

Ready, Set, Grow! Preparing and Equipping the Rural School Leader for Success

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Abstract

Rural instructional leaders require specialized training and ongoing support to effectively navigate within their local and unique contexts. A review of the literature written predominantly between 2007 and 2017 was conducted to explore effective practices in developing and supporting rural instructional leaders. Approximately 32 studies focused on the rural instructional leader were selected and analyzed for common themes. As a result, a tripartite framework encompassing preparation, induction, and ongoing professional development evolved. The literature review revealed an education preparation curriculum developed in a collaborative effort between the university and a partnering district(s) as the foundation needed for building an effectual rural instructional leader. These collaborative partnerships were also shown to be vital for providing purposeful induction to the novice instructional leader helping bridge the theory and practice gap and resulting in increasing the leader's confidence, efficacy, and instructional leadership skills. Additional support of in-service instructional leaders as they seek to improve student performance was also highlighted as a professional development need in the literature. Just as a cross country runner runs the race course, the rural school leader must "get ready" by completing a relevant education preparation program, "get set" by participating in a quality mentoring program, and "go" or in this case "grow" through a journey of life-long learning with ongoing, meaningful professional development. The tripartite framework for rural instructional leader development presented offers a guide for universities and rural school districts in creating focused preparation, mentoring, and ongoing support for the rural instructional leader.

Keywords: rural, leader, preparation, mentoring, professional development

To meet the challenges of their complex courses, cross-country runners prepare differently than those who run in track and road races; therefore, they require specialized support and ongoing training for continued effectiveness. Similarly, rural school leaders must have specialized preparation to meet the unique challenges they face and then they need focused ongoing, professional development to stay the course. The purpose of this paper is to describe and discuss the current research on preparation, induction, and ongoing professional development focusing on the impact on novice instructional leaders in a rural setting.

Research Design and Methodology

A systematic literature review was conducted to examine the practices in place to prepare and support instructional leaders to thrive in a rural environment. The purpose of the systematic literature review is to objectively report on current knowledge on a topic (Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006), and “uses a specific methodology to produce a synthesis of available evidence in answer to a focused research question” (Bearman et al., 2012, p. 627). Hart (2001) further explained that a systematic literature review is especially useful for a small number of studies.

The study began by performing a preliminary search of the current literature and an attempt was made to find all primary research studies, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles. The review was delimited to work published predominantly in the last 10 years (2007-2017). The primary keywords that were used in the search were: rural, leader, preparation, mentoring, and professional development. From this review, a tripartite framework encompassing preparation, induction, and ongoing professional development evolved.

Preparation of the Rural Instructional Leader

Cross-country runners spend years receiving precision instruction and applying the techniques in a supervised setting. In the same manner, educational preparation lays the foundation upon which an instructional leader begins or “gets ready” for the journey to school leadership. The principal has an impact on the effectiveness of the school and likewise, student achievement (Wood, Finch, & Mirecki, 2013); therefore, it is vital that preparation programs impart the knowledge and skills needed by leadership candidates as they begin the race toward effective school leadership. Moreover, the rural school instructional leader must be uniquely prepared to face the contextual nuances and challenges specifically found in the rural setting. In what follows, aspects of leadership preparation elucidated from a review of the literature on rural leader preparation are discussed.

University-District Partnerships

Collaborative relationships between university educational preparation programs and rural district partners have the potential to create and support effective leaders equipped with the knowledge and skills to address the academic, social, and cultural needs of the rural school district. Challenges such as high poverty, high teacher turnover, low school funding, and low principal salaries make recruitment to geographically isolated rural schools difficult. The “grow your own” philosophy, where future instructional leaders are selected by the district for leadership preparation programs, ensures a sustainable pipeline of instructional leaders vested in the quality of the school and community (Sanzo, Myran & Clayton, 2011; Versland, 2013).

