not having an understanding of curriculum | 19 | 1 |
| Not enough collaboration time with teachers | 18 | 0 |
| Balanced classroom (social and academic) | 12 | 0 |
| Lack of Professional Development | 10 | 10 |
| Time (planning, adapting curriculum) | 10 | 0 |
| Parents  not understanding multiage | 5 | 5 |
| Not understanding multiage | 2 | 10 |

All the principals believed that lack of professional development and not enough time planning and adapting curriculum were the major reasons a multiage program would fail. They thought that new teachers, who do not understand the philosophy of multiage programs, could find implementation difficult. They believed that if teachers had not previously taught in a multiage classroom before being hired in their school, or if they did not understand the concept of multiage, they would need to be trained. Another area that emerged during these interviews with principals was the education of parents. They believed that parents needed to understand how multiage classrooms were taught; otherwise, the parents might question if the instruction was age appropriate.

Teachers agreed with the principals regarding one of the barriers to a successful multiage program which was the absence of professional development. Teachers believed that multiage programs would not thrive if teachers did not have a good understanding of curriculum and the skills to differentiate for all children.

Other areas that teachers believed would have an impact on the sustainability of a multiage program were lack of time for the purpose of differentiating instruction and time to develop thematic units. According to Hunter (1992), teachers need time for planning with fellow teachers and sharing ideas about students. These teachers agreed that teaching in a multiage setting requires more preparation time and long-range planning.

Balancing classrooms was another factor that the teachers believed was needed for a successful multiage program. If classes did not have students with diverse academic and social needs, a program would be more apt to fail. The last area that teachers indicated as an area of necessity was the need for a culture of collaboration. Teachers needed opportunities and time to collaborate and plan with peers. According to Stone (1998), professional teamwork is an integral part of the successful multiage program. Collaboration among teachers and other staff is important in meeting the needs of all students in a multiage setting. Regular time set aside for planning and sharing by staff members is essential for a successful program.

The major themes that emerged from this question for the teachers were the same as for a successful program. The teachers expressed that if you did not have differentiated instruction, an understanding of curriculum, collaboration with colleagues and a classroom that was balanced both socially and academically, the multiage program would fail. Most of

these themes were not indicated as important by the principals who indicated that the two biggest barriers to a successful multiage program would be the lack of professional development and lack of time for planning and adapting the curriculum.

**Research Question 6: How is the institutionalization of multiage programs in the teachers' and principals' schools monitored and evaluated?**

The researchers asked teachers and principals if they had multiage education in their schools for at least three years, and 100% of the teachers and principals answered yes. The second part of that question was to discover how they had monitored, evaluated and modified their multiage programs over time. In order to avoid skewing the responses of the participants, no prompts were suggested. Since prompts were not provided in the questioning, the answers reflected the participants' highest priority, not necessarily all their priorities in answering the interview question. Table18 represents the seven emergent themes from the teachers and principals in response to the open-ended questions: "Have you had multiage in your school at least three years? How have you monitored, evaluated, and modified your multiage programs over time?"

**Table 18.** Monitoring and Evaluating Multiage.

| Factors | Teachers (20) | Principals (10) |
|---|---|---|
| Implementation of multiage at least three years | 20 | 10 |
| Student showing success and growth | 20 | 0 |
| Collaboration with colleagues | 18 | 0 |
| Self reflection | 15 | 0 |
| Standardized tests | 0 | 10 |
| Walkthroughs | 0 | 5 |
| Evaluations and at times eliminating staff | 0 | 5 |

Principals stated that one way they monitored and evaluated a multiage program was through an evaluation of the students and how well they did on standardized testing, such as the Illinois State Achievement Test. The principals' answers indicated that they were concerned about numbers from assessments and how well their students achieved on those assessments. They also referred to "walkthroughs" as a way to monitor classrooms. The principals indicated that during those "walkthroughs" they would look at student behavior, balanced literacy, and math in the classrooms. Principals indicated that if their program was experiencing difficulty, they would consider eliminating staff who did not teach to this process.

The teachers all agreed that they monitored and evaluated their program through the success of their children. They talked about working together and developing a community of learners where all students felt respected and empowered. The teachers spoke about setting goals for themselves, such as, "Is my instruction student centered?" and "Am I empowering students in their day to day operations?" Teachers talked about reflecting on these goals and what they did to make sure that students had ownership in their learning. Through self reflection, they were always modifying their instruction to make it better for their students. A portion of the difference between teachers' and principals' responses was because of the different roles of a teacher and a principal. Principals' responses focused on school-wide assessments while teachers' responses focused on classroom assessments.

The qualitative research revealed that there were areas of agreement between the teachers and the principals, especially in the area of beliefs regarding multiage instruction. Principals and teachers both agreed that teachers differentiated instruction; however, a larger percentage of teachers than principals indicated the need for varied assessments and flexible groupings. There were areas where the principals and teachers did not seem to be in agreement. An example was in assessment where the primary focus of the principals was on standardized tests while the teachers focused on more informal classroom assessments.

The interviewers attempted to avoid skewing the responses of the participants by providing no prompts to the open-ended questions. Since prompts were not provided in the questioning, the answers reflected the participants' highest priority, not necessarily all their priorities in answering the interview question. Most of the differences between the two groups tended to reflect each principal's primary focus on the entire school and the teacher's primary focus on his or her classroom.

## CONCLUSIONS

As we blaze new trails by preparing leaders for improving access and equity in today's schools, one of the significant challenges education faces is the need to redesign schools to nurture the needs (social, emotional, intellectual, and physical) of all children. One way schools are addressing these needs is through multiage programming which is designed to build relationships with students, parents, and community; thus empowering students to develop their own learning and behavior goals and encouraging students to be leaders in an environment which is collaborative with all stakeholders. These relationships and structures help educators address the social and emotional needs of children.

Teachers and principals had a high agreement with the six categories of beliefs (Goals of Schooling, Organization, Curriculum, Instruction, Materials, and Assessment) in Anderson and Paven's (1993) survey regarding the *Principles of Nongradedness*. For both groups, all six categories had mean scores equal to or above 13.00 which Anderson and Paven (1993) designated as a high level of agreement. The comparison of the mean scores in the six categories indicated that there was no statistical difference between the teachers' and the principals' assumptions regarding the *Principles of Nongradedness*.

Multiage is being implemented in over 80 schools in the combined states of: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri communities. The qualitative research revealed that teachers and principals did not always share the same priorities on areas that are important components of a multiage program. This was most evident in the areas of monitoring and determining the success of multiage programs. In the area of monitoring, principals focused on standardized tests, and teachers focused on more informal assessments with students. In the area of determining the success of the program, teachers focused on differentiated instruction, collaboration, and curriculum while the principals' focus was on professional development. According to Anderson and Pavan (1993), principals must be educated in the benefits of multiage instruction and in the skills needed to lend positive support. Fox (1996) stressed that principals are becoming more supportive of curriculum change and are better prepared to assume the role of facilitator and change agent. According to Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), principal leadership had significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of a sound curriculum and quality teacher instruction. This study supported that principals must possess the competencies and enthusiasm to support teachers' instructional practices that improve student-learning outcomes.

A key finding from analysis of the data was that the principals did not always communicate effectively with teachers. According to Fullan (1990), one of the key factors for successful change in instructional practices is professional classroom teacher development. Principals indicated a need for professional development, but they did not address specifics for a plan or how they would support teachers after that training. Since prompts were not provided in the questioning, the answers reflected the participants' highest priority, not necessarily all their priorities in answering the interview questions.

Because multiage programming is a very complicated process, principals should be aware of the change process and how to address those changes and sustain momentum. Throughout the interviews, there were differences between the responses of the teachers and the principals. These are areas where it is important for principals and teachers to communicate with one another so that they better understand the perspective of the other professional in order to implement a successful, purposeful program.

The role of the principal was critical to program development, implementation, and sustainability. The principal provided leadership and created situations for professional learning teams and discussion in successful multiage settings. Multiage teachers needed opportunities to share ideas and concerns about multiage instruction. Collaboration was important for planning, networking, self renewal, and program improvement. In this context, collaboration included intra-teacher, principal to teacher, and intra-administration for those principals serving different schools with the same issues.

Findings in this study indicated that teachers and principals shared the assumptions or beliefs of multiage education; however, teachers and principals did not share the same priorities in the implementation of multiage practices. The survey results revealed no statistically significant differences in the beliefs of teachers and principals. However, the interviews indicated differences in the priorities in the implementation of multiage practices where principals felt that the main barriers were lack of time and professional development while teachers cited lack of differentiated instruction, understanding of the curriculum, and collaboration.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations from this research were designed to help prepare leaders for improving access and equality in today's schools as well as for implementation of multiage programs and other new programs in order to enhance the learning of all students. Many of the recommendations focus on communication because the data supported that even though principals and teachers had similar beliefs regarding multiage instruction, the principal's focus tended to be on the entire school, and the teacher's focus was on what was occurring in the classroom. Therefore, the following recommendations were offered:

- Principals and teachers need to communicate effectively with one another so that they better understand the perspective of the other professional.
- The principals and the building leadership team should work together to provide effective, on-going professional development as an important factor in multiage education implementation.
- Principals and the building leadership team should work together to develop a schedule which would assure time for teachers to collaborate with their team members as they plan thematic units and instruction to meet the needs of all students.

- • Principals should strive to provide teachers with the skills and knowledge to be successful in a multiage classroom. This would include practical training in strategies that work in multiage instruction, school visitations, and contact and networking opportunities with experienced multiage teachers.

By meeting these recommendations, the implementation of multiage education can be enhanced and lead to institutionalization of successful practices in multiage education.

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# Distinguishing Practices for Administrators: A Case Study of a University's Lab Settings' Journey to Academic Excellence

Gloria Gresham

Determining effective or distinguishing practices implemented by academically successful educational institutions that lead to student academic success is crucial for school administrators today. In our high accountability environment fueled by the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act, educational leaders scramble to meet high standards, such as, testing requirements, reading and math expectations, and higher qualifications for teachers (Jennings & Renter, 2006; Odland, 2006). School leaders may turn to canned instructional programs with claims of scientifically proven practices, and oftentimes, require teachers to follow these programs in hopes that higher student achievement will follow.

Even though, effective schools research emerged over thirty years ago which identified common characteristics of effective schools, numerous educational institutions struggle to meet national and state expectations (Effective Schools, 2008). For example, in the state of Texas, there are 1,235 school campuses including charter campuses. In 2009, only 117 or approximately 10% of these campuses achieved the state's top accountability rating of exemplary, and 73 or six percent were rated unacceptable. Furthermore, results from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress indicated no significant change in fourth grade reading scores, and eighth grade scores were only one point higher compared to 2007. Mathematics scores were higher when compared to 2007 scores at grade eight but unchanged at grade four. Academic gaps between ethnic minorities and whites are not narrowing (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). However, some schools have promoted student achievement. The intent of this study was to discover the organizational and instructional practices of one university's educational lab settings that led to documented student academic success over time. Recent literature supports this effort of unearthing distinguishing or successful practices.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Effective Schools movement began in the late seventies and early eighties in response to the Coleman report (*The Equal Educational Opportunity Survey*) published in July 1966 that stated schools did not make a difference (Lezotte, n.d.). Spurred by this report, a group led by Ronald Edmonds including educators, policy makers, and concerned citizens assembled to initiate school reform (Lake Forest College, 1995). A product of the Effective Schools' research was a list of correlates or characteristics exhibited by successful schools. The correlates were critical aspects of an effective school because they "represent the leading organizational and contextual indicators that have been shown to influence student learning" (Lezotte, n.d., p. 7). Over time, these correlates evolved to include the following elements of safe and orderly environment, climate of high expectations for success, instructional leadership,

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clear and focused mission, opportunity to learn and student time on task, frequent monitoring of student progress, and home-school relations (Kirk & Jones, 2004). As time passed, the correlates termed the first generation evolved to what Lezotte (2010) termed the second generation correlates. According to Lezotte, the idea of the second generation correlates was an attempt to incorporate current research and offer more challenging goals for schools committed to success. With the second generation correlates, Lezotte offered a warning; the first generation correlates must be exhibited in schools before moving on to the second. Second generation correlates shifted to include the following: safe and orderly environment broadened to increased presence of desirable behaviors; high expectations for success broadened to ensure success; instructional leadership was dispersed to include all adults; clear and focused mission shifted toward a balance of higher-level learning and basic skills; opportunity to learn and student time on task asked that students master the content; frequent monitoring of student progress included efficiency and a move to criterion-referenced measures, and home-school relations evolved to a real partnership between the home and school.

Effectiveness in schools continued as a topic of research in the 90s and early in the 21st century. In 1994, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) contracted with the International School Effectiveness and Improvement Center (ISEIC) to engage in a review of school effectiveness research to determine the key determinants of school effectiveness in secondary and primary schools. According to this study, eleven key characteristics of effective schools were determined: professional leadership, shared vision and goals, a learning environment, concentration on teaching and learning, purposeful teaching, high expectations, positive reinforcement, monitoring progress, pupil rights and responsibilities, home-school partnerships, and a learning organization (Samms, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995). Stoll, Wideley, and Reezigt (2002) participated in a study that compared effective schools across European countries. They concluded that success is a journey of improvement, change agents appear to play a significant role, and capacity and sustainability are critical to effectiveness. Attaining effective schools through support from the California Center for Effective Schools was outlined by Chrispeels (2002). The partnership between Oxnard School District and the California Center for Effective Schools began in the spring of 2000. After a year and a half, positive changes were noted as a result of this partnership and were attributed to the effective schools' processes of assessing need, encouraging instructional leadership, developing school leadership teams, implementing standards-based instructional redesign, instituting facilitated grade-level meetings, and initiating a data management system.

Currently, successful reform strategies or models of reform that meet the needs of all diverse learners are terms that are prevalent in the literature. According to Karns (2010), the primary task of school reform is to close the achievement gap. Project Access, Culture and Climate Expectation, and Strategies (ACES) (2008) outlined key practices with the potential of closing the achievement gap of: (a) providing all students with academic access, (b) offering safe and inclusive learning environments, (c) assisting staff with the ability to use proven instructional strategies, (d) confronting beliefs and biases that hinder learning, (e) assessing teaching and learning, (f) embracing data to make decisions, and (g) changing the instructional venue to meet student needs. Karns (2010) supported these practices of embracing differences and added that elementary schools should establish a culture of inclusion, collaboration, and celebration. Pogrow (2006) focused on restructuring high-poverty elementary schools and stressed three essential features necessary for success: (a) high quality teachers, (b) a synergistic blend of successful traditionalist and progressive ideas, and (c) a means to address the large differences in skill levels among students.

Both elementary and secondary school reform are topics of current literature (Karns, 2010; Kuo, 2010). Kuo (2010) reviewed the next phase in reforming American high schools and found that reform efforts should include the following: smaller size high schools and increased sense of personalization, belonging, and safety; comprehensive change in overall focus, curricula, student support services, and professional development; structural and instructional integration that make the transition from high school to career or college seamless; and drastically improving the nation's lowest performing high schools. In addition, the National Secondary School Principals Association emphasized the importance of rigor, relevance, and relationships to successful secondary schools adding to this current knowledge base of what makes a school successful. However, illumination of practices and processes that influence successful school reform is needed since many school reforms fail (Cuban et al., 2010). To assist practicing and future administrators in leading school reform, the academically exemplary educational laboratory settings at a regional university were reviewed to determine the organizational and instructional practices that were developed and sustained overtime that contributed to students' academic success.

## THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This regional university was founded as a Teachers' College. The legislature believed that a state-supported institution of higher learning was needed to upgrade the lagging educational system and to bolster growth and advancement in the region. The 35th Legislature on April 4, 1917, created provisions for locating a normal school. Senators along with the city leaders fought and won the battle to establish a Teachers' College (Craddock, 1973). Teachers' Colleges, converted normal schools that trained high school graduates in the norms or standards for teaching, were founded as free-standing education schools with the purpose of preparing teachers for careers in education and were not intended as traditional research universities (Davis, 2007; Haberman & Stinnet, 1973; Lucas, 2006; Rudolph, 1962; Thelin, 2004).

In September 1923, this regional college opened and moved away from the title "Normal College." Craddock exclaimed, "With the new name came a new birth in spirit" (p. 9). From its inception, this regional university embraced educational laboratory (lab) settings with a twofold mission: (1.) to better prepare teacher educators, and (2.) to provide an exemplary instructional program for children where theory is modeled for teacher candidates (Hallman, 2001).

Over the years, the College of Education established and implemented six educational lab settings to fulfill the mission: a demonstration school, a nursery school, a kindergarten program, an early childhood laboratory (serving children two months through five years of age), an early childhood laboratory linked to a district/university charter elementary school, and an early childhood laboratory associated with an independent university charter elementary school serving kindergartners through fifth grade children.

The educational lab settings achieved excellence as reported by many parents of students who attended the labs. This excellence was voiced by a parent of two children who attended the Early Childhood Laboratory.

> It was the premier site. We were blessed to have it. I knew it at that time; I know it today. When you walk into another world and think about your child going into care of some kind or school of some kind . . . to think that we had this. It was incredible. It was the premier. You don't do better than what we had.

In addition, in 2008 the Early Childhood Lab was one of the first early childhood programs to earn accreditation from the more rigorous standards established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). As reported by the University Office of Public Affairs (2008), the Early Childhood Lab conducted an extensive self-study that measured its program and services against ten NAEYC early childhood program standards. This lab setting was also designated as a Texas Rising Star Provider, a child care provider that exceeded the State Minimum Licensing Standards for child care facilities (Texas Workforce Commission, 2008). The charter school achieved the state of Texas accountability rating of recognized (the second highest rating) in 1999, the first year in operation, and exemplary (the highest rating) beginning the third year. The exemplary rating was maintained for all subsequent years, 2001-2010. Since students' academic success was well established, a study of the organizational and instructional practices was conducted to identify the organizational and instructional practices that influenced students' high academic success.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to discover the practices of the educational lab settings, a case study spanning the years of 1923 to 2010 was conducted during one academic school year beginning in the fall and ending in the spring semester. Since the researcher desired to attain a deeper understanding of the strategies or practices implemented that fostered students' academic success, the case study was selected to provide "intensive descriptions and analyses of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 19). Purposive or convenience sampling was used to select the participants who the researchers believed would provide the most in-depth information (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2008). The participants of the study included university administrators who had authority over the development of the lab settings and/or were the administrators of record for the lab settings, teachers who taught in the lab settings, and parents of children who attended the lab settings. Seventeen participants were interviewed: six administrators, seven teachers, and four parents. The purpose of the study was to investigate the organizational and instructional practices implemented that led to student academic success over the history of the six lab educational settings. Particularly, the research question was: What were the organizational and instructional practices that led to student academic success across the six lab educational settings?

Data collection involved interviews and document review. Individuals were questioned who had knowledge of the lab settings from the first lab setting, the demonstration school, to the present lab setting, the early childhood laboratory associated with the independent university charter elementary school. Artifacts were examined from the Research Center and included Regents' Board minutes, pictures, scrap books of pictures, newspaper articles, College of Education accreditation documents, and records from the Elementary Education Department, Human Sciences Department, and the College of Education. Also studied were website historical articles, published historical accounts of the lab settings, and minutes and documents from the charter school and the early childhood laboratory. The researcher also gathered information informally through conversations with other individuals who had memories of and/or involvement with the lab settings.

All interviews were taped, transcribed, and analyzed to ascertain themes. Examination began with the first observation (Merriam, 2009). As individuals were interviewed and documents reviewed, the researcher noted and coded emerging themes. As events and stories were revealed through interviews, the researcher analyzed documents to support and verify dates and events. Triangulation was achieved through analyzing interview notes, supporting

findings with numerous documents, and discussing findings with individuals who were knowledgeable of the lab settings. The preponderance of data indicated to the researcher the story of each lab setting (Merriam, 2009). Through rich analysis, a cohesive story that outlined the organizational and instructional practices implemented in the lab settings and their importance was verified. After the themes for each lab setting were noted, the researcher analyzed the data across lab settings to note the organizational and instructional distinguishing practices that were consistent over the years.

## FINDINGS

Analyzed data gathered from the documents and interviews of the administrators, teachers, parents, and students from each of the lab settings painted a vivid picture of the organizational and instructional practices implemented consistently over time. The distinguishing organizational and instructional practices that emerged from the analyses were as follows: aligned practices to a clear, focused mission; implementation of proven, constructivist-based instruction; planning and assessment with a purpose; realization that learning never ceases; leadership alongside the experts; establishment of a family-like atmosphere; embracing market needs and desires; and capitalizing on available resources. Each of these distinguishing practices will be further discussed.

### Align Practices to a Clear, Focused Mission

A single articulated mission was always the beacon leading the way for the lab settings. From 1923, when the demonstration school opened its doors to the present lab settings of the Charter School and Early Childhood Laboratory, this clearly verbalized mission was shared by the College of Education administration, the Elementary Education Department faculty, and the administration, faculty, staff, and parents of the lab settings. A former dean of the College of Education expressed the mission in an interview conducted in 2009.

> The mission was to demonstrate an exemplary program in Early Childhood Education to our students who planned to become teachers, to give them hands-on experiences in working in a setting that was exemplary and to provide high quality education for future teachers. A secondary interest was to offer the children a good program.

Each interview and all documents that were studied supported this aligned mission consistently as a parent from the charter school expressed, "The primary interest from the university was that it was a great teaching tool for its students."

### Implement Proven, Constructivist-based Instruction

Documents and interviews revealed that constructivism was the grounding philosophy of the lab settings' instructional program. The belief that learning is an active, contextualized, social process where children construct knowledge based on their personal experiences and surroundings was evident beginning with the nursery school. John Dewey (1935), noted philosopher, believed that school curriculum should be based on everyday life and encompass the needs of the child. Adherence to Dewey's beliefs is displayed by a document which illustrated the curriculum offered at the nursery school:

The 16 young students enjoy watching corn stalks grow which they have planted and are caring for, churning butter, and exploring the mysteries of magnetism. They also blow soap bubbles, inflate balloons, and inner tubes to aid their learning of air and friction.

Later, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Maria Montessori, and Erik Erikson's work influenced the instructional program (Mooney, 2000). The child was the focus, and the teaching intent was reiterated by a teacher of the early childhood lab, "The instructional program was to teach the whole child in a constructivist, discovery-based setting by taking the children where they were, accepting them on whatever level they were, and working from a positive stance instead of a negative one."

One instructional delivery method present from the beginning of the kindergarten setting to the present day was a learning centers' approach as described by one Elementary Education administrator, "There was always a strong emphasis on learning centers. The learning centers are pretty much the same now, but more emphasis now is on literacy and math skills." Learning centers were developed as a method for children to guide and master learning. Lab setting teachers and education faculty initiated a system of using symbol charts to assist students in self-directed learning. One former lab teacher disclosed this system:

Rebus symbols had been around forever, but we took it to a different level so that we could post them in the different learning centers to give children guidelines. They could turn to the picture or symbol and text to find out what to do. These were called symbol charts.

Furthermore, research-based and proven instructional strategies were implemented in all of the lab settings, and in recent years, more cutting-edge constructivist strategies were the focus as described by a charter school teacher:

We rely heavily on text, not textbooks that authors have written, such as, Lucy Calkins, Ralph Fletcher, Katie Wood Ray, Kathy Richardson, and Catherine Fosnot. Reading is based on *Public Education and Business Coalition* thinking strategies, the work of Ellen Thorpe and Ellin Keene, Sam Bennett, Susan Zimmerman, and Patrick Allen.

Constructivist practices of looking to the individual child, nurturing his or her curiosity through learning centers, and implementing proven instructional strategies focusing on the child as the learner were keys to the lab settings' success.

**Plan and Assess with a Purpose**

Before curriculum alignment and assessment were used widely in the field of education, developing an aligned curriculum and assessing curriculum standards were priorities in the lab settings beginning with kindergarten. An early childhood expert was hired to oversee and develop the kindergarten and early childhood lab settings. Through his wisdom and expertise, a curriculum titled the Integrated Approach Design (IAD) was instituted. A former Early Childhood Lab teacher described this curriculum, "Well, we had the same four goals that we have now in terms of autonomy, openness, integrity, and problem-solving.

Those were the four goals that the lab director had identified and established. There was always an emphasis on individual development." Not only were written curriculum standards for teaching and learning present, but assessment was incorporated with the IAD as an early childhood lab teacher explained:

> The written curriculum was sequential, and the way we assessed in those days was with a checklist on clipboards in a classroom. As we observed the children in centers during activities in the day, we would check off. It was set up like we still do a lot of this information now; you would plan based on the skills you wanted to work on.

This practice of implementing a written curriculum and assessing to guide instruction continued through the lab settings. A charter school administrator pointed out that the school had a writing and math continuum and a social studies and science curriculum framework in addition to the state curriculum. Authentic assessment drove instruction as one charter school teacher demonstrated:

> I am constantly assessing. I am conferring with the students during reading and writing workshop. I have lists of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (the state curriculum) so that I can go through and see where they are periodically. I have anecdotal records that I keep. I have notebooks that each child keeps. I can see where they were the last time I conferred with them. I assess their use of learning centers with another assessment tool. We share in grand conversations and writing celebrations where I can hear their language and how they are discussing their reading and writing to know if they clearly understand the concepts.

Curriculum to focus learning and assessment to guide instruction were distinguishing instructional practices existing historically in the lab settings.

**Realize Learning Never Ceases**

Learning was the mission for university teacher candidates and lab children, but learning for faculty and lab teachers was also a priority. In the early years, professional development was gained through active participation in professional organizations and personal reading of current, scholarly literature. One former lab teacher and administrator stated, "We were active in professional associations. We traveled to state meetings especially in the area of early childhood education. There was little money for professional development, but we did a lot of reading." As grant funds were acquired, experts in the fields of early childhood education, mathematics, constructivist practices, and literacy were engaged to deliver workshops, and groups traveled to listen to the experts in order to learn and grow. The faculty and lab teachers widened professional development offerings to the surrounding public schools with the intent of creating a learning community. An administrator described the desire for involving surrounding educators in learning:

> We looked at problem solving institutionally. I think the very first leap into this was when we had the Texas Reading Grant. We looked at best practices in reading and involved the university faculty as well as local school district curriculum specialists. We were trying to make all of the stakeholders one.

Continued, sustained learning was a common practice with the education faculty and lab teachers. Book studies and long-term relationships with experts who presented content, modeled content in lab classrooms for faculty and lab teachers, and assessed implementation of content were accepted occurrences in current lab settings. Data showed that continued learning required delving deeply into content areas and instructional practices. One such area is math. A charter school teacher explained this deepening or layering understanding of the teaching of mathematics:

> The learning process in mathematics started many years go. It began with Constance Kamii, the math games. We moved into talking about problem solving. We moved to Project Construct. We went to the math component of Project Construct dealing with problem solving and setting up investigations. From there, we honed in on a consultant, Lisa Meredith. She has been to our school three times. She provided support for pieces in the math workshop of the mental math and problem solving. She provided specific examples of curriculum that supports development math stages. That is an ongoing process. We have had lots of book studies on math. Most of them deal with using thinking strategies in math as well as problem solving. We provided support and study of specific curriculum using the arithmetic rack for mental math and using math strings to develop strategies.

Realizing that learning never ceases and expecting sustained, deep understanding of teaching pedagogy were critical and powerful instructional distinguishing practices fostered by leaders.

## Lead Alongside the Experts

Document and interview data indicated that the leaders of the lab settings were always highly educated individuals who understood how to implement early childhood programs and were faculty in the Elementary Education Department. This distinguishing practice nurtured the collaborative connection among the lab settings and the faculty. From the first lab setting, experts in the field were hired to lead faculty and lab teachers. Later, when the kindergarten and nursery school merged to form the Early Childhood Laboratory, an educational leader titled a campus director was hired to nurture and lead lab teachers alongside a faculty member who was an expert in the field of early childhood and had the responsibility of coordinating and guiding the instruction of children and teacher candidates in the lab settings. Additionally, the campus director was educated in the field of early childhood. Each campus director had experience as a classroom teacher, had an educational background in early childhood education, and was expected to serve as a faculty member in the Education Department. Leadership was a joint, collaborative effort. A former campus leader explained this relationship, "It was collaborative leadership. The changes that were implemented were because as a faculty we looked at what was going, and we worked together to figure out what we needed to change as a unit." This distinguishing practice of joint leadership nurtured a family-like atmosphere.

## Establish a Family-like Atmosphere

"We are a family. I see us as a partnership," were sentences in the documents and interview data that indicated a collaborative, supportive atmosphere within the lab settings

and among the lab teachers and faculty. From the beginning, the lab settings were an integral component of the teacher education program, and one former lab teacher described the relationship as, "a cooperative or collaborative relationship" among the teachers of the lab settings and faculty. Faculty and lab teachers worked in concert to form the ever-changing teacher education program dedicated to current, research-based educational practices. One university administrator described this relationship as, "What is being taught in the college classrooms must be reflected in the classrooms with children." A lab teacher further revealed how the lab teachers and faculty collaborated, "It is really a partnership, and we are continuing to learn from things that they are putting into our hands, as well as, they are learning a lot of things from us as we research and move forward." This collaborative or family-like spirit was present in the climate of the lab settings as a lab teacher reiterated, "It is very important that the lab setting has a family feel and that the people that are working there are very connected. The students feel connected, and the families feel very connected because it is really one, huge family."

**Embrace Market Needs and Desires**

The practices displayed by the leaders of the College of Education are summarized by the old adage, "hitting when the iron is hot." As trends and market demands emerged, administrators seized the opportunity to expand lab setting opportunities. Triangulated data revealed that this distinguishing practice began with the creation of the Teachers College in 1923 to boost the economy of the area. In 1969, the kindergarten lab setting was instituted as a site for early childhood teacher preparation after the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 provided the foundation for the National Head Start Program, and teachers with kindergarten endorsements were needed in the region and state. A former College of Education dean described the state demand:

> The state of Texas (Texas Education Agency, TEA) and the State Board of Education (SBOE), which is their governing body, approved a kindergarten endorsement as a teaching credential. Until that time, there was no kindergarten in public school. When kindergartens were started in the public schools, they (TEA, SBOE) approved the kindergarten endorsement.

Later, in 1974, the kindergarten and the second lab setting, the nursery school, merged due to the growing early childhood teacher market and parent demand for child care as more mothers began working outside of the home. When national unrest with the public school systems intensified, an educational alternative, charter schools, emerged, and the Texas Legislature in 1995 opened the door for charter campuses. University administrators quickly reacted to this opened door by collaborating with local school district administrators to first expand the Early Childhood Lab to house a second grade class from a nearby local school district elementary campus and later to form a local school district campus charter school housing kindergarten through grade four students. Data indicated that in 2008, the charter school evolved to an open enrollment charter housing kindergarten through grade five children. Today, the Early Childhood Laboratory and the Charter School are housed in the Early Childhood Research Center on the campus serving infants through grade five.

**Capitalize on Available Resources**

According to document and interview data, education administrators exhibited the distinguishing practice of capitalizing on their resources: people, tuition, outside funding sources, and inside resources. From the beginning, highly quality faculty were employed to lead the lab staff, and other faculty were involved through teaching courses where teacher candidates observed and implemented activities with children. Lab teachers were the backbone of each lab setting providing instruction to children through modeling research-based practices for teacher candidates. This tradition began with the demonstration school and continues today. A former lab teacher described her responsibilities:

> As a teacher in the kindergarten and primary class, my role was to schedule the activities teacher candidates were assigned to do, such as music activities, group stories, set up centers, and participate in outside play. It was my role as the lab teacher to set up those activities. In other words, someone else did the lecture part of the class. I did the lab part of the class and set them up for all of those practicum students. I was not the teacher of record for the lab. I was the lead teacher in the classroom that allowed the students to come in and participate. The teacher and I coordinated the lab experience. I was not actually a faculty member. I was paid by the University, of course, but I was not considered a faculty member at that time.

Additionally, students seeking a teaching degree were and are a valuable resource for the lab settings by working with the children and creating classroom materials. A former parent described how the university students provided resources as, "The college students also increased the resources because they had to create things and bring them to the lab to work with the children." Also, parents were a driving force in the development of lab settings because they eagerly sought the lab settings for their children and fought to expand them.

The second resource, tuition from lab children and university students along with state appropriations provided the bulk of the operating expenses for the lab settings. In the beginning, funding was through state appropriations and lab children tuition. As labs were added to Elementary Education and Early Childhood courses, university tuition money was available to purchase supplies for the lab settings. As stated by an Elementary Education Department chair, "If university students use the classrooms in the lab settings, it is only logical that the Elementary Department and Human Services Department pick up some of the cost of the teachers' salaries."

Available funding sources were not sufficient to provide all of the resources required by the lab settings; so, outside resources were essential. Grant funding was an avenue for additional support accessed beginning with the kindergarten. When the collaboration with the local school district began, state funding was available to support the second grade and later the campus charter school. The first campus leader explained that the agreement was that the charter school would receive 85% of the funds generated by the children in attendance at the campus. With the Charter School and Early Childhood Lab expanding, space was limited. Administrators decided to petition the state for a Tuition Revenue Bond to institute a research center to house the Department of Elementary Education, the Early Childhood Lab, and the Charter School. In July 2006, the state of Texas approved a Tuition Revenue Bond of $20.1 million, and the building opened in the fall of 2009.

Finally, the teachers at the labs accessed inside resources such as instructors from other departments to enrich the content taught in classes. Not only was the school a place for

tours and excursions, but many departments directly collaborated with the lab settings to provide services such as music and physical instruction for lab children. Funding lab settings was traditionally a concern that required university administrators to capitalize on all available inside and outside resources.

## DISCUSSION

Triangulation of the interview and document data confirmed the distinguishing organizational and instructional practices implemented by the lab settings that enhanced students' academic success. As expressed by one education administrator, the mission was focused and practices were aligned to the longstanding mission, "To provide an environment where children are in a learner-centered environment and, at the same time, provide model classrooms to better prepare students." Constructivist-based instruction was the instructional focus in the lab settings where children actively engaged in experiences designed to develop the whole child. Curriculum was developed to support state expectations and assessed using authentic measures. Findings revealed that continued and sustained learning became a common practice for faculty and staff. Lab setting administrators led alongside experts in the Education Department to create a collaborative, coherent program for lab children and university teacher candidates. Thus, this collaborative spirit encouraged the family-like atmosphere that was displayed in the lab settings. Echoed through the voices of many, administrators reacted quickly to market needs and desires, and this practice helped to maintain the lab settings over time. Although funding always was a concern, capitalizing on resources such as people, tuition, outside funding sources, and inside resources supported and expanded lab offerings.

The study is significant to practicing administrators in educational settings today. With accountability standards looming, administrators are seeking avenues to encourage students' academic success. Researching successful institutions highlights distinguishing practices that provide such avenues. Furthermore, the preparation of future school leaders that have the knowledge to lead successful schools is imperative. Such stories provide hope and direction in how to create and bolster faculty and staff with the capacity to guide students to excellence through implementing proven organizational and instructional practices. Good, proven practices will map the way to good teaching and learning where attaining accountability standards is common place.

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# CRITICAL ISSUES IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

# Self-Efficacy and Principal Involvement in Character Education

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With character education as one of the "fastest growing reform movements in P-12 education today" (Williams, 2000, p. 32), understanding the principal's leadership role and perceived abilities in character education is critical for program success. Educational administrators, in pivotal roles as instructional leaders and school reform change agents, need to be aware of character education programs including curriculum content, program delivery, and evaluation processes designed to assess effectiveness. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has posited that school counselors, teachers, and administrators work cooperatively in providing character education as an integral part of the school curriculum and activities (ASCA, 1998).

The growth of the character education movement, according to Wynne and Hess (1987), is largely due to the increasing irresponsible and destructive behavior being reported among youth. Jensen, Lewis, Williams, and Yanchar (2003) noted, however, "The vast majority of character education programs to date have not focused on secondary education applications where youth might participate" (p. 4). In such a context of increasing malevolent youth behavior, parents and the public alike are demanding that schools eradicate bad behavior, promote good behavior, and maintain a safe learning environment. With the responsibility for school change and success resting with the building-level principal, we believe it is important to examine relationships between principals' perceived efficacy beliefs for character education success and their abilities to implement, administer, and evaluate character education programs. School administrators who are aware of personal levels of self-efficacy necessary to implement the many components of a successful character program may be aided in their decision-making, leadership focus, and levels of effort toward self-improvement.

National attention is now being given to more areas than academic achievement alone. With the goal of ensuring students' future success, an educational shift exists that includes a broader view of what constitutes student successes. For example, focusing on the educational practice of developing the whole child is the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's (ASCD) adopted position (Freeley, 2005). This stance affirms the organization's educational belief regarding the dimensions of human growth and development, and reflects a broader understanding of the whole child—a view resurfacing amidst the heavily entrenched culture of academic performance and accountability (Freeley, 2005). Encapsulating ASCD's position that extends a child's education beyond the present focus on academic achievement and assessment, Freeley (2005) noted, "A comprehensive approach to learning recognizes that successful young people are knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, motivated, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond their own borders" (para. 2).

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## CHARACTER EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

School principals and administrators are challenged by a myriad of taxing forces which ultimately find their source in character-related problems. First, administrative leaders are challenged by an accountability-rich standardized testing environment that demands the improvement of academic skills on the part of all students. Ryan (2003) noted, "After two decades of poking and prodding high school students toward higher academic achievement, education reformers, administrators, and teachers are becoming discouraged" (para. 1). Character programs that demonstrate positive relationships to academic improvement can justify educational leaders' efforts to focus on character-building and ethical conduct. Ryan (2003), making a connection between character education and academics, related significant benefits of character education to the learning community writing:

> A strong case can be made that the poor academic performance of American high school students is directly linked to their failure of character: that is, to their lack of strong personal habits, such as taking responsibility for completing their academic chores, and having persistence in tackling the hard business of learning. (para. 2)

Students with instructional self-discipline skills could improve students' academic performance. An administrative leader's knowledge of the benefits associated with character education could be the motivating force for the implementation of a character education program.

Secondly, the current condition of student character warrants study of administrator efficacy in teaching character education. Schools are challenged by the associated behaviors and attitudes resulting from students' moral decline as evidenced by the incidences of student violence, drug and substance abuse, bullying, cheating, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and a host of safety concerns (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004).

Thirdly, school administrators must face the increasing demands inherent in the principalship including, but not limited to, teachers' concerns for school safety and job satisfaction, parents' concerns for students' safety, self-esteem, and growth, community concerns for civil and caring students, and the business community's concern for a well-prepared and honest workforce. Under such circumstances, the study of educators' perceptions of their ability to successfully implement character education efforts, as well as their motivations and convictions for doing so, can provide insights into principal leadership preparation and practice.

## PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Implementing a character education endeavor requires the consideration of the constructs and associated descriptors as proposed in the administrator character education efficacy model. Of these constructs and descriptors, the administrator leadership construct has connections to various leadership theories including ethical leadership (Hitt, 1990; Trautman, 1998), moral leadership (Pellicer, 1999; Spears, 2001), servant leadership (Covrig, 2000: McKerrow, 1997), and transformational leadership. Pragmatic implications of these theories impact a variety of leadership components including decision-making, modeling, moral reasoning for problem-solving, personal integrity, consistent behavior, and moral purpose.

A character-focused school presupposes a leader who has a conceptual understanding of character education programming, but who also possesses an affinity toward a leadership

style conducive to an effective implementation of a program designed to promote character-building and moral development (McCormick, 2001). The following section will highlight certain leadership theories which contain elements that closely align with the leadership qualities and skills needed to evoke changes in students' character and moral thinking.

However, the demanding expectations placed on campus principals in discharging their responsibilities and obligations for effective character education will require more than the application of leadership skills, concepts, and styles (Jenson et al., 2003). Positive and transformational change will depend on the administrator having knowledge of and understanding his or her self-efficacy for implementing a character education program, and the administrator then responding accordingly.

**Ethical Leadership**

Germane to research on a school administrator's perceived self-efficacy beliefs is the study of ethical leadership. Hitt (1990) explained the salient relationship between ethics and leadership:

> Ethics and leadership go hand-in-hand. An ethical environment is conducive to effective leadership, and effective leadership is conducive to ethics. Effective leadership is a consequence of effective leadership. Ethics and leadership function as both cause and effect. (p. 1)

Leadership literature is replete with descriptions of core leadership values that should characterize the school leader. Drummond, Ellis, Hook, Murray, and Seymour (2002) noted the relationship between a leader and ethics:

> To be effective, a leader must understand and embrace a strong set of ethics, communicate them as a valued standard to co-workers, and live by them. Integrity is the cornerstone on which trusting relationships are built and from which all honest consensus is created. (p. 3)

The same authors also detailed how ethical behavior becomes an integral theme of the organization by noting:

> It is clear that leaders must consider a multiplicity of issues and concerns in making consistently ethical decisions and in developing a code of ethical behavior for their organizations. It is the leader's role to set a clear and uniform example of ethical behavior and to articulate specific expectations and goals so that ethical behavior becomes an integral *theme* of the organization. (Drummond et al., 2002, p. 5)

However, in addition to the communication and modeling of value standards, school leaders must understand that their own motivation will be a determining factor in whether or not the organization's ethical code will serve itself as a motivating factor.

According to Trautman (1998) of the National Institute of Ethics, leaders who encourage their staff to maintain high ethical behavior and who desire to maximize their potential will inherently (a) convey sincere interest in others, (b) satisfy the needs of their employees, (c) develop a commitment to the organization, (d) demonstrate integrity when dealing with fellow employees, (e) allow co-workers to actively participate in decision-

making, (f) provide staff with challenges and responsibilities, (g) convey trust and understanding to others, and (h) assist in personal development. The list of action steps to be undertaken by the building-level principal provides a framework from which to develop faculty who act upon their ethical convictions and subsequently realize their potential.

Doggett (1988) claimed, "Many of the routine issues confronting principals each day are of an ethical nature and call for school administrators to uphold principles of honesty and integrity" (p. 6). Because school leaders should fulfill their obligations in both moral and ethical ways (Campbell, 1997), the challenge is for a principal to be an ethical leader who maintains standards of honesty and integrity. This challenge means that the school leader is making decisions based on what is right or wrong such that the residual benefit extends to both the members of the organization and to the organization itself. Describing both the process and the goal of ethics, Pritchett (1999) understood ethics as the process of making the right decision based on having the knowledge of right and wrong whereas the goal is to make ethical decisions that result in what is best for individuals and the organization.

School administrators must possess moral reasoning skills to lead their school from a moral perspective. For Greenfield (1999), leaders' competence in moral reasoning is fundamental to the administrators' ability to oversee a school in a distinctly moral manner. Raising the plane of responsibility higher, Campbell (1997) posited, "Contemporary theoretical and empirical literature increasingly has addressed the necessity for educators to regard their professional responsibilities as basic moral and ethical imperatives" (p. 288). From an organizational perspective, "School administration, in contrast to administration in other organizations, makes a unique set of ethical demands on the administrator" (Greenfield, 1991, p. 2).

Leaders' focus must be unidirectional as they must simultaneously address a variety of different educational responsibilities and challenges. According to Martin (2004), schools are:

> …charged with assuring the well-being of their students. The campus leader has a profound influence on the stakeholders and moral fiber of the campus. Therefore, the behavior of the leader must consistently focus on moral and responsible actions, directly impacting the ethical culture of the educational institution. (p. 1)

In addition, Martin (2004) asserted, "School administrators are held to an even higher standard than leaders in other fields because they are uniquely in charge of establishing citizenship as well as socializing children to the norms of society" (p. 16). Greenfield (1991) maintained that the activities in a school not only have consequences for the child, but for society as well. Therefore, ethical leadership in the school also has a profound effect on the community at large. With the myriad of responsibilities that school administrators must shoulder, the importance of making the right ethical decisions cannot be overstated. Such a case for the importance of ethical decision-making is made by Walker and Dimmock (2002) who wrote, "Ethical leadership is synonymous with effective schools. It is the moral component of instructional leadership" (p. 32).

## Moral Leadership

McKerrow (1997) maintained that education is a fundamentally moral venture. Greenfield (1991) contended the public school administrators are moral representatives, and Smith and Blase` (1988) reasoned, "The moral leader should realize that there is much more to schooling than the attainment of certain quantitatively measured goals" (p. 8). Lunenburg

and Ornstein (2000) posited, "There is a desperate need for credibility among leaders who people respect and admire; the result is that individuals feel better and are willing to work harder" (p. 470). Greenfield (1991) listed some of these dilemmas as good pedagogical practices, friendships, rules and regulations, efficiency of the organization, and educational outcomes. There may be many conflicting moral issues at play when considering decisions to be made. As Greenfield (1991) asserted, "Moral reasoning is a tool the administrator can use to identify and analyze the moral dimensions of the dilemma and arrive at a conclusion regarding what action ought to be taken…" (p. 10). Beck and Murphy (1994) asserted, "Ethics provide principles to guide administrators toward morally sound decisions" (p. 2).

Sergiovanni (1992), who wrote on the moral dimensions of school leadership, purported that school leaders desiring to provide moral leadership will achieve success when they are characterized by character and integrity. In terms of school renewal, leadership traits must include consistency, loyalty, and honest if trust is to be developed and change implemented (Sergiovanni, 1992). For change and renewal to occur, Fullan (1993) claimed that moral purpose had to be linked to the change agent concept noting, "Without moral purpose, aimlessness and fragmentation prevail. Without change agentry, moral purpose stagnates" (p. 18). According to Covrig (2000), the role of moral leadership in administration is about administering in such a way that:

> one fosters moral sensitivity, develops an ethos of moral judgment, crafts an environment that promotes the motivation to do good, and finally institutionalizes behaviors that promote moral actions, and when necessary routinizes organizational operations around those institutional values. (pp. 55-56)

Consequently, as Covrig (2000) explained, "Moral administration is about keeping the organization faithful to its central identity and also reinterpreting its central identity in response to changing pressures and new understandings of morality" (p. 56).

As the administrative leader in a school organization, moral leadership is a dynamic process with multiple applications to the implementation of a school program such as character education. Consequently, an administrator's role in providing administrative moral leadership is in constant flux as an organization confronts new moral issues as new core values and moral codes are introduced and existing core values are marginalized. In summary, Covrig (2000) asserted the positive element of the conflict that results from such organization moral flux by noting that, "…moral administration is the practice of effective ethical decision-making and leadership which responds to, preserves and clarifies the organization's core values. Conflict and conflict resolution suggest a healthy moral administrative process" (p. 57). English (1994), writing on the indispensable role of morality in leadership, stated, "Leadership without morality is simply bureaucratic technique" (p. 231). School leaders must be proficient in both managerial and moral leadership.

## Servant Leadership

Leadership qualities such as commitment, trust, ethics, and integrity are moral qualities. Addressed in this leadership section is the relationship between the role of the educational leader and these leadership qualities required to lead a school organization in a spiritual or moral context because the servant leader concept "is at the heart of any discussion of leadership values and integrity" (Drummond et al., 2002., p. 20). Thus, the servant-leader

model of leadership accurately conceptualizes the traits and actions that constitute the prerequisites required for leadership in character education reform efforts.

Servant leadership is a leadership style exemplified by leaders' priority on serving within the organizational context (Greenleaf, 1977). The servant leader must ensure that the highest priority needs of other people are being served, and that the best test to determine if that is occurring is to ask:

> Are those served growing as individuals? Are they healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? What is the effect on the least privileged of society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? (Spears, 2001, para. 8)

According to Drummond et al. (2002), servant leadership in its purest form, "advocates the power of persuasion and the seeking of consensus so that the mind of the servant leader and the needs of the employees, customers, constituents, and community, become the most important reason for the organization's existence" (p. 21). In the school context, servant leadership affords leadership prerequisites for effective leadership: leading so that all school constituents benefit, managing to maintain organizational health so school goals can be met, and relating to people persuasively through collaboration and consensus-building. Pellicer (1999) aptly described the servant aspect of leadership, noting:

> Leaders are servants to their followers in that they seek to remove the obstacles that prevent them from doing their jobs and give them the freedom and incentive to live up to their potential, while completing themselves as human beings. (p. 8)

As the servant leader of the school campus, the principal has the potential to make staff, students, and parents "want to be better terms of what they do and who they are as human beings" (Pellicer, 1999, p. 13). As to the school leader's greatest attribute, Pellicer (1999) noted that he believed, "The ability to make the people around them want to be better is the greatest attribute any leader could ever possess" (p. 13). According to Bolman and Deal (2001), "A caring school system requires servant leaders who serve the best interests of the institution and its stakeholders. This implies a profound and challenging responsibility for leaders to understand the needs and concern of those they serve" (p. 26). The guiding leadership principle that is concerned about facilitating the personal growth and welfare of all school constituents succinctly encapsulates the driving purpose of school leadership committed to the implementation of character education programs.

## EFFICACY BELIEFS FRAMEWORK

In addition to principal leadership, an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of efficacy is critical to this study as well. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) noted that the awareness of efficacy beliefs provides beneficial determinations in several areas of the school-wide program of which character education is a part. To illustrate, efficacy belief levels would determine which school and district goals are placed in improvement plans, determine which professional development areas are chosen for teachers and administrators, and determine which support mechanisms administrators would establish based on their own strengths and weaknesses. Administering a character education efficacy instrument to educational administrators would surface an administrator's self-knowledge regarding character education implementation. Awareness of administrators' perceived ability beliefs

could in part aid the administrator in selecting a character program most conducive to their skills and abilities, determine the manner and degree to which school constituents are involved, and determine which problems the administrators and staff of the school will choose to address.

## Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy was defined by Bandura (1997) as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). The self-efficacy construct also relates to "peoples' judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Leadership self-efficacy refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to lead successfully (McCormick, 2001). According to McCollum, Kaja, and Minter (2006), "Essentially, self-efficacy is the belief and confidence an individual has in performing a specific task" (p. 42). Pertinent to the current study which focuses on administrators' perceived efficacy beliefs when implementing a character education program, McCollum et al. (2006) stated, "Self-efficacy is known to be an important construct in predicting the success of an individual on multiple types of tasks" (p. 42).

## Principal Self-efficacy

Leadership self-efficacy refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to lead a group successfully, and is "critical to the leadership process because it affects the goals a leader selects, leader motivation, development of functional leadership strategies, and the skillful execution of those strategies" (McCormick, 2001, p. 30). McCormick (2001) wrote, "Enhancing leadership self-efficacy should be an important objective for those responsible for improving the quality of leadership in organizations" (p. 31).

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) noted, "One promising, but largely unexplored avenue to understanding principal motivation and behavior is principals' sense of efficacy" (p. 573). The relationship between principals' efficacy beliefs and their leadership performance is substantial. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) commented:

> Principals' efficacy beliefs influence the level of effort and persistence they put forth in their daily work, as well as their resilience in the face of setbacks. It is not enough to hire and retain the most capable principals – they must believe that they can successfully meet the challenges of the task at hand. (p. 582)

Bandura (2000) explained, "When faced with obstacles, setbacks, and failures, those who doubt their capabilities slacken their efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions" (p. 120). In contrast, Bandura (2000) stated, "Those who have a strong belief in the capabilities redouble their effort to master the challenge" (p. 120).

Concerning academic accountability, the principals' sense of efficacy cannot be underestimated. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) purported:

> With the role of the school principal being increasingly defined in terms of academic achievement and success as measured by high-stakes assessment results, a principal's sense of efficacy plays a critical role in meeting the expectations and demands of the position. (p. 582)

To understand this motivation and behavior, the administrator's own sense of efficacy regarding the implementation of character education was explored. Applying Bandura's (1997) construct to the principalship would involve several factors including the principal's determination of effectiveness on the set of tasks associated with character education, considerations of the principal's own capabilities and experiences in character education, and the principal's unique work context. Social cognitive theory proposes that such factors related to the principalship form the motivational and behavioral catalyst needed to successfully accomplish school goals in the character education domain.

In contrast to a principal's general efficacy beliefs, we are focusing on only the perceived efficacy beliefs in the context of character education because self-efficacy instruments must be context-specific as Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) wrote:

> Self-efficacy beliefs are context-specific, however, people do not feel equally efficacious for all situations. Principals may feel efficacious for leading in particular contexts, but this sense of efficacy may or may not transfer to other contexts, depending on the perceived similarities of the task. Therefore in making an efficacy judgment, consideration of the elements of the task at hand are required. (pp. 573-574)

In the decision process of making perceived efficacy belief determinations, principals should analyze the tasks associated with implementing a character education programming by assessing their personal leadership capabilities including personality traits, skills and knowledge levels, and available strategies (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Administrators continuously employ decision-making based on acquired skills, personal knowledge, and experiences. Bandura (1997) suggested that a strong sense of self-efficacy is necessary to access skills and knowledge and simultaneously remaining focused on tasks in a complex environment.

Administrative assets of school administrators should then be weighed against their personal weaknesses, liabilities, or posed challenges that the administrator possesses that would constitute barriers or constraints to leading a school effectively through the implementation stage of a school's character education program. Administrators' self-efficacy judgments are subsequently determined by the dynamic interplay between leadership assets and liabilities (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004).

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) commented that few empirical investigations of principals' sense of efficacy had been conducted. The studies that have been conducted, however, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis noted had provided interesting findings. For example, "principals with a strong sense of self-efficacy have been found to be persistent in pursuing their goals, but are also more flexible and more willing to adapt strategies to meeting contextual conditions" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004, p. 574). In terms of problem-solving skills when confronting school issues, according to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004), high efficacy principals, "do not interpret their inability to solve the problems immediately as failure. They regulate their personal expectations to correspond to conditions, typically remaining confident and calm and keeping their sense of humor, even in difficult situations" (p. 574). In contrast, significant leadership challenges are experienced by principals with low efficacy beliefs. According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004), low efficacy belief principals have:

…been found to perceive an inability to control the environment and tend to be less likely to identify appropriate strategies or modify unsuccessful ones. When confronted with failure, they rigidly persist in their original course of action. When challenged, they are more likely to blame others. (p. 574)

It appears to us that no small differences exist between high and low efficacy principals.

An administrator's responsibilities in complex school environments require the ability to access skills and knowledge simultaneously and to remain task-focused. This ability, according to Bandura (1997), is the by-product of a strong sense of self-efficacy. Similarly, Hoy (1998) purported that self-efficacy is also related to other administrator leadership skills, such as, communication, leading, and motivating others.

Varied job duties and responsibilities impact principals' efficacy beliefs. Accordingly, principals' efficacy beliefs impact their own actions to no small degree. Self-efficacy beliefs vary in strength and exhibit consequential differences along a weak to strong continuum. Bandura (2001) asserted, "Weak efficacy beliefs are easily negated by disconfirming experiences, whereas people who have a tenacious belief in their capabilities will persevere in their efforts despite innumerable difficulties and obstacles. They are not easily dissuaded by adversity" (p. 9).

Implications are replete for building-level principals who daily confront disappointments, resistance, and challenges from all quarters and levels. In terms of the relationship between self-assurance and self-efficacy, Bandura (2001) wrote, "A certain threshold of self-assurance is needed to attempt a course of action, but higher strengths of self-efficacy will result in the same attempt" (p. 9). The contrast, however, is, Bandura (2001) noted, "The stronger the sense of personal efficacy, however, the greater the perseverance and the higher the likelihood that the chosen activity will be performed successfully" (p. 9).

Principal self-efficacy is a promising, but largely unexplored, construct for understanding principal motivation and behavior" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005, p. 3). Bandura (1997) associated principals' sense of efficacy with principals' determination of their effectiveness at a certain task or tasks in light of their own capabilities and experiences, as well as the context of work in which the implementation of administrative tasks will occur. McCormick (2001) delineated how principals' sense of efficacy is a judgment of their capabilities to develop a plan of action so that particular school outcomes can be achieved. Principals' efficacy is also a more focused understanding of how principals' self-perceived capabilities related to group processes and goal achievement. McCormick (2001) noted that the principal's success in planning and achieving particular school goals is correlated to the self-efficacy beliefs that the principal possesses. Administrators' self-efficacy beliefs also impact the functional leadership strategies that are developed as well as how skillfully those strategies are executed (McCormick, 2001).

## SELF-EFFICACY AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

A wide range of relationships have been documented in the literature between the role of self-efficacy beliefs and the components of effective leadership. Paglis and Green (2002) and Bandura and Wood (1989) have both shown how perceived self-efficacy influenced analytic strategies, direction-setting, and managers' subsequent organizational performance. McCormick (2001) purported, "Successful leadership involves using social influence processes to organize, direct, and motivate the actions of others. It requires persistent task-

directed effort, effective task strategies, and the artful application of various conceptual, technical, and interpersonal skills" (p. 28).

Crucial to the leadership needed for successfully implementing character education, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) noted, "Leaders' perceived self-efficacy beliefs were related to subordinates' performance abilities, as well as to success at gaining followers' commitment to the task" (p. 4). In high-stakes accountability environment for students' academics and actions, highly-efficacious principals would possess two significant components of effective leadership: improved performance of subordinates and the procurement of subordinates' commitment to the leader's vision and program.

Social cognitive theory presupposes that a principal's own sense of efficacy is determinative to the acquisition of the leadership abilities and skills needed to impact student successfully student achievement, school climate, school direction, and school reform. Also underlying social cognitive theory is the impact that a leader's self-efficacy has on providing leadership expertise, marshalling resources, unifying school constituents, and maintaining effort (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005). Principals' perceived self-efficacy significantly impacts the following leadership components: (a) level of aspiration, goal-setting, effort, adaptability, and persistence (Bandura, 1997; Gist & Mitchell, 1992); (b) analytical strategies, direction-setting, and subsequent organizational performance of managers (Bandura & Wood, 1989; Paglis & Green, 2002); and, (c) sustained attentional focus and persistent efforts needed to succeed at organizational goals (Bandura & Wood, 1989)

A principal's level of efficacy may strongly influence outcomes of school leadership efforts. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) noted, "Although empirical studies of principal's sense of efficacy are few, the results are enticing" (p. 574). For example, Bandura (2000) explained that levels of principal efficacy are inherently determinative for, "When faced with obstacles, setbacks, and failures, those who doubt their capabilities slacken their efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions. Those who have a strong belief in their capabilities redouble their efforts to master the challenge" (p. 120). Referencing Lyons and Murphy (1994), Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) wrote, "Principals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to use internally-based personal power, such as expert, informational, and referent power, when carrying out their roles" (p. 5). In terms of pursuing goals, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) stressed, "Self-efficacy beliefs are excellent predictors of individual behavior. Principals with a strong sense of self-efficacy have been found to be persistent in pursuing their goals, but are also more flexible and more willing to adapt strategies to meeting contextual conditions" (p. 574). Highly efficacious principals persevere in their efforts to achieve goals, but not to the point where they persist in unsuccessful strategies (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996). The different positives associated with high-efficacious principals builds the case for making applications to the principalship because the efficacy construct has the potential to influence positively so many areas of the school environment.

In lieu of the burgeoning demands currently burdening principals, Osterman and Sullivan (1996) suggested the leadership deficiencies associated with low-efficacy principals included principals' inability to detect opportunities, make adaptations, or to generate support (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005). Other low-efficacy characteristics offered by Lyons and Murphy (1994) included affective factors such as demonstrable anxiety, stress, frustration, as well as a higher rate of self-deprecating feelings of failure. In terms of personal dynamics of power, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) reported that, low efficacy principals are more prone "to rely on external and institutional bases of power, such as coercive, positional, and reward power" (p. 5). Another leadership malady facing low-efficacy principals is burnout. Friedman (1997) posited, "Inefficacious beliefs have been related to higher levels of burnout"

(p. 6). The contrasting leadership characteristics between high- and low-efficacy principals provide convincing rationale for the concerted emphasis on self-efficacy development.

## DEVELOPING PRINCIPALS' SELF- EFFICACY BELIEFS

Reform-minded administrators striving to improve the quality of school leadership must develop leaders' self efficacy, particularly if these leaders are to develop and implement effective character education programs on campus. Discussions on principals' self-efficacy should, therefore, address four considerations germane to administrators' development of personal efficacy beliefs: (a) How are efficacy beliefs formed in the individual?; (b) How does one make an efficacy belief determination?; (c) How can principals' self-efficacy beliefs be developed?; and, (d) How can principals impact teachers' self-efficacy beliefs? Descriptive elaboration is now presented for the four considerations in terms of educator self-efficacy.

### Formation of Efficacy Beliefs

How are efficacy beliefs formed in the individual? Developing self-efficacy beliefs is especially important in lieu of Bandura's (1977) assertion, "Efficacy beliefs regulate aspirations, choice of behavioral courses, mobilization and maintenance of effort, and effective reactions" (p. 4). Labone (2004), however, noted that though principal self-efficacy observably impacts effective school leadership practices, context factors linked to cultivating a higher sense of efficacy is less known.

Triadic reciprocal causation is the concept that describes the dynamics of how efficacy perceptions are formed. The dynamic involves interaction between the leaders' internal thoughts and beliefs and their external elements in their environment that includes other individuals. The social cognitive concept further explains that in this reciprocal relationship, the leaders' personal factors (cognitive processing and behaviors) and his or her external forces (people and circumstances) are both constantly interacting with and exerting influencing on the other (Bandura, 2001).

Human functioning, according to Bandura (1986), is characterized by five different human capabilities: symbolizing, forethought, vicarious learning, self-regulation, and self-reflection. Important to the current study, where respondents were asked to note their own perceived efficacy beliefs, self-reflection was significantly determinative to one's behavior. Bandura's definition of self-efficacy highlights the important relationship between a person's judgment of their abilities and an intended action. However, Bandura (1986) understood self-efficacy as the most influential arbiter in human functioning in comparison to all cognitive and personal factors.

The self-efficacy construct has a strong predictive element in terms of future achievement. Self-efficacy functions as a mediator between past knowledge, skills, and achievement and future achievement. Self-efficacy, therefore, affects a person's behavior by impacting behavioral choices, expended effort, and persistence exhibited even in the face of failure. Consequently, self-efficacy can often be utilized to predict future success better than one's actual skills and abilities (Bandura, 1986). Consideration of the high predictive potential of the self-efficacy construct could aid school administrators with several components of character education programming including program selection, implementation strategies, and staff needs.

**Efficacy Belief Determination**

How does one make an efficacy belief determination? Determination of perceived efficacy beliefs is critically important in research rooted in the development of an instrument designed to measure self-efficacy judgments. Administrators should consider all aspects associated with the particular research task being investigated including both facilitative and inhibiting forces in the specific context of character education implementation (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005). One factor to consider when determining perceived efficacy levels is assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the principal in relation to the task requirements. During this task analysis, the administrator surmises the comparison and contrast between impediments to leading in a particular context with an assessment of available resources that facilitate leadership (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005).

In explicating this assessment of self-perceptions of the leader's competence, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) stated:

> A school principal assesses personal capabilities such as skills, knowledge, strategies, and personality traits against personal weaknesses or liabilities in a particular school setting. The interaction of these two components leads to judgments about self-efficacy for leadership in a particular school context. (p. 8)

Weighing personal weaknesses against personal strengths, school administrators make judgments about self-efficacy.

**Development of Self-Efficacy Beliefs**

How can principals' self-efficacy beliefs be developed? Foundational to a principal's development of personal efficacy beliefs is Bandura's (1997) proposal that the four sources of efficacy beliefs include mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological experiences with mastery experiences the most powerful. Changing personal efficacy beliefs is possible but is considered most pliable early in learning. When available, mastery experiences will most significantly impact one's sense of efficacy; however, other sources will affect levels of efficacy in the absence of mastery experiences (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005).

The particular school context is determinative in the development of self-efficacy beliefs as Bandura (1997) asserted that interpersonal support from the superintendent, central office staff, teachers, support staff, and parents could serve as important contextual support in changing principal efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) included other contextual elements determinative to principals' efficacious assessments of the leadership tasks ahead. Context factors suggested were available resources, facility quality, school level and setting, and the percent of low-income students.

## CONNECTING EFFICACY AND CHARACTER EDUCATION

Ryan (2003) suggested that if schools would take back their responsibility to help students gain a moral compass and form good habits, then schools could have greater academic achievement and simultaneously meet their responsibilities as educators of students' character. In order to accomplish this task, schools need strong, highly efficacious leaders who can implement effective character education programs. The promise residing in the

education of students' character is the promise that academic goals can be attained as character goals are accomplished. As Ryan (2003) stressed,

> Teachers must help students see that the hard, often tedious work of school is the stuff of their own character formation…Teachers must confidently make them the promise, however, that while doing this hard work of forging good character, they will be able to achieve the academic goals we have set for them. (p. 16)

School administrators implementing character education initiatives will find both academic and character goals accomplished.

Efficacy research is replete with assorted ways in which principals' self-efficacy impacts the different components of school leadership (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991; Moore & Esselman, 1992). Resultant leadership effectiveness positively correlates to teachers' sense of efficacy. The efficacy dynamic is important in light of the educational benefits students could enjoy as the by-product of educators' increased levels of efficacy; and, if this efficacy impacts the implementation of effective character education, then the benefits extend to all members of society.

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# Navigating the Politics of Change in a Suburban School District:
## A Phenomenological Study

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According to historical research on teacher leadership and school improvement (Smylie & Denny, 1990) and recent studies on teacher leader models and implementation (Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Mujis & Harris, 2007), there is a lack of appropriate training for identified teacher leaders that allows them to build and sustain their skills as teacher leaders. The goal in teacher leadership is to provide consistent opportunities to improve teaching and learning through professional learning communities (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Case studies and other research (Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Muijs & Harris, 2007) identified that teachers taking on leadership positions require training to be effective in their practice and to overcome challenges associated with transitioning into a teacher leader role.

School districts across the nation have established teacher leader models and support systems for these teacher leaders; however, at times, these models are unsuccessful. Barriers to teacher leadership and challenges in teacher leader models are well documented in research. Harris (2005) summarized the literature on challenges in teacher leadership by stating that isolation has been noted as a consistent issue for teacher leaders as they transition into leadership roles. Cultures of isolation and lack of time, training, and funding often inhibit the potential success of teacher leaders on school campuses (Drago-Severson, 2007). Relational factors impact the success of the teacher leader including those of his or her ability to interpersonally connect with colleagues, to maintain productive relationships with school leaders, and to provide conflict resolution that may be necessary with teachers or administration (Harris, 2005). Collaborative skills necessary to carry out the roles and responsibilities of a teacher leader require training and knowledge of strategies in dealing with colleagues that may be resistant to the teacher leadership role as a means of assistance (Lieberman, et al., 2000). The list of negative factors that have the potential to squelch the effect that a teacher leader can have on a school campus causes barriers that, in some instances, cause significant issues in creating and supporting a district level teacher leader model.

As these districts experience the challenges associated with teacher leadership and the requirements within an effective teacher leader model involving a professional development component, there comes a need to shift from current practices in a program or model by evaluating areas for improvement and beginning to act on needed changes. This change process to impact school improvement is one that district leaders struggle with regardless of the attempted change being addressed. Research shows that organizational change of any kind is complex and essentially unique in every situation (Fullan, 1999).

This research study identified issues associated with a fundamental change in the way elementary school teacher leaders were trained and supported in a suburban school district. In implementing a new teacher leader preparation program, it was necessary for the researcher to

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negotiate the political inner-workings of the school district to establish the need for changes in an established program, to implement the changes, and to gain feedback from teacher leaders on the effectiveness of change at the campus level.

## Cedar Ridge Independent School District

Cedar Ridge Independent School District (CRISD) covers 110 square miles encompassing high tech manufacturing and urban retail centers, suburban neighborhoods, and farm and ranch land stretching across two counties in Central Texas. The district includes the entire city of Cedar Ridge and sections of the neighboring cities of Johnsonfield and Charlotte. Approximately 51,000 students attend the district's four high schools, nine middle schools, thirty elementary schools, and three alternative education centers. CRISD has 5,000 employees, of which 2, 775 are classroom teachers.

## Political Climate of the District

Farmer (2009) described local school systems as organizations with a competitive culture that produces an environment where various groups within and outside the organization compete for power and limited resources. Cedar Ridge Independent School District fits this description. Like many large suburban and urban school districts, CRISD has a formal hierarchical structure through which communication flows to all departments and campuses. At the top of the district hierarchy are the Board of Trustees and Superintendent of Schools. The next level includes Deputy Superintendents, followed by Assistant Superintendents, and then Directors of Departments for all school operations. At the bottom of the formal structure are principals, teachers, and students who comprise the separate campuses of the district. The competitive political environment that Farmer (2009) described in his research marks the political culture of the central office of Cedar Ridge Independent School District and has implications for all departments and campuses.

Drory (1993) explained that employees in any environment "attribute the political decision-making climate primarily to the decision-makers namely, the supervisory and managerial levels" (p. 23). The central office administration is the primary decision making body for CRISD. It is here that decisions about all district functions are made and communicated to subordinate departments and campuses. However, because accurate communication is often a challenge for those in leadership positions, progress toward implementing district office decisions is often uneven. A breakdown in effective communication between the central office and subordinate departments is a challenge in many school districts across the nation (Drory, 1993). Moreover, Garza (2008) noted that most central office decision making is political in nature and fails to involve those who must implement the decisions. The result can be feelings of isolation and lack of collaboration on action items within the district and a failure to utilize district personnel resources to their fullest potential.

Fullan (1999) explained that "isolated cultures" do not effectively value the vast sources of knowledge available in the organization and have no way of "mobilizing the competencies and motivation of organizational members" (p. 16). Fullan (1999) further asserted that when school districts operate as educational bureaucracies, it is ultimately the students who are adversely impacted by the system's inability to meet their needs. Fullan's (1999) descriptor aptly characterizes the political climate of Cedar Ridge Independent School District.

At times, in spite of the underlying political culture in CRISD, programs or models are implemented that have the potential for rippling a positive impact at the campus level. The Teachers Leading Teachers model for teacher leadership is one of those programs. The focus of this study was on navigating the political climate as described in the district to influence the way CRISD prepared teacher leaders.

## TEACHERS LEADING TEACHERS MODEL

In 2003, the campus-based Teachers Leading Teachers (TLT) model of professional development was established in Cedar Ridge ISD to promote and support best practice instruction and campus collaboration. The Teachers Leading Teachers model was the first formalized teacher leader position established in CRISD that was created at the district level and not the campus level where many teacher leaders, department chairs, team leaders, and others had existed for years.

The work of Teachers Leading Teachers included, but was not limited to, modeling effective lessons, conducting peer observations and debriefing, sharing resources with staff members, reviewing current best-practice research, data analysis, coaching, providing professional development sessions and serving as a mentor for new teachers (Cedar Ridge Independent School District, 2008).

All elementary campuses were allocated two Teachers Leading Teachers per campus, one from the primary level and one from the intermediate level. Each elementary campus was also allocated a Professional Development Educational Assistant who was a half-time employee and worked 18.75 hours per week. Teachers Leading Teachers earned a stipend for their work, but still had a full-time teaching load in most cases at the elementary level.

Secondary campuses elected to identify five Teachers Leading Teachers; one in each of the four content areas and the fifth was a representative from Special Education, English as a Second Language, Languages Other than English, or Fine Arts. Campuses were at liberty to choose the fifth TLT based on their individual campus need. All secondary campuses were allocated a full-time Professional Development Educational Assistant. Most of the identified Teachers Leading Teachers at the secondary campuses also had a full-time teaching load; however, some were also serving in the role of department chairperson and/ or other leadership positions that allowed for an additional period off during the school day (Cedar Ridge Independent School District, 2008).

At the close of the 2007–2008 school year, teachers participating in the TLT program completed a survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing training model. The survey included open-ended response questions about how to improve the training they received to help them with the responsibilities on their campuses. The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into the celebrations and challenges of the current structure of the TLT model and to assess how teacher leaders were supported at the district and campus levels. The survey showed that 45% of the participants felt that the meetings held were not effective (CRISD Teachers Leading Teachers Survey, 2008). In response to this information district-level personnel, including representatives from the Curriculum Leadership Team, developed an alternate training plan for the 2008–2009 school year.

An additional contextual understanding necessary to gain a true picture of the need for a change in the training plan and the execution of the TLT model in CRISD was that there was the possibility of the model being abandoned. According to the district level leadership team, the TLT model and funding to support it was not viewed as a successful use of resources for the district and would be disbanded. In response, the professional development

coordinator submitted a formal request to the assistant superintendent that the model be revamped and continued for another year. This request was granted by the district leadership team. The implementation of a new system of training for all TLTs in the district became the responsibility of the professional development coordinator, one of the authors.

## ELEMENTARY TEACHERS LEADING TEACHERS TRAINING PLAN

During the fall semester of the 2008-2009, the ground work for change was laid. In August, all campus principals submitted names of two identified TLTs for their campuses. Previously, the Teachers Leading Teachers at the elementary level had participated in a one-hour training after school one day each month for six weeks. Under the new training program, TLTs would meet on a quarterly basis for half-day trainings in areas of interest the teachers themselves would identify.

At the time that this study was completed, how this small scale change would be received at the district level could not be predicted. It was quickly apparent that efforts to save the TLT model and change the training to impact the teacher leaders' work in a more effective way was an extremely political act because of the sense of ownership among those in the district office who had developed and implemented the original TLT model. As the person responsible for implementing the new training schedule, it became important to understand what challenges were involved in making the changes in professional development for teacher leaders and in negotiating the politics of change at the district level.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This qualitative research study was completed utilizing a phenomenological framework. Phenomenology focuses on the person or people that have most directly experienced the phenomenon in question (Patton, 2002). This research study was conducted through the focus of these research questions:

1. What challenges are involved for a leader implementing district-level change of professional development for teacher leaders?
2. How does a district leader negotiate the politics of this change at the district level?

A review of pertinent literature identified major topics through which questions regarding teacher leadership and effective professional development for teacher leaders could be addressed. The topic of educational change was relevant as school improvement efforts are often closely linked to the role of teachers and the leadership required to make lasting impact for student achievement. Administrative leadership and teacher leadership were also discussed in relation to their roles in the school improvement effort and types of leadership backgrounds that led to formalizing the roles of teacher leaders in schools. The goal of this literature was to provide a sound basis for understanding the change process in a political environment and the importance of professional development for teacher leaders in our schools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Educational Change

Living in the current conditions of economic crisis, cultural struggles, and complex circumstances, leadership that promotes change becomes an increasingly challenging topic in the world of education. Understanding the change process was identified as one of Fullan's (2001) components essential for leaders. He explained that successful changes, no matter how big or small, are based on the improvement of relationships. Purposeful interactions between people that are concerned about an issue stimulate efforts toward problem solving (Fullan, 2001).

Hargreaves (2007) explained that long-term educational change is based in five central factors beginning with educational leaders putting learning first, even before achievement and high stakes testing. Second, leadership should be distributed to promote professional responsibility and avoid top-down control. Disseminated leadership roles ensure that the third factor is in place, that is, to sustain the change effort even when leadership is altered. The fourth and fifth elements necessary to experience educational change are collaboration among schools to raise the achievement standards, and, finally, to connect future changes to past achievements. In essence, Hargreaves (2007) stated that all educators should be involved in the change effort and should understand the change process as connected and relevant to the individual needs of the students, teachers, and campus.

Because change efforts in schools are often the work of the teachers, educational change leaders must take into consideration the perspectives of the teachers to gain trust and buy-in to the innovation or new idea (Mitchell, 2008). As part of an on-going change effort that requires a leap of faith on the part of experienced teachers, coaching and communication are necessary to deeply integrate new ideas into their regular practice. Small-group dialogue is also essential to teachers feeling supported through a change (Mitchell, 2008). Teachers are consistently dealing with change in their worlds of education, and it is the job of educational leaders to identify models of leadership that are more democratic in thinking and to create collaborative work environments where teachers and administrators alike are striving together to respond to the diverse needs of the students in their schools (Beachum & Dentith, 2004).

School improvement and educational change through leadership often rests on the ability of a leader to utilize power and influence for the purpose of gaining support for the desired outcome and the change process. The terms power and influence are often used interchangeably; however, in the educational system and in other formal organizational structures, the ability to influence change does not always reside in those with powerful positions. In order to understand this concept more fully, it is essential to identify the differences between power and influence and to clearly link leadership to both ideas.

### Power and Influence in the Change Process

Power and influence are closely related within the change process, but cannot be confused especially when related to educational systems and political frameworks. Power and influence have been broadly referred to as the capacity to change the actions of others toward an intended purpose (Mowday, 1978). Researchers have used the terms synonymously (Mechanic, 1962; Mowday, 1978); however, even in these instances, writers refer to their definitions of power being about force (Mechanic, 1962). More recent definitions in research

studies separate the two concepts which better denote how the terms were used in this research study.

## Power

McDonald and Gooding (2005) explained that power is the potential to cause change. Power often comes from position, control over resources, organizational alliances, and the ability to use personal characteristics effectively (Anderson, Flynn & Spataro, 2008; Boonstra & Bennebroek-Gravehorst, 1998). Over 40 years ago, Mechanic (1962) defined power as a force, not a relationship, and considerable control over resources, relating directly to positional power is often the most identifying characteristic of someone with positional power. Within the idea of positional power, there is no direct correlation to relationship building. In fact, because power is often associated with control over another person, resistance is met when power is exercised without a level of influence or the building of relationships (Boonstra & Bennebroek-Gravenhorst, 1998). Within this separation of influence and power, it is imperative to understand that formal position or authority with organizational power is not equal to the ability to influence (Mowday, 1978). This leads to the separate definition of influence.

## Influence

According to McDonald and Gooding (2005), influence refers to the methods and efforts or behaviors that a leader utilizes to affect the change. Individuals with a high level of influence have personal characteristics that help them "build a network of relationships, provide favors to others and build social capital, lobby co-workers to generate support for their own agendas, and pursue opportunities to expand their domains of control" (Anderson, Flynn & Spataro, 2008, p. 703). It is important to note that it is not unusual for stakeholders in lower level positions to assume and wield considerable influence not associated with their formally defined positions (Mechanic, 1962; Drory, 1993). This elevation in levels of influence is often due to the amount of access an employee has to information or personnel because of their honed interpersonal characteristics and level of respect within the organization (Drory, 1993).

The separation of power and influence outlines clearly that "…even if two individuals have the same level of power, they might differ in their levels of influence…." (Anderson, Flynn & Spataro, 2008, p. 702). In this research study, the concept of power was that of positional power related specifically to job responsibilities, direct reports and resource control within the school district while influence referred to personal characteristics that one has the ability to change or manipulate as needed in a given instance. Influence within the organization is critical to effectiveness within the change process because stakeholders at all levels of the organization can use it (Anderson, Flynn & Spataro, 2008).

*Types of influence.* Depending on the level of a person in an organization, the types of influence that are used may be different. Research supports that there are two main types of influence—upward influence and downward influence (Kaul, 2003; McDonald & Gooding, 2005). Downward influence refers to people in formal positions of power utilizing their position to move subordinates in a certain direction (Kaul, 2003). The idea of upward influence is applicable in this research as we discuss teacher leadership and the change process. Upward influence is the ability to impact superiors through multiple tactics to work

toward personal or group goals (Kaul, 2003). Employees in an organization attempt to gain support from those higher in the organizational hierarchy using upward influence (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988). Upward influence is a standard organizational behavior, even in education where the systemic hierarchy is more divided than other organizations (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988).

Power, downward influence, and upward influence have their places in formal organizations as part of the change process. Fullan (1999) explained that educational change that is to be embedded and deeply rooted in improvement cannot be mandated, but must emerge as collaboration between top-down directives and bottom-up energies. A leader must be able to connect the concepts of upward and downward influence to make system-wide change.

## DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

A qualitative design was chosen for this research as it allowed the researcher to focus on a phenomenon as it happened in the natural state. Qualitative researchers attempt to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Hatch (2002) supported this method as understanding the world from multiple perspectives, and working to interpret the realities that participants create in response to human experiences. Participants in the study included 60 elementary teacher leaders identified by campus principals.

Understanding the change process within the political domains of the school district was the goal of this study. To achieve this purpose, a phenomenological framework was identified as the most effective way to communicate the experience of a district leader as she implemented change for teacher leaders' professional development. CRISD archival data, observations and field notes, written teacher feedback, and reflective journaling were the techniques used to uncover the themes and the essence of truth to district-level change of an established teacher leader model.

### Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl, arguably the father of phenomenology, developed the foundations of phenomenology early in the 20th century. He introduced the idea that philosophy of consciousness, while suspending natural attitudes or assumptions, helps to gain understanding of the essence of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenologists that subsequently followed Husserl contested some of his arguments, but essentially, the basis of phenomenological research can be traced back to his initial theory (Creswell, 1998).

The central purpose of phenomenology is to understand a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). In the case of this research, the concept examined was that of the experience of change within the political context of a school district. It is important to note that alternative traditions of inquiry were compared to determine which most closely met the purpose of the study. Creswell (1998) defined phenomenology as a study where "lived experiences for several individuals" are described as related to a concept or phenomenon they have in common (p. 51).

This research diverged from Creswell's (1998) description of a phenomenological study. There was no group experiencing the same phenomenon in this research; the explanations and descriptions came from one of the authors, the district leader who implemented the change. Therefore, in discussing the results and implications of the research,

the personal pronoun "I" is frequently used. Often, an auto-ethnographic research study focuses on the experiences of the researcher to relate personal to cultural layers of consciousness (Ellis & Bochner 2000), and where this study did, in fact, utilize the researcher as the unit of analysis, it was not for the purpose of uncovering connections to personal experiences over time as part of a culture, but was focused on the phenomenon of change as it was experienced in this setting.

## Data Analysis

Phenomenological data analysis calls for three types of description that serve to help the researcher begin the bracketing process and reduce the data collected to get to the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The textural description is the first description written by the researcher and, in this study, was the chronological timeline of the experience of district level change to the Teachers Leading Teachers' model. Upon completion of the textural description, the researcher then focused on the "structural description" which defined how the phenomenon was experienced considering "all possible meanings and divergent perspectives, varying frames of reference about the phenomenon…." (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). In crafting the structural description, the researcher used a variety of data sources, including archival data, observations and field notes, written reflections, and reflective journaling to identify themes and patterns that helped to focus the researcher on the meaning of the research.

Reflective journaling was an important tool in understanding the change process. During the year and a half of research, each journal entry established more firmly the phenomenon of district level change. The final entry of the reflective journal was composed after reviewing all of the other entries and constituted a reflective summary of the entire experience of change. The initial findings of *power*, *influence, perception,* and *reality* continued to resonate as overarching themes within the study. Patton (2002) stated that the identification of major patterns and themes forces the researcher to look deeply at the data for support of the patterns to make clear the connections between the research and the identified themes.

## FINDINGS

## Power and Influence within District Level Change

Multiple definitions exist within research for *power* and *influence*. For the purposes of this research study, the concept of power was defined as the ability to impact change through positional responsibilities, communication, and resources. This definition aligned with that of Anderson, Flynn, and Spataro (2008) who stated that power comes from position, control over resources, and organizational alliances. McDonald and Gooding (2005) explained that power is the potential to cause change and should not be confused with influence.