Authentic field-based experiences. University-district partnerships offer candidates opportunities for authentic, field-based learning experiences to better prepare them for the challenges and opportunities of the rural school. Researchers have shown that course work not taught in isolation, but rather in conjunction with authentic field experiences helps bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and practical applications (Brown, 2016; Myran, Sanzo, & Clayton, 2011; Sanzo, et al., 2011; Versland, 2013;). Field-based experiences assist an instructional leader candidate in the development and envisioning of his/her leadership style and its effectiveness in a rural setting (Parson, Hunter, & Kallio, 2016). Effective internships collaboratively designed (Myran, et al., 2011) to furnish a holistic picture of leadership in the rural school (Sanzo, et al., 2011) and to provide experience across all grade levels as well as central office (Griffin, Taylor, Varner, & White, 2012) prepare the future leader to meet the challenges of leading a rural school.

Mentoring. Collaborative partnerships afford the instructional leader candidate the opportunity for mentoring and professional development experiences that otherwise may not exist. Mentoring by established in-service district administrators is effective in increasing the “grow your own” candidate’s leadership self-efficacy (Griffin, et al., 2012; Versland, 2013) and offers benefits such as modeling of day to day activities, data gathering, and decision-making in the rural school atmosphere (Brown, 2016; Dodson, 2014). Furthermore, candidates involved in strategic planning and delivering district professional development gain first-hand knowledge of the rural district’s needs and experience as instructional leaders (Myran, et al., 2011). The partnership benefits not only the university, but also the rural district partners. Universities provide training in instructional leadership theory for district administrators serving as mentors and in turn, the district mentor provides mentees with first hand practical knowledge and skills, painting a realistic picture of rural school leadership (Sanzo, et al., 2011).

Challenges of partnerships. The current literature reviewed also comprised studies highlighting the negative side to university-district partnerships (Browne-Ferrigno, 2011; VanTuyle, & Reeves, 2014). For some rural districts, forming partnerships adds an undue financial burden to the already underfunded rural K12 educational system. The geographic distance between the rural district and the nearest university is one concern due to the increased travel costs and release time required for travel between the university and rural district. Using district mentors has been postulated as an area of inequity as well. Some concerns surrounding mentoring instructional leader candidates lie in potential inequalities in mentoring abilities and lack of time on behalf of the district administrator. However, most research indicates that mentoring during the educational preparation program is beneficial (Dodson, 2014; Griffin, et al., 2012; Sanzo, et al., 2011; Versland, 2013). Collectively, these concerns raise the need for future research involving online and onsite in-district course offerings to reduce the cost of travel and time as well as effective mentoring strategies to support district administrators as candidate mentors.

Preparation Programs

Effective preparation programs need to not only be comprehensive in their coverage of theory, knowledge, and skills; but also, accessible to potential candidates for rural school leadership positions. Geographic isolation of rural schools often prohibits candidates traveling to universities due to both the financial cost as well as the time commitment. Cray and Millen (2010) identified the in-district university cohort program as the preferred delivery method. In this method the principal candidates come together at a site within the district and instruction is delivered face-to-face or online by university instructors.

Recruitment and selection of cohorts. Wood, et al., (2013) recognized “grow your own” initiatives as the top method for recruiting principals to isolated rural school districts. However, due to limited experience and lack of a variety of instructional leader role models, “grow your own” candidates may lack a realistic view of the role of an instructional leader and/or be deficient in leadership theory. This shortfall in theoretical foundations and narrow vision of what an instructional leader is or does in a rural school negatively impacts leadership self-efficacy (Versland, 2013). To address these deficits and recruit highly qualified instructional leadership candidates, preparation programs need a rigorous application and selection process which includes not only candidate’s educational accomplishments, but also, an interview component to ascertain the candidate’s core value/beliefs (Brown, 2016). Preparation programs which employ a cohort model for acceptance and matriculation provide a trusting environment which promotes the development of lasting relationships and ensures a regional professional learning community for continued support (Brown, 2016; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012; Griffin, et al., 2012). Recruitment of strong candidates as well as the formation of cohorts are two strategies for increasing the success of instructional leader candidates.