Influence, as it is understood in this study, refers to the methods and efforts or behaviors that a leader utilizes to affect the change (McDonald & Gooding, 2005). Influence was not in direct correlation with positional power, as influence took strategy, skill, and desire to exercise. Effectiveness within the change process was often due to people that wielded a high level of influence because of their personal characteristics and ability to build social capital with those around them inside the organization (Anderson, Flynn, & Spataro, 2008). Boonstra and Bennebroek-Gravenhorst (1998) established that power is often associated with

control over another person; resistance is met with when power is exercised without a level of influence or the building of relationships. In reporting the findings, as participant-researcher, the subjective voice of first person (I) was used.

The concepts of *power* and *influence* were recurring themes in almost every interaction at the district level regarding the change of the Teachers leading Teachers model. It was evident from observations and personal interactions that all members of the district utilized their positional power and their influence differently to impact change. In the initial stages of approval of the change in the training plan, I was asked to create a proposal outlining my ideas for change. Further into the change process, I was asked for a more in-depth rationale for the change because certain district leaders did not agree with altering the teacher leader model. I created an executive summary of the need for the change in the training model based on a review of the research. I was given the opportunity to present information to the campus principals. The levels of positional power and influence were not only evident in the beginning of the study, but also as the change was implemented. Levels of power and influence impacted my ideas for change, and I was struggling with how to deal with it effectively. Neither my supervisor nor the leader of the curriculum division had time to express views on every issue nor should they be expected to; however, our supervisors' positional power was a determining factor in compliance to collaborate. At this time, I began to think more deeply about how the power and influence concepts were at play in the change process for the teacher leaders.

Issues around positional power and influence were at play in all levels of this change process. I was not the only one dealing with how to effectively implement the change. Teacher leaders were also experiencing similar challenges on campus. While reassuring teacher leaders that their influence could make an impact, I felt that it was necessary to more clearly define this relationship between power and influence that was present in the changes in the TLT model.

*Figure 1* depicts a power and influence quadrant that was created to depict the connection between power and influence. I recognized that in my role as the change leader, power was a significant determining factor in the change effort but was not always in direct correlation to the level of influence. For example, it was evident in the early decision making stages of the change process that approval from high power entities was necessary to move forward. However, it was also evident from the teacher leaders' responses that decision making on the campus level had not been impacted by this same power structure. It was necessary to convince teacher leaders that their level of influence would make the difference on their campuses, not any positional power (Reflective Journal, December 2, 2008).

People in an organization function in a power and influence quadrant to implement change. The connection between power and influence is an important understanding for this research. Each of the quadrants in the chart above represents a level of power and a level of influence that a person within the district holds. All stakeholders within the district fall into one of the four power-influence quadrants. These quadrants identified the relationship between power and influence within the change process (see Figure 1).
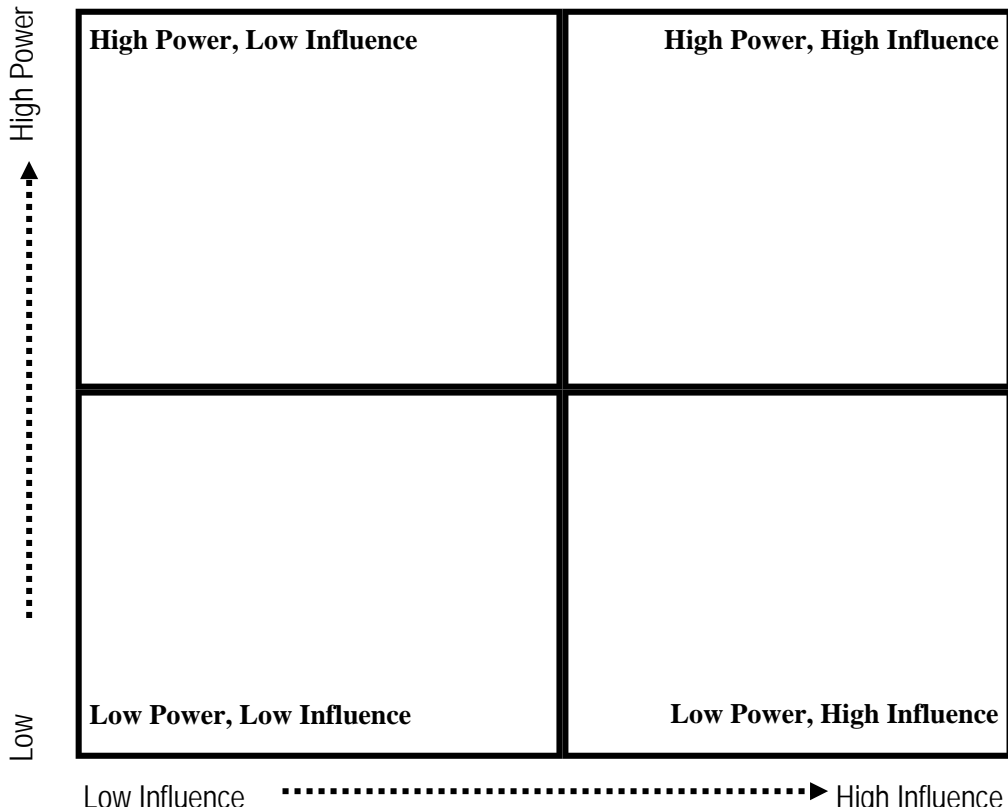
*Figure 1. Power and Influence Quadrants.*

Power and influence were not the only identifiable themes within this study. The concepts of *perception* and *reality* were also relevant to many of the incidents and issues related to the changes in the Teacher Leader Training model.

**Perception and Reality within the District**

Perception and reality as themes in this study were evident through the in-depth analysis process required in phenomenological research. It was through considerable reduction of data, that an understanding of how self-perception, perception of others, and reality played a key role in the change effort (Patton, 2002). In the beginning, my perception of my role was that I had little power to make a large scale change. My formal position within the district with relation to low levels of positional power was a given; it was the reality. At the time, I failed to consider the difference or separation of power and influence and that no matter my positional power in the organization, I had a level of influence that I could control. Because of the large groups that I directed in the district, I had the opportunity to exercise a great deal of influence through my work personally with them, my email communication, my explanations to other departments within the district about the work of the teacher leaders, as well as opportunities for continued communication with my superiors at any given time. These levels of influence, if I had recognized them as such, would have empowered me even though I felt lacking in power.

At the time, I did not realize it, but I had already identified one major theme in the research that is, levels of positional power and levels of influence within the organization and

the impact of perception or reality on those levels. I realized quickly that my self-perception described in that journal entry did not match those of the teacher leaders that I worked with. One teacher leader I spoke with at an alternate district meeting stated that she was so glad that I was making changes to the training plan for teacher leaders (Reflective Journal, August 30, 2008).

This teacher leader and others that communicated similar messages perceived me as the person that was going to make the large scale changes to an established model of teacher leadership in the district. I attempted to explain that decisions were being made at a much higher level, but it seemed as if the TLTs could not see past me (Reflective Journal, September 20, 2008).

Because I was often the only central office employee who had contact with this group on a regular basis, the teacher leaders perceived my role in the organization as one with a great amount of influence and power. One teacher leader commented, "You are working on behalf of us at the central office....You will continue to make great changes happen" (Reflective Journal, April 4, 2009). The teacher leaders perceived my role in the organization very differently than I did, and that view impacted their views of my ability to create change.

Throughout the change process, I attempted to explain that the reality of influence did not reside with me, but truly within the abilities of the teacher leaders. Fullan (1999) explained that for school change to occur, a synergy must be in place between all stakeholders. The elementary TLTs numbered sixty and were placed on every campus in the district. This was the reality. They each had a partner to work with on campus that served in the TLT role as well. In collaboration with TLTs from other campuses, they discussed at length the structure and support of the TLT model on individual campuses. The conversation centered around the TLTs looking to me as the one with power to wield over principals, and when I turned that around to help them focus on themselves as the powerful ones because of relationships they had on campus, their thinking shifted. This conversation about self-perception and their view of my role in the change effort was powerful. At this point in the study, perceptions began to shift, and the teacher leaders began to feel more empowered to use their upward influence to make changes on their campuses. Kaul (2003) stated that upward influence is the ability to use multiple tactics to impact superiors toward a personal goal. The ability to perceive yourself as a person with that upward influence was important in being able to impact the reality of change. The ideas or themes of power, influence, perception and reality were central to the change process of the TLT model in this study; however, other factors were evident that impacted levels of power and influence as well as the perceptions of others within the change effort.

## Core Factors that Impact the Change Process

Patton (2002) explained that a researcher must be able to clearly define from the literature and from the data collection how the themes and factors emerged and were supported in the data analysis. In this research study, the power and influence quadrants that we worked within to make change, the perception that we had of ourselves as well as the perception that others had of us, and the reality of a situation were all directly related to the four core factors of change in an organization: (a) roles within the organization, (b) ability to communicate, (c) personal motivation or agenda, and (d) resource control. Each of these factors contributed to or took away the amount of power or influence every person within this research study exercised.

Roles in the organization, ability to communicate, personal motivation or agenda, and resource control were the most prevalent factors in the study of change to the TLT model that altered levels of power and influence or shaped perceptions. For this reason, additional examples and further explanations of each factor connected to the research study were the next part of the structural description.

***Roles in the organization.*** The concept of roles in the organization had a significant bearing on my learning in this research as I attempted to navigate the politics of the organization and work within the established parameters of my own position. These hierarchical levels within CRISD impacted the change in the TLT model at every incident. Though literature suggested that alternative leadership styles are becoming more prevalent and are replacing those historic top-down organizational views (Danielson, 2007), it seemed that in this change effort, our district was pre-historic. Roles within the organization, whether formal or informal, consistently determined who would be involved in the change of the TLT trainings, what I could or could not do in relation to the timeline or budget, and how the process would be presented to other stakeholders. I often wrote about the number of informal roles that I was required to play in order to move the change process in one direction or another.

I was feeling that there was a lack of clarity from the district level about what Teacher Leaders' professional development should look like, and vastly different opinions were communicated by multiple people at the district office. Danielson (2007) and Donaldson and Sanderson (1996) explained that informal leadership roles also surfaced on school campuses with teacher leaders. Certain teachers hold a level of respect from their colleagues and though specific job responsibilities are not defined within these informal roles, they often have a significant amount of influence over the faculty or staff (Danielson, 2007). My personal experience with informal roles in the district compared to communications from my teacher leaders about their informal roles. Even though they were identified on campus formally, they were functioning in many informal roles for those they served. I was forced to look critically at who I most needed to listen to in order to determine my next step in the change process (Danielson, 2007). In most cases, the formal role in the organization made that determination. In essence, the more elevated in the hierarchy, the more power over the change process one had.

The TLT meetings at this point were not listed on the district level meeting agendas and, therefore, were viewed as a success so far. However, it was evident from this exchange that there was some surprise that the training was being looked upon favorably. Because the model was "off of the respective district radar," I was able to move more smoothly within the change of the TLT trainings for the second semester.

Informal connections with people and inside information allowed me to navigate effectively and get things to progress more quickly (Danielson, 2007). This navigation exemplified when it was time to plan trainings during the spring semester that would require the help of some alternate departments. My informal role and personal relationships with members of certain departments allowed me to schedule trainers very quickly wherein if I had utilized the formal communication process, I would most likely still be waiting for those trainings to be scheduled. Personal connections or relationships that were built informally eased the lines of communication necessary to make decisions quickly and efficiently. Clearly, the informal roles in the organization had a significant impact on the TLT training. Oftentimes, in the course of the study, the formal or informal role in the organization was

determined by one's ability to communicate within the district. The second factor in the change process identified as a sub-theme in this research was the ability to communicate.

   ***Ability to communicate.*** The need for effective communication and collaboration within this effort to change training for teacher leaders was imperative and often helped or hurt the process as a whole. Through the course of change to the TLT model, it was apparent that communication was a foundational element to the success or failure of my vision. In the beginning stages of my experience, I learned that communication with stakeholders around the Teachers Leading Teachers model had been a concern. In researching further on the unrest with campus administrators and central office staff, I learned that it was always important to pay close attention to the *who*, *what*, and *how* within my communication efforts. My reflective journal demonstrated that who I had the opportunity to communicate with, how I engaged in that communication, and what I chose to communicate about changed the course of my work in many instances.

   Some positive examples gave me great hope for the change effort. However, it became evident quickly that my ability to communicate was impacted by others and their communication with me. Through the approval process to implement certain changes to the timing of training or additional support at the campus level, I wrote "… my passion for the area of teacher leader professional development is not shared by my superiors….It takes weeks to get a response from executive leadership on requested action items" (Reflective Journal, October 12, 2008). The inability to communicate within our organization was paralyzing at times when I expressed that impending approval or disapproval, requirements posed as questions, and the information I was given or not given made massive transformations to the formulated plan.

   Fullan (1999) explained that "isolated cultures" do not effectively value the vast resources of knowledge available in the organization and have no way of "mobilizing the competencies and motivation of organizational members" (p. 16). During much of this study, it seemed that district personnel were operating in this isolated style because they were not communicating with each other. Within my own circle of ability to communicate, I attempted to be as open as possible so that these same challenges were not occurring because of me.

   During the course of the research, many teacher leaders approached me to discuss areas of concern or celebration relating to their roles at the campus level. Often, my answer or response was that I was working on the issues they had addressed, but I did not have an effective way to solve the problems right away. In my journal, I related that one teacher leader explained that she heard others talking about their roles and responsibilities on their campuses and that she was frustrated because she had no administrative support or understanding of what she should be doing (Reflective Journal, November 14, 2008). I brought the general issue to the whole group at the January meeting, and we had a discussion about ways to work with the campus administration and effective communication techniques that had been successful on other campuses.

   In this situation, my ability to communicate centered on *how* I addressed the issue, not that I had the answers. The teacher leaders knew my motivation and that I really wanted to help, and they recognized that they could help each other more than I could help them. In open communication, we were able to make small changes for the good of the group. This collective focus and attempt to improve the model for the district as a whole was a motivating factor with the teacher leader group. The progression of the established teacher leader model in CRISD brought forth many differing motivations of stakeholders within the district. Personal motivation or agendas were the next factors that emerged in the change process.

*Personal motivation or agendas.* As shown in the initial questions of this research study, I anticipated that the political workings of the school district and formal leaders would be large factors within the change process. However, I found that essentially there were more factors in the change process than simply politics. The political undertones of the organization were at play from the start, but they seemed to stem from personal motivations or agendas around issues in CRISD. Regrettably, personal motivations and agendas were consistently at play through this process as individuals or groups attempted to move the change process in a way that most benefitted their group or them individually (Farmer, 2009). Hargreaves (2007) contended that this type of breakdown in communication should be addressed by initially focusing on the main goal and effort of education—learning. If all stakeholders can have that central focus, decision making aligns with the common goal (Hargreaves, 2007). The lack of vision and goals from the district perspective was an issue I identified early in the TLT model and much of the challenge in defining vision and goals was due to personal agendas and even egos disallowing true communication to occur in order to settle on a model that would be supported by all parts of the organization. Open lines of communication breed solid organizational visions and collaborative work to meet common goals (Danielson, 2007). CRISD was focused more on personal agendas than organizational vision with regard to the TLT model at this phase. The issues around personal motivations and agendas were components that slowed the change in the teacher leader training plan (Reflective Journal, July 3, 2009).

While a person's motivation and personal agenda can be largely impacted by politics in an organization, I was able to find examples where political and personal agendas were not matched. A specific example from the beginning of my work on changing the teacher leader model showed a conflict in a personal and political agenda. My supervisor communicated that her personal motivation was supportive of my change efforts, but that politically, she knew the work would not be sustained long-term at the district level. Personal motivation or agendas often are the underlying elements in the politics of an organization that are not acknowledged. The conglomeration of personal agendas or motivations create the politics within the organization, and in any given instance, you may work with the politics or against it (Drory, 1993). I found myself in the middle of a political situation that I could not have imagined. I noted in my journal that it seemed challenging to think that all of these issues were being discussed in relation to the TLT model without the knowledge of the TLTs or most campus principals (Reflective Journal, September 27, 2008). Many times, it seemed that an issue must be extremely important to a person to fight against the tide of the political force within the organization. For this reason, personal motivation or agendas were usually connected to the resources that one controlled and how one utilized those resources to meet personal goals. The final of the four factors relevant to the change process in this study was resource control.

*Resource control.* Drory (1993) described power in business and educational organizations by stating, "Employees who have access to sources of organizational power and status, are in a position to take advantage of the political game and to gain a greater share of organizational benefits than they formally deserve" (p. 22). In CRISD, the people involved with the change process of the TLT model that had monetary resource control were those placed higher in the political hierarchy. However, monetary resources were not the only ones that should be noted. The ability to mobilize funding or groups of people allowed certain district employees to be involved in decision making without being involved at the ground level of the change. This influence referred to personnel resources.

Monetary resources were relevant immediately in the study. As I was preparing the proposal for the changes in the model, my supervisor asked questions about how the changes would be funded. Her goal was to make sure that the changes I was suggesting could be supported by my budget, since she knew that I would not gain additional dollars from alternate sources in the district (Reflective Journal, August 24, 2008). My resources were key to the implementation of the new training plan, since I would not be gaining any additional help in the way of funding from other departments or campuses.

The ability to mobilize personnel resources impacted the changes in the TLT model as well. As planning was underway and discussion about the anticipated training topics arose, one of the executive team members mobilized one of the groups in the district to become involved in the process (Reflective Journal, September 4, 2008). The executive leader who put this group into action had a purpose in their involvement in the training of the TLTs at the campus level. This additional personnel resource had a direct impact on the change process because suddenly my level of control was much lower, and I was sharing decision-making power with a group that had been directed to be a part of the training process. The collaboration had the potential to be a positive; unfortunately, because of the way that the year progressed, the other group's involvement was not a priority for the participants, and they withdrew from their part of the work in December after hosting two trainings. Their withdrawal showed evidence of how influence and power were interacting. The group was mobilized because of an executive team member's power over them, and they complied with the request without being committed to the work. At the time when other initiatives took precedence, these individuals asked to be removed from the training of the TLTs, and their request was approved. This ability to easily control resources served as evidence of the use of power in this change process.

Studies have shown that power comes from position, control over monetary and other resources, organizational alliances, and the ability to use personal characteristics effectively (Anderson, Flynn & Spataro, 2008; Boonstra & Bennebroek-Gravehorst, 1998). The ideas of power and influence in relation to resource control were evident in my reflections on the change experience as a whole. The factors that impacted changes in the TLT model were (a) roles in the organization, (b) ability to communicate, (c) personal motivation or agendas, and (d) resource control. Each of these factors related specifically to the power and influence quadrants discussed as one of the themes in this study, as well as the concepts of perception and reality. As part of a phenomenological research study, the essence of the experience must be determined after extensive reductions in data (Creswell, 1998).

## ESSENCE OF THE EXPERIENCE

The essence of this research was based on the overall concepts of power, influence, perception, and reality relating to the change process. In reflecting once again on my experience of negotiating the political domain of the school district to improve training for our group of teacher leaders, I was able to clearly make the connections between these themes and patterns as well as the factors in the change process. During the course of the study, I reflected on my self-perception of power and influence in the organization, how I viewed CRISD stakeholders and their levels of power or influence, and finally my view of our teacher leaders and how they exercised power and influence within their work.

It was evident in self reflection of my own placement within the power and influence quadrant that I viewed my role and my actions as low power and high influence. As explained in relation to the factors of change, my positional power within the district's organizational

chart did not carry strong decision-making ability, personnel or monetary control, or access to high levels of communication or information. For these reasons, I felt as though my power level was low. However, my thoughts on my influential abilities shifted as I understood more about influence and how one effectively utilizes it within an organization. I learned that because of the number of programs and projects where I had the opportunity to work with hundreds of teachers and teacher leaders, that I truly had a high level of influence, if I chose to use it. In short, my self-perception changed; therefore, I viewed my reality differently. My perception of my own level of influence altered within the change process. I thought my level of influence was in the lower quadrant, but I realized it was not.

In reflecting back on the teacher leaders' comments and views, they saw me as a central office employee in charge of professional development. Therefore, I had to be a person of great power and influence in our organization in their perceptions. They were looking through a lens of understanding based on their personal knowledge and experiences. Their perceptions were different than mine because they viewed me as high power, high influence. In reality, I may be higher in power than most of them, but still in the low power quadrant because of my position in the organization. I also learned that self-perception and the perception of others can alter one's placement in the power and influence quadrant. My level of influence changed based on the change in self-perception. While this study focused specifically on navigating the political domain of district office to implement change to the teacher leader model of professional development, this new learning about my level of influence will impact all areas of my work, and is the reason it serves as the essence of this study.

## IMPLICATIONS

The implications of results and findings within this study are not complex in their scope, but can be complex in their implementation depending on how a person chooses to navigate the political undercurrents of a school district to create change. In this research, I discovered that power and influence were key elements that I dealt with regularly to impact district-level change. I came to understand how much my perception of self and the teacher leaders' perception of me affected my location within the power and influence quadrant. This movement within the quadrants of power and influence based on perception and the factors that impact change are applicable to all people in a school district.

In order to apply this learning to all school districts or organizations, it is important to be aware of and understand the structure of positions within the work environment. With this awareness, one is able to begin to see how the quadrants of power and influence interact in organizational decision making and change. While not all school district leaders may be easily distinguishable in their power and influence structure, these quadrants are applicable and provide helpful knowledge to those that must navigate the political domain to create change.

As I discussed this finding with my critical peer and reflected further on my own career, it was evident that these levels of power and influence as well as the factors that impacted changes were relevant in all work environments.

## DISCUSSION

### Core Factors that Impact the Change Process

Within this research study, I determined the overarching themes of power, influence, perception and reality that defined the phenomenon of change. Each quadrant of the power and influence model presented in this chapter could be explained more fully through the factors that impact change including a description of the characteristics that were evident in the study.

***Roles within the organization.*** As discussed in the literature review, there are formal and informal teacher leader roles (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Through this research, it was evident that there were formal leadership roles and informal leadership roles at all levels of the district. Formal positions in an organization often have a prescribed level of power associated with them (Anderson, Flynn & Spataro, 2008). In essence, the higher level in the organizational hierarchy that a person occupies, the more power he or she is assigned or given related to position. Positional power does not always mean that a person automatically has a large level of influence (Mowday, 1978). He or she can use power to force those working beneath him or her to do certain things because of fear, direct job requirements, or other coercive measures (Boonstra & Bennebroek-Gravenhorst, 1998). Influence is closely related to a person's ability to inspire those around him or her with no relation to positional power (McDonald & Gooding, 2005).

Much like informal teacher leaders, informal leaders within the organization may not always have a high level of power, but most often have a high level of influence (Mechanic, 1962). Informal roles within the district include people in the district that have established characteristics, connections, additional responsibilities, or decision making power that have little to do with their formal position within the hierarchy (Anderson, Flynn & Spataro, 2008). Again, this mirrors the positions of teacher leaders who have a high level of reverence or influence, but no formal position in leadership (Danielson, 2007).

Understanding the differences between formal roles and informal roles in a school district or organization helps in the navigation of politics when implementing district level change. District-level change, specifically that which is politically charged, takes the support of formal leadership, but many times, as was the case in this research study, the change process also takes movement within the informal leadership roles at the district or campus level. District leaders working to implement change must recognize the importance of both types of roles so as to effectively deal with and communicate appropriately information needed to gain support. The roles that one plays in a school district or in an organization are closely connected with the second factor identified in this research study that impacted change: the ability to communicate.

***Ability to communicate.*** All members of an organization have the ability to communicate with others. Within the explanation of the results of my research study, the evidence supported that communication as a major determinant in the change process. I identified three parts of the ability to communicate that were most important. Communication in an organization is connected to *who* a person communicates with, *how* he or she goes about communication, and finally *what* he or she chooses to communicate.

Most often those in positions of high power have a number of people around them that they can communicate with including others in high positions of power as well as a large

number of people that report directly or indirectly to them (Drory, 1993). People in high positions of power choose to take the opportunity to communicate with these people or not. The choice to communicate or not impacts the level of influence that a person in a position of power has. For instance, a person at the top of the hierarchy who chooses to communicate using encouragement to promote collaboration among team members and to gain buy-in or feedback on key issues and consistently sends a common message to all stakeholders will yield a high level of influence. In contrast, a person who chooses not to communicate effectively and focuses on isolation and communication with individuals rather than groups which inevitably leads to inconsistent understanding cannot build a level of influence (Anderson, Flynn & Spataro, 2008).

Though people in lower positions of power may not have formal direct reports or the ear of those at the top of the hierarchy, they can choose to have a high or low level of influence related to their ability to communicate. A person with low power and high influence is one that communicates effectively with smaller groups or individuals (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988). He or she uses many of the same strategies to promote collaboration around topics of passion and displays excellent listening skills to understand all stakeholder positions so that when opportunities arise to make changes, he or she can speak for larger numbers of people in an impactful way (McDonald & Gooding, 2005). He or she also shares and communicates on many topics to help others in understanding the decision making processes which elicit trust and reverence from those that work directly and indirectly with the person (Kaul, 2003).

However, a person in a low power position can also choose not to talk with anyone and operate in isolation with the belief that he or she is there to do one job. This type of person often does the minimum that he or she must to stay in compliance with job requirements, but does not believe that his or her work can or does impact others. This low power and low influence group operates in isolation and is only individually motivated to communicate with those that can improve or enhance situations that will move them forward. Roles and communication inside an organization are often driven by an individual's personal motivation or agenda. This is the third factor identified in this study that impacted the change process for the teacher leader model and translates to impact all types of change in a school district or organization.

*Personal motivation or agendas.* Within the organization, personal motivation and personal agendas can be strong motivators for change. In the high power, high influence quadrant, a leader is personally motivated by what is best for the team or organization as a whole and personal agendas were always focused on what is best for stakeholders within the district (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009). Personal gain is not a consideration for this type of person when what the majority wants is in conflict with what he or she feels. A person operating in the high power, low influence quadrant is driven by personal motivation and personal agendas without consideration of the team or organization (Crowther, et al., 2009). There is no level of understanding of what those below him or her in the hierarchy may be experiencing and no forward thinking about how they may be impacted by decisions that will be beneficial on a personal level. Often these people compete against those in positions laterally to them and function in an unethical way with those operating above them in the hierarchy, choosing to tell them what they may want to hear, but not what they need to hear.

People who have low amounts of power, but high influence utilize their personal motivation and agendas to be the voice of their team or small group. These people may not have hierarchal power, but gain a level of respect because of their service oriented attitudes and willingness to think globally instead of personally. Often, this is where a teacher leader

position would fall within the quadrants relating to personal motivation. Teacher leaders work to meet the needs of others outside of their own classrooms to have a greater impact on campus and on students (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Finally, persons functioning in the low power, low influence quadrant are primarily motivated by their personal needs, but have often alienated themselves such that those around them know there is not a level of trust and personal agendas will always outrank the good of the group.

Personal motivation and agendas within an organization or school district are often difficult for people to define, especially if they are in contradiction with the vision or mission of the organization. However, one of the clear indicators of a person's motivation or agendas in the large scope of an organization is how he or she uses resources available to him or her. The final factor identified in this study as contributing to or inhibiting change was resource control.

*Resource control.* Resource control referred to a person's ability to mobilize funding, information and people. A person in the high power, high influence category often has a large budget to control and has a high level of trust and respect of those reporting directly or indirectly to him or her which allows for quick mobilization of those people to accomplish a task (Mechanic, 1962). People with high power and low influence may have a large budget and be able to require employees working directly or indirectly for them to do something, but efficiency will be significantly lower because the level of influence over those directly reporting does not exist. Boonstra and Bennebroek-Gravenhorst (1998) explained that "information power" allows a person some control over others through their willingness to share, withhold, or redirect information toward certain recipients (p. 102). A person that chooses to withhold information would fall into the high power, low influence because after a period of time those around him or her learn that he or she cannot be trusted. A person with low power, but high influence most likely has very little budget to work with, but in many cases can rally groups of people together to accomplish many tasks because of deep personal connections or reputation (McDonald & Gooding, 2005).

Low power, high influence people would be information sharers because they have created relationships of trust with their willingness to be open (Boonstra & Bennebroek-Gravenhorst, 1998). Finally, a person with low power and low influence has little budget or monetary control and does not believe that her or she can gather any group around an issue. Usually, people in this quadrant have little confidence and isolate themselves within the organization which equals the inability to gain the trust of other personnel.

The interpretation of these concepts in relation to the research questions comes down to a final idea: choice. The initial research question asked, what challenges are involved for a leader implementing district level change to professional development for teacher leaders? I believe that this research study demonstrated many challenges, but the factors of change and descriptors outlined here within the quadrants of power and influence encompass the challenges that one must overcome to implement district level change.

District level leaders working to implement changes to programs, policies, or other initiatives could utilize these four factors to effectively address issues associated with change in a proactive way. The question is, "How does a district leader negotiate the politics of this change at the district level?" The answer to this question lies in my interpretation of this study. I believe that the negotiation of politics in the implementation of change in an organization is ultimately about *choice*. Within an organization, each person makes choices about how he or she operates, especially in relation to change. It is important as the culmination of this study to look deeply at the identified themes and factors to determine

whether or not they can be a choice. *Table 1* displays the themes and factors within the research study with an explanation of how they could or could not be a choice in the change process. I deduced from the study that there were only four elements within the themes or factors that could be easily labeled as not a choice: power, formal role, monetary resource control, and personnel resource control. These pieces of the research are further explained within the *Table 1* as to why they fit in this part of the chart. In contrast, I believe that this study indicated that all other themes and factors fall within the choice side of the T-chart and that people within an organization have the ability to change or work within those areas.

**Table 1.** Choice T-chart with all Themes and Factors of the Research Study.

| Not a Choice | Choice |
|---|---|
| **Power:** Power in this study relates to specific formal position and unless one chooses to change jobs within the organization or quit, level of power is not a choice. | **Influence:** Influence within this study relates to a person's ability to work within the factors established that impact change. All people in an organization choose the level of influence they will have by making choices about the factors listed below. |
| **Formal Role:** The identified position within the hierarchy of an organization is the formal role that a person holds. Again, unless one chooses to change jobs, quit, or request reorganization, formal role is not a choice. | **Informal Role:** Because informal roles are not assigned, but assumed because of levels of respect or reverence, knowledge, willingness to complete work outside of job description, and other qualifying characteristics, they are a choice. |
| **Monetary Resource Control:** Within a school district, there is most often an assigned budget manager to each budget for all departments and campuses. The budget assigned to your formal position is most often not determined by you, unless you are the Superintendent or School Board. | **Who One Communicates With:** In the descriptive chart of the factors, this area dealt with the size of the groups that one most often communicates with. This is a choice because one chooses to communicate effectively with team or department members, grade levels, campus personnel, other organizational department members, just as one chooses to take opportunities to place themselves in positions to do so. |
| **Personnel Resource Control:** The number of people that report directly to any given position is not a choice. | **How One Communicates:** In every position within an organization, people choose how to communicate with others. Their communication can exhibit openness, trust, relationship building skills, collaborative problem solving as well as other positive characteristics or it may not. This is a choice. |
| | **What One Communicates:** The collaborative nature of open communication that celebrates accomplishments of self and others, shares new found knowledge, and takes into consideration alternative views and perspectives is the what that impacts levels of influence. |

**Table 1 (continued).** Choice T-chart with all Themes and Factors of the Research Study

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| Themes | |
|---|---|
| | **Personal Motivation:** One chooses what does or does not motivate actions. Motivations stemming from group consideration rather than personal gain are a choice. |
| | **Personal Agenda:** An underlying personal agenda is only the choice of that person. Often no one else knows another's true personal agenda and at times it is difficult to admit to self, but it is a choice. |
| | **Informational Resource Control:** Access to information within the organization often is related to position or power; however, if personal connections are made and collaborative communication is a utilized characteristic, many times the amount of information is based on choice. |
| | **Perception of Self:** Self perception is always a choice. If you believe you can or you believe you can't, you're right. |
| | **Perception of Others:** One chooses how to look at others related to their power and influence. The more facts and information one is armed with, the more a person is able to create a more targeted perception of others. |

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It is evident that choice determines one's ability to impact change. Purposefully, there is a dotted line in between the two sides of the T-chart above. The reason for this is that, ultimately, there is choice in everything. One could choose to quit working in certain situations or, on the other hand, decide not to make that choice because of extenuating outside circumstances. We are in control of our actions in the workplace as much as we wish to be. The change process is challenging and often causes unrest in the organization. For this reason, it is imperative to be aware of the choices that are made within that change process. It can be concluded that a district leader must make intentional decisions related to all of the categories listed on the T-chart in order to effectively negotiate a district change. If attention is paid to each of these areas, the political environment of an organization is manageable.

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# Redefining Curriculum Leadership for Principals:
# Perspectives of Texas Administrators

Sandra Stewart
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As society and communities change, the role of the principal changes. Historically, the principal's roles and responsibilities were primarily focused on the management of the school and facilities (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1991). In the late 80s and early 90s, the role was redefined with an emphasis on the improvement of schools, in part, due to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. This report was published as an open letter to the American people on the state of the national education system in America. Alarming statistics concerning illiteracy, lower SAT scores in mathematics, and the decline of American students' achievement internationally set the stage for this new focus on school standards and accountability (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

The face of American education began to change. Classroom teachers were no longer able to close the door and teach what they wanted and to the level that they chose (Glickman, 2002). The goal of principal preparation programs and administrative staff development was to prepare principals to be actively involved in ensuring that classroom instruction was effective for all students (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). This transition from manager to a leader of school improvement spanned a decade and led schools into a new system of accountability in which the principal was responsible for ensuring student achievement (Glickman, 2002). Sergiovanni (1996) described this change of principal focus as slow and frustrating. Many defined this shift as a change reform that would redefine the role of the principal as the instructional leader (Fullan, 1993). At the end of the 90s and the beginning of the 21st century, this reform became the norm for educational leadership and principal preparation programs.

Today, many principal preparation programs in Texas emphasize instructional leadership, which is one of the three principal domains of the TExES certification exam (Wilmore, 2003). Yet, in the two studies of Texas principals and superintendents guiding this study, researchers found that more emphasis was placed on the role of the principal as instructional leader while leading curriculum alignment was, in many cases, the responsibility of curriculum directors and instructional strategists (Stewart & Tareilo, 2009, 2010). While the role of the principal as instructional leader has been identified (Fullan, 1993; Glickman, 2002), the principal's role in curriculum leadership is less developed in the research literature. The purpose of this study was to identify the principal's role in curriculum leadership. Specifically, the research questions were:

1. What is the definition of curriculum?
2. What is the principal's role as curriculum leader?

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## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership as the role of the principal has moved from administration and management to leadership, and the responsibilities for ensuring student achievement and success have fallen directly on the shoulders of the principal (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). Principals are no longer simply managers of the campus, but they have also become the leaders of classroom instruction. This role has been defined in terms of setting a vision for success and changing the campus culture to focus on student achievement and school success. Fullan (1993) defined instructional leadership as, "…designers, stewards, and teachers. They are responsible for building organizations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models—that is, they are responsible for learning" (p. 71). Deal and Peterson (2009) expressed instructional leadership in terms of changing the culture of the campus to focus on student learning and achievement.

Instructional leadership is a combination of principal roles focused on instructional teacher actions. These roles include supervising teacher instruction, providing effective professional development for teachers, and providing curriculum development (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). This definition would indicate that principals must know how to effectively evaluate teaching effectiveness, connect instruction to the curriculum, and then be able to guide teachers in professional development opportunities that improve classroom instruction.

These definitions are similar in two aspects; they focus on the leader as the change agent, and they view the role of the principal as the supporter and facilitator of instruction through his or her leadership. As the educational community has evolved, so has the role of the principal in leading. More emphasis is now placed on supervision and evaluation of classroom instruction (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). This new shift is a more narrow focus on the principal's understanding of how to help teachers become more effective in the classroom. Since the curriculum guides classroom instruction, principals today must become more focused on the development and implementation of the curriculum in order to ensure effective teacher instruction (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008).

### Curriculum Leadership

Curriculum has been defined historically in terms of documents or coursework used to guide classroom instruction. More recently, curriculum has been defined in terms of actions and outcomes aligned with classroom instruction (Wiles & Bondi, 2011). This shift in curriculum, from inactive to active, has placed an emphasis on student outcomes or achievement instead of just a set of written standards. Wiles and Bondi (2011) stated, "We see the curriculum as a desired goal or set of values that can be activated through a development process, culminating in experiences for learners" (p. 5). This change in active curriculum would then necessitate a change in the role of the principal as an active leader of curriculum.

Just as instructional leadership has been defined in a variety of ways in the literature, so has curriculum leadership. Fiore (2004) stated that in order to turn schools around, principals must have an understanding of the curriculum that guides classroom instruction. According to DiPaola and Hoy (2008), effective principals should have the knowledge, skills and understanding of the curriculum. This includes the development, implementation, articulation and evaluation of the curriculum. The primary difference noted in the literature between the instructional leader and the curriculum leader is the depth and understanding of the skills and content being taught in the classroom.

The definitions of instructional leadership have included curriculum development as one of the key elements for principal effectiveness (Blasé & Blasé, 2004; DiPaola & Hoy, 2008); however, curriculum leadership requires that the principals lead the development, implementation, and evaluation of the campus curriculum, in order to ensure effective instruction in the classroom, not that they act only as followers of a district developed curriculum. In essence, curriculum leadership encompasses instructional leadership as one element in the implementation of curriculum and instruction, instead of the traditional view of curriculum development as one element of instructional leadership.

## The Principal's Role as Curriculum Leader

According to Lunenburg and Ornstein (2000), the center of curriculum development lies at the campus level which then requires the principal to be a leader of the curriculum. Glatthorn (1997) asserted that in order to improve schools today, school leaders must assume the role of curriculum leaders. These roles include the development of the curriculum, the implementation of the curriculum, and the evaluation of the curriculum (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). Curriculum leadership, through active involvement, is vital to the improvement of schools.

Developing curriculum first requires that federal, state, and district required standards be the foundation that drives the instruction (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). However, the role of the principal in developing the curriculum is more complex than merely infusing standards into classroom practices. The principal must ensure that the campus vision and goals are infused into the standards, including being responsive to the cultural and individual differences of their students (Glickman, 2002; Deal & Peterson, 2009). Ethical curriculum leaders would then understand this process of creating campus curriculum that meets the vision of the campus, envelopes the standards, and is equitable for all students.

The implementation of curriculum is what has been historically termed as instructional leadership. It is the supervision and evaluation of teacher effectiveness in instructing the curriculum (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). Leading instruction means that the principal knows the curriculum, knows how to evaluate effective instruction that is tied to the curriculum, and understands effective instructional practices. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) stressed the importance of principal leadership in differentiating instruction to meet individual student needs. Principals are responsible for ensuring that teachers are effective in classroom instruction that leads to successful student achievement and outcomes (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). Appropriate teacher evaluation ensures appropriate curriculum evaluation.

Wiles and Bondi (2011) provided both standardized and non-standardized measurements for evaluating curriculum effectiveness and proposed research as the method for ensuring appropriate tools of measurement. In addition, curriculum evaluation assists principals in determining effective professional development for individual teachers as well as the campus. Once the curriculum is evaluated, the process for determining needs begins again. This cycle of determining needs, developing curriculum, implementing curriculum effectively, and evaluating curriculum and instructional needs defines the role of the principal as the curriculum leader and redefines instructional leadership in action.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology guided this study in order to determine how Texas university professors, practicing principals, and practicing superintendents define curriculum leadership for principals and the perceptions of these principals and superintendents on the

role of the principal as the curriculum leader. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), qualitative research is utilized when the researchers are seeking to understand events and/or perceptions of participants in the study.

Online open-ended surveys were emailed to all university professors teaching in principal preparation programs in Texas. A similar survey, designed for practicing principals, was emailed to all Texas principals, via a state listserv from Texas Education Agency (TEA). Twelve university professors participated in this study, and 188 principals responded to the open-ended survey. Of those participants, all 12 professors answered the question related to defining curriculum leadership, and 188 principals responded to that question. In addition, 186 Texas principals responded to the question related to the role of the principal as the leader of curriculum and 12 professors responded.

A listserv was provided to TEA and the open-ended survey was emailed to all practicing superintendents in Texas, yielding 210 respondents who completed a rating scale, and 124 respondents who answered the open-ended questions. The scale listed the six principal responsibilities identified by the Texas state competencies. Participants were asked to rate these responsibilities in order of importance.

Open-ended responses were collected through SurveyMonkey and were hand coded by the researchers seeking common responses in answering the two research questions for this study. Both open coding and axial coding were utilized in the data analysis to identify the key themes emerging from the open-ended responses. Percentages, numbers, and quotes from respondents were used to report the findings in answering these two questions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When answering the open-ended statement to define curriculum leadership, the results were surprising. Professors, though small in number (12), had more knowledge of the terminology and understanding of the research while the 188 practicing principals' and 124 superintendents' knowledge of the research on curriculum was more surface, and they did not identify the role of the principal in leading the curriculum.

### Curriculum Leadership Defined

In this study, 12 professors, 188 practicing principals, and 124 practicing superintendents in Texas provided a definition of curriculum leaders. Ten of the professors defined, in some aspect, curriculum leadership as leading the development, alignment and implementation of the campus curriculum. Curriculum leadership also involved the evaluation of the effectiveness of curriculum. Two respondents made a direct connection from the curriculum to classroom instruction. One of the two stated:

> Curriculum leadership means that the principal understands the importance of curriculum (including its necessary parts of the instruction and assessment); actively pursues excellence in alignment, instruction, and teacher expertise; uses data to inform decisions on program effectiveness and to chart a course for improvement; actively develops personnel for improvement in teaching, and leads the culture of the school to adopting a philosophy that is focused on learning.

Overall, the practicing principals were much more general in their definition of curriculum leadership, and few made a connection to instructional leadership. Many delegated

their role in the curriculum as participants instead of leaders. Statements such as, "evaluating curriculum and make suggestions as needed" and "a person who supports and promotes the curriculum of the campus" were common in this study. Terms such as 'assisting,' 'supporting' and 'fostering' were utilized much more often than the term leading. One participant defined curriculum leadership as "being able to work with the staff in looking at the curriculum and best practices." Principals defined the curriculum in terms of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS); the state mandated teaching objectives and end of the year assessments. In other words, their concept of curriculum was directly connected to the state objectives and test only. Only 26 of the 188 principals defined curriculum leadership as a role or responsibility of the principal and indicated responsibilities in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum. Definitions included the support of district-developed curriculum, support of instruction in the classroom, and ensuring that the TEKS are being followed by the teachers.

Basically, the practicing principals did not define curriculum leaders as those that were responsible for the curriculum, rather as those whose role was supportive of the curriculum and the teachers. It should be noted that 17 of the practicing principals indicated that the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) were the curriculum. In actuality, the TEKS are grade-level objectives/standards and student expectations mandated by the state to be taught within the curriculum and are not the total curriculum. The principals' responses indicated that principals did not define curriculum as content objectives taught in an appropriate sequence and timeframe and at the appropriate learning level to meet the student expectations.

Of the 124 Texas superintendents that responded, curriculum leadership was defined primarily in a similar manner as the principals. Nineteen superintendents focused on the role of the principal as curriculum leader in ensuring that the district curriculum was followed by the teachers. One superintendent stated, "Knowing the curriculum plan for the district and getting the staff to buy in [is important]" while another said, "Curriculum leadership is the ability to lead staff in the curriculum the district has chosen like C-Scope." C-Scope is a packaged curriculum adopted by many Texas districts. Curriculum leadership was not the primary responsibility of the principal, as indicated by this statement, "Curriculum leadership is a district responsibility. This role defines the scope and sequence, depth and breadth and rigor of the curriculum." Though not as many as the principals, 14 superintendents defined curriculum leadership in terms of teaching the TEKS objectives in order to pass the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. Only two of the 124 participants indicated that the principal had a direct role in the development, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum. One stated, "Understanding the curriculum to the point of leadership in curriculum development and implementation… [is important]" and another stressed, "Curriculum leadership should be developed both vertically and horizontally. Principals have to rely on previous grade levels to provide appropriate curriculum."

The majority of Texas superintendents did not define curriculum leadership as a direct role or responsibility of the principal. Instead, curriculum leadership for the principal was discussed in terms of ensuring that teachers were supported in the TEKS and/or district curriculum and in evaluation of effective instructional teaching strategies in the classroom. Therefore, the superintendents who are hiring campus principals had little or no expectation for curriculum knowledge or leadership; yet, they expected the principal to evaluate teacher effectiveness in the classroom. These results indicated that many Texas principals and superintendents do not make the connection between the development and implementation of curriculum to the implementation and evaluation of teacher effectiveness in the classroom.

**Principal as Curriculum Leader**

When asked to define their role as curriculum leaders, principals' responses were similar to their definition of curriculum leadership. Ninety percent of the respondents alluded to some aspect of managing or monitoring existing curriculum, district-developed or adopted curriculum, and/or the TEKS objectives. They understood their role in evaluating teachers, but only in relation to curriculum that had already been developed by the curriculum director or district administration. One principal stated, "My role as curriculum leader is to ensure that the district approved curriculum is followed." Most of the participants focused on their responsibility in evaluating teachers in the classroom.

Words commonly used by principals included, "supporter," "facilitator," "monitor," "supervisor," and "evaluator." However, only two of the 186 respondents utilized the word "leader." Only eight principals stated that their role was to develop the curriculum that was best for their campus.

In the superintendent study, participants were asked to rate six principal responsibilities in order of importance when hiring. Of the 210 participants in the study, all completed the rating scale. The rating scale rated decision-making skills first, instructional leadership next, knowledge of school law third, knowledge of curriculum fourth, community relations fifth, and managerial responsibilities last.

When asked what qualities they expected in a principal, five primary areas emerged: relationships, communication, instructional leadership, modeling, and ethical leadership. Of the 124 responses from principals, over half indicated that relationship building and effective communication were the qualities that they looked for in a principal. One-third indicated that instructional knowledge and leadership were the qualities they needed in a principal, and more than a fourth stated that integrity and honesty were the most important characteristics. Interestingly, five of the participants responded that "loyalty to the superintendent" was the quality most sought in a principal. Only two of the 124 respondents stated that the knowledge of curriculum or curriculum leadership was the quality they wanted in a principal. Though each of the five characteristics listed above are important, that curriculum leadership was not listed as a top characteristic desired in principals reflected a lack of emphasis on this role by superintendents.

## CONCLUSIONS

In order for principals to expand their role from instructional leaders to curriculum leaders, principal preparation programs, practicing principals, and practicing superintendents must first be able to define the meaning of curriculum leadership and its impact on the role of the principal in practice (Wiles & Bondi, 2004). Principals cannot truly lead instructionally without understanding the impact of the curriculum on effective classroom instruction (Wiles & Bondi, 2004). In other words, curriculum and classroom instruction are dependent on one another.

Understanding this need for transition, principal preparation programs should consider how instructional leadership is currently defined and taught. A stronger focus on curriculum development should be emphasized in educational leadership and principal preparation courses. Even though only 12 professors answered the question in the study, they were able to define curriculum leadership as it relates to the role of the principal. These professors stated that they were teaching the concept of curriculum leadership; however, 53% of the principals

indicated that their experiences in their principal preparation programs did not adequately prepare them as curriculum leaders.

This research indicated that many of the principals that participated in this study did not understand the connection between effective classroom instruction and curriculum development and implementation. They did not define curriculum leadership with a focus on the development and implementation of the curriculum in the classroom, although it was obvious that they understood their responsibility for campus improvement and accountability.

The superintendents in this study were even less knowledgeable in defining curriculum leadership or the impact that curriculum had on classroom instruction. In addition, they rated knowledge of curriculum in the lower half of the rating scale in this study; although they rated instructional leadership second only to decision-making skills. According to the results from this study, Texas superintendents that hire campus principals do not have expectations for their principals to be directly involved in the curriculum process. If principals are expected to shoulder the responsibility for campus accountability and for developing and evaluating effective teaching practices in the classroom, then would it not be assumed that they should have an active role in leading the curriculum? If superintendents have few expectations for principals to be curriculum leaders and do not understand the connection between curriculum development and instructional effectiveness, then it should come as no surprise when schools struggle to attain high ratings on state accountability measures. Principals and superintendents need to further explore these issues through staff development and critical dialogue in order to ensure student achievement and success.

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# Structured Inequity: The Intersection of Socioeconomic Status and the Standard Error of Measurement of State Mandated High School Test Results

Christopher H. Tienken

Assessment-driven education policies are in place in all 50 states in America. The reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, P.L. 89-10), known as the No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind [NCLB PL 107-110], 2002), signed into law on January 8, 2002, cemented test-based policy making into the education landscape during the first decade of the new millennium. The introduction of the Race To the Top (RTTT) competitive grant program administered by the United States Department of Education (USDOE), and the report, *A Blueprint for Reform, The Emergency and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA Blueprint) *Reauthorization* (United States Department of Education, 2010), combined with stated support for the Common Core State Standards by 49 states and territories added more pressure to continue the policy practice of using standardized test results as the sole or deciding factor to evaluate student achievement and public education effectiveness.

The policy and practice of using results from statewide standardized tests to evaluate students and education quality is not new (Education Commission of the States, 2008). Georgia, Texas, Florida, and Louisiana and cities, such as New York and Chicago have used results from standardized state tests to make grade promotion decisions about students for some time, and 23 states used statewide exams to determine high school graduation eligibility in 2009. The practice of using high school exit exams as the deciding factor on whether a student can receive a standard diploma began over 30 years ago in 1978. By 2012, Arkansas, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Oklahoma might also use exit exams, bringing the total to 27 states (Education Commission of the States, 2008).

School administrators in the 50 states are encouraged to make data-driven decisions based on the results of state mandated tests (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Weiss, 1998). For example, the word "data" appears 230 times in the NCLB Act legislation. The word data appears 16 times, almost once every-other page, in the report (ESEA Blueprint) (United States Department of Education, 2010), and the RTTT program requires administrators to use results from state mandated tests to make decisions about student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Every state education agency has at least one statement related to data-driven decision making on its official web pages, and most have special pages related to data reporting from statewide tests of academic skills and knowledge. School administrators use state assessment results as data to make decisions and judgments about such things as teacher effectiveness, student achievement, and program effectiveness (Burch, 2005; Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Penfield, 2010; Roderick & Engel, 2001; Tienken, 2008).

All results from statewide tests of academic skills and knowledge contain technical flaws that should preclude them from being used as the only data point or as the deciding factor

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to make high-stakes decisions about individual students, such as for high school graduation or grade promotion (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999; Joint Committee on Testing Practices [JCTP], 2004); yet, the practice continues. Unintended social and education consequences of using the results from one state mandated high school exam to make important decisions can include students being retained in grade (which increases the chances of not completing high school), placement in low-level course sequences (which increases the chances of not completing high school), having to take the test again and endure a semester or year of a test preparation course, mandating students to go through an alternative assessment procedure, not receiving a standard high school diploma, or being denied graduation.

Not graduating from high school or being denied a high school diploma can trigger a series of negative events in terms of life-long consequences. As a group, adults who do not hold a high school diploma earn between $7,000 to $10,000 less per year than adults who have a high school diploma (Cheeseman Day & Newburger, 2002). Individual earnings can be related to a person's long-term health with the difference in life expectancy between middle class and wealthy Americans is almost five years more than for poor Americans (Thomas, 2010). Depressed earnings result in lower tax receipts, and they are also associated with higher public medical costs, greater rates of incarceration, and greater use of the welfare system (Levin, 2009). Negative consequences are associated with use of the test results to make potentially life-altering decisions about students (Messick, 1995, 1996).

**Test Score Validity and Misinterpreting Results**

Messick (1995, 1996) cautioned psychometricians that the traditional view of validity as three distinct categories, construct, content, and criterion, is ill-suited to explain the potential negative social and education consequences of test-score misinterpretation. He proposed a more comprehensive and progressive view of validity that integrated criteria and content validity with intended and potential unintended consequences associated with high stakes testing within the construct validity framework. Messick (1995) placed the intended and unintended social and education consequences of test score interpretation or score misuse as an aspect of construct validity and not as its own category of validity. Messick's proposal suggested that those who create and use high stakes tests should weigh the possible intended and unintended consequences to children before enacting a testing program. The integrated view of construct validity allows school administrators and policymakers to consider social and education consequences in the validity discussion and potentially make more informed policy decisions.

One troubling technical characteristic associated with construct validity and the use of the results from state mandated high school tests to make potentially life-altering decisions about individual students is conditional standard error of measurement (*CSEM*) and its effect on individual test-score interpretation. The reported results of individual students might not be the actual or true scores. The *CSEM* is an estimate of the amount of error the user of test results must consider when interpreting a score at a specific cut-point or proficiency level or when making a high-stakes decision based on the test score (Harville, 1991). Think of *CSEM* as the margin of error reported in political polls (e.g. + or – 7 points): The individual student-level results from every large-scale state standardized test have a margin of error. The *CSEM* describes how large the margin of error is at the various proficiency cut-points and how much the reported test results might differ from a student's true score.

For example, if a student receives a reported scale score of 546, and there are + or – 12 scale-score points of *CSEM at the proficiency cut-point*, then the true score could be located somewhere within the range of 534 to 558, and the student could be expected to score within that range if he or she took that test again. If that state's proficiency cut-score is 547, then the student is rated *not proficient* based on his or her reported score if the State Education Agency personnel (SEA) do not account for *CSEM* in some way in the proficiency calculations, even though the student scored within the error band, only one point away from proficiency. This is especially troubling when the single test score determines if a student can graduate high school or receive a standard diploma, as it does in 23 states (Education Commission of the States, 2008).

## Problem

A more focused problem appears at the confluence of *CSEM,* score interpretation policy for high school exams in the 50 states, and the documented effects of group membership in the Economically Disadvantaged (ED) subgroup on ultimate student achievement. Students eligible for free or reduced lunch, known in many states as *Economically Disadvantaged*, score as a group statistically and practically significantly lower on statewide high school exams, and state exams in all other grade levels, than their peers who are *Non-economically Disadvantaged* (Non-ED). Students in the ED subgroup are more likely, as a group, to be affected negatively by misinterpretations of score results due to *CSEM* that cause them to be labeled as not proficient because they score closer to their state's proficiency cut-score. There has been little empirical research published since the inception of NCLB that describes the amount of error present in high school state standardized test scores for language arts and mathematics. Even less literature exists that attempts to account for the number of students potentially harmed by SEA policies that do not account for the error inherent in the individual scores of students.

The purpose of this chapter is to (a) describe the practical significance of the differences in results on state mandated high school exams in language arts and mathematics between students categorized as *Economically Disadvantaged* (ED) and those not categorized as ED, (b) determine the number of students potentially miscategorized as not proficient due to *CSEM,* and (c) describe the policy options available to state education agency personnel and school leaders.

## Research Questions and Significance

Three questions guided the study: (a) How do SEA personnel attempt to remedy the imprecision issues posed by *CSEM* on the interpretation of reported individual student test scores?; (b) What is the practical significance (effect size) between high school exam results on the language arts (LA) and mathematics (M) sections for students designated as economically disadvantaged (ED) and those not ED?; and (c) Approximately how many students are potentially mislabeled as less than proficient on state LA and M exams due to *CSEM*? The results of this study provide leverage, on which to advocate for policy adjustments. Education policy and high-stakes testing schemes continue to take shape at the federal level, and the informed discussion of *CSEM* should be a priority topic.

## RESEARCH AND LITERATURE ON HIGH SCHOOL EXAMS
## AND THEIR RESULTS

This section provides an overview of the characteristics of the literature on the topic of state mandated high school standardized tests and CSEM. I conducted an initial Internet search and used Boolean techniques to explore the literature on the topic of state mandated high school standardized tests and *CSEM*. The search terms included *conditional error of measurement* and *state mandated tests*, *measurement error* and *high school exam*, and *high school state exams* and *conditional standard error of measurement*. The initial search produced three types of results: (a) non-empirical literature, (b) empirical literature, and (c) psychometric technical documents and professional standards for testing. A second search was conducted using the AERA and Education Policy Analysis Archives journal databases. The results of the second search also produced results that fit into the three categories above.

### Non-empirical Literature

The non-empirical literature ranged from advocacy, policy briefs, and editorials published by think-tanks and researchers who support the practice of using state mandated high school test results to make high-stakes decisions about children (e.g., Achieve Inc., 2008; Education Commission of States, 2008; Freedman, 2004; Greene & Winters, 2004; Hanushek & Welch, 2006) to literature of those who opposed the practice (e.g., Fairtest.org, 2008; Neill, 1997; Ohanian, 2001). Although the non-empirical literature might not rise to the level of empirical research as defined by Haller and Kleine (2001), it has influenced education policy in the past (e.g., Goals 2000, NCLB, Achieve, Inc. and its *American Diploma Project, Common Core State Standards, RTTT, ESEA Blueprint for Reauthorization*). There is little discussion about the *CSEM* in the non-empirical literature.

### Empirical Literature

In a related study (Tienken, 2009), a review of empirical literature on *CSEM* issues and high school exams revealed 53 peer-reviewed articles with the terms "high school exam." A Boolean search with the terms *conditional standard error of measurement* and *high school exam* did not result in a peer-reviewed article that reported the actual scale-score *CSEM* present in high school exams used nationally or reported directly on the influence of *CSEM* on interpretation of the results. However, three contradictory claims about the influence of high-stakes high school exams on student achievement and graduation rates surfaced. For example, in terms of high school exit exams (in use in 23 states), the literature suggested they (a) improve overall achievement and graduation rates (Stringfield & Yakamowski-Srebnick, 2005); (b) suppress overall achievement and graduation rates, and have negative unintended consequences, especially for minorities (Hursh, 2007; Lee & Wong, 2004; Vasquez Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008); or (c) provide mixed, uneven, or inconsistent results (Allensworth, 2005; Clarke, Shore, Rhoades, Abrams, Miao, & Li, 2006).

### Standards for Education Testing

Authors of *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999) and the *Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education* (JCTP, 2004) present specific standards and recommendations for test developers, test takers, and those who use

test results to make decisions about children. The standards and recommendations cover test construction, fairness in testing practices, appropriate documentation of technical characteristics of tests, and other related topics. Both publications make specific recommendations for how state personnel and school leaders can address *CSEM* in the context of high-stakes testing. I chose to focus on the *Standards* instead of the *Code* because the three largest organizations (in terms of membership) associated with testing produced the *Standards* (APA, AERA, and NCME, 1999). They provide specific guidance for developers and users of high stakes testing programs, and the working group who produced the *Code* included members of the three *Standards* organizations, and many recommendations contained in the *Code* are included in the *Standards*.

Specific statements related to construct validity, as defined by Messick (1995, 1996), and measurement error are listed in Part I and Part III of the *Standards* (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999). The authors of the *Standards* concurred with Messick (1995; 1996) when they wrote:

> Measurement error reduces the usefulness of measures. It limits the extent to which test results can be generalized beyond the particulars of a specific application of the measurement process. Therefore, it reduces the confidence that can be placed in any single measurement. (p. 27)

The authors recommended that error and its sources be reported, stating, "The critical information on reliability includes the identification of the major sources of error, summary statistics bearing on the size of such error…." (p. 27). The authors of the *Standards* explained why test developers and users (i.e., SEA, school administrators, policy makers) must report and be aware of the *CSEM* at the proficiency cut-score levels on tests:

> Mismeasurement of examinees whose true scores are close to the cut score is a more serious concern. The techniques used to quantify reliability should recognize these circumstances. This can be done by reporting the conditional standard error in the vicinity of the critical value. (p. 30)

Table I includes the applicable macro-standards, statements, and paraphrased recommendations related to error and reporting. Authors of the *Standards* provide overall guidance on interpretation and score precision stating, "The higher the stakes… the more important it is that the test-based inferences are supported with strong evidence of technical quality" (p. 139).

**Theoretical Perspectives for Using Statewide High School Exams as High-Stakes Indicators of Achievement**

Advocates of high school exams generate policy frameworks and proposals from the rationalistic and behaviorist fields of education psychology. The proposals are operationalized via state education policies that use positive reinforcement and punishment, also known as carrots and sticks. Bryk and Hermanson (1993) termed this an *instrumental use* model. Norris, Leighton, and Phillips (2007) termed it the *Stakes Competency Model*. The theory is that a policy body develops a set of expected education outcome measures (e.g. state standards) and monitors the relationship between the measures and school processes through a high stakes statewide standardized test, and then attempts to change behavior of those in the system through external force. The standardized testing measures rest upon arbitrarily set proficiency

bands and external control (e.g., threats of state takeover, vending the school to an education management corporation, or state monitoring).

**Table 1.** Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999) Related to Test-Score Precision and Conditional Standard Error of Measurement.

| Standard | Standard Statement | Recommendations |
|---|---|---|
| 2.2 | "The standard error of measurement, both overall and conditional…, should be reported…in units of each derived score" (p. 31). | The CSEM is important in high school exit exam situations due to the consequence of imprecision. |
| 5.10 | "…those responsible for the testing programs should provide appropriate interpretations. (They) should describe …the precision of the scores, common misinterpretations of test scores…" (p. 65). | Score precision should be illustrated by error bands or potential score ranges for individual students and should show the CSEM. |
| 6.5 | "…When relevant for test interpretation, test documents ordinarily should include item level information, cut scores…the SEM…" (p.69). | The SEM should be reported. |
| 7.9 | "When tests or assessments are proposed for use as instruments of social, educational or public policy, …users …should fully and accurately inform policy-makers of the characteristics of the tests…" (p. 83). | Precision is an important issue… Users should report the amount of error present in scores. |

Advocates of high-stakes testing policies postulate that high-stakes exams cause students and teachers to work harder and achieve more because the tests create teaching and learning targets that have perceived meanings to both groups. There are underlying assumptions that teachers and students do not already work hard and that one test can measure and provide information that is meaningful in terms of student achievement and systemic efficacy. Another example of the theory in policy includes the threats from State Education Agency's (SEA) to withhold funding for poor performance to compel school personnel to work harder because they do not want to lose funding. A similar version is the use of public castigation via the press and ratings and/or rankings of districts by SEA personnel to spur educators to work harder to achieve outcomes. This type of policy making philosophy is in line with Rational Choice Theory. But those who rely on Rational Choice Theory seem not to understand Reactance Theory: You push me, I push back, resist, and/or subvert.

Conversely, high-stakes exam opponents derive theoretical guidance from an enlightenment model based on self-determination theory (Laitsch, 2006). Creators of an assessment system based on an enlightenment model seek to foster greater discussion, study, and reflection of education practices based on the indicators of the assessment system. Standardized tests still play a part, but their uses and interpretations are different compared to those within an instrumental use model, and they are not high stakes in nature. The system includes multiple data points, both quantitative and qualitative. Greater use might be placed upon teacher grades or student grade point average, which have been shown to be a better predictor of first year college success than the SAT (Zwick, 2004).

## DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

I used a non-experimental, exploratory, descriptive cross-sectional design (Johnson, 2001) to answer the research questions. Data were collected between 2008 and 2010 from publically available state test technical manuals and databases. First, an Internet search of

SEA websites was conducted for the mathematics (M) and language arts (LA) exam technical manuals of the 50 states that use high school exams. I used the "search" function on each SEA site to locate the technical manuals and used Boolean search techniques and appropriate descriptors to find high school exam technical manuals. Formal emails were sent to the SEA testing coordinators to request the technical manuals if the manual was not posted on the SEA website. A second email was sent after two weeks if a reply was not received. In some cases, I called the assessment directors to ask for information. Technical manuals are supposed to be in the public domain as recommended by the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999).

Some states posted multiple years and grade levels of technical manuals for each subject. I chose the most recent manual at the highest grade level if there were exams for multiple high-school grades. The manuals' most recent publication dates ranged from 2005 to 2009. If a state included Algebra I and Algebra II exams, the Algebra II exam was chosen because of the assumption that the Algebra II exam would represent more closely the higher level of high school math attainment. *SEM* and *CSEM* values for each test in each state where data were available were determined from a previous study (Tienken, 2009) on that subject, and they are listed in Appendix A. of this chapter.

Then, I searched each SEA website for information regarding cut-score setting methods and the treatment of *CSEM*. In cases in which information was incomplete or not included, the director of state testing was emailed to request the information. As per the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* that type of information is supposed to be reported in the public domain. Finally, I used the publically accessible *Center on Education Policy* database that reports state test results for various subgroups of students across the 50 states. I created a table (see Appendix) to show the LA and M scores from high school exams for students in the ED subgroup and those in the non-ED subgroup. Glass's Delta formula was used to calculate the effect size difference (practical significance) in mean scores for the two groups.

It should be noted that the term Economically Disadvantaged is the term used in this chapter to describe those students designated by their states as eligible for either free or reduced priced lunches at school; this term was used most often in the literature and data reviewed. I am well aware of the potential weaknesses of relying on free or reduced lunch status as the primary indicator of a student's complete economic status (Harwell & LeBeau, 2010). Free/reduced lunch status is a blunt indicator of socio-economic status. There are meaningful differences between being eligible for free lunch as opposed to reduced lunch and those differences have varying influences on student achievement. Data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) for M and LA results for Grades 4 and 8 suggest that students eligible for free lunch scored statistically significantly ($p < .05$) lower than students not eligible for free or reduced lunch. Conversely, there was not a statistically significant difference in scores between students eligible for reduced lunch and those not eligible for reduced or free lunch.

The free lunch category captures some of the effects of poverty whereas the reduced lunch category does not. However, states do not often separate achievement into the two distinct categories, and instead, report achievement as one category: free/reduced lunch. This designation masks some of the negative influences of poverty because the scores for students eligible for free lunch would be even lower than those in the category known as free/reduced lunch. The combined free/reduced lunch category does not allow for deep exploration of the effects of poverty because it includes students whose family income is up to $39,220, almost two times the federal poverty level income threshold.

The federal guidelines for determining eligibility contribute to the blurriness of the indicator. The guidelines have not been substantially updated since they were created in 1960s, and they do not take into account other factors that depress after-tax income that were never considered when the guidelines were created. Those factors include such things as costs for child care, health insurance premiums and related costs, variations in costs of living throughout geographic regions, transportation costs, and the influences and effects of living in an impoverished neighborhood (Harwell & LeBeau, 2010). Because more fine grained census data or definitions of economic status are not provided by states, I chose to use the data that were reported most widely.

## RESULTS

Appendix A presents (a) the name of each state; (b) the most recently reported or estimated *CSEM* at the proficiency cut-point for the LA and M portions of the high school exams; (c) mean scale scores, standard deviations, and population sizes for students in the ED subgroup and those in the non-ED subgroup; (d) number of students potentially affected negatively (miscategorized as not proficient) due to not accounting for *CSEM* in the individual scores; and (e) effect size differences between the mean scale scores for the ED subgroup and Non-ED subgroup.

The range of *CSEM* at the proficiency cut-point for LA was 3.3 scale-score points to 89 scale-score points and the range of *CSEM* at the proficiency cut-point for M was 3.3 scale score points to 88 scale-score points. I am less concerned with the size of the error because each state uses a *hard and fast* cut-score. That means there is no accommodation for *CSEM*, almost as if it does not exist. If a state's proficiency cut-score is 200, as it is in New Jersey, and a student scores a 198, then that student is categorized as not proficient, even though there are approximately nine points of error at the cut-point on the New Jersey tests. Therefore, even one point of *CSEM* can cause misinterpretation and miscategorization of student performance because SEA personnel do not account for *CSEM* in individual test results.

Every SEA provided at least two opportunities for students to take and pass the high school exam. The mode was three testing opportunities. That was the SEA-preferred mechanism to deal with not accounting for *CSEM* in the individual student scores. None of the SEA reporting policies awarded the CSEM to the student. Only two states (4%) stated that they attempted to account for the *CSEM* in the score setting process, but further review of their processes, as stated in their technical manuals, revealed inconclusive methods. One state reported that the CSEM was accounted for by setting the initial proficiency cut score lower to account for the error. That just moves the problem to a different cut-score. A more appropriate method would be to award the students the scale score *CSEM,* the margin of error if you will, at the proficiency cut-score to their results. None of the SEAs account for the *CSEM* by awarding the student the theoretical higher score, the score at the top-end of the error band.

### The Intersection of Not Addressing *CSEM*, Being Economically Disadvantaged, and Structured Inequity

More than one quarter, 13/50, (26%) of the SEA did not report mean scale scores for the ED and non-ED subgroups. For all states that did report those data, 37/50 (74%), there was no instance when the ED subgroup achieved a higher mean score on the LA or M portions of the high school state tests than the non-ED subgroup. In 37 states that reported data, the children in the ED subgroup scored closer, and in some cases, below the proficiency

cut-score for their respective states. In 12/37 states that reported data, children in the ED subgroup scored below their state's proficiency cut-score in mathematics. In 8/12 of those states, they scored within the *CSEM* band from proficiency, meaning that, as a group, the ED students in those 8 states (in 75% of the states where this occurred) would have achieved a mean score above the proficiency cut-point had the SEA personnel in those states accommodated for the *CSEM* in the individual student results. Instead, their mean group score fell below the proficient level making them candidates to be more likely miscategorized as not proficient, due to measurement error than their non-disadvantaged peers.

The data suggested that students in the ED subgroup are more likely to be affected by not accommodating for *CSEM* in test scores than their non-ED peers, and they are more frequently categorized as not proficient than if the error were addressed as recommended in the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. The students in the ED subgroup scored lower in LA and M in every state that reported data. They scored closer to their states' proficiency cut point in every state that reported data. They actually scored below their states' proficiency cut points in LA in 11/37 (30%) of the states that reported data and below in M in 12 states. Not accounting for error places the students in the ED subgroup at greater risk of being categorized mistakenly as not proficient.

By comparison, in only five states did the non-ED student subgroup score below their state's math proficiency cut-score. The non-ED student sub-group scored within the *CSEM* range in four of the five states. None of the non-ED students in any state scored below their state's proficiency cut-score in LA, whereas the children in the ED subgroup in 11 states scored below their states' LA proficiency cut-score and in 9/11 (82%) of those states, the students scored within the *CSEM* range on the LA test.

The achievement differences were striking in terms of scale scores and effect sizes. The effect size differences in mean achievement between the students in the ED subgroup and their non-ED peers ranged from 0.39 to 1.05 in LA and 0.36 to 1.02 in M. The effect size was 0.50 or higher favoring the non-ED in LA and M in 27/37 (73%) states that reported data. To put that into perspective, an effect size of 0.50 favoring the non-ED subgroup would be the difference between a student scoring at approximately the 67th percentile on a nationally norm-referenced test compared to a student scoring at the 50th percentile.

## Number of Students Affected

I was able to locate or estimate the number of students in 23/50 (46%) students potentially affected negatively by not accommodating *CSEM* (i.e., being miscategorized as something less than proficient). An estimated 166,305 students were miscategorized at least once in an academic year as *less than proficient* on their statewide mandated LA test because of *CSEM* and the fact that SEA personnel do not account for it at the student level. Similarly, an estimated 164,982 students were categorized as *less than proficient* on their statewide mandated math test. It is unclear how many students who were miscategorized in M were also miscategorized in LA or vice versa. Because students in the ED group scored closer to their states' proficiency cut points more frequently than their non-ED peers, the data suggested that *CSEM* is an issue that disproportionately affects students who are economically disadvantaged compared to students who are not economically disadvantaged.

The results suggested that the tests in all states that reported data might be influenced by the out-of-school factors associated with being in the ED subgroup more than the in-school factors that influence achievement. The results suggested that inequity is being structured by faulty testing policy and score interpretation. Some students are being treated differently and

potentially not getting what they need as a result of proficiency miscategorization. The inequity is most severe in terms of who receives a high school diploma, who is allowed to take higher level courses, and who must be required to take low level basic skills instruction courses. Students in the ED subgroup are more likely to be miscategorized as *less than proficient* and more likely to experience negative consequences due to the miscategorization. Consequences can include lower lifetime income and shorter lifespan (Levin, 2009; Thomas, 2010).

## CONCLUSIONS

Is *CSEM* a real concern for students?  Yes, and even more so for students who are members of the ED group. According to the leadership of APA, AERA, NCME and individuals in the field of educational testing like Messick (1995, 1996) and Koretz (2008), the error inherent in the test results poses a negative construct validity issue because of the unintended consequences that it produces when SEA personnel do not report it and/or account for it through policy remedies. Construct validity issues are heightened when SEA personnel and others use the scores to make high-stakes decisions about students without considering error. Even a small amount of *CSEM* can have severe consequences for students when SEA personnel or school leaders simply require students to achieve a set cut-score to demonstrate proficiency (Koretz, 2008). The fact that one group whose membership includes some the nation's most fragile children is disproportionately affected negatively by policies that are known to lead to structured inequity is morally, ethically, and professionally troubling.

Because high school exams and *CSEM* are nationwide phenomena, we can be sure that hundreds of thousands of youth might be potentially affected negatively by inaction at the state and local levels to develop policy remedies and administrative practices aligned with standards and recommendations for appropriate testing practices. As stated in the *Standards,* "Measurement error reduces the usefulness of measures. … It reduces the confidence that can be placed in any single measurement" (p. 27).

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

One appropriate policy recommendation is for SEA personnel, policymakers, and school administrators to take a page out of the medical profession's handbook and to adhere to an education version of the Hippocratic oath, especially the oath of *do no harm*. Although education might have a similar oath, not all educators and education policy-makers seem to respect it. The time has come for school administrators to stop using the results from high stakes statewide high school exams to make high stakes decisions about children and to petition their state agencies to do the same. Until SEA personnel, policymakers, and all school administrators decide to protect children, put forth evidence based policies for appropriate practices, and *do no harm,* there should be a nationwide moratorium, through explicit policy language and law, on using such results for high-stakes decisions. At the very least, school leaders should adopt policies at the local level that limit the use of the test results for making high stakes decisions at the district level.

Because I see no signs of all school administrators or the policy-makers acting on my first set of recommendations, another approach to consider is to change the way *CSEM* is mitigated at the state level. One way is for states to keep their current number of testing opportunities but report all student scores with the *CSEM* band and award the highest score to the student (e.g., student's reported score plus the total amount of *CSEM* at the proficiency

cut-point). This increases the transparency of the process and helps overcome some score interpretation issues because the SEAs would recognize formally the *CSEM* on the individual score reports. This policy band-aid would help to ameliorate the potential negative social and educational consequences to students of not accounting for the *CSEM* when making decisions based on the scores. The score advantage should always go to the student in the high-stakes situation because of the inherent uncertainty and imprecision of the reported test results (APA, AERA, NCME, 1999). Including the *CSEM* in the student's score and awarding the score at the top end of the *CSEM*, along with multiple testing opportunities provides one procedural safeguard to lessen the unintended consequences due to *CSEM* precision issues recognizing, "Precision and consistency in measurement are always desirable. However, the need for precision increases as the consequences of decisions and interpretations grow in importance" (APA, AERA, NCME, 1999, p. 30).

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Children do not have a seat at the policy-making table. Policy is thrust upon them, and done to them, not with them. If those who make the policies and those who carry them out do not recognize or are unwilling to confront the potentially negative aspects of those policies and their actions, then children will be harmed, as they are every year. Perhaps, SEA personnel, policymakers, school leaders, and those who prepare them should be made to provide peer-reviewed, scientific evidence for their proposed policies and programs before those policies and programs are enacted. An agency like another Food and Drug Administration may be needed, but in this case an Education Protection Administration (EDPA), whose function is to review policies and programs through the lens of what's best for children and scientific evidence. The people who make and implement policies that mandate statewide testing and facilitate high-stakes decisions from the results need to consider inequities of our current system. The ends do not automatically justify the means. A "proficient" score, alone, does not have the empirical backing to support its reliability as the sole determiner of a student's academic performance.

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## Appendix A. Mean Scale Scores and Effect Size Differences on Statewide High School Exams in Mathematics (M) and Reading/Language Arts (LA) for Students Labeled Economically Disadvantaged and Not Disadvantaged

| State | Proficiency Cut-Score LA/Math | LA/Math CSEM (SS) | ED. Scale Score, (SD), & N | Non-ED.Scale Score, (SD), & N | Effect Size Math/LA | Students Affected |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AL | NA | -/- | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | NA |
| AK (LA) (M) | NA | 19 19 | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | 412 937 |
| AR (LA) (M) | NA | -/- | 191 (21.7)12,793 203.9 (44.3) 16,669 | 206 (21.1) 16,870 231.2 (43.1) 16,781 | 0.69 0.62 | NA NA |
| AZ (LA) (M) | NA | 13 8 | 672 (93) 27,569 677 (91) 26,930 | 712 (70) 47,737 710 (67) 47,324 | 0.43 0.36 | 4906 1907 |
| CA (LA) (M) | 350 350 | 14 18 | 365.91 (34.8) 191,318 370.68 (36.7) 191,324 | 389.78 (36.1) 266,500 391.55 (38.3) 266,512 | 0.69 0.57 | 54,000 [3] 54,000 |
| CO (LA) (M) | 663 627 | 28 13 | 650.38 (62.1) 14,136 544.33 (71.6) 14,251 | 692.47 (56.9) 42,114 600.18 (69.2) 41,288 | 0.68 0.78 | 7594 4037 |
| CT (LA) (M) | NA | -/- | 211.40 (41.2), 10,349 218.20 (45.1) 10,320 | 254.50 (41.8) 31,432 264.30 (39.1) 31,374 | 1.05 1.02 | NA NA |
| DE (LA) (M) | NA | 10 10 | 501.82 (34.9) 2,418 518.66 (30.8) 2,595 | 525.17 (36.1) 5,975 542.52 (41.1) 6,138 | 0.67 0.77 | 773 977 |
| FL (LA) (M) | 300 300 | 19 8 | 282 (N/A) 69,044 313 (N/A) 68,748 | 321 (N/A) 114,368 336 (N/A) 114,003 | NA NA | 6,348 [3] 10,006 |
| GA (LA) (M) | NA | 9 5 | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | NA |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| HI (LA) | NA | -/- | 300.3 (40.5) 4,359 | 318 (38.5) 8,154 | 0.43 | NA |
| (M) | | | 269 (41.2) 4,359 | 287 (41.4) 8,154 | 0.44 | NA |
| IA (LA) | NA | -/- | 269.33 (41) 8,025 | 294 (39.6) 25,650 | 0.60 | NA |
| (M) | | | 270.43 (37.7) 8,024 | 295 (36.5) 25,638 | 0.65 | NA |
| ID (LA) | NA | 3.3 | 226 (N/A) 5,967 | No Data Reported | NA | 718 |
| (M) | | 3.3 | 242 (N/A) 6,008 | No Data Reported | NA | 1226 |
| IL (LA) | 155 | 4.03 | 148.39 (14) 35,361 | 159.69 (15.5) 95,385 | 0.81 | NA |
| (M) | 156 | 6.75 | 147.62 (13.9) 35,392 | 160.60 (16) 95,413 | 0.94 | NA |
| IN (LA) | NA | -/- | 549.5 (49.2) 27,700 | 583.3 (46.7) 51,046 | 0.69 | NA |
| (M) | | | 577.9 (65) 27,700 | 621.3 (58.4) 51,046 | 0.67 | NA |
| KS (LA) | NA | -/- | 70.68 (16.2) 9,033 | 80.3 (12.89) 22,597 | 0.59 | NA |
| (M) | | | 48.53 (15.4) 9,069 | 55.40 (15.6) 22,503 | 0.45 | NA |
| KY (LA) | 1040 | -/- | 1039 (14.7) 21,775 | 1048 (15.5) 27,414 | 0.61 | NA |
| (M) | 1040 | | 1127 (19.2) 17,613 | 1139 (21.6) 26,806 | 0.63 | NA |
| LA (LA) | 299 | 15 | 292 (44) 21,503 | 314 (43) 20,091 | 0.50 | NA |
| (M) | 305 | 15 | 309 (43) 21,497 | 337 (52) 20,093 | 0.65 | NA |
| MA (LA) | 240 | 9 | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | 7700 |
| (M) | 240 | 9 | | | | 5600 |
| MD LA) | 396 | -/- | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | NA |
| (M) | 412 | | | | | |
| ME (LA) | 1142 | 29 | 1134 (13.8) 3545 | 1143 (14.4) 11,034 | 0.65 | 7719 |
| (M) | 1142 | 32 | 1136 (9.9) 3,695 | 1142 (11.1) 11,175 | 0.61 | 9360 |
| MI (LA) | 1100 | 89 | 1091 (32.7) 30,898 | 1110 (30.5) 82,744 | 0.58 | 19,371 |
| (M) | 1100 | 88 | 1078 (31.7) 30,694 | 1098 (29.4) 82,540 | 0.63 | 25,794 |
| MN (LA) | 1040 | 14 | 1048.3 (13.7) 18,106 | 1058.8 (12.4) 46,983 | 0.77 | 5435 |
| (M) | 1140 | 12 | 1129 (19) 15,605 | 1144.6 (19.8) 46,832 | 0.82 | NA |
| MO (LA) | NA | 8 | 700.25 (35.9) 19,089 | 718 (34.8) 43,384 | 0.49 | 1,926 [3] |
| (M) | | 9 | 709.44 (48.7) 23,771 | 739 (46.7) 45,002 | 0.61 | 2,038 |
| MS (LA) | NA | -/- | 646.44 (7.8) 13,936 | 652.9 (11.1) 14,118 | 0.83 | NA |
| (M) | | | 649.44 (9.4) 14,527 | 654.9 (10.6) 14,683 | 0.58 | NA |
| MT (LA) | 250 | 13 | 249.8 (35.1) 2,643 | 268.3 (31.4) 8,619 | 0.53 | 788 |
| (M) | 250 | 12 | 245.3 (27) 2,643 | 261.7 (27.4) 8,619 | 0.61 | 816 |
| NC | NA | -/- | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | NA |
| ND (LA) | 700 | 35 | 698.2 (29.8) 1,670 | 710 (27.3) 5,577 | 0.40 | 2500 |
| (M) | 739 | 37 | 725.2 (41.4) 1,664 | 745.6 (36.5) 5,566 | 0.49 | 1650 |
| NE | NA | -/- | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | NA |
| NH (LA) | NA | -/- | 1138 (N/A) 2,127 | 1144 (N/A) 13,484 | NA | NA |
| (M) | | | 1129 (N/A) 2,106 | 1134 (N/A) 13,440 | NA | NA |
| NJ (LA) | 200 | 9 | 202.7 (N/A) 18,849 | 225.1 (N/A) 79,207 | NA | 9,500 [3] |
| (M) | 200 | 9 | 200.7 (N/A) 18,833 | 226.0 (N/A) 79,152 | NA | 9,500 |
| NM*(LA9) | NA | 9 | 674.1 (33.7) 14,895 | 693.9 (35.2) 11,942 | 0.59 | 1664 |
| (M) | | 9 | 695.6 (34.1) 14,860 | 718.7 (40.2) 11,932 | 0.68 | 1897 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NY | NA | -/- | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | NA |
| NV (LA) | 251 | 26 | 270 (60) 7,660 | 298 (57) 22,477 | 0.47 | NA |
| (M) | 242 | 33 | 278 (57) 7,887 | 302 (56) 22,951 | 0.42 | NA |
| OH (LA) | 400 | 8.59 | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | NA |
| (M) | 400 | 10.02 | | | | |
| OK[1] (LA) | 684 | -/- | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | 867 |
| (M) | NA | | | | | 820 |
| OR (LA) | 236 | -/- | 234.8 (8.7) 14,787 | 240.4 (8.9) 26,944 | 0.64 | NA |
| (M) | 236 | | 231.7 (9.3) 14,715 | 237.8 (10.2) 26,736 | 0.66 | NA |
| PA (LA) | 1257 | 54 | 1220 (252.6) 34,176 | 1410 (266.5) 100,839 | 0.75 | 12,223 |
| (M) | 1304 | 49 | 1210 (240.8) 34,231 | 1390 (260.9) 100,906 | 0.74 | 9950 |
| RI (LA) | 1140 | 6 | 1138 (N/A) 3,367 | 1145 (N/A) 8,294 | NA | 1515 |
| (M) | 1140 | 4 | 1128 (N/A) 3,367 | 1134 (N/A) 8,294 | NA | 1982 |
| SC (LA) | 200 | 5.6 | 218.26 (21) 20,319 | 234.76 (21) 26,495 | 0.79 | 995 [3] |
| (M) | 200 | 5.5 | 215.19 (23) 20,682 | 232.27 (24) 26,727 | 0.74 | 1079 |
| SD (LA) | 709 | -/- | 720.35 (35.9) 1,771 | 738.51 (37.1) 6,875 | 0.51 | NA |
| (M) | NA | | 715.35 (36.4) 1,778 | 734.47 (37.4) 6,890 | 0.53 | NA |
| TN**(LA9) | NA | -/- | 515.5 (43.3) 23,605 | 543.7 (40) 40,489 | 0.65 | NA |
| (M) | | | 526.4 (51.6) 12,871 | 554.2 (44) 21,119 | 0.54 | NA |
| TX (LA) | 2100 | 32 | 2217 (130.8) 130,407 | 2296 (138.9) 167,764 | 0.60 | 9,610 |
| (M) | 2100 | 39 | 2115 (172.6) 127,130 | 2217 (197.1) 165,562 | 0.59 | 14,869 |
| UT (LA) | NA | -/- | 161 (13.3) 9,383 | 168 (11.5) 27,283 | 0.53 | NA |
| (M) | | | 157 (13.7) 8,062 | 164 (12.8) 32,588 | 0.51 | NA |
| VA (LA) | 400 | 24 | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | 1212 |
| (M) | 400 | 17 | | | | 1445 |
| VT (LA) | NA | -/- | 1139 (N/A) 1,489 | 1145 (N/A) 5,751 | NA | NA |
| (M) | | | 1129 (N/A) 1,469 | 1135 (N/A) 5,718 | NA | NA |
| WA (LA) | 400 | 9 | 412.2 (31.3) 19,885 | 429.4 (30.5) 42,954 | 0.55 | 3623 |
| (M) | 400 | 10 | 376.5 (38.2) 20,520 | 403.4 (39.7) 44,745 | 0.70 | 5092 |
| WI (LA) | 503 | 16 | 504.6 (61) 17,552 | 550.3 (55) 50,609 | 0.75 | NA |
| (M) | 541 | 12 | 532.9 (48.4) 17,670 | 571.2 (44.7) 50,666 | 0.79 | NA |
| WV | NA | -/- | No Data Reported | No Data Reported | NA | NA |
| WY[2](LA) | 159 | 5 | 151.5 (16) 826 | 157.7 (16.2) 2,827 | 0.39 | NA |
| (M) | 148 | 5 | 143.1 (16.3) 894 | 149.5 (16.5) 3,167 | 0.40 | NA |

Note: All results come from the 2008 administration of each state's test in LA and M unless otherwise noted. All tests are either from Grade 10 or 11 unless otherwise noted.