Knowledge and skill needs. Parson, et al. (2016) postulated the need for preparation programs tailored to meet the needs of the future rural instructional leader. A key area in need of attention during preparation is the multi-faceted role a rural school leader plays. Teaching principal, principal/superintendent, disciplinarian, manager, custodian, bus driver, athletic director and most importantly instructional leader are all roles that an instructional leader in a rural school may play (Lynch, 2012; Myran, et al., 2011; Parson, et al., 2016; VanTuyle, & Reeves, 2014). Other researchers identified skills such as data gathering, decision making, finance and budgeting as needed in preparation programs (Dodson, 2014). Preparing for multiple roles and leadership in a rural school environment can be a daunting task; however, a standards-based course sequence with integrated authentic rural school-based experiences in conjunction with quality mentoring provide the foundational structure for success (Carlson, 2012; Myran, et al., Parson, et al., 2016; 2011; Sanzo, et al., 2011; Versland, 2013).

Induction for Rural Instructional Leaders

Novice instructional leaders in rural schools need additional training and support beyond their preparation program as they learn to connect knowledge to practice in the unique settings. This is similar to the cross-country runners’ reliance on their coach to help maneuver through new courses even though they are physically and mentally prepared to win races. Browne-Ferrigno (2007) stated, “Successful completion of a graduate program in educational administration and passage of licensure examinations makes one eligible to serve as a principal. Becoming a successful school leader, however, requires important dispositions and skills” (p. 21). Transitioning from the preparation program to practice is overwhelming and an induction program with a mentoring component can help new leaders move past the initial challenges to have a positive impact (Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Augustine-Shaw, 2015; Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Spiro et al., 2007; Wood, et al., 2013).

Induction and mentoring are especially important for rural instructional leaders learning to navigate within the rural culture with its distinct needs and unique perceptions of the stakeholders (Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013). Ashton and Duncan (2012) stated that “when a new leader assumes the principal role, the combination of being both inexperienced and in a rural setting can be overwhelming” (p. 2). In order to thrive,

new rural leaders must have support (Augustine-Shaw, 2016). The following discussion focuses on induction and mentoring of rural leaders unveiled in the review of the literature and emphasizes the value of partnerships.

Positive Outcomes of Rural Instructional Leader Induction Partnerships

The reviewed literature revealed there are many positive benefits of induction and mentoring for rural school leaders. Networks and partnerships created in mentoring and coaching are vital for helping new school leaders grow and become more competent. Moreover, “the value of such networking lies as much in the awareness that they are not alone in facing difficulties and challenges as in gaining knowledge” (Duncan & Stock, 2010, pp. 306-307). Mentoring partnerships are reciprocal in benefits to the mentor and the mentee as both report professional growth as they learned to look at their own practices with new eyes (Augustine-Shaw & Hachiya, 2017; Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Clayton, Sanzo & Myran, 2013; Sanzo, Myran & Clayton, 2011).

Many times, rural principals feel their most important role is that of instructional leader, but this is also the area they feel least trained in and prepared to do effectively (Sanzo, et al., 2011). Sciarappa and Mason (2014) found that mentoring support provided growth in instructional leadership skills, developed trust, improved school culture, and supported the development of effective communication with staff. Mentoring has also shown to help new rural leaders increase their confidence and efficacy as an instructional leader as well as in other areas of the principalship (Augustine-Shaw & Hachiya, 2017; Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Clayton, Sanzo, & Myran, 2013; Duncan & Stock, 2010;). Fusarelli and Militello (2012) reported 83% of first year principals involved in a mentoring program met or exceeded growth in high-need, Title I Schools compared to 75% of experienced principals in all other schools in the state. The literature reviewed validated that mentoring partnerships provided professional growth of new rural instructional leaders in the areas of socialization, decision-making, communication, and management skills (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Versland, 2013). The literature highlights the effectiveness of induction and mentoring programs through district and university partnerships.