[1] # of students affected estimated by using the number of students who were 2nd time test takers

[2] The mean scores for all learners are below the proficiency cut-points. This is due to a scoring error by Pearson that has not been corrected in the official score publications.

[3] # of students affected was estimated

*2007 data because 2008 were incomplete

**2006 data because 2007 and 2008 were incomplete

# The Social Justice Implications of the Deteriorating U.S. Economy on Public Schools in Selected U.S. School Districts in Colorado and Illinois

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Gregory N. Pierson

Unlike many countries, the federal government in the United States provides little of the funding necessary to support its public school system. The United States government, through the United States Department of Education, provides an average of less than 10 % of the money needed to operate the public schools. Historically, education in the United States has been a function reserved for the individual states (Essex, 2005). Consequently, the primary responsibility for funding the public schools falls to the fifty respective states. Most states rely upon a combination of money provided from the state, often called general state aid, and local property taxes, along with the relatively small percentage of federal funds, to support their schools. Due to this funding mechanism, the distribution of resources among public school districts in many states is inequitable (Thompson & Wood, 2005). The degree of inequity varies from state-to-state. In Illinois, for example, the amount of money spent per student ranged from under $6000 to over $18,000 per year during the FY 2009 fiscal year (Fritts, 2008). The districts on the upper end of this financing scenario relied heavily upon local property taxes and relatively little upon state financial assistance. Antithetically, the districts in the bottom quadrants of this fiscal system relied very heavily upon general and categorical state aid.

Educators, parents, and the general public have long known that they were operating under an inequitable funding system. While the Illinois constitution requires that the state has the primary responsibility for financing the system of public education, this has never actually transpired. Primary responsibility has been interpreted to mean funding 51%, which has not happened since the ratification of the most recent Illinois constitution (Illinois Constitution of 1970). Numerous attempts have been made to correct this inequitable system, including the formation of a number of commissions and study groups over the years. The most recent of these coalitions is the Education Funding Advisory Board, subsequently known as EFAB, which was created by the Illinois General Assembly in the late 1990's to once again address this issue (105 ILCS 5/18-8.05 (M)). By law, the EFAB was required to submit a report to the General Assembly by January 1 of each year, beginning in 2001. Based upon the very first EFAB report, several major recommendations were posted on the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) website in October of 2002 (Education Funding Advisory Board). Among the major recommendations were the following:

- Increase the foundation level of the general state aid formula to $5665 for the subsequent year;

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- Change (liberalize) the manner in which the child poverty count was to be calculated in the general state aid formula;
- Encourage, through fiscal incentives, the consolidation of small school districts and mandate that K-12 districts should have no high school smaller than 250 students; and
- Reduce the reliance upon local property taxes in the state aid formula by seeking other revenues sources, such as increasing the level of the state income tax. (Education Funding Advisory Board, 2002)

Although the EFAB report had recommended a foundation state aid level of $5665 per student for fiscal year 2003 (FY03), the legislature voted for a funding level of $4810, which constituted an increase of $250 per student over the previous year (Fritts, 2008). While very minor adjustments were made in the child poverty calculation and consolidation incentives, nothing major was done regarding a change in funding mechanisms. In April of 2005, a second EFAB report recommended a foundation level of $6405 for FY06 (Education Funding Advisory Board, *Illinois Education Funding*, 2005*)*. The actual allocation was $5164 per student (Fritts, 2008). Over the subsequent years since FY06, the foundation level of the Illinois general state aid formula has crept up to a level of $6119 for FY10 (ISBE. Funding: General State Aid, 2010). The General Assembly had not sent a final budget for FY11 to Illinois Governor Pat Quinn by the time this article was completed, but school districts have been told to expect a foundation level of less than $5000 for FY 11.

The purpose of this chapter was to show that not only is there a disparity of funding between and among states, but also within school districts in individual states. Illinois and Colorado funding levels were examined to show that those school districts with the highest concentrations of minority and low income students are the most likely to be inadequately funded by the state. This leads to fewer resources to employ the most qualified teachers and administrators. The social justice implications of this situation are addressed later in the paper.

**Illinois School District Structure**

One of the recommendations of the previously cited original EFAB report was to encourage the consolidation of school districts. Illinois is a populous state with a public school enrollment of 2,035,211 students in the 2008–2009 school year (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009). These students were educated in 869 school districts utilizing a triad of organizational structures. Some school districts in Illinois are K-12 unit districts. These tend to predominate in rural and downstate Illinois. Another type of district is the K-8 elementary district. Finally, there are also grades 9–12 high school districts in Illinois. The reason that Illinois has so many school districts dates back to the Land Ordinance of 1785. It had several key purposes, but "one of its key provisions was to divide the land acquired from Great Britain following the Revolutionary War, primarily in the Midwest, into six mile square townships, each composed of 36 one square mile blocks"(Kersten, 2009, p. 6). At one time in the mid-twentieth century, Illinois had over 10,000 school districts. Virtually every school was a separate school district. While many school district consolidations occurred in the last century, and even periodically occur today, Illinois residents are protective of their local schools. In the words of Kersten (2009),

To understand how the township system still impacts Illinois public schools, let us use Niles Township as an example. The township is composed of the following elementary (K-8) school districts:

- Golf School District 67
- Skokie School District 68
- Skokie School District 69
- Morton Grove School District 70
- Niles School District 71
- Fairview School District 72
- East Prairie School District 73
- Skokie School District 73 ½
- Lincolnwood School District 74.

With the exception of a small portion of Golf 67 that was annexed by the Glenview School District 34 in the 1980s, all school district boundaries are coterminous (same boundaries) with Niles Township High School District 219 which is the public high school serving all township students. (p.7)

While this is a highly populated region of the state, one township has ten public school districts within its boundaries. Kersten (2009) stated that virtually all of the territory of the nine elementary districts was contained within the borders of the one high school district. This type of situation makes it more likely that the curriculum is coordinated among the elementary and high school districts. However, there are many situations in Illinois where the elementary and high school districts are not coterminous, and students from one elementary district may move on to two more separate high school districts. The problem with the large number of school districts in Illinois does not generally fall within the property rich suburban areas of the state, such as the Niles Township area. Rather, the EFAB call for consolidation was generally directed toward the less wealthy districts in the more rural and downstate portions of the state. These are the districts that are spending closer to the $6000 level per student, which is considerably less than their northern Illinois counterparts.

In its 12th annual comparison of educational practices in the 50 states, the Editorial Projects in Education's report titled *Quality Counts 2008* rated Illinois 43rd among the states in a key component called the "Wealth Neutrality Score"(Educational Projects in Education Research Center, 2008). This score measures the ratio between district funding and local property tax wealth. Only seven states showed a less equitable ratio than Illinois. In another equity measure in the same study, Illinois ranked 40th in actual spending as the % of the amount needed to bring all students to the median level (Educational Projects in Education Research Center, 2008).

## Legal Challenges

There have been legal challenges to the Illinois school funding formula. Even though the Illinois Constitution contains a strongly worded education clause, giving the state primary responsibility for funding the schools, the Illinois Supreme Court has twice rejected challenges to the state's finance system, based upon the separation of powers principle. In the first case, heard in 1996, the court held that the process of school funding reform must be undertaken in a legislative forum rather than in the courts (*Committee for Educational Rights*

*vs. Edgar,* 1996*).* In a similar case, decided in 1999, the court rejected the plaintiff's attempt to distinguish its 1996 decision from their "adequacy" claims and stated that it would not enter in to the arena of Illinois public school policy (*Lewis E. vs. Spagnolo* , 1999). In August of 2008, the plaintiffs in *Chicago Urban League vs. State of Illinois* filed a complaint asking the court to declare Illinois' current school funding system unconstitutional. In this case, the plaintiffs stated that the Illinois finance system was in violation of the provision of the state constitution guaranteeing all students a high quality education and that it also discriminates against families based on race in violation of the Illinois Civil Rights Act of 2003. While the Cook County Circuit Court dismissed four of the five claims made in the complaint, it did find that the plaintiffs had met their burden to allege facts demonstrating that minority students have suffered injury from the discriminatory, although unintentional, effect of the implementation of the Illinois school funding system (*Chicago Urban League, et.al. vs. State of Illinois*, 2009). The Court's opinion highlighted some of the more startling facts from the complaint concerning Illinois' inequitable school funding system. These are explicated below:

- Students who attend schools in property-poor communities do not receive an equal educational opportunity. Illinois ranks 49th in the nation in the size of per-pupil funding disparity between its lowest and highest poverty districts.
- The EAV [Equalized Assessed Valuation] per pupil in the top five wealthiest districts ranged from $1.2 to $1.8 million, while the EAV per pupil ranged from $7000 to just over $24,000 in the five districts with the lowest property wealth.
- The disparity existed despite the fact that low property wealth areas generally pay much higher property tax rates than areas with higher property wealth, and yet they still generate less local funding for their schools. The tax rate in the districts with the lowest property wealth was more than six times higher than the tax rate in the highest poverty districts.
- As just one example, Illinois School District Unit 188 in Brooklyn, Illinois, ranked 386th out of a total of 395 consolidated [K-12] school districts in EAV per student in 2007, 97% of Brooklyn's students came from low income households in 2007, and almost 100% of Brooklyn's students are African-American or Hispanic. (*Chicago Urban League*, *et.al. vs. State of Illinois*, 2009, p.1)

The plaintiffs are considering an appeal to the Illinois Supreme Court on the rejected claims. However, the plaintiffs believe that this ruling paves the way for them to receive relief that was sought when the case was originally filed. This relief would essentially be a revision of the Illinois system of financing its schools (*Chicago Urban League, et.al. vs. State of Illinois*, 2009, p.1).

The most recent Illinois court case related to the funding of schools was filed on March 24, 2010 in the Circuit Court of the Seventh Judicial Circuit, in Sangamon County, Illinois (*Carr vs. Koch*). In this case, known as *Carr vs. Koch*, the plaintiffs were Paul Carr, a high school counselor who resided in Chicago Heights, Illinois and who owned property in the Homewood-Flossmoor Consolidated High School District 233, and Ron Newell, a retired teacher, resident and property owner in Cairo Unified School District 1, in Cairo, Illinois. The plaintiffs filed this suit under the Equal Protection Clause of the Illinois Constitution because they claimed, "In short, the State education funding system imposes substantially greater burdens on taxpayers who reside in property-poor districts than it does on similarly situated

taxpayers who reside in property-rich districts"(*Carr vs. Koch*, 2010, p.2). While the Homewood-Flossmoor District is located in the south suburbs near Chicago, and Cairo is the southernmost community in Illinois, both have a large majority of minority and low-income students. While the plaintiffs, as current and former educators are filing the complaint with students in mind, they hope to overthrow the current Illinois school funding system by highlighting the disparate impact upon taxpayers.

**School District Financial Health in Illinois**

For several years, the Illinois State Board of Education has generated a Financial Profile for each of the 869 school districts in the state. This profile analyzes the following five ratios and generates a score and fiscal health rating for each school district. The five indicators were:

1. Fund Balance to Revenue Ratio. This indicator reflected the overall financial strength of the district. It was the result of dividing the ending fund balances by the revenues for the four operating and negative IMRF/SS funds. Operating Funds are the Educational, Operations and Maintenance, Transportation and Working Cash funds.
2. Expenditure to Revenue Ratio. This indicator identified how much is expended for each dollar received.
3. Days Cash on Hand Ratio. This indicator provided a projected estimate of the number of days a district could meet operating expenditures provided no additional revenues were received.
4. Percent of Short-Term Borrowing Ability Remaining. Districts often incurred short-term debt due to several factors (i.e., delays in receipt of local revenues, etc.).
5. Percent of Long-Term Debt Margin Remaining. A district often incurred long-term debt for major expenditures such as buildings and equipment. (School District Financial Profile, 2009)

After calculating these ratios, ISBE generated a Financial Profile Designation for each district based upon the following score ranges:

- Financial Recognition (3.54–4.00)
- Financial Review (3.08–3.53)
- Financial Early Warning (2.62–3.07)
- Financial Watch (1.00–2.61). (School District Financial Profile, 2009)

Based upon these financial calculations for the 2008–2009 (FY09) school year, of the 869 school districts in Illinois, 550 achieved Financial Recognition, 203 were placed in the Financial Review category, 77 were designated as Financial Early Warning Districts, and 39 were targeted for Financial Watch (School District Financial Profile, 2009). In the most extreme cases, the ISBE may appoint a financial oversight panel to actually take over and run the most troubled districts. Currently, five school districts operate under ISBE appointed oversight panels. These districts are Cairo, Hazel Crest, Proviso Township, Round Lake and Venice. These districts are spread geographically throughout the state, with three being in northern Illinois, one in southwestern Illinois, and the fifth in deep southern Illinois.

In essence, although Illinois is often perceived as a wealthy state, in 2011, it faced a $13 billion budget deficit. Historically, in spite of past state surpluses, the educational opportunities provided to students varied greatly, depending upon their specific school districts. Some students in property-rich districts received the best education possible, often matriculating to the nation's best universities. Others, often living only a few miles from the most advantaged students, perhaps even in the same county, were educated in schools with limited current curricular materials, supplies, access to technology, and excellent teachers.

## UNIQUE COLORADO CHARACTERISTICS

Colorado educated 802,639 students in 178 school districts in 2007-2008 (Colorado Department of Education, 2007). Colorado was selected for comparison with Illinois because it differs from Illinois in its approach to schooling in major ways. While Illinois is heavily unionized, Colorado is not as unionized as Illinois. This unionization extends to the teaching ranks. In many instances, Illinois teacher local unions are very powerful and strongly impact the bargaining which leads to teacher work conditions and compensation. Colorado's teacher unions are continuing to evolve, but do not generally have the influence seen in Illinois. Due in part to the weaker teacher unions, Colorado has long had a number of options leading to flexibility and options for parents and students. Colorado has been an open enrollment state since 1991, which essentially means that any student may attend any school district in the state, as long as there is room.

The popularity of the open enrollment option soon led to the growth of the charter school movement in Colorado. In 1993, Senator Bill Owens, a Republican, and Representative Peggy Kerns, a Democrat, introduced the original Charter Schools Act, which was subsequently signed by Governor Roy Romer, a Democrat (C.R.S.22-30.5-101 et. seq.). Thus, this Act had bi-partisan support in Colorado. Over the seventeen years since the passage of the original Charter Schools Act, it has been modified numerous times, often liberalizing the Act. The first Colorado charter school was initiated shortly after the passage of the Act, and the growth in charter schools has been very strong. Six years after the passage of the Charter School Act, there was a legal challenge to the State Board of Education's ability to appeal public school districts' decisions regarding the granting of charters. In a Colorado Supreme Court case, involving the Denver Public Schools (DPS), the Court denied DPS's contention that it had the right to determine educational delivery within its boundaries (*Board of Education School District No.1 vs. Booth,* 1999). During the 2007–2008 school year, there were 141 charter schools operating in the state of Colorado. These schools served 56,788 students which constituted nearly 7% of the K-12 public school enrollment in Colorado (Carpenter & Kafer, 2008). According to Carpenter and Kafer, "If all the charter schools were combined into an imaginary district, the enrollment of that district would be the fourth largest in the state" (Carpenter & Kafer., 2008, p.10). While most of the charter schools are in Front-Range cities and suburbs, some also exist in rural areas in the mountains and plains. By 2007, 46 of the 178 (25.4%) Colorado school districts had authorized charter schools (Carpenter & Kafer, 2008). The charter school enrollment within districts with three or more charter schools in 2007-2008 ranged from 4.1% (Adams-Arapaho 28J) to 16.9% (Northglenn-Thornton 12) (Carpenter & Kafer, 2008). While it was initially thought that charter schools would primarily serve at-risk students, that concept has changed and Colorado charter schools now serve all types of students. There are often claims that charter schools are overly selective and do not pull their student enrollments from a wide range of students. However, when reviewing one often examined category, racial balance, Colorado charter schools enrolled 20,930

racial/ethnic minority students in 2007–2008, which constituted 37% of their total enrollment, as compared to a statewide racial/ethnic percentage of 39% (Carpenter & Kafer, 2008). In this category, the charter schools were fairly comparable to the state average.

While funding inequities do exist among Colorado school districts, these differences are not as extreme as in Illinois. During the 2008-2009 school year, the per pupil expenditure in Colorado ranged from a low of $4187 in Branson Reorganized District 82 in Las Animas County to a high of $10,981 per student in Pritchett RE-3 School District in Baca County (Comparison of Instructional Expenditures by Location, 2008-2009). Both of these districts are located in rural areas of the state. Arapahoe County, with seven school districts, falls primarily in Denver metropolitan area. Arapahoe County school district expenditures range from a low of $5374 per student in Byers 32 J School District to a high of $7636 per student in Deer Trail 26 J (Carpenter  & Kafer, 2008). Thus, this county has a fairly tight spread of funding levels. Denver County District 1, or the Denver Public Schools, operated upon a per pupil expenditure of $5684 in 2008–2009 (Carpenter & Kafer, 2008).

**School District Financial Health in Colorado**

Like Illinois, Colorado does an analysis of the financial health of school districts. Unlike Illinois, Colorado's analysis is conducted by the Office of the State Auditor, assisted by the Legislative Audit Committee. However, the type of analysis completed, as well as the financial indicators utilized in this process have many similarities to those used in Illinois. Colorado utilizes the following financial ratios in its analysis of school district financial health:

1. Asset Sufficiency Ratio (ASR). This ratio indicates whether the school district's total assets are adequate to cover all of its obligations or amounts owed. This ratio divides the general fund total assets by general fund total liabilities.
2. Debt Burden Ratio (DBR). This ratio indicates whether the school district's annual revenue will cover its annual debt payments including principal and interest. This ratio divides total government revenue of funds paying debt by total governmental debt payments.
3. Operating Reserve Ratio (ORR). This ratio indicates the school district's reserve to cover future expenditures. This ratio divides the fund balance of the general fund by the total fund general fund expenditures.
4. Operating Margin Ratio (OMR). This ratio indicates the amount added to the school district's reserves for every $1 generated in revenues. This ratio subtracts general fund expenditures from general fund total revenue and divides by general fund total revenues.
5. Deficit Fund Balance Ratio (DFBR). This ratio indicates the portion of annual revenue the school district must generate simply to cover an existing deficit fund balance in a governmental fund. This ratio is only calculated when a net deficit fund balance exists. This ratio subtracts the fund balance of the general fund if the balance is positive, from the total deficit fund balances (shown as an absolute value) and divides the total by the total revenue in the deficit funds.
6. Change in Fund Balance Ratio (CFBR). This ratio indicates whether the school district's reserves in its general fund are increasing or decreasing. This ratio subtracts the prior year fund balance of the general fund from the current year fund balance and divides by the prior year fund balance. (Fiscal Analysis of Colorado School Districts, 2009)

The 2008–2009 fiscal analysis completed by the Colorado Auditor and Legislative Audit Committee, based upon the six categories above showed that of Colorado's 178 school districts, 43 had one or more warning indicators, based upon state determined negative ratings in the six categories listed above (Fiscal Analysis of Colorado School Districts, 2009). An analysis of these 43 districts identified 28 districts with one warning indicator, 13 districts with two warning indicators, one district had three warning indicators, and one district had four warning indicators (Fiscal Analysis of Colorado School Districts, 2009). Perhaps not surprisingly, the district with three warning indicators was Branson Reorganized District 82 in Las Animas County, which had the lowest per pupil expenditure that year. The 43 districts with warning indicators exhibited a total of 61 indicators among the 6 categories, with most of the warning indicators occurring in the operating margin (OMR) and in changes in the fund balance (CFBR) (Fiscal Analysis of Colorado School Districts, 2009). The changes in the fund balance category shows that the districts with a negative rating in this area were spending down their district reserves. While this could have been intentional in some cases, it was more likely that this was done out of necessity, due to financial stress.

As might be anticipated from the smaller discrepancies between the higher and lower spending school districts in Colorado, the 12th annual *Quality Counts* study conducted in 2008 showed Colorado with better scores in the areas of its "Wealth Neutrality Score." Whereas Illinois scored 43rd out of 50 states, Colorado scored 37th. When comparing the actual spending needed to bring all students to the median level, Colorado ranked 22nd compared to Illinois' 40th place ranking.

## DISPARATE FISCAL IMPACT ON LOWER INCOME DISTRICTS

It has been confirmed that both Illinois and Colorado have disparate school funding regulations, with Illinois' system being the less equitable of the two systems. Thus, the normal impact upon students in the districts with a heavier reliance upon state aid is a smaller expenditure upon each pupil than in those districts with a larger tax base (Fritts, 2008). While this situation is unfair in normal economic times, it is exacerbated in times of economic stress. When increases in general state aid are held to minimal levels, or when state aid is reduced, as is now being suggested, the consequences can be dire for poorer districts. While there is and will be a negative impact upon the property-rich school districts, they are more able to survive the economic difficulties which ensue from state financial reductions. Therefore, when districts with little or even moderate reliance upon general state aid are forced to make major reductions, then it can be assumed that the less fortunate school districts are facing major financial stress. The fiscal situation in Illinois has been in a downward spiral for several years. One indicator of this is the growing number of districts in financial trouble as indicated by the previously mentioned financial watch list. In FY09, 29 school districts were on the state's financial watch list, which is the most severe category. This was an increase of 7 districts over the FY08 total of 22 school districts (Boyan, 2010). In a related indicator, 44% of Illinois school districts were expected to overspend in FY09, compared with 40% in FY08, and 32.5% in FY07 (Boyan, 2010). This shows a clear trend in a negative direction for those school districts, especially since Illinois school districts have been required to operate with balanced budgets, beginning in 2006. A major reason for the deficit spending by some school districts is "…the state owes schools $894.2 million in unpaid bills. That could reach $1 billion by the end of the school year" (Boyan, 2010, p.1).

Due to the continuing decline in Illinois' financial situation, many Illinois public school districts have been forced to make major reductions in their budgets. A number of

press accounts supporting this assertion are cited below. The only feasible way to make reductions of the magnitude currently required is to eliminate administrative positions, teaching positions, and support staff positions. In FY 2008, the typical Illinois public school district spent 66% of its budget on salaries and another 11% on employee benefits, for a total of 78% spent on personnel (Smith, 2008). Therefore, any reductions of any magnitude would require cuts in staffing levels. Many Illinois public school districts made major reductions during the 2008–2009 school year. The pace of such reductions intensified during the 2009-2010 school year, in preparation for the next school year. Even districts considered to be middle class with good academic achievement have been forced to make major staff reductions. For example, "The Roxana School Board has issued potential layoff notices to 11 of its teachers and may also lay off 17 or 18 non-certified staff members working as teachers' aides. The board also voted Thursday night to lay off one assistant principal at Roxana Middle School" (Roxana Notifies Teachers of Possible Layoffs, 2010, p.1). In two other school districts located in Madison County, the same county as Roxana, large staff reductions were also implemented. Edwardsville and Bethalto both made cuts. It was reported by one news outlet, "Edwardsville let 25 teachers go, as well as 18 teaching assistants, five parent educators, five custodians, and seven administrators were reassigned" (KTVI News, *East St. Louis School District Making Massive Cuts*, 2010, p.2). In the same article, it was announced, "Big layoffs are also coming in the Bethalto School District. Despite student and teacher protests, roughly one-in-four teachers, 54, became casualties of those state budget cuts, along with nine support staff and an assistant superintendent (KTVI News, *East St. Louis School District Making Massive Cuts*, 2010, p.2).

While these reductions are likely to have a deleterious impact upon the districts noted, similar reductions have the potential of being devastating to less advantaged districts across the state. For example, East St. Louis School District 189, in St. Clair County, Illinois, was under financial oversight by the Illinois State Board of Education from 1994-2004. After spending years digging itself out of a deficit situation, with the guidance of a state oversight panel, the district is again facing a financial crisis. Fox News 2 reported, "District 189 will slash just over 300 employees through early retirement and layoffs. The pink slips will go to 134 teachers who do not have tenure. Twenty-six other certified staff including some district administrators and social workers will lose their jobs, as will 61 non-certified staff" (KTVI News. *Deep Cuts*, 2010, p.2). East St. Louis District 189 has an African-American student enrollment of 97.8%, compared with an Illinois average of 19.1% (Illinois State Board of Education, 2010). The low income rate for District 189 is 66.2%, compared with a statewide average of 42.9% (Illinois State Board of Education, 2010). In Illinois, low income students come from families receiving public aid; live in institutions for neglected or delinquent children; are supported in foster homes with public funds; or are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches (Illinois State Board of Education, 2010).

In another school district, Venice CUSD 3, previously cited as currently being one of the five Illinois districts under state financial oversight, the situation is easily as bleak as in East St. Louis. Venice has an African-American student population of 91%, compared with the statewide average of 19.1% (Illinois State Board of Education, 2010). However, 92.5% of Venice's students are listed as low income, compared with the state average of 42.9% (Illinois State Board of Education, 2010). Cairo USD 1, located in Alexander County, Illinois, is another of the five districts currently under state financial oversight. Cairo's student population is 86.7% African-American and 99.7% of its students are classified as low income.

All three of the financially stressed school districts just mentioned are currently struggling with the issue of student academic achievement. Venice, an elementary district, is

not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (Illinois State Board of Education: School Report Cards, 2010). In 2009, East St. Louis had a high school graduation rate of 62.1%, compared with the Illinois statewide average of 87.1% (Illinois State Board of Education: School Report Cards, 2010). All high school juniors in Illinois take the ACT examination, which is a college entrance examination. The ACT is administered as a section of the statewide testing program for AYP purposes. Students in East St. Louis had an average composite ACT score of 15.2, compared with a statewide ACT composite of 20.6 in 2009 (Illinois State Board of Education: School Report Cards, 2010). In Cairo, a district under state oversight, the 2009 ACT composite was 16.1 (Illinois State Board of Education: School Report Cards, 2010).

## RAMIFICATIONS

There is no guarantee that increasing school funding for school districts in low-income areas will automatically improve student academic achievement. Indeed, the issue of poor academic achievement among many low-income students may be more related to background experiences, or lack thereof, as opposed to the number of dollars spent on each student in particular schools and school districts (Marzano, 2003; Ravitch, 2010). However, if the districts educating students from lower income homes do not have a level of financing on a par with the wealthier districts, it is highly unlikely that major strides can be made in the improvement of academic achievement. The disparate funding is truly a violation of the ethic of justice, which calls for all students to be given the same baseline of opportunities (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2007). All school districts need to start on a level playing field. There is also some indication that additional funding, such as that allocated in Colorado, may help erase some of the deficits faced by low income students.

It appears unlikely that the school funding mechanism will change soon in either Illinois or Colorado. Even if the public school funding system is overturned by the courts in either state, it will then take additional time to devise and implement a replacement system. In the interim, many school districts in lower income areas will continue to operate with less money per students than those in more affluent areas.

There are school districts in the U.S. commonly referred to as 90/90/90 school districts (Reeves, 2003). These are schools which have a 90 percent poverty rate, a 90 percent minority enrollment, and a 90 percent academic success rate. In spite of the poverty rate in these 90/90/90 districts, students are still making excellent academic progress. While the inequity of school financing certainly exists in many states in the U.S., and while these disparities are being exacerbated by the economic downturn in the U.S., the students in these economically distressed districts still deserve the best education possible. Until such time as more equitable funding mechanisms can be put into place in the U.S., it is incumbent upon school leaders and school boards to become familiar with and to implement the best practices from the 90/90/90 schools, to the extent possible. Marzano (2003) addressed the best practices in the most effective schools, which includes the 90/90/90 schools in the following prioritized listing:

1. Guaranteed and viable curriculum;
2. Challenging goals and effective feedback;
3. Parent and community involvement;
4. Safe and orderly environment; and
5. Collegiality and professionalism. (p.15)

Waiting for fiscal conditions to change before taking action will be time wasted and will be a disservice to all students, but particularly those in fiscally challenged school districts.

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# Experiences with PTELL in Six Illinois School Districts: Leadership Perceptions and Student Performance

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The discussion of public education funding has been acrimonious, controversial, and is sure to be debated well into the future. The State of Illinois has a complex formula for computing State Aid for school district funding but the percentage of state revenue to schools has decreased and local property taxation has been the majority source of funding for public education. With the economy being in recession, there is no discussion of increasing State revenues to increase funding for our schools.

In 1991 the Illinois General Assembly passed legislation that limited the amount of local property taxes that may be levied for all municipal forms of government, which included public school districts. The legislation was known as the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law (PTELL). This legislation limited the amount of property taxes that could be levied based upon the lesser of either a maximum of 5% or the Consumer Price Index, which most recently has remained under 1%. The PTELL legislation permitted counties to conduct referenda to decide whether to impose this tax cap or not. Currently, 39 counties of the state's 102 have approved tax caps for their municipalities including local school districts. These 39 tax-capped counties contain over 52% of the school districts of the state (Olsen, 2001, July 23).

When compared to other measures enacted earlier in the "modern era" of property tax limitations, Sokolow (1998) characterizes PTELL as a "cautious and limited" approach to property tax limitation. PTELL attempts to limit the increase in taxes extended (paid) to a taxing body in successive years to the lesser of either five percent or the percentage of change in the Consumer Price Index for urban consumers (C.P.I.-U). The central feature of PTELL is calculation of the "limiting rate," which is the multiplier that is applied to the previous year's total extension (taxes paid to the taxing body) to calculate the maximum extension for the current year (Illinois Department of Revenue, 2001). PTELL exempts from limitation any property in the first year it appears on the tax rolls. Therefore, a taxing district experiencing a relatively high level of new property each year could realize growth in the tax extension that would be greater than either five percent or the change in the C.P.I.-U (Illinois Department of Revenue).

Since 1991, when tax cap legislation was passed, numerous studies have been done analyzing the consequences of this new law. In 1997, a study of the highly affluent counties of Will, Kan, Du Page, Lake, McHenry, and Cook found a limited effect on school district operating expenditures but no effect on school district instructional spending (Dye & McGuire, 1997). Another 1998 study of school districts in the Chicago area revealed limited evidence of any effect of tax caps on student performance ( Downes , Dye, & McGuire,1998).

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Much of the research was conducted shortly after the tax cap legislation was approved; therefore, significant differences may not have not observed in these earlier studies. Additional research was needed to further investigate any relationship between property tax limitations and student achievement on a larger scale. In a study of all Unit School Districts in Illinois, there was no significant relationship between PTELL and ISAT test scores for each of three years studied including FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008 (Manahan, 2009). The results of the study did suggest that there was a significant relationship between PTELL and student achievement in terms of the three year trend differences over this timeframe.

The case study provided a deeper understanding of the experience of school leaders under PTELL and of the impact of PTELL on school revenues in tax-capped school districts in Central Illinois. Earlier research focused on school districts in the six affluent counties upon which the Illinois General assembly imposed PTELL (Downes, Dye & McGuire, 1998; Dye & McGuire, 1997; Hylbert, 2001; Rudow, 2003). The lack of focus on the remaining 33 counties of Illinois, particularly in the counties of Central and Southern regions of the state, created a void in the full understanding of PTELL. School districts in those counties typically are not as fortunate with the same level of property values (Illinois Local Educational Agency Retrieval Network, 2005) and do not experience the same level of population growth (Illinois Statistical Abstract, 2003) as the school districts in Northern Illinois. This gap suggested the overriding question: Is the experience with PTELL in low-growth and lower property value counties the same as in higher growth, higher property value counties?

## CASE STUDY OF SELECTED DISTRICTS UNDER PTELL

The researchers entered the study with the twin purpose of developing a deeper understanding of the experiences of school district leaders across Central Illinois area with PTELL and to learn what administrators do in response to what they perceive as the impact PTELL has on their districts. Previous studies examined PTELL through various quantitative designs that yielded information on student achievement in school systems under the tax limitation (Downes, Dye & McGuire, 1998), fiscal effects of PTELL on taxing bodies (Dye & McGuire; Dye, McGuire & McMillen, 2005), and the state of selected financial characteristics and leader perceptions in school districts under PTELL (Hylbert, 2001; Rudow, 2003). These earlier studies pulled data primarily from taxing bodies in the affluent, urban, and growing counties of Cook and the collar counties. The researchers sought to provide a deeper understanding of the tax limitation law by probing the experiences of school leaders in Central Illinois through a case study approach and to convey the experience of leading school districts under PTELL through the feelings, perceptions, and beliefs of those individuals who fill school leadership roles.

## METHODOLOGY

Six school districts were selected from the 16 PTELL adopter counties in Central Illinois, which was operationally defined for this study as the counties lying wholly south of Interstate 80 and north of Interstate 70. The researcher selected districts that were under PTELL at least 5 years since similar revenue limitations generally become more constraining over a period of time (Cox & Lowery, 1990; Dye, McGuire & McMillen, 2005). All six of the districts eventually selected were in five counties that adopted PTELL at least 7 years prior to the start of the study (Illinois Department of Revenue, 2009). Table 1 provides a listing and descriptions of the six participating school districts.

**Table 1.** Participating School Districts.

| Name | Type (Grade Level) | Enrollment | Description |
|------|--------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Exton | High School (9-12) | 783 | High % of low-income students |
| Gateway | High School (9-12) | 1,067 | Low % of low-income students |
| Sundown Ridge | Elementary (K-8) | 166 | Negative rate of EAV growth |
| New Prairie | Elementary (K-8) | 682 | High rate of EAV growth |
| Millennium | Unit (K-12) | 700 | High rate of EAV growth |
| Haptowne | Unit (K-12) | 366 | Negative rate of EAV growth |

*Note:* All districts names are pseudonyms provided to protect confidentiality. Enrollment data was from 2005 and was taken from the *Interactive Illinois Report Card (2005)*. Retrieved February 3, 2007 from http://iirc.niu.edu. Information on EAV growth rates was obtained from the *Illinois Local Education Agency Retrieval Network (2005)*. Retrieved May 20, 2006 from http://webprod1.isbe.net/ilearn/ASP/LstARCDData.asp.

As can be seen in Table 1, the districts that participated in the study represented the three types of school districts that exist in Illinois. The description of each district supplied in Table 1 indicates the characteristic that served as the basis of its selection for the study. Two districts of each type were paired for study based on their contrasting descriptions. All field work was conducted from late 2006 through early 2007.

Selection of participating districts was purposeful, driven by two criteria. One was the need for proximity to the researchers; as a matter of practicality, all districts studied would need to be within a reasonable commuting distance. The other was that all districts be located in low-growth counties. PTELL allows a taxing body to take full advantage of new construction only in the first year it appears on the tax rolls. The effects of PTELL in counties experiencing a robust level of new construction would be mitigated. Since comparisons of new construction data proved to be very difficult to obtain, the researchers used population growth rate as a proxy indicator for the amount of new construction in a county. The five counties in northeast Illinois (Du Page, Kane, Mc Henry, Lake, and Will) in which the state originally imposed PTELL exhibited higher rates of population growth, both individually and as a group, than the adopter counties in Central Illinois (Illinois Statistical Abstract, 2003), with the lowest average growth rate in the data available at the time was falling between one and two percent. This fact led the researchers to limit selection of participating school districts to those located in Central Illinois counties with average growth rates of less than one percent. The result of the numerous criteria employed was a discriminate sampling approach, fully intended to maximize the potential learning of what PTELL meant to school leaders in Central Illinois school districts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The researchers contacted the superintendent of each selected school district to gain permission to conduct research in the school system and to seek their informed consent to be an individual participant. In one district, the business manager was the primary participant since he had the primary financial decision-making role. Each primary participant was asked

to identify one building-level staff member who had worked since before PTELL was enacted in the county. The researchers interviewed each superintendent or business manager twice and each building-level participant once, with each interview taking approximately 60 minutes. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant. The semi-structured interview was selected in order to give the researchers access to a broader range of information from the participants as each may be more likely to open up and share more deeply of his or her personal experiences (Kvale, 1996).

The researchers employed a simple coding approach to analyze interview data and identify the patterns and recurring themes. The themes more relevant to students and district finances are included in the results section. The theoretical perspectives gave structure to the data assembled into a scheme that better explained both each specific case and the experience of school leadership under PTELL, in general. The analysis was performed to provide illumination and better understanding of PTELL as it formed part of the context for certain Central Illinois school districts (Shank, 2002).

## RESULTS OF THE CASE STUDY

Analysis of interview data from the case study led to the identification of several themes in the six districts enlisted for the study. In the larger study that formed the basis of this paper, the themes touched on a wide range of issues associated with PTELL. The themes presented here focus on two major areas of the school leadership:

- School district revenues and fiscal practices
- The impact on students

The themes were discussed as they pertained to each of the major areas. Where appropriate, the words of the participants were included to provide rich description and deepen the understanding of the experience of Central Illinois school districts that are under PTELL.

### District Revenues and Fiscal Practices

**Tax revenues maximized every year.** The school leaders that were interviewed expressed that they felt compelled to maximize their levies every year, regardless of the actual fiscal need of the respective school districts. The PTELL formula bases the allowable growth of each year's tax levy on the total levy from the previous year. School leaders expressed that this fact left no recourse but to maximize the tax levy each year. Failure to do so would result in permanent loss of access to locally-generated financial resources. As one superintendent said, "Prior to PTELL, we lowered the levy when we didn't need money in the bank….Since that time, we have nailed the taxpayers to the wall." Another superintendent responded, "…it's led to schools taking more taxes than they felt they would have had to take in order to maintain an increasing base on which they could base next year's levy."

The tax levy was no longer constructed with any thought given to the actual financial need of the district. The primary goal of the levy in PTELL districts was to maximize the amount of tax revenue each year. Fear of losing access to all potential revenues became more important than responsible financial planning in the development of the tax levy.

**Cash reserves accumulated in limited-use funds.** Two of the participating districts had tax bases that were decreasing. This created a situation in which those districts had to raise the overall tax rate to maximize the levy. Statutory and voter-established rate limits on some of the funds forced these school districts to use the restricted-use funds, such as Tort and the funds used for Social Security and pension payments, as a means of maximizing the tax levy each year. Unique to Illinois, these funds do not have a tax-rate limitation imposed by statute or by voters, and the tax rate imposed in each of them is affected only by the overall limitations placed on the total levy by PTELL. While these funds were limited in their use, the tax rate in each fund can increase to whatever level is allowable under PTELL. This fiscal practice resulted in a growing level of cash reserves in funds that are very limited in how they could be used.