Induction Support Through University-District Partnerships

Preston, Jakubiec, and Kooymans (2013) conducted an extensive literature review that illuminated the importance of relationships to the rural leader’s success which supports partnerships of various types. The partnerships prominent in the literature reviewed on rural induction programs were university-district partnerships that contained a purposeful mentoring component, which Versland (2013) argued is vital for supporting new rural leaders. The university and district partnerships offer more focused and intentional induction programs by utilizing their combined resources including personnel and funds received from grants, foundations, state programs, and district funds to assist with providing quality mentoring (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012; Hartung & Harvey, 2015).

To provide induction and mentoring that supports personal and professional growth of novice leaders in the development of the leadership skills needed in 21st Century schools, universities help keep the focus on national and state standards as well standards-based strategies, and best practice (Augustine-Shaw, 2015; Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Augustine-Shaw & Hachiya, 2017; Augustine-Shaw & Liang, 2016; Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Clayton, Sanzo, & Myran, 2013). The university and district partnerships help ensure the rural leaders apply the knowledge gained

in preparation programs to their new practices and bridge the gap that often exists (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). Trainings, mentoring and professional development offered through formal induction programs expand the novice leader's standards-based instructional leadership skills (Clayton, Sanzo, & Myran, 2013).

In contrast, when rural districts do not have the opportunity to partner with universities, formal induction programs that are district mandated and funded are usually not provided (Duncan & Stock, 2010). Duncan and Stock (2010) found that while 97% of the participants surveyed considered mentoring important, only 13% of the districts were involved in formal mentoring. Versland (2013) identified that many principals were the lone administrator in their schools and did not have an opportunity for any type of mentoring. When districts do not provide formal induction and mentoring, rural leaders often initiate their own mentoring partnerships to get the social interaction and learning and advice needed; however, even that may not be enough and there is a great danger of failure. One relevant study that spotlights this, even though it is over 10 years old, was conducted by Morford (2002) in Utah where he found that at the end of two years, eight of ten new principal participants left their positions because they were disillusioned and overloaded with work. When districts partner with universities they are supporting the growth of the novice leaders and retention of quality administrators.

Strategic mentor and mentee partnerships. Careful attention to matching mentors and mentees according to communication styles and responsibilities has an impact on success and satisfaction (Clayton, et al., 2013). Mentors and mentees that were matched according to geographic location provided the best setting for sharing of skills applicable to the local setting and context of the smaller rural districts (Augustine-Shaw, 2016). Providing opportunities for partnering with others in regional and state-wide organizations and meetings was also found to be beneficial (Augustine-Shaw & Liang, 2016).

Differentiation is also a key component of effective induction and mentoring programs. Varying the delivery formats of induction programs supports the growth of mentees by allowing for individualization of support. Cohorts allow the participants to progress through the program together while experiencing strategic team building in a safe learning environment and affording opportunities to expand networking (Brown-Ferrigno, 2007; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). Being able to have face-to-face interactions in either the mentor's or the mentee's school allowed for collaboration and individualized support opportunities (Augustine-Shaw & Liang, 2016; Sanzo, et al., 201). Once successful partnerships are formed, the research revealed that mentors and mentees often continue their partnerships into the second year and beyond allowing for more personalized support at a deeper level.

Enhancing partnerships with technology. Utilizing technology as a tool in mentoring with rural leaders can be effective and efficient. Using an electronic network with social media platforms, video conferencing, emails, etc. gives mentors and mentees opportunities to network with those in other locations, while also saving time and costs (Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012; Hartung & Harvey, 2015; Wood, et al., 2013). Technology offers opportunities for leaders to experiment with technology in a safe environment and the flexibility to participate when convenient. Online mentoring also allows for the participants to be better matched to those who have similar situations and needs in areas that may not otherwise be accessible (Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012; Hartung & Harvey, 2015; Wood, et al., 2013). In evaluating a program that infused technology and mentoring, Hartung and Harvey (2015) found that most participants indicated they would continue using a social media platform in their future professional growth. Taking

advantage of social media for access to professional development is especially beneficial to leaders who serve in rural schools.

Once rural instructional leaders have been strengthened and supported during their preparation and early years of practice through induction and mentoring, participation in continuous learning is still needed. Professional development in schools is often focused on teachers and not the leaders. Rural school leaders will have a more positive impact on student achievement and teacher development when they also focus and reflect on their own learning.

Professional Development

Rubio (2009) stated that cross-country racing requires a runner to apply “strengths as a runner to the various courses while minimizing weaknesses” (p. 5). In much the same way, rural school leaders can minimize weaknesses and maximize strengths by participating in ongoing professional development. Salazar (2007) stated

Leadership today requires the ability to mobilize constituents to do important but difficult work under conditions of constant change, overload, and fragmentation. This requires ongoing professional development opportunities to help principals update their leadership knowledge and skills on a continuing basis. (pp. 25-26)

To determine appropriate professional development requirements, consideration of the specialized responsibilities for rural school leaders is suggested. A review of current literature revealed both challenges faced by rural leaders as well as professional development needs and preferred modes of delivery.

Challenges Faced by Rural School Leaders

Ewington, et al. (2008) shared research confirming a lack of study regarding small, rural schools, and the limited research that does exist has not recognized the complexity of small schools. Stewart and Matthews (2015) reported that there is also limited research on professional development for principals, and even less research on the topic for principals of small, remote, rural schools. Because these principals serve in remote, isolated locations, limited resources and limited access to colleagues are barriers to appropriate professional development. However, principals in small, rural schools frequently are in their initial principalship and note a need for assistance in “providing strong and shared leadership and using resources effectively while working collaboratively” (Ewington, et al., 2008, p. 8). While all leaders must overcome obstacles in their path to success, rural school principals face numerous unique challenges which must be addressed when designing effective professional development.

The rural school principal often wears multiple hats leaving little time for the role of instructional leader. For example, Starr and White (2008) studied small rural schools in Australia and found principals in these schools are expected to perform additional duties not required of their more urban counterparts. Rural school principals serve as teachers, receptionists, bookkeepers, and groundskeepers in addition to their leadership roles. The important role of leading instruction takes second place to more urgent demands.

Rural school principals often must utilize different types of skills, and assume diverse responsibilities in their work (Versland, 2013). Principals’ efforts to set direction, develop faculty and staff, improve the organization, and manage instruction are influenced by their self-efficacy. Leader self-efficacy is critical to school success. Positive self-efficacy leads people to action,

while negative self-efficacy causes leaders self-doubt and lack of action. Negative self-efficacy inhibits the ability to set high goals, formulate collaborative relationship with peers, and address minor obstacles. Because rural leaders are often the only administrator in their school, their numerous responsibilities and stressful job expectations can lead to isolation and self-doubt. (Versland, 2013). Participation in professional development increases knowledge and skills; thereby, increasing self-efficacy and positively impacting the rural leader's effectiveness.

Professional Development Needs for Rural School Leaders

Researchers have examined the unique professional development needs of rural school leaders (Parson, et al., 2016; Salzar, 2007). Salazar's study (2007) of principals in the United States' Northwest sought to both determine the participants' preferred mode of receiving professional development and to identify professional development needs of high school principals. The results of Salazar's survey identified principals' most important professional development needs as maintaining focus on improvement through team commitment; setting appropriate instructional direction, and communicating to effect change when indicated. The study went on to identify conferences and seminars, followed by workshops, as the most preferred delivery mode for professional development.

Additionally, Stewart and Matthews (2015) studied the perceptions of Utah rural school principals regarding their professional development needs. The researchers ascertained that small, rural school principals have specific needs relative to supervision, student behavior, and budgeting. The community connection to the school is quite strong when the community is isolated from larger populated areas. Those principals in small schools located in rural areas also expressed a need for professional development in community collaboration in order to maximize the potential of the community-school relationship.

Student achievement was highlighted in a study of professional development for assistant principals in the state of Hawaii (Enomoto, 2012). Because Hawaii was on the verge of facing a serious shortage of school leaders, they worked to identify and train future leaders. Training included "five aspects: (a) content knowledge and skill development, (b) application to school standards, support, systems, (c) opportunity to network with peers and resource teachers, (d) conversations with principals, and (e) reflections for continuous learning" (p. 267). District leaders desired that school leaders have an understanding of leadership skills as well as the importance of being life-long learners.