A total of three school districts involved in the study featured the practice of increasing restricted use funds as a means to capture all possible property tax revenue each year and to ensure attainment of the highest allowable base for the next year's levy. The superintendents involved in this use of the restricted purpose funds recognized that it wasn't the "best use" of public tax dollars but they felt it was necessary to ensure that their respective levies would be maximized in each successive year. One superintendent in a district with a declining Equalized Assessed Valuation (EAV) said:

> If one increases their levy each year by the cost of living, their income
> continues to go up even as the assessed value goes down. But, to do that, the
> tax rate has to go up and the only funds that can be used to collect those funds
> are Tort, Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF), and Social Security.

In another district, also with a declining EAV, the superintendent revealed that the district's most recent levy requested more revenue in the Tort, Social Security and IMRF funds than the district possibly needed. She explained, "If I didn't have to worry about the base eroding, I wouldn't have to take so much."

PTELL limits the growth of property tax revenue of school districts and other taxing bodies. Absent new construction EAV, as the property values increase over time, the limitation imposed by PTELL will result in an erosion of the overall tax rate. Therefore, the tax rate allowable in the Tort, IMRF and Social Security funds will be limited. The districts in the study that made the most use out of the three limited-use funds had a decreasing EAV, resulting in significant jumps in the total tax rate. The levy in these districts reflected the need to maximize the total tax dollars taken in and did not reflect the actual needs of the school district to pay for expenditures from the Tort, IMRF and Social Security funds.

**The last pre-PTELL tax levy maximized taxes and tax rates.** The available literature on PTELL revealed newspaper accounts of governing bodies making maximum use of the last levy that would be passed before PTELL went into effect (Ratcliffe, 1999, April 5; Sanderstrom, 2001). This restriction also occurred in four of the six districts in the study. School boards adopted levies that maximized all allowable tax rates. Boards in some districts approved working cash or life safety bond sales. The bond payments were "front-loaded" to push the highest tax rate and total levy amount into the last pre-PTELL levy. Working cash and life safety bonds, absent an appropriate petition by the district's taxpayers, may be issued without a referendum. Under PTELL, that is still true for any working cash or life safety bond issues that will not cause the district to exceed the total taxes extended to service the bonded

indebtedness of the district immediately before PTELL went into effect. Levels of debt were maintained as a certain means of providing the highest possible base level from which the extension could grow in succeeding years.

The record of growth in the total taxes extended to the six school districts in the study illustrates this theme. The median percent change in the extension for the six districts ranged from a low of 3.15 % to a high of 7.15%. The percent change in the last pre-PTELL extension values ranged from a low of 6.8 % to a high of 24.9 % (Illinois Local Education Agency Retrieval Network, 2005). In only two of the six districts was there no attempt to maximize the last tax levy filed before PTELL went into effect, resulting in a less-than-maximized final pre-PTELL tax extension.

**Expenditures outpaced revenues.** PTELL allows property tax revenue to grow in successive years by either the change in the Consumer Price Index for Urban consumers (C.P.I.-U) or five percent, whichever is less (Illinois Department of Revenue, 2001). The perception in four of the six districts was that PTELL limited the growth of tax revenue to the point that it no longer outpaced the growth of expenditures. One superintendent explained, "Caps are limiting the increases in funds, yet expenditures such as health insurance aren't capped in what increases they can have … the increase in costs don't follow the C.P.I." The business manager in another district explained how limiting the allowable increase in tax revenue to the increase in the C.P.I. is harmful:

> No matter how good your school system is, no matter how well supported, if you're under PTELL your tax base will erode. The reason is because half of your revenue stays the same, at least in our case. You can't run a district if your revenues only increase 1.7 to 3.4 percent. That is only half of your revenues that increase, the other half stays flat. So, you actually only get that percent in half, so it is like getting .8 to 1.7 percent more money. You can't run a school district on that. Paper, heating costs, textbooks, contract costs for personnel, all these things go up by much greater than the C.P.I.

The statement "half of your revenues" was a reference to the flat level of state aid received by the district in which the business manager worked. While not expressed in all six of the districts in the study, the majority of the participants were unequivocal in the view that, under PTELL, school district revenues became increasingly inadequate to meet the growing cost of education.

## IMPACT ON STUDENTS

**Preservation of pre-PTELL programming.** When PTELL was first initiated, district leaders stated that it did not adversely impact students' educational programs because they were able to preserve the programs and course offerings that existed when PTELL went into effect. Most of the districts in the study did not discontinue anything offered to students, a fact interpreted by school leaders to mean that students did not suffer any initial adverse effects from PTELL's passage.

Not all school district administrators shared this benign view of PTELL. The superintendent of an elementary district decried the decisions made prior to his arrival in the district to discontinue some course offerings:

> You can just look right here in the vocational areas we have in this school. We have an unbelievable shop area for Home Economics and Woodworking. Those areas aren't required by the state, so they were just cut. In a blue-collar area, how do you make that cut? If you remove early vocational experiences before they go into high school, they aren't as prepared as they should be to make some choices about their high school courses. Look at the gifted program. The state requirement for this was written off the books, so it was cut.

For the great majority of school districts in the study, students did not lose any curricular choices, non-instructional programs, or extra-curricular activities when PTELL went into effect. That alone served as the basis of the perception that, in most districts, students had not suffered any ill effects due to the tax limitation.

**Lack of expansion of the instructional program.** The reverse side of the seemingly positive outlook on what PTELL has meant for students was that there was not a great deal of growth in the instructional program in the majority of the school districts in the study. The superintendent in the only district that boasted any expansion of programming stressed that only the steady growth in EAV the district realized from new construction each year made that possible, but that still characterized any additions as "thoughtful and frugal." For the majority of school districts, school leaders perceived resources as uncertain and limited, making impossible the expansion of any programs. School leaders reported expending a great deal of energy to provide resources to continue the current instructional and non-instructional programs for students.

Anything new for students came at the price of discontinuing something that already existed. One school principal confided, "We have a curriculum rule; we don't add a class without dropping one….so, students don't have the options they used to have without PTELL." Another principal said, "With the resource limitation we have, we can't develop new programs." School leaders focused on maintaining what was offered students while trying to build cash reserves for what they perceived as an uncertain fiscal future under PTELL.

**Increased class sizes.** Leaders in three of the districts indicated that class sizes were larger under PTELL than before PTELL's adoption. There was a perception that the districts could not afford to add staff, classrooms, or both. In two of the districts, student enrollment was increasing causing the overcrowding of classes. In one of those districts, a high school district near a large industrial community, classroom space was available but adding teachers was not seen as a possibility. The school leader in this district shared that most of the academic classes had rosters of 30 students and that the classes serving the students most academically at-risk had 22 to 24 students. He expressed concern that the higher than optimal class sizes would start impacting performance on the state assessment.

In the other school system, which was an elementary district, the school board's priority on low class sizes in the primary grades was ignored since there were not enough resources to pay for additional teachers in those grade-levels. Attempts in the past to keep primary class sizes in keeping with the school board's expectations of not adding teachers led to large class sizes in the upper grades, which remained over 30 for most academic classes at the time of the study. The superintendent in this district also expressed concern over what

impact larger class sizes would have on the performance of the students on the state academic assessments.

Class size was an issue in a third district, but the main issue was rapid student enrollment growth with no additional classrooms for new teachers. This district was in the process of addressing the space problem by holding a construction bond referendum. The other districts in the study saw declining or steady enrollment and reported no problem with class sizes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The case study yielded several findings that illuminated consequences of the tax cap that are not in the best interests of students or taxpayers. The case study of six selected school district's Fiscal behaviors exhibited by school district leaders focused on maximizing the amount of property tax revenue districts received each year and establishing as high of a base for future revenue calculations. The effort to maximize tax dollars in some districts led to the development of excess cash reserves in funds with limited use. Establishment of the highest possible tax base for the calculation of all subsequent property tax extensions led to dramatic increases in tax levies prior to PTELL taking effect. Many school districts increased the level of debt service for the taxpayers by issuing non-referendum bonds before the enactment of PTELL. Prior research on the reasons voters support tax limitation measures concluded that such support is given as a means of imposing boundaries on the actions of, and greater economic efficiencies upon, units of local government (Citrin, 1979; Grammlich, Rubinfeld & Swift, 1981; Ladd & Wilson, 1982; Elder, 1992). The reported fiscal behaviors in the districts involved in the study appear to be contrary to those expectations.

School leaders in the six districts observed how revenues were not growing at the same rate as expenditures. In some districts, that was a concern but had not had an immediate impact. In others, school leaders attested to a growing financial crisis that was negatively affecting their schools. This common realization led to a uniformly negative appraisal of PTELL in terms of what it will mean to school districts over time. This created a focus on the development of reserves and appears to contribute to the fiscal practices mentioned above.

The overall picture of the importance of PTELL for students that emerged from the case study was that district leaders expended a great amount of effort to preserve the programs and course offerings that were in place before PTELL passed at referendum, but the addition of new items was uncommon. Class sizes were likely to increase under PTELL, with districts unable to construct new classrooms or unwilling to bear the cost of additional staff members. None of the school district leaders saw larger class sizes as a positive development for student learning and academic performance.

## DISCUSSION

A common question asked in education circles is, "Does money matter?" A question that can be asked in relation to the topic of this paper is, "Does PTELL matter?" Regardless of whether the person asking this question is a taxpayer or a school administrator, the apparent answer is, "Yes" but the difference PTELL it is making is not a positive one.

The expectation of PTELL imposing greater fiscal discipline and extending more public control over school districts is not fulfilled. The experience of school leaders in Central Illinois with PTELL points the failure of the tax limitation measure to encourage fiscal behavior that is responsive to the actual financial needs of school districts. In fact, individuals

serving as the chief financial decision-makers in school systems consider it irresponsible to do anything other than take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that every tax dollar is captured and that the district is able to maintain a level of bonded debt without voter approval. PTELL rewards the district that refrains from maximizing the tax levy in a given year by denying it access to that revenue in all future years.

Students in districts under PTELL are treated to a static set of instructional and non-instructional programs. Changes to those programs come very slowly and expansion of choices is not a common feature of Central Illinois school districts under PTELL, as school leaders focus more on building cash reserves for future use than they do on the development of programs. Understanding the experience of school leaders and students under PTELL may become much more important as the poor condition of the national economy continues. Public schools in Illinois face $311 million in cuts in state funding for fiscal year 2011 (Broadway, 2010, August 4)**.** State cut-backs may force more pressure on local taxpayers to provide more financial support for the local schools. This pressure may, in turn, generate a tide of taxpayer support for limiting the allowable increase in local property tax, with PTELL a readily available tool to accomplish that goal. That potential development makes it more vital that a well-rounded understanding of PTELL is available. Potential PTELL supporters should be made aware of both the tax cap's apparent fiscal shortcomings and its potential long-term harm on the educational experience offered to students. School leaders in districts not currently under PTELL need to understand what other school leaders have faced once PTELL becomes a fact for their school districts.

Moultrie County held the last referendum on PTELL in April of 2003 (Illinois Department of Revenue, 2009) with the measure meeting defeat. It has not appeared on the ballot in any other general election after that time. However, since the completion of the multi-case study (Forney, 2007), economic conditions in Illinois may motivate property owners in the central region of the state to resurrect PTELL as a means of exerting control over the growth of property tax. A discussion of the fairness of the property tax or its appropriateness as a vehicle of funding public education was beyond the scope of this study. What emerged was an understanding that PTELL encouraged fiscal practices that are not consistent with taxpayer expectations, established financial conditions that were not conducive to long-term school district solvency, and led to limitation of educational opportunities that may have a negative impact on the learning and academic achievement of students.

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# CRITICAL ISSUES IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PREPARATION

# Preparing Future School Leaders to Foster Site Level Cultural Proficiency: Investigating the Work of Successful Schools First-hand

Kathryn Singh

Currently, our schools are faced with the challenge of assisting all students in attaining higher levels of academic achievement regardless of their ethnic, language or socioeconomic subgroup (Moyer & Clymer, 2009). It is imperative that school personnel who work with students and their families on a daily basis are equipped to make and carry out decisions that take into consideration the ever increasing diversity at their sites in a way that guarantees all students will have the same opportunity to succeed (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). When schools do not offer conditions that give all cultural groups a chance to excel, there may be a lack of cultural proficiency on the part of those who work at the site. Cultural proficiency means that educators clearly understand their own and others' cultural backgrounds and are aware of how these cultures influence the teaching-learning process. This knowledge allows educators to take students' needs into consideration in order to provide an environment that promotes their well-being and success in and out of the classroom (Lindsey et al., 2005).

Leaders must ensure that all students and staffs are prepared to interact in a diverse world (Banks, 2008). Hence, it is important for graduates of educational leadership programs to attain the knowledge and skills of culturally proficient leadership so that they may assist their school community in embracing diversity and capitalizing on it in order to make the educational experience more powerful and successful (Lindsey et al., 2005). It is helpful for education leadership students to read, discuss and listen to speakers on the topic of cultural proficiency (Bustamante et al., 2009). However, it is even more powerful for them to confront the issue of diversity directly in the schools as an observer and investigator. Hearing and seeing first-hand what school members think and do will allow them to reflect on the urgency and complexity of guaranteeing a quality education to all (Lindsey et al., 2005).

Gathering information related to cultural proficiency in the schools provides education administration students with knowledge and skills that are essential to school leadership. As students explore educational leaders' perceptions and the way they focus their work on diversity issues, they develop insights regarding strategies for bringing about positive change. Students can specifically analyze how those in leadership roles, both formal and informal, successfully develop cultural proficiency at successful sites (Bustamante et al., 2009).

Examining leadership attitudes and practices at diverse schools where students are achieving academic success provides students and faculty with an understanding of dispositions, knowledge and skills that could be developed in future leaders. Asking that no child be left behind but sending graduates out into the schools without the mindset and tools needed to ensure that all truly have a chance is unrealistic (Johnson, 2003). Students and staff will achieve greater results, and families will support the process when they feel they are part of the system and equipped with the tools to be successful (Howley, Woodrum, Burgess, & Rhodes, 2009).

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The purpose of this chapter is to share results of an action research study that examined the process and products that resulted from a strategy used with students who were completing their administrative credential and pursuing a master's degree in education leadership. The project involved teams of students immersed in a professor-designed investigation focused on the phenomenon of culturally proficient leadership in public elementary schools with high levels of diversity and academic achievement. The goal of the project was threefold: to provide students with a hands-on research experience, to immerse them in the reality of cultural proficiency in the schools, and to require them to work as part of a team. This action research project came about due to the author's doubts regarding the degree to which the students understood the importance of a *level playing field* for all students and families. It is hoped that the results of this study will be useful to those preparing future school administrators.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: WHY BECOME A CULTURALLY PROFICIENT LEADER?

Culturally proficient leaders recognize their influence on student achievement, the importance of understanding the school and community cultures, the leader's role in promoting social equity, the concept of cultural proficiency, and ways to strengthen cultural proficiency for school-wide success. Each of these concepts will be discussed below.

### The Leader's Influence on Student Achievement

Research has shown that leaders influence student learning by setting direction, developing people and *making the organization work* (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Leaders articulate the vision, collaborate with others to set goals, enforce high expectations and provide support for producing results. *Making the organization work* involves the creation of a positive culture that supports the ever changing improvement agenda at each site. Part of this culture involves policies and practices that allow school personnel to welcome and effectively serve the diverse students enrolled at their site.

### The Need for Leaders to Understand School and Community Culture

Research literature emphasized that school leaders must understand their school culture in order to *make the organization work* (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, 2000; Peterson & Deal, 2002; Sashkin & Walberg, 1993; Sergiovanni, 2001). However, being familiar with the school culture alone is not the end of the leader's journey. He or she must also become familiar with the community's many cultures and then align policies and practices with them (Getzels, Lipam and Campbell, 1968; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). In a study conducted by Howley, Woodrum, Burgess and Rhodes (2009), the match between leadership style and community culture in four very different schools was examined. It was determined that success in moving the school forward was closely tied to the leader's respect of and response to the local cultures rather than disregarding, trying to change, or opposing them. In each case, the principal mediated between his/her vision and the values and expectations of the community. The authors suggested that the community be taken into consideration when educational leaders are hired in order to ensure a better fit. They also pointed out that cultural competence means that the school molds itself to meet the needs of the community rather than the other way around.

**The Leader's Role in Promoting Social Equity**

In order to develop culturally competent schools, leaders must promote social justice. If there is social justice, there is a greater chance that students will be successful (Johnson, 2003; Juettner, 2003; Riehl, 2000). When Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) identified what leaders do to promote social justice, they emphasized that these individuals provide a "critical analysis of conditions that have perpetuated historical inequities in schools and work to change institutional structures and culture" (p. 202). The authors shared their concerns regarding the lack of preparation for school leaders in the area of social justice, claiming that new leadership standards alone do not address these issues. In addition, high academic standards and stringent assessment strategies are not necessarily the answer to helping all students achieve, and these elements may actually limit leaders who wish to create more inclusive environments (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005).

**The Concept of Cultural Proficiency**

A culturally responsive approach to leadership in the schools is needed due to changes in demographics and the ever present demand to assure that all groups reach acceptable academic levels as mandated by No Child Left Behind. Moyer and Clymer (2009) chronicled the changes that have occurred in American schools, describing the millions of second language learners in need of assistance and the growing number of minority students (estimated to reach 57% of the student population by 2050). They emphasized that educators must be able and willing to effectively serve this increasingly diverse student body. The authors optimistically applauded the gradual shift that is evolving in mindsets of more and more educators seeing diversity as positive rather than problematic.

Providing a culturally responsive environment means that staff members understand their own culture, are aware and accepting of the cultures at their site, and create and carry out policies and practices that support all students and families, not just some. Cultural competence goes beyond celebrations, months dedicated to recognize particular groups, artifact displays, and inspirational speakers. Instead, it means that the mission and vision of the school effectively address diversity. It also means that curriculum, instruction and assessment are designed to provide experiences that are inclusive, meaningful and realistic. Interaction with all segments of the population both within and outside of the classroom is respectful, and conflict is dealt with in a culturally appropriate way in culturally responsive schools (Bustamante et al., 2009).

**Developing Cultural Proficiency**

Cultural proficiency requires leaders to ask themselves and others difficult questions. Lindsey et al. (2005) asked educators to examine their attitudes and values, weigh their ability to openly discuss race and culture, assess their willingness to accept others' viewpoints, and consider their communication skills when working with diverse groups. In order to guide others in this crucial process, leaders must be able and willing to challenge and reconstruct paradigms that have been in existence for a long time. This task requires that leaders know what to look for and expect. They must also possess a readiness to lead individuals through a difficult and oftentimes uncomfortable change process.

It is necessary to point out that cultural diversity includes other aspects besides minority or second language status. Payne (1996) offered a perspective concerning a culture of poverty

that students who come from poverty, whether it be generational (on-going) or situational (sudden, due to circumstances), have a variety of issues to deal with. Students of poverty have assets that may often be untapped by the schools as well as areas that need additional scaffolding in order for them to experience success. Cultural competence also means recognizing and serving the needs of students and families in poverty.

Cultural competence also entails working with diversity in the staff as well. Madsen and Obakeng Mabokela (2005) described a study that analyzed workplace relationships between African American and European Americans in schools. Their goal in examining these relationships was to determine how well these schools provided safe spaces for teachers to work and avoid intergroup conflict. These authors stated that not only the student body suffers when the dominant culture has little or no regard for others and stressed the need for leaders to facilitate interpersonal relationships and create integrated networks among the staff.

In order to provide a positive, culturally in tune, environment for students, staff and families, school leaders need preparation. Recognizing policies and practices that are inequitable and deeply embedded in an organization's culture is not an easy task. Leaders, like any human being, are products of their own bias and societal expectations, and they may overlook factors that unfairly influence who is successful and who is not (Bustamante et al., 2009). Bustamante and colleagues (2009) invited researchers to continue their exploration of the phenomenon of culturally competent leadership. They claimed, "Few researchers have empirically examined the construct of school-wide cultural competence and proficiency to determine ways to assess it and determine the impact of school-wide cultural competence on inclusion, equity, and student achievement" (p. 799).

Leaders need to hear and respond to others' voices. Delpit (2006) stressed that the answer to reducing the achievement gap lies in understanding who we are and how we are connected and disconnected to others. She suggested that the human factor is most important for students' success, not the adding-on of more and more reform programs. She further stated:

> It is time to look closely at elements of our educational system, particularly those elements we consider progressive; time to see whether there is minority involvement and support, and if not, ask why; time to reassess what we are doing in public schools and universities to include other voices, other experiences; time to seek the diversity in our educational movements that we talk about seeking in our classrooms. (p. 20)

In order to better serve all students, researchers emphasized the need to mesh school and community cultures (Banks, 2008; Bazron, Osher & Fleishman, 2005). Bazron, Osher and Fleischman (2005) described the cultural disconnect that occurs for many students which may lead to negative results personally, socially and academically. They recommended that schools consider programs that support students of color through high expectations and scaffolding rather than tracking. They also suggested that educators provide environments that allow for greater personal contact. In addition, Banks (2008) reminded educators that schools must prepare all students to interact in a positive way with people who are culturally different. Cultural responsiveness is not just for students of color and their families, but instead is for all students and families. Lindsey, Nuri Robins, Lindsey, and Terrell (2009) emphasized that culture plays an important role in people's lives, the dominant culture serves some better than others, we each have an individual and a group identity, and cultures have diversity within them and specific needs tied to those differences. Consequently, schools cannot ignore culture

as a variable that influences student and staff success. Furthermore, they must be aware of subtleties within cultural groups, avoiding a *"one size fits all"* approach.

As the literature illustrated, a lack of cultural proficiency on the part of leaders may result in some student or staff groups experiencing success and others failing. Leaders must be equipped to lead courageous conversations that move school communities to greater levels of cultural proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2005).

## ACTION RESEARCH

Action research is conducted with the purpose of "solving a problem or obtaining information in order to inform local practice" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p.589). During an action research process, the investigator identifies the question, gathers data, analyzes and interprets, and develops a plan to guide future action. This approach to investigation allows practitioners to learn from and fine tune their craft.

The purpose of this particular action research project was to achieve and reflect on the following student goals. As a result of participating in this project, students would:

- Gain a greater appreciation and understanding of the research process, especially in terms of its applicability to PreK-12 education,
- Understand the reality of cultural proficiency and the role the leader plays in setting the tone for all of the school community, and
- Enhance their ability to work in a team.

Before this project, educational leadership master's students participated in a sequence of three courses that included an overview of research methodologies and the design and implementation of an individual, small scale research project. Students typically selected their fieldwork as the focus of their project. Fieldwork involved the selection of a target group, an intervention developed with an advisory committee, and monitoring and reporting of results. Students typically adapted this task to a research design. When their fieldwork-based project was completed, they wrote a paper and then presented results to their colleagues and professor via a poster session.

After teaching the research sequence twice, it became apparent to this author that students were often not fully prepared to conduct research on their own, and their fieldwork did not always lend itself to serving as their research focus. Many times, the themes they presented would not relate explicitly to school leadership. Also, students' degrees of cultural proficiency seemed to be impacted greatly by their own personal and professional circumstances. For example, many students were amazed that not all families felt welcome and included at school and surprised to hear that students from "non-mainstream" populations did not always experience optimal conditions of learning in schools.

The author's personal experiences, as a parent of a second language learner (she and her 13 year old son lived for 10 years in Mexico, arriving to the U.S. when he was in the fifth grade), also made her more conscious of what it feels like for parents of children who do not fit the profile that leads to proficient test scores and high levels of classroom performance. The author's work as a bilingual teacher and administrator, both in the U.S. and in Mexico, also inspired her to address this issue with future leaders. She decided to involve students in a structured, well-designed research project that would have meaning for them as well as implications for their future school communities.

Data were gathered through observations of graduate students within class sessions, student reflections at the end of the first semester (half way through project including data collection) and at the end of the second semester (through data analysis, results, conclusions and presentation of findings in oral and written form) and analysis of documents including data records for each team, cases and Power Point presentations. The author's intent was to examine the process and products that resulted as students participated in this new theme-based, team-centered research process. The following section describes the students' project. The project took place from summer 2010 to spring 2011 and involved 18 master's students.

## THE STUDENTS' PROJECTS

Students were involved in a mixed method multiple case study that focused on the following research question: What characterizes culturally competent leadership at diverse suburban and urban schools with high levels of student achievement?  The objectives of the study included: (1) Determine the perception and role the principal assumes in terms of fostering cultural competency, (2) Explore the perceptions and roles of support staff in the promotion of cultural competence, (3) Identify the perceptions that teachers have of cultural competence and the role they play in fostering it at the site, (4) Determine which cultural competency elements are more evident in the schools and which appear to be lacking, and (5) Investigate how parents perceive cultural competency and the role they play in it. A mixed methodology allowed research teams to provide a thick description of the leadership roles played in promoting cultural proficiency in schools with high levels of student achievement. In this study, it was assumed that leadership is a distributed force; it does not just rest in the formal leader.

The work of Bustamante and colleagues (2009) was used to guide the students' research project. *"Cultural competence"* was described by Bustamante et al. (2009) as, "how well a school's policies, programs, practices, artifacts, and rituals reflect the needs and experience of diverse groups in the school and out of the school community" (p. 798).

### Participant Selection

In the summer of 2010, students enrolled in an online methods course that provided them with information on the purpose of research, types of research, data collection and analysis, and effective presentation of findings. Students read cultural proficient literature, generated questions related to the topic, and discussed ways they could gather and analyze data to best answer research questions in this area of study. This course allowed students to have a basic understanding of research and, at the same time, an introduction to a specific topic of study. In preparation for the Fall semester, the professor (lead investigator) established contact with local districts and met with site principals. After meeting with 10 principals and explaining the study and how it would work, six agreed to participate as cases.

All six cases were K-6 schools in Southern California with diverse populations of approximately 500 students. All had met their adequate yearly progress (AYP) in both math and English language arts for the past two testing cycles for all subgroups, or had shown important gains. Diversity was defined as a mixed population and/or a population that is primarily *"non-mainstream."* Teachers, support staff and parents were purposively selected to participate in the study based on their ability to provide relevant data and to represent their professional role group. They were presented with information about the study and asked to participate on a voluntary basis. One district, where four sites were studied, was a large

organization with almost 30,000 students while the other, with two sites, was a smaller district with approximately 6,000 students. Both had 85–90% students of color (with Hispanic being the main group) as well as a 35-60% ELL (English language learner) population and a socioeconomically disadvantaged (free and reduced lunch) population that ranged from 20–100% of the total student body. Principals at the sites had served at least two years, and most had served six or more. Staffs ranged from 20-30 classroom teachers and specialists.

**Data Sources**

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered by the graduate students. Staffs completed Bustamante et al.'s (2009) survey on aspects of cultural competency at their site. This instrument used a Likert scale and asked respondents to comment on: the mission and vision, curriculum, student interaction and leadership, teaching and learning, parents and community, conflict management, and assessments. Principals participated in a semi-structured interview of 30-45 minutes. They were asked about their experiences with and approach to diversity, roles played by different groups on campus in promoting cultural proficiency, and ways in which they build this capacity in others. During a two to three hour school visit, observations were conducted in meetings, classrooms and common spaces, and artifacts were provided by the principal in order to gather evidence of cultural competence. Teachers, support staff and parents participated in 30–45 minutes of role-based focus groups. Participants were asked about their perceptions regarding the benefits and challenges of being at a diverse school, inclusion and voice of students and families, leadership related to cultural proficiency, and ways in which the site could continue to improve services. All interviews and focus groups were taped with the participants' permission. Participants were asked to confirm data gathered through member checking. A check list was developed for analyzing documents and other artifacts collected at the site during the walk through. This checklist was based on the cultural competency survey. Researchers also took field notes.

**Format of the Class Sessions**

In three face-to-face sessions during the fall 2010 semester, teams prepared for each step of the research project. In the first session, students reviewed the research design and discussed the plan for the semester. They also provided input on instruments designed by the professor. They formed research teams of five to six members and discussed how they would work together. They revisited cultural proficiency literature they had read in the research methods course. In the second session, teams prepared for data collection. The professor led them through a number of role plays that provided them with skills in facilitating an interview, leading a focus group, administering a survey, and conducting an observation. At this time, research teams were assigned to their case schools. Leaders of the three research teams were asked to contact the principal at their assigned site within a week to schedule: the principal interview, focus groups, survey administration, and a walk through. It was agreed that only the team leader would be in contact with the principal in order to streamline communication. Research teams reviewed the site's vision and mission as well as other information on the school's website. They also examined demographic and performance data through the California State Department website. Teams were told that data collection could be completed in a short period of time (one to two visits) or could be stretched out over a couple of months (one data collection activity each visit) depending on the research teams' and school's

schedule. It was suggested that they work in pairs or trios when gathering data. The author and professor of record for the course gathered data on three case sites as well. In the third session, teams shared progress on data collection, discussed what they had learned so far, started to scan their data and relate it to the literature and to background information they had gathered on their site, wrote individual reflections, and spoke about next steps.

During the spring 2011 semester, the group met in person three times in three to four hour blocks, just like the first semester. In the first session, they analyzed their data. The professor explained how to code, categorize and triangulate, and she provided them with an example of how she had completed this process with one of her three cases. She also gave them templates and suggested general categories. Teams were given the task of creating a data record with coded and categorized data to be submitted the second session. In the second session, teams reviewed the elements of a case study and started to work in class on this process after seeing an example of a case written by their professor. They also started to talk about how they would present their findings in a PowerPoint presentation of 30 minutes. For the third session, teams submitted their case (10-15 pages) and shared results orally with the class. The professor also shared results of her 3 cases. The group talked about similarities and differences across the cases and their implications. They wrote individual reflections. During the process, the research teams worked very closely with their colleagues and the professor both in person and on-line (through Blackboard). Face-to-face sessions were approximately one month apart.

## ACTION RESEARCH RESULTS

After working with students in the research methods course during the summer and over the two semesters they were involved in the research study, the following results emerged. At the end of fall 2010, students shared their first comments. They expressed appreciation for the opportunity of experiencing the research process first-hand rather than just reading about it. They also expressed appreciation for the process of working collaboratively rather than designing and carrying out a study in isolation. They stated that they experienced the research process as part of an actual multiple case research project of conducting the research, gathering data, coding, categorizing, triangulating and arriving at conclusions. They realized that research is labor intensive, yet worthwhile. Those who had been more familiar with quantitative approaches in the past struggled with a mixed methods approach at first. As a class, the students noted that what educators say they do in the schools and what they actually do may be two different things. The students discovered that being culturally proficient is complex and not easy to describe. They began to look at their own schools with a more critical eye. They realized that all stakeholders did not share the same idea regarding cultural proficiency and that parents did not always want what educators thought was best for their children. They also discovered that many of the school members described cultural proficiency as celebrations, customs and costumes rather than getting to know people in depth and working with who they are as learners. Comments included:

- This process, so far, has taught me equally as much about leadership as it has about data collection and analysis. I've learned what it means to be a principal, how to communicate with staff, parents and the community. I know what it takes to recognize cultures and to celebrate them in order to create a supportive and successful school.

- There is a big difference between reading about cultural competence and what schools say they do to achieve this and actually finding out for yourself how this environment is created.
- It seems to me that the school has developed a culture of learning at an individual level. Teacher leaders have made efforts to meet the needs of individual students but not always distinct cultural groups. I feel that teacher leaders, more so than the principal, have helped to develop a sense of community and acceptance of all cultures on campus.
- I am also realizing that the most difficult part of investigation is not so much the observations and data collection, but the transcriptions and subjective notes and themes present in the data. I feel that this is going to be difficult for me, not looking at hard data such as the survey, but instead analyzing the nuances and behaviors of those we observed.
- One thing that I've realized is that things like cultural awareness in education are very subjective. For example, things that I would see as culturally aware, such as differentiating instruction for students and using primary language support, were things that some of the parents did not agree with. For them, being culturally aware was treating all students equally and having them adopt the norms and language of the school.
- I have begun to look at my own school under the culturally proficient lens. Even within my own library, I became increasingly aware of the book displays, posters, student work, and projects on display. In some cases, I was pleased with the observations at my own site, but I also noticed great areas of need.
- I think with a truly culturally competent school you are going to find staff members who truly understand, respect, and embrace the different cultures of the students they serve. It is not a matter of having a cultural day or cultural event.

At the end of the project, in spring 2011, students reflected at a deeper level. They continued to comment on the benefits of doing research rather than just reading about it. They reiterated the advantages of working as part of a team which included sharing the work, having others to dialogue with during the process, and being exposed to different perspectives when working with data. They were more openly questioning and expressed feelings disillusioned with their own site's level of cultural proficiency. They expressed an understanding of how important the principal's role is in setting the cultural competency tone. They shared instances where they, personally, had started working with parents and children in a different way. For example, they even questioned their own willingness to genuinely welcome and include all families. They learned that just because a school has a high overall score and they meet adequate yearly progress (AYP), it does not mean that the achievement gap has been erased. Students became aware that stakeholders' priorities varied according to role. For example, teachers and administrators had testing as a concern and many parents had a strong desire for their children to adapt and be successful in a new system. The previous supporters of quantitative research realized that the field of education needs both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to shape practice. Comments included:

- Participating in this study has enabled me to look at my school site through a different lens. For being such a diverse middle school, I don't think we have an acceptable level of cultural competence. It seems like we have many pieces in place—a principal who

represents a minority group, a diverse population, but we don't make use of and work on building cultural proficiency.

- I have come to the conclusion that three main aspects contribute to a leader's success: modeling culturally proficienct behaviors, building relationships, and celebrating diversity and achievement.

- Since collecting the data, I have spent more time working with parents and learning about them and how best to reach their children, not just academically but what motivates and drives them. I have also learned that adjusting my perceptions about a student can be difficult, but very beneficial.

- Some schools are very successful when it comes to test scores because they teach to the test. Once we started pulling off the layers, we found out that the students who needed the most support were not getting it.

- Just yesterday, I had a parent/teacher conference with the mother and father of a bilingual student. After reviewing the student's report card with me, the parents began openly discussing with me and each other whether or not they should cease speaking their traditional language at home, switching over to English. I adamantly disagreed with them. 'You don't want to give away your mother tongue?' I said, 'Being bilingual is an asset in the long run,' I argued. I realized, however, that the report card disagreed with me. The CST (standardized test) disagreed with me. This student was being scored and judged based on her ability to read and write in English. Schools and their leaders need to value the aspects of students that are not valued in assessments and report cards.

- This is the essence of educational research—to inform and to teach educators who have not previously learned to engage in using data, case studies, or other research to drive their decision making. Without this class, I would not have been willing to search and find research to present to other educators because my egotism about scientific research being the only true type of research would have kept me from reading the type of research that indeed is the most useful to educators and educational leaders as a whole. How delighted I am that performing research of a different method has helped me to see the value of the research that I ignorantly turned away from in the past.

In terms of product and process, all three teams created very complete data records and became emerging experts in coding, categorizing and triangulating. They comfortably used a common language as they talked about issues of validity, reliability, ways to improve school selection and data collection. They valued the work in teams, and all teams appeared to work effectively. They relied more on face-to-face meetings rather than on the online space provided. They preferred the physical closeness and expressed a need to have the data spread out in front of them. Modeling of each step by the professor was identified as being useful. The students appreciated the fact that their professor was going through the same process. Cases and presentations were organized; and results, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research were based on the data. As teams presented their cases, they were asked questions, and comments were made about similarities and differences. As is the case with any process, the process can always be refined; however, overall, students appeared to understand the research process more fully, gain a more realistic picture of cultural proficiency, and learn how to work effectively on a long-term team project. As an added bonus, they identified successful practices of school leaders.

## CONCLUSIONS

Using a research topic as the underlying thread for an initial research methods course was very helpful. Students were better able to visualize the research process because it was tied to a real theme that was developed over time. As they learned about crafting research questions, conducting a literature review, and shaping a research design, they explored each step using the theme of cultural proficiency as an anchor. Upon finishing the course, they had created a draft of a research proposal, which naturally set the stage for the investigation they would do in the 2010–2011 academic year.

Having students focus on a pre-designed research project had many benefits. Everyone was reading, talking about, and exploring the same topic in different settings. They experienced a well-planned, supervised process that allowed them to see a positive example of research and to focus their energy on data collection and analysis rather than on conceptualizing a study, designing it and carrying it out alone. Their research experience was scaffolded and modeled continuously, and the team approach provided additional support.

Researching the topic of cultural proficiency in the schools challenged students to meet identified needs. As the students gathered data, they began to see that schools do not always have a very clear idea of how to address diversity. Sometimes, they do have a good level of cultural proficiency, but they do not know how to verbalize what they do and why.

Gathering data on additional cases, as lead investigator, while students were also gathering data, was an interesting process. Students saw that their professor was working alongside them gathering data on her own case schools. She was transcribing, analyzing, writing and presenting, just like them. It allowed the professor to be more in touch with what the students were experiencing and to give them helpful recommendations along the way.

As students delved into the issue of cultural proficiency in the schools, they realized many things. The context within which the school operated influenced stakeholders' thoughts and actions. School staffs struggled with the dilemma of whether they should treat all students the same or whether they should differentiate. Standardized testing contributed to this debate. Many times educators worried about being *"fair"* and not providing special circumstances for one and not all. The researchers discovered that leaders definitely *set the tone* for academic success at the site. All school members are responsible for leveling the playing field, but the principal is ultimately responsible for establishing the conditions for student success.

This project offered students a hands-on experience that challenged them to read and discuss research, conduct a team-based investigation that was well-designed, analyze data, present findings and make recommendations in oral and written form, learn about cultural proficiency and leadership, and consider investigation as a practical tool for informing decision making. In order to enhance and improve the process, this author would recommend making sure that districts and schools are selected in advance; carefully screening and selecting schools with a high level of cultural proficiency (perhaps doing a quick selection interview with the principal and/or applying the Bustamante et al. scale as part of the selection process); considering a face to face or online meeting with each team each semester in addition to total group sessions; involving guest speakers and other materials, such as video clips and additional readings in order to continue adding to the students' background in cultural proficiency; and including a text on the case study method in the research methods course.

Making sure that graduates leave fully prepared to lead the effort to provide a quality education and a positive experience for all students, families and staffs is a responsibility that must be taken seriously. Talking, reading and hearing about diversity and the role it plays in students' lives are first steps. Going into the field and investigating sites where diverse

students are academically successful with diverse populations is valuable for aspiring school leaders. Educational leaders set the tone for academic success including courageous conversations about cultural proficiency. In the preparation of school leaders, we must make sure aspiring leaders are prepared to provide culturally proficient leadership.

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# Shifting From a Face-to-Face to an Online Educational Leadership Program: A Case Study

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The process of change is usually met with opposition (Fullan, 2001). As educational leaders and teachers of aspiring educational leaders, we encourage our students to embrace the process of change, and we assume they will promote this concept in their schools. The change process is stressed because technology has drastically changed the means, methods and approaches by which we communicate. The ways we socialize, learn and educate have been impacted by technology.

According to Alford (2007), "Educational writers of the last three decades have called for changes in educational leadership preparation programs" (p. 93). The discourse though has elevated from a concern focused on content versus process to a debate over traditional (face-to-face) versus a non-traditional (online) design and delivery. If one googles the phrase "educational leadership preparation programs," one would find several links that introduce and explain online educational leadership programs that are in full operation across this nation. Harris (2007) stated, "Dialogue often initiates change which leads to close inspection that is required for existing programs to re-invent themselves" (p. 23).

Some educational leadership preparation programs are having these critical conversations in hopes of altering the way they deliver their services. Specifically, Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, entered into a public-private partnership with Higher Education Holdings, LLC of Dallas to market, produce, and disseminate Lamar's Master's in Educational Leadership degree statewide. The results were immediate and dramatic. In the first semester, this university attracted more than 2000 students from 200 partner schools across Texas. Currently, Higher Education Holdings has changed its name to Academic Partnerships LLC and operates as the American University System. It has partnered with higher education institutions in Ohio, Arizona, Arkansas and Texas to replicate this process and offer master's degrees in educational leadership programs with principal certification (American University System, 2011).

Whether it is labeled a resistance to change or a stance against altering traditional face-to-face educational leadership programs, some higher education programs oppose what they considered a fundamental change to educational leadership preparation (Romano, 2006; Price, 2008). Others displayed their rejection in more subtle ways using their self-interest to

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guide their resentment (So & Brush, 2008). Irrespective if the resistance is necessary or worthwhile, or whether it continues, educational leadership preparation programs have reached a crossroads. Advances in technology are causing educational leadership preparation programs to at least begin the dialogue to reconsider the design and delivery of their programs. Nationally, these programs are beginning to find creative and innovative ways to ignite practical considerations in a design that showcases an attractive and systemic approach to not only content and processes, but delivery as well (Condie & Livingston, 2007; Allen & Seaman, 2008).

This phenomenon caused us to begin a dialogue to initiate changes in our educational leadership preparation program. The advances in technology, coupled with Lamar's initiative, began to drive our programmatic preparation decisions in preparing our future educational leaders. The purpose of our research was to share our design and to investigate this systems thinking model as it relates to producing educational leaders who are prepared to handle the duties and responsibilities of the job of educational leaders. This chapter reports on a case study of one university's experiences including changes and results in the initial year of implementation. This case study was not intended for generalization. The intent of the study was to compare the changes from face-to-face to an online experience and to contribute to the dialogue within the profession concerning changes in the preparation of educational leaders.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The notion of providing an online educational leadership preparation program is not new. Solid rationales have been provided for offering a nontraditional program. Prensky (2001) suggested the need to move to design and delivery systems that support the working conditions and habits of the digital natives. According to Prensky (2001), we are beginning to educate the digital natives who have never known a world without technology as opposed to the digital immigrants who did not grow up with technology.