Parson, et al.'s research focused on leadership styles needed for effective leadership (2016). The researchers noted leadership styles such as transactional, participatory, instructional, and transformative in rural principals in North Dakota. Through a review of the data gathered, little evidence was found of either participatory leadership, collective decision-making of the principal and leadership team, or transformative leadership, the principal's role in creating schools that are inclusive, diverse, and equitable. Outcomes indicated both a need for specialized training for rural principals to develop leadership styles effective in their schools and to address other areas such as equity and diversity (Parson, et al., 2016).

While the principals of small, rural schools recognize the importance of networking to enhance their own professional growth, most report that they have little, if any, time for such endeavors. Leadership placements and assignments often include extra tasks in addition to being the schools' principals. They report much on-the-job training and learning by trial and error in place of more formal professional development activities (Clarke & Stevens, 2009). Because time

is limited, rural principals often seek professional development opportunities that will benefit them as school leaders, but, more importantly, will also profit teachers and the school as a whole. Geographically isolated locations and time constraints support the need for networks or learning groups where resources to sustain continued growth and development of the rural administrator and to benefit all school stakeholders are shared.

Findings from all of the aforementioned studies provide examples of the uniqueness of the professional development needs of rural schools. There is no “one size fits all” when designing effective professional development for rural school leaders. Knowing the professional development needs and preferred modes for delivering such, is the first step in designing engaging, beneficial professional development for the rural school leader. The message is clear. More research into the professional development needs of rural school leaders is essential. Results of continued research will provide data to be studied as educators plan for imminent and future training. Empowering both current and aspiring school leaders with strategies to be successful in guiding school improvement will benefit students and communities.

Discussion/Conclusion

The goal of cross-country training is to “learn to employ a steady effort rather than set an even pace” (Rubio, 2009, p. 1), and with the support of coaches and peers in the preparation and ongoing training, the runner is able to be successful. A similar tripartite framework for developing effective rural school leaders resulted from a comprehensive review of recent literature (see Figure 1). By receiving the proper initial training (preparation), getting support during the first experiences (induction), and then being provided with ongoing reinforcement (professional development), a rural instructional leader, like a cross-country runner, will gain the knowledge, persistence, and confidence to be successful in the journey.

Preparation is the foundation of the proposed Tripartite Continuous Growth Model. Programs intent on preparing aspiring rural instructional leaders are best developed as a collaborative effort between the university and surrounding rural districts. The university program benefits from having access to experienced rural school administrators as mentors, the district benefits from receiving instructional leaders who understand the needs of the districts, and candidates benefit from authentic leading and learning experiences on site in rural schools. Programming should include a standards-based course sequence with embedded authentic field-based experiences in a rural setting that prepares the aspiring leader to face the challenges and nuances of leadership in a rural school. The university-district partnership model for instructional leadership preparation offers the greatest opportunity for a holistic learning experience.

As in many professions, learning how to navigate in a new school leadership position requires encouragement and support from a more knowledgeable person. Research indicates that many rural school districts do not offer formal mentoring or coaching programs for school leaders in the same way they do for teachers. Quality mentoring for the new rural school leader during the first years is the second aspect of the proposed Tripartite Continuous Growth Model for the nurturing and development of effective rural school leaders. Ashton and Duncan (2012) identified that new principals can gain insight into their roles by working with a mentor and discovering skills to deal with the various situations faced daily. However, there is a lack of research to indicate how rural school districts support new leaders, especially if they are not supported through a university-district partnership. More research needs to be conducted in this area as well as how technology may be used to help alleviate the geographical isolation many rural school leaders face.