Today's programs of educational leadership preparation are facing three major challenges: (1) Questions as to the rigor and appropriateness of the program (2) Pressure to increase enrollment as state dollars that fund higher education decrease, and (3) Competition from radical innovations in the delivery models of the program. The first two challenges are long-standing. Over the past 20 years, numerous groups have questioned the quality and appropriateness of principal preparation programs offered throughout the United States (Sherman, Gill, & Sherman, 2007). One of the most recent comes from Arthur Levine in his 2005 report *Educating School Leaders.* A common thread through all these challenges is the focus on the "how" of educating school principals to be effective leaders and change agents. In other words, should we have professional models (Baugh, 2003), or academic studies models (Sergiovanni, 1988) or, perhaps, a clinical studies component (Daresh, 2001)?

As departments of educational leadership grapple with program design and implementation, colleges and universities are struggling to provide the resources to support quality programs. Financially, many universities have to do more with less. According to the State Higher Education Executive Officers report in 2005, state funding for higher education is at its lowest levels in 25 years. State legislatures' attempts to fund social programs, prisons and K-12 education frequently have resulted in reduced or level funding for universities. This dwindling resource base leads to pressure to have higher student credit hour (SCH) levels and increased student fees.

It is the third challenge, the entry of innovative delivery methods that is shaking the very foundation of traditional university programs. Research from the business community

suggests that introduction of a radical innovation results in three significant effects on the existing markets: (1) market expansion, (2) cannibalization, and (3) destabilization (Christensen, 1997). The market expands with the entry of customers who had not previously considered the product. The innovation pulls customers away from existing competitors (cannibalization) and causes a general destabilization in the market as everyone seeks to accommodate innovation. Departments of Educational Leadership and programs of principal preparation are facing just such effects with the entry of new innovations in program delivery.

Charitou and Markides (2003) suggested that there are four approaches a department or program may take in response to innovation: (1) focus on one's own program and invest in it, (2) ignore the new delivery model if it is not a threat, (3) disrupt the radical innovation, or (4) keep your own program but start a new program in competition with the innovation. Each of these approaches has merit in different contexts if a program has a clear foundational model of leadership preparation that provides the scaffolding for a quality program. The radical innovation can be tested against this model to determine the best response for that program. We propose that it is the clear foundational model of leadership preparation that provides the touchstone that guides a department in responding to any of the three challenges. This main focus has forced The University of Texas at Tyler's Educational Leadership preparation program to take a pragmatic stance on designing and delivering its offerings after twenty-five years of face-to-face delivery.

## PROGRAM MODEL

We chose a case study research design in order to situate our program into a real-life comparison of one program that changed from face-to-face to online. This study is not intended for generalization. However, we do suggest other programs can be informed by the processes engaged in and the data reported in the study. In addition, this case study might immerse readers into a setting that rests on both the researchers' and the participants' views of the program (Yin, 2003).

The quandary that educational leadership programs face today is that programs need to be perceived as pragmatic by both students and the institution delivering the program. Thus, the programs now have two masters, the consumer and the producer. Prior to online technology, the consumer had little choice but to select the educational leadership program that was physically accessible to him/her. However, with the onset of online programs, the consumer has other options. In our case, the significant reduction in our semester credit hour enrollments caused us to alter our principal preparation program or results would have been a loss of faculty.

The University of Texas at Tyler's Educational Leadership program has two strands: a Master of Education in educational administration with principal certification and principal certification for those who already hold a master's degree.

Four questions guided the restructuring of the program:

1. How much should be offered online?
2. How long should it take to complete the program?
3. How much will the program cost?
4. How do we assure the quality of the program?

The first three questions were derived by assessing in a pragmatic way what the consumer wanted operationally in an educational leadership program. The fourth question addressed the quality of the program, which was desired by the student and faculty within the program.

The first question dealt with how much of the program should be delivered online or asynchronous. A variety of options were discussed including maintaining a face-to-face program, using a hybrid approach in each class, to offering some of the classes online. In the end, it was determined that anything less than a totally online program would adversely impact the geographical area the program could recruit from and thus negatively impact potential enrollment.

The second question addressed the issue of how long should it take to complete the program. It was determined that students wanted a time efficient program and the best way to achieve that objective was to bundle classes together in blocks of study. Thus a 30 semester credit hour Master of Education degree could be completed in semesters or 15–18 months as a part time student. The principal certification could be completed in 22 semester credit hour or three semesters for a student who already possessed a master's degree (see Appendix A).

The bundling of courses also impacted the third question, which was how much should it cost? By bundling courses, it reduced the number of times that student registered and paid fees that are typically charged by universities such as: athletics, fine and performing arts, computer, etc. Typically, each semester a student pays the fees irrespective of the number of hours that he or she is taking. Thus, the more hours taken results in less semesters registered and less fees paid. In addition, we approached the central administration and proposed a $120 per semester credit hour scholarship be awarded to each student to reduce his or her tuition. We also presented a proposal which indicated a 20% increase in semester credit hour generation would offset the amount provided through the scholarship. Thus, we were able to offer a program that was highly cost competitive.

Obviously, the fourth question was the key to the program development. The one non-negotiable was to design a high quality program the faculty could support. The program was based on the principal competencies identified by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), which are based on the 2008 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards. The faculty determined the courses should be provided in four integrated thematic blocks (see Figure 1). Block I is an *Introduction to Educational Leadership*. Block II is *Best Practices in Curriculum and Instruction*. Block III is *Special Populations and Special Functions in Schools* and Block IV is *The Principalship*. Block II-IV has applied experiences to complement the coursework (see Appendix A).

## FINDINGS

Data were collected to compare the last face-to-face group of students (2008–2009) to the first online group of students (2009–2010). Specifically, semester credit hours generated, semester credit hour capacity/efficiency, revenue generated and performance on the state certification examination were compared.

Table 1 shows a comparison of semester credit hours generated for the face-to-face and on line program. With minimal marketing of the program, limited to e-mails to school districts, information on the department's website and word of mouth from students the Department experienced a 250% increase in semester credit hour generation.

**Table 1.** Semester Credit Hour Generated Comparison.

| Semester | Face-to-Face 2008–2009 Semester Credit Hour | Online 2009–2010 Semester Credit Hour |
|---|---|---|
| Fall | 324 | 865 |
| Spring | 288 | 800 |
| Summer | 339 | 1092 |
| Total | 951 | 2757 |

Another measure of comparison is the number of semester credit hours generated per class. This demonstrates the efficiency and cost effectiveness of each class. The Department actually had one less faculty member in 2009-2010 (online) then in the 2008-2009 (face-to-face) school year because of a grant position. The department strategically decided not to replace the faculty line, but to use teaching assistants to help grade papers and monitor discussion boards, etc. The teaching assistants were paid out of course fees, which are assessed to all courses by the University and are designed to offset expenses associated with courses. Table 2 shows the average semester credit hours generated per class.

**Table 2.** Semester Credit Hour Generated Average per Class.

| Semester | Face-to-Face 2008–2009 Semester Credit Hour Per Class Average (SCH/Total Number of Classes) | Online 2009–2010 Semester Credit Hour Per Class Average (SCH/Total Number of Classes) |
|---|---|---|
| Fall | 29 | 108 |
| Spring | 29 | 67 |
| Summer | 42 | 99 |
| Total Average | 33 | 91 |

The State of Texas uses a two tier funding system for institutions of higher education. The University receives the tuition and fees paid by the students, and the University is then reimbursed by the state for semester credit hours that are generated. Typically, graduate reimbursement rates are higher than undergraduate rates. Table 3 presents the comparison of revenue generated from the face-to-face and online programs excluding fees. After the $120 per semester credit hour was factored into the revenue generated, the online program increased tuition and fees by $107, 633 or 34%. In addition, the University experienced an increase in the fees to support the various operations of the institution.

**Table 3.** Revenue Generated Comparison.

| Semester | Face-to-Face 2008–2009 Revenue Generated | Online 2009–2010 Revenue Generated |
|---|---|---|
| Fall | $82,352 | $219,860 |
| Spring | $73,202 | $203,338 |
| Summer | $86,164 | $277,557 |
| Total | $241,719 | $700,756 |
| Adjusted for Scholarship | $241,719 | $369,915 |

Certification as an administrator in the State of Texas is a function of completing a prescribed curriculum of study and passing the state mandated Texas Examination of Educator Standards (TExES). Although this is not the only measure of a quality program, it is a standardized measure that allows comparison of the face-to-face and on line programs. A total scale score on the examination of 240 is required to pass the test. Table 4 presents the performance of students on the state mandated certification examination for the face-to-face and online students. The data include the number of students who took the test, the passing rate on the first administration and the average scale score. We will continue to collect data, longitudinally, to establish reliability of the findings.

**Table 4.** Performance on State Mandated Certification Examination.

| | Face-to-Face 2008–2009 | Online 2009–2010 |
|---|---|---|
| Number Taken | 29 | 37 |
| Number Passed/Percentage | 24/83% | 31/84% |
| Total Test Scaled Score | 256 | 254 |

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Institutions of higher education need to adapt or be willing to suffer the consequences. What implications will the profession experience as a result of the movement to online delivery of programs? Traditionally, there has been a perception that there is a shortage of administrators. It was estimated by the National Association of Secondary School Principals that 40% of all administrators would retire within 10 years (2002). The Northeast Regional Elementary School Principals Council estimated 36% of principals in nine northeastern states planned to retire within five years (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2007). The demand for administrators tends to outpace the supply. However, with the onset of online administrator preparation, the number of individuals seeking administrative certification appears to be increasing. For instance, in a recent administrative opening for an

assistant principal position, a small rural district received 125 applicants, where historically they would have received approximately 20. Thus, online programs may cause the supply of certified individuals to exceed the demand for administrators and increase the number of applicants that school districts have to select from in filling administrative positions.

Online programs tend to make it more difficult for professors to get to know students since the in-class social interaction is difficult to replicate through online experiences. It is generally accepted that human relations, the ability to interact effectively with students, parents and colleagues, is an important skill for success as an administrator (Katz, 1974). Historically, professors in face-to-face classes have had the opportunity to get to know their students on a professional level and ascertain whether the individuals possess the social skills necessary for a leadership position. This may not be possible in online environments. Therefore, school districts are going to have to consider carefully the qualifications of individuals who have received their certification through online courses to assure that individuals possess the interpersonal skills necessary for success as an administrator before offering an administrative position.

## CONCLUSION

Challenges to programs of higher education have always existed. The confluence of questions about rigor, decreasing resources, and competition outside the traditional university system provide the opportunity to truly examine educational leadership preparation. The impact of innovative approaches to leadership development may be both positive and negative. Innovation, in and of itself, does not guarantee a positive impact on the quality and quantity of emerging leaders. Still, innovation that is not seen as a positive addition or is viewed as a threat to existing programs may drive the development of other innovative approaches that do provide quality educational leaders. Exploring the impact of innovation on the practice of leadership development programs offers the opportunity to revisit the core beliefs of a program and align any changes or adjustments with these core beliefs.

Universities are seeking ways to meaningfully engage with students in ways that are attractive to both students and faculty while providing a high quality educational experience. Discussions of radical innovations are critical if Colleges of Education are to meet the challenges these innovations bring. It is critical to examine methods to evaluate these radical innovations so that a program clarifies its core beliefs and tests these core beliefs against the innovation. Colleges of Education and Departments of Educational Leadership cannot become merry-go-rounds where faculty simply jump on the next passing horse. Therefore, whatever makes the program successful and whatever makes the student successful, not only in program completion, but practice, should be the main focus. We are, indeed, blazing a new trail, not only for East Texans, but with the support of technology, the world.

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**Appendix A**. Course Sequence

| Course | Title | Hours |
|---|---|---|
| | BLOCK I | |
| EDLR 5310 | Educational Leadership Theory and Practice | 3 |
| EDLR 5313 | Critical Issues in Educational Leadership | 3 |
| | | 6 hours |
| | BLOCK II* | |
| *EDLR 5311* | *Developmental\* Supervision* | *3* |
| *EDLR 5349* | *Leadership in the Restructured School\** | *3* |
| *EDLR 5270* | *Internship in the Principalship I\** | *2* |
| | | 8 hours |
| | BLOCK III | |
| EDLR 5320 | School Law | 3 |
| EDLR 5333 | Administration of Special Programs in Schools | 3 |
| EDLR 5271 | Internship in the Principalship II | 2 |
| | | 8 hours |
| | BLOCK IV | |
| EDLR 5330 | The Principalship | 3 |
| EDLR 5337 | School Building Operations | 3 |
| EDLR 5272 | Internship in the Principalship III | 2 |
| | | 8 hours |
| | | 30/22 Hours |

Master of Education in Educational Leadership -30 hours (Block I–IV)
Principal Certification–22 hours (Block I, III, IV)

Note: Block II is not required for students who have a master's degree and are pursuing principal certification only.

# Service to the Profession: The Forgotten Element of Tenure and the Importance of Faculty Mentoring

Janet Tareilo

In the field of higher education, achieving tenure reflects a professor's achievements in three predetermined and accepted areas: (1) scholarship; (2) teaching; and (3) service. Granting a professor tenure gives a university a process and system that promotes and recognizes excellence among their faculty members (Florida Atlantic University (FAU), 2006). This process generally includes a timeline of responsibilities, the expectations of commitment and competency (FAU, 2006), and a record of a professor's accomplishments in scholarship, teaching, and service. For professors on the tenure track, this means that scholarship needs to be connected to a defined research agenda, teaching evaluations must reflect excellence in effective instructional methods, and service must indicate meaningful contributions at the various levels of the profession.

## Tenets of Tenure

Understanding the basis of tenure requires more reflection than a mere definition. Whicker, Kronenfeld, and Strickland (1993) suggested, "Tenure is an important milestone in the career of any professor" (p. 137). Stalcup (2006) pointed out, "Tenure was originally developed to provide autonomy for creative scholarly pursuits and represents a solemn contract between the institution and the academic" (p. 1). Mantero (2004) recognized that tenure "is just a process that takes time and provides faculty with five or six years to support their efforts in scholarly teaching and service" (p. 1). Regardless of the level of understanding associated with tenure, professors at all stages of the profession face university requirements for tenure. Assistant professors find themselves in a quandary due to the fact that the amount and emphasis in the prescribed areas of tenure remains vague, university-specific, and subjective. While college and university tenure policies state that research, teaching, and service are required for tenure, very little instruction or guidance is given to assistant professors as they begin their journeys in higher education.

The impact and importance of achieving tenure primarily affects newly positioned assistant professors. Junior faculty members are usually directed to existing faculty to answer questions concerning the university's tenure requirements, the weight and importance of each tenure criteria, and how they are to document their evidentiary material from research endeavors, teaching loads, and service opportunities (Young, 2002). With the many changes that face junior faculty, they must always be cognizant of the tenure process and prepared to focus their time, efforts, and energies on the development of a meaningful tenure agenda (Mantero, 2004). However, in the area of service, the amount required to meet tenure expectations is still uncertain as is the meaning and definition of service (Whicker et al., 1993). Research is needed to identify the role of service, ways assistant professors are informed about service opportunities, and ways to achieve the service requirement.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

The quest for tenure, in the area of service, is often problematic when deciding on what meets the service requirement. Stalcup (2006) explained that the issue of service applies not only to department possibilities such as committee membership and involvement in organizational activities but to serving in areas that impact the "larger community" of the profession such as national service as a reviewer or editor of a journal. Robbins (2002) contended that the area of service should receive greater consideration in regards to tenure because of the benefits faculty members receive toward their place in the profession. While service does constitute only one part of the tenure process, efforts toward service projects should be "intricately intertwined" with teaching and research in order to represent a well-rounded candidate who has adequately prepared for the tenure review (Office of Academic Affairs, n.d., p. 1).

For junior faculty, service to the field of higher education involves acknowledging the importance of service as well as establishing a plan of action that will ensure this requirement is met. Careful consideration should be taken when choosing service projects due to the fact that the quantity of experiences is not as important as the merit associated with the activity (FAU, 2006). The University of Oregon (n.d.), in their tenure policy, suggested that a faculty member "develops a commitment to service that has a long-term positive impact on [their] disciplines, and is a well-rounded pattern of service" (p. 1). In the general guidelines for tenure and promotion for the University of Texas (2010), there are seven different requirements for teaching, candidates for tenure are expected to provide evidence of at least five "significant" pieces of scholarly works, while in the area of service there are only two expectations, service on committees and service in "scholarly or professional organizations."

In a book review by O'Meara, she purported that in trying to assess the impact and purpose of service in regards to achieving tenure, university and college tenure committees are on "soft and mushy ground" (Robbins, 2002, p. 90). Young (2002) added, "Community and professional service is often given little attention and appreciation, but faculty tend to be involved (maybe by necessity) in many service roles" (p. 2). Filetti (2009) wrote, "Many universities do include service as one component in annual reviews as well as in assessing progress toward tenure and promotion. Unfortunately, criteria for evaluating service are often not specified" (p. 343). Whicker et al. (1993) agreed that while a quantitative requirement for scholarly publications and certain expectations for teaching exists, professors are faced with unclear guidelines on "how to acquire service hours" (p. 141).

This uncertainty about the service requirement coupled with scholarly and teaching responsibilities presents additional stress and concerns for novice faculty on the tenure track. Whicker et al. (1993) voiced a common thought about service in regards to attaining tenure, "Service has typically been the criterion that people think about the least, often waiting until the last minute" (p. 107). Newly hired assistant professors have limited knowledge and understanding and may well be at a loss when defining and meeting the service requirement for tenure. Stalcup (2006) remarked, "Service is often the least valued component of faculty activities at research-oriented institutions; yet, it can represent a significant amount of effort" (p. 2). The logical person in place to help assist junior faculty on this journey is an existing faculty member who has already achieved tenure.

**Assisting New Faculty**

Understanding the responsibilities and role of an assistant professor who has chosen to follow the tenure track places an equal responsibility on the current faculty members to serve as mentors and guides. One key to helping junior faculty during the typical transition period into higher education is the assistance provided by senior faculty (June, 2008). Tenured faculty members are able to steer junior professors away from potential errors in managing their time, balancing teaching, research, and service requirements, and learning the culture of their departments (June, 2008). Greene, O'Conner, Good, Ledford, Peel, and Zhang (2008) recognized that as new faculty enters the profession, the "responsibility to nurture and guide the teaching and research talents of young professors" falls on the shoulders of the university and their respective departments (p. 429). With that said, the somewhat forgotten requirement for service goes unaddressed.

As a mentor and a guide for junior faculty, established professors become valuable resources to assist novice assistant professors with beginning research projects, advice on balancing research with teaching responsibilities (Young, 2002), and initiating service opportunities that supports a successful tenure plan. By establishing a sound and productive mentoring relationship with already tenured professors, new faculty members garner not only support and guidance in research and teaching endeavors but are also presented with service opportunities that allow them to learn more about their chosen profession and the workings of higher education.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to gain an understanding about the connective relationship between service and tenure at Texas colleges and universities as well as how established faculty can assist new faculty in the area of service, this study examined the beliefs and perceptions of practicing professors regarding the service requirement for tenure and the means by which they were assisted with service opportunities. The research questions that guided this study were:

1.    What role does service play in acquiring tenure?
2.    How are assistant professors informed about the tenure process?
3.    What are possible areas for the acquisition of service opportunities?

In order to collect relevant quantitative and rich qualitative data, a mixed-method research design was incorporated through the use of the electronic survey engine Survey Monkey. Mertler and Charles (2011) contended that a mixed-method approach "capitalizes on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research" (p. 319) as well as the fact that quantitative data allow researchers to examine useful information and qualitative data allow "individuals to express their own perspectives on the topic" (p. 319). With the issue of service and how it relates to tenure, the mixed-method approach provided valuable data.

The quantitative data were automatically collected and analyzed through the disaggregation component of the survey engine. Qualitative data were collected from three open-ended statements. From the collected responses, similar comments were coded and themes were identified regarding the beliefs and practices offered from the professors on the issue of service and tenure.

The survey was electronically emailed to the professors of 62 colleges and universities identified as member of the Texas Council of Professors of Educational Administration

(TCPEA). Of the 268 professors that were emailed the survey, 69 replied to the demographic and Likert-scale sections of the survey while 46 completed the open-ended statements. A reminder letter to complete the survey was delivered two weeks after the initial request.

The research instrument consisted of a letter of intent from the researcher, a demographic section that asked for ranking, importance of the three areas (teaching, scholarship, and service) of tenure, time devoted to each of the areas, and ways and the levels in which the participants participated in service opportunities. Thirteen statements were included using a Likert-scale format with a rating from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and a "not applicable." These statements were used to gain information about the participants' personal beliefs regarding tenure, service, and faculty mentoring.

## FINDINGS

### Demographic Data

Collecting demographic data provides participants a way to identify their personal characteristics (Mertler & Charles, 2011). The participants were asked to identify their current ranking. Table 1 reveals the collected data.

**Table 1.** Ranking of the Participant.

| Ranking | n / % |
|---|---|
| Assistant Professor | 33 (47.8%) |
| Associate Professor | 19 (27.5%) |
| Full Professor | 17 (24.6%) |

Of the 69 respondents, 22 (31.9%) entered the professorship directly from their doctoral programs, 10 (14.5%) from a superintendency, 15 (21.7%) from a principalship, 12 (17.4%) from a central office position, and 10 (14.5%) from another role or position. Fifty-two (75.4%) served at a college or university that had a tenure with promotion policy while 17 (24.6%) served on campuses where tenure could occur without promotion.

### Research Question One

In response to research question one that asked the professors to identify the role service played in acquiring tenure, the participants were asked to identify the significance level of service as well as scholarship and teaching according to their university tenure policies. Table 2 reveals the responses of those professors who addressed this particular question on the survey.

**Table 2.** Areas Associate with Tenure.

| Area | Significant | Somewhat Significant | Not Significant |
|---|---|---|---|
| Scholarship | 83.9% (52) | 12.9% (8) | 3.2% (2) |
| Teaching | 65.6% (42) | 31.3% (20) | 3.1% (2) |
| Service | 15.9% (10) | 63.5% (40) | 20.6% (13) |

The data revealed that the majority of the respondents identified that the two most significant areas related to tenure were scholarship (83.9%) and teaching (65.6%). The majority of the professors (63.5%) reported service to be only somewhat significant. When asked if service was required in their departments, 30 (43.5%) agreed and 37 (53.6%) strongly agreed with the statement.

The participating professors were also asked to identify the amount of time they spent on service projects as compared to scholarship and teaching. The results of this question are revealed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Dedication of Time.

| Area of Tenure | At least 10% | At least 25% | At least 33% | At least 50% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scholarship | 14.5% (10) | 23.2% (16) | 37.7% (26) | 24.6% (17) |
| Teaching | 1.4% (1) | 7.2% (5) | 43.5% (30) | 47.8% (33) |
| Service | 27.5% (19) | 40.6% (28) | 17.4% (12) | 14.5% (10) |

Nineteen (27.5%) replied that they devoted at least 10% of their time to service, 28 (40.6%) devoted at least 33% to service projects, 12 (17.4%) spent at least 33% of their time, and only 10 (14.5%) spent at least 50% of their time on service. The results also showed that 26 of the professors (37.7%) devoted at least 33% of their time on scholarship while the majority (33, 47.8%) of the professors spent at least 50% of their time devoted to teaching.

**Research Question Two**

In response to research question two, professors were asked to identify ways in which they were informed about the tenure process and the service requirements on their respective campuses. Table 4 reveals the Likert-scale statements and the participants' responses.

**Table 4.** Awareness of Tenure Process.

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | NA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I was made aware of the university's tenure policy when hired. | 4.3% (3) | 7.2% (5) | 42.0% (29) | 40.6% (28) | 5.8% (4) |
| There was a department mentor available to me to help me understand the tenure process. | 18.8% (13) | 24.6% (17) | 30.4% (21) | 20.3% (14) | 5.8% (4) |
| There was a department mentor available to me to help me understand the service requirement for tenure. | 20.3% (14) | 30.4% (21) | 27.5% (19) | 17.4% (12) | 4.3% (3) |

The professors' responses indicated that the majority were made aware of their university's tenure policies when they were hired as well as someone was available to help them understand that policy. Respondents also reported that while there was someone available for defining the tenure policy, the majority of the professors (30.4%) did not have a mentor available to help them understand the requirement or expectations for service.

**Research Question Three**

In response to research question three, professors were asked to identify the ways in which they had added to their service agendas. Eight potential service areas were listed as well as the level of that service ranging from department to international service opportunities. Respondents were asked to check all of the areas that applied to their particular experiences. This resulted in various responses rates for each area. Table 5 reveals the collected data.

**Table 5.** Opportunities for Service.

| Service Area | Department | College | University | State | National | International |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Committee Member | 94.0% (63) | 74.6% (50) | 77.6% (52) | 25.4% (17) | 37.3% (25) | 13.4% (9) |
| Reviewer | 14.5% (8) | 16.4% (9) | 10.9% (6) | 38.2% (21) | 87.3% (48) | 29.1% (16) |
| Assistant Editor | 0.0% (0) | 7.1% (1) | 0.0% (0) | 21.4% (3) | 64.3% (9) | 28.6% (4) |
| Editor | 16.7% (2) | 8.3% (1) | 8.3% (1) | 16.7% (2) | 66.7% (8) | 25.0% (3) |
| Board Member | 10.7% (3) | 17.9% (5) | 10.7% (3) | 46.4% (13) | 57.1% (16) | 10.7% (3) |
| Guest Speaker | 21.3% (10) | 29.8% (14) | 42.4% (20) | 70.2% (33) | 44.7% (21) | 29.8% (14) |
| Organizational Activities | 45.6% (26) | 40.4% (23) | 43.9% (25) | 45.6% (26) | 49.1% (28) | 17.5% (10) |
| Advisor | 89.7% (52) | 41.4% (24) | 27.6% (16) | 8.6% (5) | 8.6% (5) | 1.7% (1) |

Service in higher education usually begins at the department level and moves across a wide spectrum that includes college, university, state, national, and international fields. The data presented in Table 5 revealed that committee membership (94.6%) and advising (89.7%) were the two primary means of service at the department level; the same was seen at the college level with committee membership (74.6%) and advising (41.4%) respectively. The two primary means of service at the university level included committee membership (77.6%) and involvement in organizational activities (43.9%). At the state level, service centered primarily on guest speaking (70.2%) and being a board member of an organization (46.4%). The national level of service recognized reviewer work (87.3%) and editorship (66.7%) as the main ways in which the participants fulfilled service obligations. Service opportunities at the international level showed a decrease in participation from the professors with the majority (29.8%) reporting services as guest speakers and reviewers (29.1%).

**Qualitative Data**

After collecting and coding the responses from the open-ended statements, three primary themes emerged regarding the ways in which tenured faculty could be of assistance to junior faculty concerning service requirements: (1) mentoring them in the area; (2) sharing service opportunities with them; and (3) modeling behaviors that encourage junior faculty to become involved in service endeavors.

*Mentoring*. Mentoring provides tenured faculty opportunities to assist junior faculty with the transition from the public education sector to that of higher education (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2000). Novice professors face many challenges as they make this change and acclimate themselves to their new positions and responsibilities. One area of concentration for new faculty is recognizing the importance of tenure and how it is achieved. Because the process of achieving tenure is university specific (Stalcup, 2006), members of the existing faculty who have already achieved tenure seem the most likely mentor for newly hired assistant professors.

Villani (2006) posited that if mentoring from tenured faculty occurs the performance and success of newly hired professors may be beneficial to helping junior faculty acclimate themselves to their roles in higher education. As one respondent shared, "[We should] act as mentors to navigate the [tenure] system and [help them] locate service opportunities." Another professor felt that there should be "formal and informal mentoring related to teaching, scholarship, and service…in that order." Tenured faculty who serve as mentors should provide a positive and lasting impact on the professional lives of junior faculty to enable them to "find success and gratification in their new work" (Rowley, 1999, p. 20). Striving to reach tenure (Greene, et al., 2008) coupled with understanding their new roles as assistant professors leaves many junior faculty members needing words of encouragement and elements of a supportive effort to sustain them. This is mentoring at its simplest.

*Sharing*. The professors also identified that sharing was vital when assisting young faculty in locating and providing service opportunities. Junior faculty members may face several obstacles when deciding on what service opportunities are and how they can take part in those opportunities. Again, this constitutes the need for a mentor to help guide them in the area of service.

For mentoring to prove successful, senior faculty members who have agreed to be mentors invest a great deal of time and effort to share information about service opportunities with non-tenured faculty (Rowley, 1999). This kind of energy consists of, as one participant suggested "include them [junior faculty] in activities and recommend them for opportunities of which they are unaware." Other professors shared that they had a responsibility to "[connect] them with organizational leaders who can provide meaningful experiences" as well as "[partner] with them in various activities." Excelling in the area of service may rest in the willingness of existing faculty to share service opportunities with novice assistant professors.

Participants wrote that they saw sharing as a means of helping junior faculty with service activities by nominating them for various committees as various levels of higher education, by involving them in already existing service events, and providing networking possibilities from involvement in professional organizations and civic happenings. Trying to identify and find ways to increase the amount of service to the profession is somewhat unknown to junior faculty members, but with the help and guidance of tenured professors, as

one respondent implied "[I am simply] providing avenues and or ideas for potential service opportunities."

*Modeling*. The concept of modeling was also presented as a way existing faculty member could assist newly placed assistant professors in understanding the importance of service in the acquisition of tenure. Modeling behaviors, work ethics, and professionalism for junior faculty members allows tenured faculty not only an opportunity to exemplify the essence of the professorship but also embody the importance of serving the higher education community.

The responding professors also referred to modeling as a means to help junior faculty become acquainted with the how to become involved in service projects. Boreen et al. (2000) suggested that the concept of modeling by a mentor helps to provide practical experiences that exemplify the concepts of service. They continue to support this frame of thought by adding, "[as mentors] we offer invaluable service to our profession" (p. 2). Modeling also included being cognizant of junior faculty and their need for service opportunities by vacating committee positions so that new faculty could obtain required tenure service and bringing them along to meetings that may be of interest to them were ways in which many professors felt they were able to "give back to the institution."

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For newly hired assistant professors, understanding the structure of the tenure process should be developed early in their careers with the help and guidance from existing faculty. The traditional areas for tenure (scholarship, teaching, and service) in which a professor must contribute time, effort, energy, and productivity are constant from university to university. However, differences do arise when attempting to qualify and quantify each of the areas associated with tenure and promotion. For many new junior faculty members, these differences could become problematic as they attempt to define and seek ways to fulfill the necessary obligations for each area.

The support and assistance they receive from existing faculty could be the keys to helping novice faculty meet the tenure requirements especially in the area of service. Therefore, the foci of this study were to define service at the university level, help clarify the importance of service as it relates to the acquisition of tenure, and examine ways in which senior faculty could assist and mentor junior faculty with service opportunities

The quantitative data revealed that, for the majority of the respondents, service was only somewhat significant at their universities. Understandably, scholarship (83.9%) and teaching (65.6%) were found to be of significant importance. While 63.5% of the professors said that service was somewhat significant, 40.6% also stated that they only devoted 25% of their time toward service endeavors. A disconnect then exists between the significance of tenure in relation to service and the time allocated for service endeavors. If in fact professors are aware of the significance of service, the time devoted to this area is still minimal as compared to scholarship and teaching. This leads to the supposition, as supported by Whicker et al. (1993), that any activity centered on the service requirement for tenure should be more subjective in nature, measureable, and ample enough to warrant the acquisition of tenure. It seems that this disconnect would suggest that it is important for junior faculty to become very aware of the tenure and promotion guidelines in order to help them create a plan of how and what to focus on as they work toward gaining tenure.

Fifty-seven professors (82.6%) collectively agreed with the statement that asked them if they had been made aware of their university's tenure policy when hired. While they may have been made aware of the tenure policy, they may not have received detailed information regarding the quantitative requirements placed on each area. This was evident in the response rate when professors were asked if there had been a department mentor provided to them to help them understand how service was related to the tenure process. Thirty-five (50.7%) disagreed with this statement signifying they did not have a clear understanding of the service requirement for tenure. These results supported the need for additional mentoring and guidance for novice assistant professors on the tenure track.

In regards to the opportunities for service at the various levels of the profession, it appeared that as the levels moved from department to international, the opportunities for the eight identified areas decreased in involvement. The majority of committee service was completed at the department (94.0%) and university levels (77.6%). This suggested that there are several opportunities at these levels for junior faculty for their consideration. The most common service opportunity at the state level was guest speaking (70.2%) which could also help to support a professor's teaching and scholarly efforts by presenting research projects and teaching effectiveness at conferences and scholarly meetings.

The possibilities for service venues at the national level showed the highest level of involvement by serving as a reviewer (87.3%), editor (66.7%), an assistant editor (64.3%), a board member (57.1%), and involvement in organizational activities (49.1%). National level of service could occur with the help of a tenured mentor who encourages networking and collaboration with junior faculty. The least involvement regarding service activity was seen at the international level which may be a result of limited opportunities, travel costs, and the time that would be taken away from teaching responsibilities. This is clearly an area of service that requires more discussion regarding possible endeavors.

The tenure process is a journey that no junior faculty member should take alone. A mentor from the members of the existing faculty would provide a novice assistant professor with a guide through the formalities of the tenure process, a mentor that could lead them to service opportunities, and an advisor to help them understand the responsibilities of their new profession. The results of the qualitative data supported these suggestions on how to assist novice faculty by recognizing the importance of mentoring, sharing, and modeling. Boreen et al. (2000) emphasized that having a mentor in any situation that listens and shares experiences for the growth of another individual will certainly help in resolving "potential difficulties" (p. 21). The potential difficulty that could face junior faculty is the inability to meet the tenure requirements for scholarship, teaching, and the forgotten area of service.

With the uncertainty of the amount of or the opportunity for service activities, some junior faculty during their first years in higher education could become overwhelmed with the requirements of tenure and the expectations of their new position. To prevent this from happening, the assistance provided by a caring and concerned mentor is suggested. Mentors should be willing to help guide and nurture junior faculty by opening honest lines of communication, developing trusting relationships, and involving their charges in the daily operation procedures of university life. By taking these small efforts, junior faculty may be more inclined to use their time more effectively in the areas of scholarly and service-oriented projects.

Supporting this thought, especially in regard to service, one of the professors shared he/she was able to help new faculty by "[identifying] those service opportunities that contribute to other parts of the work agendas, as opposed to those that are only time drains and do not further those agendas." A mentor, according to another professor, leads junior

faculty in the development of a judgment system that allows them to accept or decline certain situations that would compromise their growth in the department and the profession.

Green (2008) pointed out that while the university tenure process is consistent in their expectations for scholarship, teaching, and service, the emphasis placed on each of these areas is inconsistent. Therefore, a mentor from the tenured faculty could assist novice faculty members further by helping to clarify the importance placed on these areas to avoid wasting valuable time and energy. Regarding service, this statement was further supported by one of the respondents, "make them [assistant professors] aware from the very beginning about the requirements for service related to tenure." Another professor shared, "senior faculty should guide junior faculty into the level of service participation which is acceptable."

If the goal of an assistant professor is to achieve tenure, then all areas and expectations of the process as well as a mentor should be afforded to them if they are to achieve that goal. The lack of information and assistance could mean failure for some. Mantero (2004) recognized the true meaning of tenure when he wrote, "We are here to teach well, pursue sound research, and try to improve the world around us in some way. If we do those things, then tenure will follow" (p. 2). If that is the case, then junior faculty deserves the information and assistance they need to not only meet tenure requirements but achieve tenure. Clearly, as suggested by Young (2002), "Traditional notions of teaching, research, and service need to be revisited" (p. 3).

While the service arm of the tenure process garners less attention than scholarship and teaching as revealed by the responses from this study, completed service endeavors are still of importance. Junior faculty should seek ways in which their service also relates to their teaching and research agendas. Service, as one of the professors shared, "expands the individual's horizons." While another added that service "is an essential aspect of the professional role. It causes and reinforces the fundamental human nature of university teaching and scholarly practice." Until the area of service is eliminated from college and university tenure policies, it would serve a new assistant professor well to become involved in the various aspects of the service requirement.

Tenure is not always a result of what a candidate does but the quality in how they do something (*The Colorado State University Tenure and Promotion Policy*, n.d). Service related activities can actually, contrary to common beliefs, "enhance…academic contributions" (*The Colorado State University Tenure and Promotion Policy*, n.d, p. 1). Whicker et al. (1993) suggested that having a "good performance record" may prevent a tenure-track professor from "having difficulties at tenure time" (p. 143).

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# Blazing a New Trail for the Educational Turnaround Leader

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The belief that turnaround models from business and public sectors can be utilized to turnaround failing schools has erupted onto the educational scene. Powered by accountability for productive PK-12 schooling, educational policymakers have been asking for powerful action to turnaround schools that fail to effectively educate students (Chapman, 2005; Hassel & Steiner, 2003; Levin, 2006; Malen & Rice, 2004; Wong & Shen, 2003). Students in schools that are designated as needing to improve student performance, many of whom are disadvantaged, continue to fall further and further behind their peers (Herman et al., 2008). There is nationwide agreement that the rescue plans for chronically failing schools have not been effective (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007). In the United States, nearly 30,000 schools failed to make adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the 2007–08 school year which is a 28% increase from the 2006–07 school year. In addition, approximately half of these schools missed these federally mandated achievement goals for two or more years. In most cases, schools have tried a variety of strategies to improve student achievement, but these strategies have not resulted in clear successes. For example, restructuring options may include moving to a charter school structure, state takeover, revamping administration or governance, full closure, or implementation of a turnaround model (Klein, 2009).

As a result, one in five of the nation's public schools are currently under state restructuring or school takeover action designed to improve student achievement (Hoff, 2009). More specifically, schools that lag behind are subject to an intervention process constructed in three stages: improvement, corrective action, and restructuring. When a school fails to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) two years in a row, it enters the improvement stage. Schools in this stage engage in a process of internal school renewal. A school improvement plan is written and they may implement research-based programs, comprehensive school improvement models, and extended services, where districts are required to provide assistance. If schools fail to make AYP yet another year, they enter the stage of corrective action during which district intervention intensifies. Among other measures, staff can be removed, curricula mandated, management authority revoked, and instructional time extended (Herman et al., 2008). With continued decline, schools enter into more drastic restructuring such as reconstitution, state takeover, conversion into a charter, transfer to a private management company and other, similarly radical measures. Thus, a school that fails to improve for five consecutive years ceases to exist in its original form according to No Child Left Behind.

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Even though some of these corrective efforts have been successful, they have not been consistently replicated in other schools. Some examples of success through these corrective efforts have been presented in impressive case studies of school success that have shown that schools serving highly challenged, high-poverty students can succeed. However, there has been very little research on what these schools are doing differently that would inform the broader context of school improvement (Calkins, et al., 2007). Turning around schools in an effort to prevent an epidemic in failing and low performing schools with the ultimate goal of improving overall student achievement is absolutely necessary at this juncture in education (Brady, 2007; Murphy & Meyers, 2008).

The proposed professional development model for this chapter developed specific school turnaround strategies that could be implemented when a school is in corrective action (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). The suggested strategies and integrated model incorporated current best turnaround practices from a variety of industries and adapted them for education.

## Perspectives

The notion of developing educational turnaround leaders is a concept that has been studied from various perspectives including business, government, the public sector, and education. Learning Point Associates (2005) refer to turnaround as "dramatic improvement in performance created by various changes within an organization" (p. 5). To apply these strategies to schools is a new challenge and has been a focus of study funded by the Wallace Foundation through the University of Virginia's (UVA) Darden College of Business. One of the challenges faced by local school systems was that a large scale model did not meet the individual needs of schools. Several principals stated that they would like to enroll in a program for turnaround leadership, but their school did not fit the profile dictated by the UVA model, and some said that their school did not fit the requirements for low performance. They asked, "Why can't you offer a program where we can choose to participate and gain the benefits of school turnaround?" While there are some aspects of the former model that can be retained, the proposed professional development model for an Educational Turnaround Leader (ETL) takes a new look at a decentralized model that can adapt to the individual needs of a school district. The overarching goal of this professional development model is to recruit and provide principals in failing schools the tools to strengthen organizational and instructional leadership capacities beginning with selection criteria based on individual needs assessments. A critical component to turnaround is to empower school staff to embrace decentralization rather than centralization (Chapman, 2005). Ultimately, the school principal and staff have ownership in making sustained and lasting change in the decentralized model. The Educational Turnaround Leader Professional Development Model program was designed to provide proven research-based skills and strategies that would ultimately positively impact student achievement.

## Statement of the Purpose

The objective of this review was to identify and synthesize evidence-based recommendations from the turnaround literature to be used in the development of a school leader turnaround specialist professional development program. The following research questions guided the integrative review process:

1. What are the current approaches to turnaround, and what elements have been successful?
2. How can research and best practice from business and the public sector inform education turnaround efforts?
3. How can we meet the localized needs of low performing schools that need assistance improving student achievement?
4. What are the elements of successful Professional Development Programs for the Educational Turnaround Leader?

An action research approach was recommended as a way to monitor ongoing progress and success. A series of continuous questions were used to answer questions such as, "Where are we now, where do we want to go, and how will we get there?"