In addition, Spiro (2007) discussed the scarcity of data in regards to efficacy of mentoring new principals, specifically noting that more research needs to be conducted to determine whether mentoring fosters retention of new leaders and/or impacts the ability to lead improvement in a school. Therefore, there is a need for more research in this area to help rural districts create effective mentoring programs that are part of a comprehensive plan and are evaluated so changes can be made as needed.

Ongoing professional development completes the triadic framework of the Tripartite Continuous Growth Model, yet there is no “one size fits all model” of professional development to be implemented for rural school leaders. Because rural schools are often geographically isolated, and because schools are often small, the hurdles that must be overcome are magnified tremendously. Each community requires unique support; therefore, additional research could assist in identifying specific needs as well as effective methods of delivery. District and state leaders, along with other providers of professional development would have a clearer foundation upon which to focus.

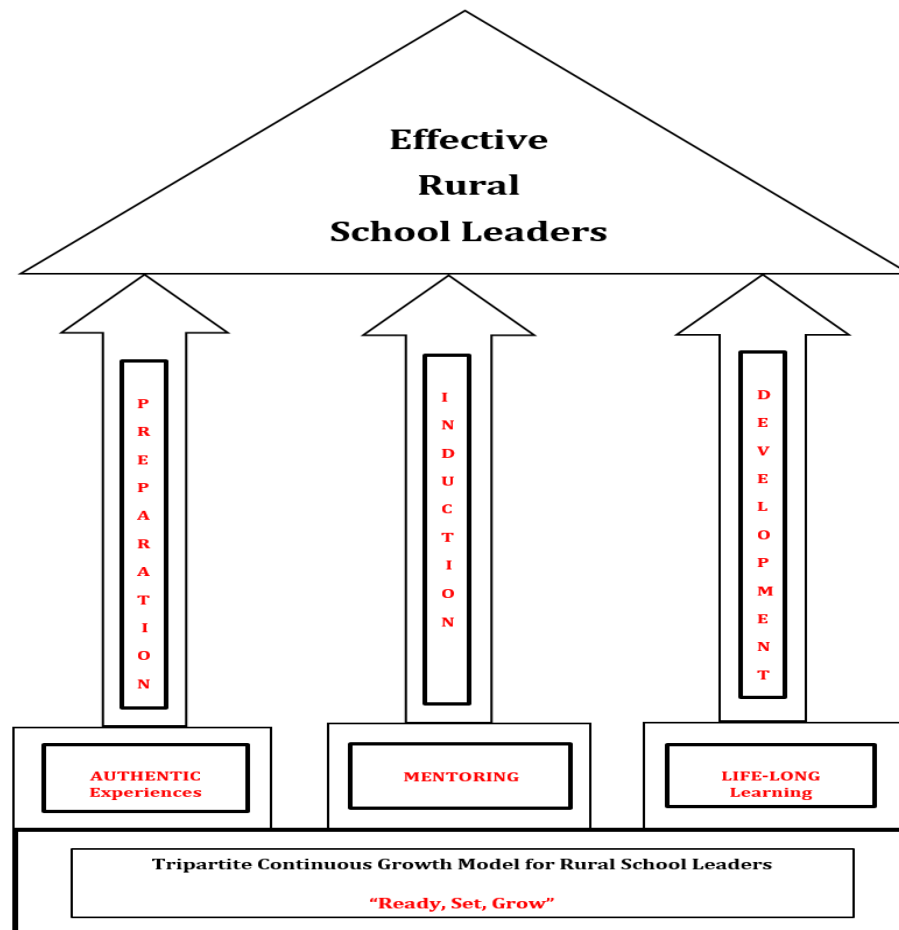


Figure 1. Tripartite Continuous Growth Model

Implications

The Tripartite Continuous Growth Model for the development of effective rural school leaders resulted from a comprehensive review of available literature on the preparation, induction,

and development of rural school leaders (see Figure 1). This model addresses the unique challenges faced by rural school leaders through preparation, induction, and continued professional development specific to the needs of the rural district. If implemented in rural areas, it is expected that new rural school leaders will be more likely to be retained as well as more effective in improving schools and student achievement; however, further study is needed to fully assess the effectiveness of the model.

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