**Inquiry Model**

An integrative review of the research process was used as the methodological classification system for analyzing the available research evidence in a systematic, rigorous, and detailed manner in much the same way as a meta-analysis of quantitative research articles (Broome, 2000). As in all literature reviews, the goal was to go beyond a summarization of related literature to one of critical evaluation of the strengths of the research evidence. The researcher approached the prior literature with an intent of identifying central issues and gaps in the body of knowledge as well as implications for future research. Overall, the hallmark end goal was a more defined and goal oriented review that would extend the traditional goals of a basic literature search to one that would provide conceptualization of a theoretical framework. In this chapter, our goal is to present the available business, public sector and educational research turnaround literature that informed our theoretical framework and conceptual model, the *Educational Turnaround Leader Professional Development Mo*del, and to describe the components of our model.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research from the business and public sector organizations were chosen for this literature review because it was believed that the public education community can learn from these organizations. One obvious difference in public education and these other organizations is that they are not governed by the state and, therefore, are not bound to them for performance scores. Another difference is that these other organizations are usually one entity, whereas school districts are comprised of many different schools separated by considerable distances. In businesses and public sector organizations, the CEO is the turnaround leader, and the counterpart to this position in the educational organization would be the superintendent and then the building level principal. In spite of these differences, schools can take the aspects of research-based knowledge and skills from these other turnaround leaders and apply them to the educational setting (Chapman, 2005).

**Business Turnarounds**

In business, there are many cases of successful turnaround initiatives from the Jet Blue story to the automobile industry. Zimmerman (1991) stated, "It is possible for troubled companies to turnaround" (p. 11). Thurow (2000) stressed, "Not all turnaround situations are

recoverable" (p. 250). Businesses also differ in context and situations that lead to turnaround. Harrigan (1988) stated, "There [is] no single road to success" (p. 133). In business, strong competent leadership is necessary for the turnaround process. Baden-Fuller and Stopford (1992) found that the leader is critically important both in jump starting the initial change and in acting as teacher during the ensuing steps.

Harker (2001) also examined organizational decline and proposed a turnaround strategy based on healthy change on turnaround processes of the Australian heavy engineering industry. He identified the conditions of decline and subsequent turnaround. He claimed that some turnarounds appear to have engaged in the process of market manipulation in order to be competitive and survive, but these quick turnaround strategies were influenced by the factors that caused the decline and may have addressed the wrong problem. This strategy consisted of doing new things for publicity and show. Rather, Harker (2001) recommended a process called *"retrenchment,"* but this process had to be coupled with management of external stakeholders and internal climate and culture. This process required an in-depth examination of culture and climate, and then undergoing substantial change throughout the organization in physical appearance, process and staff (Harker, 2001). From the business sector, Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) in their book, *The Knowing-Doing Gap*, stated that learning from university-based degree programs would only get the leader so far and that this kind of knowledge acquisition was only an illusion of knowledge; further, there is a loosely coupled relationship between knowing what to do and the ability to act on that knowledge. Simply studying the knowledge and skills is not enough, and sometimes no matter what training the employees attend, nothing will happen. Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) stressed that employees must watch someone implement a new strategy based on knowledge, work alongside them, and then perform the new skill under the watchful eye of a trainer. Turning knowledge into action is imperative for business success including the *business of education*. Borrowing from the business sector, the proposed model recognizes the importance of establishing a culture of change, ensuring stakeholder buy in, and collaborative practices.

## Public Sector Turnarounds

Public sector performance is currently a significant issue for management practice and policy, and especially the turnaround of those organizations delivering less than acceptable results. Garvin and Roberto (2005) described an impressive turnaround at a world-renowned teaching hospital by implementing a four stage persuasion campaign and eliminating dysfunctional roles. The steps were setting the stage for acceptance; framing the turnaround; managing the mood; and preventing backsliding. The elimination of dysfunctional roles can be accomplished by directly addressing these routines: (a) a culture of no; (b) the dog and pony show must go on; (c) the grass is always greener; (d) after the meeting ends, debate begins; (e) tinker and fine-tune without making a final decision; (f) this too shall pass. Prior leaders have declared crisis, but nothing happens in these lackadaisical climates with dysfunctional roles (Garvin & Roberto, 2005).

Theories of organizational failure and turnaround have derived largely from the business sector and require adaptation to the public sector service. The performance of public organizations is more complex to measure, is related to institutional norms, and the idea of *'failure'* is problematic. Turning around an organization comes down to leadership capability, and when that is absent, organizations fail to self-initiate turnaround. In this situation, authoritative external intervention is necessary; the strategies need to be concerned with

building a leadership capability that engages senior politicians and managers in order to overcome inertia (Jas & Skelcher, 2005).

## Education Turnarounds

While there are many educational  initiatives utilizing the turnaround concept, there are only a few well-documented school district cases of turnaround schools in San Francisco, Chicago, Houston, and Prince George's County, Maryland (Kowal & Hassel, 2005). This is such a new venture that to date there are few cross-site analyses or published case studies that highlight successful school turnaround processes (Kowal & Hassel, 2005).

Duke (2007) reported on the *"school turnaround specialists"* who are emerging from the pioneering program at the University of Virginia that adapts the business model of turnaround specialists to reverse the process of school decline. As mentioned previously, however, this predominant training modality for a turnaround specialist program and drastic school improvement did not support many state and district individual needs. In an effort to identify successful turnarounds, Brady (2007) described the interventions proposed by state and local policymakers as part of No Child Left Behind. He categorized and reviewed 17 interventions that were attempted by states or school districts since 1989. Three interventions were examined: the Schools Under Registration Review process in New York State, the implementation of comprehensive school reform in Memphis, Tennessee, and the reconstitution of schools in Prince George's County, Maryland. Brady's conclusions were that no particular intervention strategy was successful. In other words, most interventions yielded positive results in less than half of the schools where they were implemented. However, in most cases, solid school-level leadership seemed to be critical to success and missing in most low performing schools. This concept about finding and developing the right school leader and developing critical leadership skills is also supported by other researchers (Bossidy, 2001; Buchanan, 2003; Joyce, 2004;). In fact, Hassel and Steiner (2003) found that 70% of successful turnarounds include changes in leadership.

Murphy (2008) reported that Prince George's County, Maryland, hired turnaround specialists to lead failing schools, but they received no specialized training nor had special certification. These specialists were chosen based on state certification and notable experience (Neuman & Sheldon 2006). However, this criterion for selection was not enough according to Steiner (2009). School turnaround specialists need certain competencies, knowledge and skills. Murphy (2008) supported the notion of certain dimensions of leadership defining turnaround leaders, but a solid research base has not been established for competencies, knowledge and skills. Turnaround schools need special expertise and must be managed by educational leaders with the necessary training (Calkins et al., 2007). One organization that has achieved some success is the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE) housed in the University of Virginia. The initiative sought to combine business and education concepts in order to improve schools. The goal for the initiative was to develop and deliver the training necessary to provide low performing schools with high-impact principals trained in the knowledge and skills needed to accelerate and sustain student achievement.

In 2009, Mass Insight published a summary report that cited the limitations of state and district led school turnaround efforts (Calkins et al., 2007). States and districts had: (a) little political appetite/capacity to close schools; (b) few positive incentives for change with no negative consequences; (c) multiple improvement plans that become compliance documents rather than strategic action plans; (d) external improvement teams that did not help implement recommendations; (e) limited professional development and technical assistance;

(f) improvement not sufficiently focused on building school-level leadership and teacher capacity; (g) no strategy for sustainability (Rhim, L. M., Kowal, J. M., Hassel, B. C., & Hassel, E. A., 2007).

The need for a comprehensive educational turnaround professional development model was clearly evident from the review of literature. The research from business and public sectors had some promising practices, while others seemed impractical for the educational organization. Businesses view failure as a natural course of improvement and present a perspective that, if a business is too weak or poor to survive, they should be allowed to go out of business. However, this failure approach would not be a viable option for a low performing school unless another school took its place. Businesses claim that there are no easy solutions and no one path to success. This assertion implies that, for schools, the turnaround process needs to be very individualized and tailored to the context and community of the school. The practice of retrenchment may work in schools rather than a market manipulation approach. The business literature claimed that training and workshops do not work, but experience watching and working alongside an expert would help in developing new skills. The public sector research (Baden-Fuller & Stopford, 1992) emphasized the importance of leadership capacity, which is also important in the educational organization. This research stated that performance was complex and difficult to measure (Baden-Fuller & Stopford, 1992). The same can be said of schools. However the use of the four stage persuasion campaign and eliminating dysfunctional roles may have an impact in schools and could be implemented.

There appears to be value in a training or professional development model for turnaround leadership that encompasses leadership competencies (Steiner, 2009). Based on this integrated literature review, we recommend a self-selection process for a professional development provider and decentralized approach. The provider could be an individual consultant, business mentor, professional development provider or a university.

## EDUCATIONAL TURNAROUND LEADER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

When the individual educational leader is empowered to embrace decentralization rather than centralization, the effect on schools is a more market-orientated approach to educational improvement (Chapman, 2005). While there are some aspects of the currently utilized turnaround models that can be retained, others are irrelevant in the *Educational Turnaround Leader Professional Development Model* presented in this chapter. The school principal and staff have ownership in making sustained and lasting change in the decentralized model. As such, the theoretical framework for leadership development that is presented in this chapter incorporated prior research findings as components of the conceptualized model.

In the model presented, the localized needs of low performing schools can be met with a more personalized approach that is responsive to individual needs of the educational turnaround leader, school, district, and other stakeholders, such as the community, rather than a centralized program viewed as a state intervention or takeover. We propose that an individual who meets the turnaround leadership selection criteria and willingly accepts the challenge of turning around a failing school without being forced to change school sites would be personally vested in the professional development model and see it as a more personalized and non-threatening approach to school turnaround and ultimately to the improvement of student achievement.

The principal's role has changed and intensified under the pressures mandated by state and federal accountability and service to the school community (Chapman, 2005). These changes and demands are addressed and supported at varying levels across school systems and states. The work satisfaction of principals has had an effect on recruitment, retention, and development (Chapman, 2005). In a study of retention of principals, Norton (2003) found that there is a need to find new programs for professional development and alternative strategies for supporting these educational leaders on the job.

The *Educational Turnaround Leader Professional Development Model* provides an alternative strategy for supporting educational leaders on the job. Murphy (2008) found that leadership is the most critical element in the narrative of organizational recovery, and a change in top-level leadership is often required for organizations to recover. This top level leader in schools is ultimately the superintendent. In the proposed model, a significant change is self-selection of the school principal as a participant in the turnaround professional development.

**Educational Turnaround Leader Professional Development Model Components**

The components of the *Educational Turnaround Leader Professional Development Model* are (1) Recruitment, (2) Selection Criteria, (3) Curriculum, and (4) Implementation, Evaluation, and Ongoing Assessment. These steps are sequential and contain processes and critical subcomponents designed to assist educational leaders, schools, districts, and other stakeholders in maximizing participation in and working towards positive turnaround outcomes (see Figure 1).
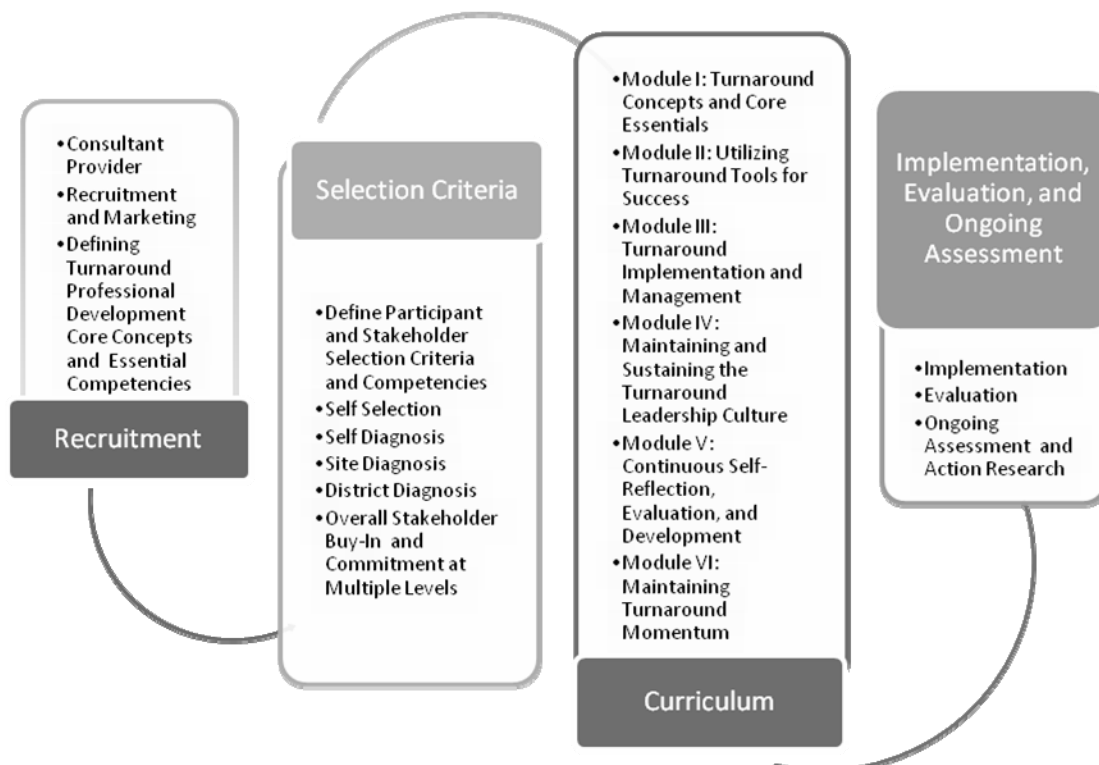


*Figure 1. Educational Turnaround Leader Professional Development Model.*

**Recruitment.** The first step in this decentralized approach to turnaround professional development was to recruit candidates from schools and districts who wanted to improve and strengthen their educational leadership skills and competencies in order to turnaround their failing schools or be proactive and prevent their schools from slipping into a turnaround situation. Unlike current turnaround programs, the turnaround professional development model allows candidates to enter the program while staying at their current school site. Rather than districts being the driving force behind choosing candidates based on the centralized guidelines that often serve as roadblocks to participation in existing turnaround programs, the turnaround candidate can select to participate in the professional development model and work with their school and district to complete an application for participation based on component two of the model, Selection Criteria.

**Selection criteria.** Who is this educational leader that will be selected to participate in the turnaround professional development program? The targeted educational leader (school principal) needs to be dedicated to the school, students, and school community. The leader must be focused on engaging the school and all its stakeholders in intense outcome and action driven goals that focus on the overall improvement of student achievement and turning around the failing school. A sufficient amount of self-confidence and self-efficacy is needed; he or she must possess and have the ability to refine, develop, and strengthen the four major clusters of competencies and dispositions of a turnaround leader as outlined in *School Turnaround Leaders: Competencies for Success Competence at Work* (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). This includes the initiative, persistence, and determination to implement and follow through to completion all components of the turnaround professional development program while at the same time ensuring buy-in from school personnel and students. In addition, it is equally important that the selected participant have the support of his or her superintendent and other district-level leadership as well as all stakeholders impacting the participating school site. This participant needs to be able to empower and  influence others to work and achieve aggressive data-driven educational gains together as a team highly focused on improving student achievement and overall school turnaround. Problem solving skills and the ability to be an analytical and conceptual thinker and implement shared leadership through ongoing team building and faculty and stakeholder buy-in are critical. Ultimately, more emphasis and ownership will be placed on team leadership with decision-making among faculty. As candidates experience the day-to-day events of their environmental work, they must process new concepts, respond accordingly, and be willing to adjust and change as needed. Flexibility and responsiveness will be key.

The ultimate goal of the Educational Turnaround Leader is improved student achievement and establishing a culture of high performance. Beginning with the end in mind, the first step is self diagnosis in order to make a personal professional development plan to develop the core competencies. These competencies allow a leader to be able to influence others to work as a collaborative team, a problem solver, and an analytical and conceptual thinker (Steiner, Hassel, Hassel, Valsing, & Crittenden, 2008). In turn, each member of the school staff will self diagnose and create a plan for strengthening core teaching competencies. The targeted educational turnaround leader (school principal) will make an informed and driven choice to turnaround his or her school and seek the tools to make it possible.

The school site must be assessed for strengths and weaknesses of core beliefs, strategic structures and distributed accountability that should be found in a high performance school culture. School characteristics and school rankings are imperative in the identification of the site; the selected school must be at a pivotal point in its school improvement process.

The optimal school site should be at a point prior to being on the verge of school take over and within the two to three years of school decline in order to maximize the potential for success. The socioeconomic make-up of the school is important as well as the history of neighborhoods and populations greatly impact both short and long term achievement gains. The school site's history of evolution in the areas of culture and climate will also have an impact in the selection criteria.

The school leader, faculty, district, and all stakeholders must choose to be completely invested in the *Educational Turnaround Leadership Professional Development Model* in order to promote and advance the development of turnaround competencies to their highest level. The learning curve will be very steep as new concepts are developed and put into action. Ideally, the new turnaround candidate will be supported by an experienced and successful advocate or mentor who has turned around a failing school or can serve as a voice at the local level to provide them with the flexibility needed in local policy, personnel, and resources to fully implement and carry each of the curriculum modules as they work toward school turnaround. This professional development program should be anticipated to span approximately two years during which the modules will be implemented and a third year to monitor ongoing growth and work towards sustaining and continuous improvement of achievement gains accomplished.

**Curriculum.** The proposed curriculum was derived from a review of existing turnaround programs, Leadership Competencies (Steiner, 2009), Leadership Curriculum Modules (SREB, 2006), and other turnaround or leadership focused research cited in the Literature Review on education turnarounds. Throughout the integrated literature review, the following six overarching themes emerged for the focus and development of the proposed turnaround professional development model's curriculum modules (see Figure 2.). The Educational Turnaround Leader Professional Development Curriculum outlines these six modules.

**Implementation, evaluation, and ongoing assessment.** The Implementation, Evaluation, and Ongoing Assessment component of the model focuses on data-driven decision making, a commitment to implementing the six modules and setting data-driven goals and action plans that are based on sound research and evaluated for impact. Results will be seen in the data collected throughout the days, weeks and months of each school year of participation and during the final year where work is focused on sustaining and improving turnaround gains and successes. Data rooms and walls will be a natural part of the physical building where teams of educators meet often to conduct ongoing evaluation, analyze and plan future practices, strategies, instructional interventions, collaboration, and accountability for continued growth and student achievement. According to Skytt and Contour (2000), action research has the ability to greatly enhance both professional development and school improvement. Educational action research attempts to solve real problems (O'Brien, 2001). Though the methodologies carry a variety of names, the models contain four common aspects which are cyclical in nature: planning, action, observation, and reflection. In addition, each new success or failure can change the direction of the action plan (Skytt & Contour, 2000). There is a real opportunity to brainstorm as a team of professionals, and to make adjustments based on outcomes and progress as each module is implemented. Reflection provides a forum for all participants to synthesize the collected data; through this ongoing process everyone can become more effective in the turnaround process (Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, 2004). The overarching evidence of success will be found in the quantitative data that shows a significant improvement in test scores and overall school improvement.

| Module I:Turnaround Concepts and Core Essentials | Module II:  Utilizing  Turnaround Tools For Success |
|---|---|
| a. Defining Turnaround: Definition and Goals, Process, and Core Competencies<br>b. Driving for Results<br>   i. Achievement<br>   ii. Initiative and Persistence<br>   iii. Monitoring and Directiveness<br>   iv. Planning Ahead<br>c. Influencing for Results<br>   i. Impact and Influence<br>   ii. Team Leadership<br>   iii. Developing Others<br>d. Problem Solving<br>   i. Analytical Thinking<br>   ii. Conceptual Thinking<br>e. Showing Confidence to Lead | a. Roadmap for Shared Vision Mission and Goals<br>b. Core Beliefs for High Performance Aligned to Strategic Structures<br>c. Teambuilding for Strong Relationships<br>d. Utilization of turnaround tools such as the 90-day plan; Leader, Teacher, Stakeholder Competencies Skills' Lists; Education based Case Studies; Ongoing Assessment and Reflection<br>e. Shared Leadership and Responsibility |
| **Module III: Turnaround Implementation and Management** | **Module IV: Maintaining and Sustaining the Turnaround Leadership Culture** |
| a. Implementation of 90-day Plan<br>b. Aligned Professional Development for all Stakeholders according to School Needs and Plan<br>c. Literacy and Numeracy Leadership<br>d. Differentiated Instruction<br>e. Ongoing Monitoring and Management of Implementation Process | a. Making necessary changes to Turnaround Plans, Strategies, Professional Development, and Practices to Sustain the Turnaround Culture<br>b. Integrating Proven Models and Tools for Educational Purposes<br>c. Application and Adaptation of these Models and Tools for the School Setting |
| **Module V: Continuous Self-Reflection, Evaluation, and  Development** | **Module VI: Maintaining Turnaround Momentum** |
| a. Becoming a Consumer of Research<br>   i. Becoming a Producer of Action Research<br>   ii. Shared Assessments<br>   iii. Analysis and Planning<br>b. Continuous Self-Refection and Evaluation<br>c. Evaluation of the Turnaround Processes, Strategies, and Actions Utilized | a. Ongoing Communication and Evaluation<br>   i. Verbal and Non-Verbal<br>   ii. Written and Spoken<br>   iii. Ensuring Continuous Buy-In and Support from all Stakeholders both Internal and External to the School<br>b. Change and Shared Leadership and Instructional  Practices to Maintain Momentum and Achievement Gains |

*Figure 2. The Educational Leader Turnaround Professional Development Curriculum.*

## CONCLUSIONS

This integrative review of literature and a new model for an *Educational Turnaround Leader Professional Development Program* blazes new trails for preparing leaders for improved access and equity for high achieving schools. This chapter may be of value to all school leaders, communities and professionals in the field of school leadership. Pertinent ideas to school leadership were selected from existing selected research literature in the field of business, the public sector and education. A centralized approach has too many barriers to reach a wide array of leaders and schools in need of turnaround. Educational leaders need a

choice to participate in a program that can help them and their schools regardless of the level of improvement deemed by accountability standards.

Even though some of the efforts at turning around schools have been successful, they have not been replicated in enough schools. While there is hope that a turnaround process may work for some, there is not enough research in the education sector to suggest that the majority of declining schools can become successful utilizing the existing format of turnaround programs. Even in the large business sector, there were only twelve studies that provided empirical evidence of success (Hess & Gift, 2009). The nation cannot continue to accept failing schools that do not adequately endorse the highest teaching and learning standards that afford maximum student achievement. This professional development model may serve as a tool to advance the turnaround effort and make its core successful components available to a vast number of schools unable to conform to or participate in the existing turnaround programs due to various reasons. It is time we recognize the importance of educational leadership and provide the professional development our leaders need. The proposed *Educational Turnaround Leader Professional Development Model* may prove to be a promising solution for turning around or improving the countless schools in need of assistance.

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# Developing and Supporting Early Childhood Teacher Leaders: A Leadership Project Connecting University, Community and Public School Resources

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The empowerment of early childhood educators as teacher leaders can translate into effective instructional practices that promote children's development (Armstrong, Kinney, & Clayton, 2009; Rodd, 1998). This chapter aims to broaden the discussion about the relationship between early childhood educators and their traditional K-12 counterparts. We seek to present a wider exploration of what it takes to develop and maintain systemic changes in thinking—the philosophies, the perceptions, and the policies that are needed to create sustained educational change.

Traditionally, early childhood education and K-12 education have operated as separate systems, with infrequent opportunities for professionals to share their philosophies, goals and perceptions or to discuss how policies and practices affect children and families transitioning from early childhood to K-12 programs (NAEYC, 2006). This chapter describes a very promising effort to link a regional and university-based teacher leadership program, which had previously been unavailable to early childhood educators, with an enthusiastic cadre of early childhood educators in an urban region of a northwestern state.

This project, designed to build a connected system, began with a series of conversations and culminated with an event to bring together ECE and K-12 educators for the purpose of exploring factors that impact building connected systems for children and families from birth throughout the school years. From these voices in the intersection of ECE and K-12 education, we share themes about successes, emerging practices, and barriers to developing connected systems in local school communities. We also suggest directions for future discourse and study about building connected educational systems that encompass all learners and all educators.

## FRAMING THE CONVERSATIONS: LEADERSHIP CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Early childhood leadership research and K-12 leadership research share similar issues and questions. Both fields examine how societal changes necessitate changes in educational systems to support children and families. Additionally, both fields advocate recognizing and supporting the broadening leadership roles of educators in current educational settings (Gigante & Firestone, 2008; Harris, Day, Hadfield, Hopkins, Hargreaves, & Chapman, 2002; Jorde Bloom, 2000; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

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This advocacy has required a shift from focusing only on the actions of those in traditional leadership positions (e.g., superintendents and principals in K-12 systems, and directors in ECE systems) to a broader focus on leadership activities of all educators in an educational system. Both early childhood leadership research and K-12 leadership research increasingly recognize that more sophisticated analytical approaches are required for capturing the complexity of what contributes to teacher quality and effectiveness (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005).

An underlying assumption for teacher leadership is that teachers can lead the way for continuous improvement of teaching and learning with increased student achievement (Bowman, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; DiRanna & Loucks-Horsley, 2001;Harris & Muijs, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Murphy, 2005; Wynne, 2001; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Additionally, there is a recognition that teachers who are central to the growth of learning in a school are well situated to share in leading the efforts to transform teaching and learning (Harris, et al, 2002; Louis, Kruse, & Raywid, 1996).

School improvement literature calls for the active involvement of teachers; yet, the research in the area of early childhood identifies leadership with the director-position, with little regard for the classroom teacher. Muijs, Aubrey, Harris and Briggs (2004) claimed that the literature on early childhood leadership does not connect with that on school leadership, despite the fact that many parallels might be expected. In a study that explored attitudes of a group of early childhood professionals, Woodrow (2002) found that "the construction of leadership that emerged was predominately managerial and seen to work against the potential for collaborative and reciprocal relationships within the early childhood sites studied" (p. 87). This study further revealed that leadership was perceived in the traditional managerial sense and limited the potential for transformative curriculum or leadership at those sites.

Goffin and Washington (2007) stated that resolving early care and education's current challenges of purpose, identity and responsibility "necessitates moving beyond reliance on individual leaders and toward creation of a field-wide community of diverse leaders" (p. 3). Lieberman and Miller (2005) advocated for policies that support teachers to "assume roles as researchers, mentors, scholars, and developers…." (p. 153). Rodd (1998) indicated that recognition of the leadership role and a broader conceptualization of their professional role and associated skills is necessary if members of the early childhood field are to be able to meet the demands for competent program administrators, supervisors, trainers, educators, researchers and advocates.

As teachers consider new opportunities to lead and serve, the cultural conditions of the school matter a great deal (Fullan, 2001; Harris, 2004; Phelps, 2008; Reeves, 2008; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson & Myers, 2007). In a study of early childhood educator competencies, the inclusion of leadership as a teacher competency stirred differing opinions. While some felt that the term implied a hierarchical style of management, others regarded leadership as inclusive, applying to everyone in the field, and felt that by including leadership as a competency, early childhood educators would be encouraged to regard themselves as leaders (CSCCE, 2008). Much of the existing research in early childhood leadership has focused on the context specific roles of early childhood leaders (AEYC, 2006; Bloom, 2000; Jorde Bloom, 2000).

In a study of early childhood managers, Rodd (1997) found that most of the roles identified as leadership roles by participants focused on maintenance rather than development and were, in fact, managerial rather than leadership roles. However, teacher leaders break from the isolation and privacy that characterize schools (Fullan, 2001; Phelps, 2008; Reeves, 2008; Scribner, et. al, 2007) to interact with other professionals.

Early childhood and K-12 leadership research acknowledge that collaborative leadership approaches, rather than previous hierarchical models, are better suited to the complexity and diversity of contemporary educational settings (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001; NAEYC, 2006; Reeves, 2008). Kagan and Bowman (1997) acknowledged that in the past, leadership theory may not have been appropriate to early childhood because of its hierarchical, top down orientation. Further, they claimed that the more modern leadership approaches which support collaborative leadership and respect the role of gender in leadership development are more in concert with early childhood principles and practices.

Both early childhood and K-12 leadership research recommended that leadership development be grounded in practice, with colleagues working on educational issues applicable to the systems in which they operate. Jorde Bloom and Rafanello (1994) indicated that key elements of effective models to increase the professional development opportunities of early childhood directors included addressing both management and leadership functions, using a problem-centered approach, and promoting collegiality and networking. Sparks (2002), provided a conceptualization of professional learning and leadership development through cases of action-oriented individuals and groups of teachers. Both ECE and K-12 leadership research promoted a flatter, less hierarchical structure, based on collaboration and power sharing (Bowman, 2004; Murphy, 2005; Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002).

While leadership has been a skill long associated with early childhood educators, our experience has shown that for early childhood educators, leadership was isolated to the leader's immediate realm of influence, and only, at best, running tangentially with that of the established K-12 system. According to Isenberg (1979), a teacher leader exhibits his or her skill in the early childhood setting first and foremost by the way in which he or she leads children for learning. Secondly, a relational role is paramount as early childhood leaders interact with many adults as routine work, whether they are staff, parents, and agency representatives. Investigating gender-specific leadership learning is necessary in early childhood and early elementary settings where educators are predominantly female (Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995; Flumerfelt, Feun, & Maxfield, in press 2010; Kagan & Bowman, 1997).

Since the 1980's, there has been a growing collection of literature on women in leadership, both in management and in education. Gosetti and Rusch (1995) argued for a women's perspective on leadership and Shakeshaft (1989) researched how women lead. Flumerfelt, et al., (2010) stated that participants in their study "indicated a most highly ranked preference for simulation, mentorship, internship, and field-based work, regardless of gender" (p. 23).

Although the fields of early childhood education and K-12 leadership share similar issues and questions, the intersection between ECE leadership research and K-12 leadership research is small. ECE leadership research focuses primarily on pre-K settings, ignoring the early elementary grades, and more on early childhood administrators than teachers (Bloom, 2000; Jorde Bloom, 2000). K-12 leadership research focuses on change in K-12 settings, and includes an emphasis on both administrators and teacher leaders as a way to understand and encourage changes in educational cultures and systems (Smylie, Conley, &Marks, 2002).

## CONTENT OF THE STUDY: TWO VOICES

Like-minded people tend to find each other. Two assistant professors at a major Midwestern University came to the world of higher education from lengthy previous careers in education and considerable experience as change agents in their respective fields. They

crossed paths at the new faculty meetings that first year, learning about mutual colleagues and where their work overlapped in the larger local community. The following year, they taught down the hall from each other on Wednesday nights, one with his group of school administrators in the Educational Leadership Master's program and the other with her group of early childhood and elementary teachers in the Early Childhood Master's program. At breaks during the long evening courses, they chatted about similar themes they were exploring in their course content, such as educational cultures, system-building activities, and models of leadership for institutional change.

The early childhood professor began to attend workshops organized by the educational leadership professor through an Institute on Teacher Leadership. She was interested in how the work in teacher leadership and school change was applicable to her research in early childhood advocacy and leadership. It became apparent that only a few early childhood educators attended these workshops and that most of the conversations were focused on K-12 education. From this unassuming beginning, the professors joined with colleagues from various educational communities to continue to talk about how to more formally develop opportunities for conversations between early childhood and K-12 educators.

Concurrent with these conversations, the early childhood professor and two doctoral students who were also interested in early childhood leadership issues began discussing possibilities for fieldwork that would support the students' dissertation research. The professor participated in various community early care and education groups and collaborated with these groups to do research on early childhood leadership and components of quality programs. Each of the doctoral students had a full time career and leadership role in early childhood agencies in the local community. One of the doctoral students was an early childhood consultant with the county Intermediate School District (ISD). In this role, she facilitated meetings of early childhood program directors in the local school districts in the county. She also provided on-site consultation for early childhood programs situated in local districts. The other doctoral student was a project specialist for a local state-funded collaborative that focused on early childhood system building. She facilitated task groups of leaders representing a wide range of early childhood education, social service, mental health and medical agencies in the county. An understanding of the local community guided the conversations that the professor and students had both in terms of identifying issues that were relevant to explore and study and in terms of which agencies and individuals would be key stakeholders to support this exploration.

## METHODOLOGY

### Focusing the Results Conversation: Early Childhood Voices

In June, 2008, an Early Childhood Leadership Forum was co-hosted by the university, the regional educational service agency's department of early childhood education and statewide public agencies for directors of early childhood programs in surrounding school districts, representing tuition-based preschool and childcare, Head Start, and state funded early childhood programs.

The focus of this leadership forum was to gain a better understanding of the needs of these directors regarding their own leadership development, their roles as mentors of other future leaders, and the kinds of opportunities they felt would be most beneficial to them in terms of future leadership development.

Two recurring themes emerged from the focus group discussions that guided the next steps in the ongoing conversation. First, while early childhood directors were able to identify their  leadership skills and felt competent to navigate relationships with their staff, families and community members, they often experienced barriers and felt disconnected when it came to navigating relationships in the larger educational community.

Their examples included feeling marginalized or left out of educational and curricular conversations and professional development opportunities, discrepancies in pay, benefits and tenure for ECE and K-12 teachers, and lack of funds and/or resources for program maintenance and development. One preschool teacher explained, "I sometimes come to work when I feel ill because I do not have sick days, and we also have a very difficult time getting substitutes because we are so poorly paid." Another ECE acknowledged that she was unaware of the school improvement plan, strategic plan or any of the goals guiding the instructional program for students in her district, even though her classroom is located within an elementary school building.

Second, these ECE directors worried that the future generation of ECE professionals were not coming into the field with the leadership skills necessary to keep early childhood education clearly in view of educational, community, and legislative decision makers. "We have not been given the opportunity to extend our leadership and impact the school beyond the walls of our classroom or program," argued one preschool teacher. Another added, "We are so busy with the day-to-day care and activities within our program, unfortunately, there is no time to keep up with pending legislation."

Based on the insights gained from the leadership forum and subsequent workshops, conversations began to focus on three general goals:

- In what ways could school district teams be encouraged to view the early childhood staff as part of their leadership team?
- In what ways could the concepts of teacher leadership be applied to leadership development for early childhood educators?
- In what ways were opportunities for teacher leadership development similar or different in ECE and K-12 settings?

## RESULTS

**Expanding the Conversation: Blending ECE and K-12 Voices**

During the following year, several planning meetings were convened to discuss activities that would support reaching these goals. On August 12, 2009, several stakeholders collaborated to sponsor a forum called Building a Connected System: Voices in the Intersection of Early Childhood and K-12 Education. Teams representing several county school districts gathered to hear success stories from two school districts and to participate in within-and-cross-district discussions of what it would take to build a connected system for children from birth throughout the school years. The forum was co-sponsored by the Early Childhood Department and the Teacher Leadership Project at the university, the ISD Early Childhood Department, and a generous grant from the county Early Childhood Collaborative. In order to ensure ownership of the change process by all stakeholders, each school district was encouraged to send a vertical team to the forum that included representatives from ECE

programs (both directors and teachers), early elementary teachers, principals, curriculum specialists and superintendents.

The common themes emphasized were the need to create connected systems that fully recognized the importance of early childhood education and how school districts can align their goals, organizational structures and resources accordingly. Teacher leadership was also stressed as an important component in this realignment.

The keynote address summarized current research on the importance of early childhood education and the status of ECE programs in the surrounding area with special attention given to the structural connections between early childhood programs and the organizational structure of the district in which the programs were provided. While it was encouraging to note that all 28 districts in the county have early childhood programs, the speaker clearly stated that these programs were not effectively integrated in the districts' administrative structures. Vast differences were noted in what the programs were called, how parents accessed information about them, the instructional staff, and how the programs fit within the district's organizational structure. Many of these issues could be resolved by creating connected PK-12 systems in which recognition is given to early childhood educators, ECE, and K-12 curriculum is aligned and early childhood administrators and teachers meet regularly with their K-12 colleagues. The keynote speaker articulated the value of such efforts by stating, "Education quality and outcomes would improve substantially if elementary teachers incorporated the best of preschool's emphases and practices and if preschool teachers made more use of those elementary grade practices that are valuable to preschoolers as well." School district success stories highlighted the development of a comprehensive preschool program that is truly connected to the district's curricular and administrative structure at one district and the creation of district-wide all day kindergarten programs which are effectively integrated into the school system at another.

These opening presentations were followed by vertical team discussions focused on creating a connected system at the local district level. Teams were asked to identify successes, emerging practices, and barriers to future progress as shown in Table 1. An interesting insight from looking across each district's summary in these three areas was that individual school districts were at quite different places in the process of building a connected PK-12 system. A barrier for one district was an emerging practice or success for another district.

Having reflected on these successes and concerns, groups were asked to generate ideas about what a "connected system" looks like. To set the tone for the discussion, each table was equipped with a tool kit and a set of Lego blocks to create a model of a connected system. The words and phrases generated during this activity were organized in the following themes:

- All stakeholders (Board, administration, community) must recognize the value of early childhood programs.
- Integrate early childhood in district's vision, goals, and overall strategic plan.
- Communication between ECE and K-12 must be on-going and intentional.
- Establish a PK-12 focus in all areas of district operations and structure including curriculum and human resource development.
- Secure stable funding.
- Align Pre-K and K-12 curriculum
- Marketing and communication with community about PK-12 VISION

**Table 1.** Successes, Emerging Practices and Barriers Identified by ECE Leaders.

| | |
|---|---|
| Successes | Early childhood staff included in K-12 professional development days |
| | Children's portfolios sent from early childhood classrooms to kindergarten classrooms |
| | Early childhood directors are part of district administrative team |
| | Long-range planning discussions |
| | Supportive administration |
| | Certified teachers in early childhood programs |
| | Early childhood programs are housed in various K-12 buildings |
| | Early childhood programs have a strong reputation in the district |
| | Strong EC curriculum based on state EC standards, which align with K-12 standards |
| Emerging practices | Increased collaboration between pre-K and Kg |
| | Including pre-k teachers in staff meetings (building level) |
| | Professional development planning committee—collaborative Pre-K and Kg PD |
| | Establishing transition meeting opportunities |
| | NAEYC accreditation for early childhood programs (increase status, quality, recognition) |
| | Response to Intervention process beginning to include early childhood classrooms |
| | Community awareness activities of EC programs in the district |
| | Survey of parents—needs regarding transition from EC to Kg |
| | Welcoming community preschool programs (non-district based) to professional development events |
| Barriers | EC and K-12 schedules for professional development not aligned |
| | Different funding sources for EC and K-12 |
| | Uncertain funding for EC (tuition-based success affected by economy, federal and state funded programs can be affected by current legislation) |
| | Difficult for EC to maintain high quality staff year to year (due to lower salaries) |
| | Perception of EC staff as less than equal faculty members |
| | Few opportunities for conversations with community (non-district) EC programs/staff |
| | Parent in EC programs do not feel they can participate in building Parent-Teacher Organizations |

The response to the Building a Connected System Forum was overwhelmingly positive. A powerful outcome for many participants was the opportunity to talk, problem-solve and share perspectives with others from their own district. Participants also shared that that in addition to learning about ideas and strategies from other districts, they appreciated knowing that there were many common successes as well as barriers across districts. An elementary school principal reflected high levels of collaboration between early childhood educators and credited this to the district's commitment to the success of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme. One preschool teacher commented, "I was surprised to see how other districts communicate. My classroom is right next to two Kindergarten classrooms and the teacher closes the door and does not even speak to me, let alone collaborate." All educators wanted to continue the conversation that had begun during the forum.

## CONCLUSION

### Creating a Discussion Environment for Teacher Leadership

Early childhood educators have fundamentally been disenfranchised in the literature on leadership, despite the fact that it is the same child who will learn discovery and

exploration from a preschool teacher, prealgebraic formulae from a middle school teacher or the love of prose from a literature teacher (Stone, 2000). Early childhood education has widely languished outside the inner circle of K-12 education—without a clear acknowledgment of its role as a critical partner in the education of all children. According to Stone (2000), "We've been faced, historically, with a limited public understanding of what we do, why we do it, how we do it, how we've been trained, how much we know, and the extent of our contributions to families and communities" (p. 29). Stone further claimed the difficulty in attempting to empower early childhood professionals as leaders relates to status issues within society, and regrettably within the field of education as well. Rust (1993) identified this obstacle in stating, "Early childhood education is not widely recognized as a distinct and well-articulated field of education. It is perceived as 'women's work,' with concomitant low status and low pay" (p. 104).

Harris (2004) theorized that the concept of distributed leadership, with its emphasis on increased capacity through shared leadership may be applied to the field of early childhood education. This linkage to educational leadership research is particularly relevant to a field that is diverse, complex and maintains strong community relationships. Barth (2001) stressed the importance of shared leadership to systematically improve schools from within. Fullan (2001), Lieberman and Miller (2004), and DuFour and Eaker (1998) echoed Barth in arguing that the complex process of school improvement can be successful only if it involves everyone throughout the organization.

Because few teachers begin their careers with a vision for a leadership role in the future, new teachers must be encouraged to assume these roles in their schools, the larger school district and educational community (Quinn, Haggard, & Ford, 2006). Fleet and Patterson (2001) contended that each teacher's experience regarding professional development is "complex, unpredictable, and dependent on contextual influences" (p. 10) and that traditional in-service training denies teachers the richness of growth contexts and overlooks the diversity of staff in early childhood centers. Carter (2010) suggested that professional development should focus on children rather than topics, concentrating on involving teachers in communities of practice. From our work with teacher leaders, we have found that you simply cannot expect positive results when you send a changed teacher back to an unchanged school. Building a Connected System: Voices in the Intersection of Early Childhood and K-12 provided a rich, context-based professional development opportunity for early childhood and K-12 educators alike that influenced changes in teacher leadership and in school policies.

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