

Principal as Servant-Leader: An Embedded-Descriptive Single-Case Study of One Prekindergarten School's Efforts to Build Teacher Capacity in Foundational Skills

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The purpose of this embedded-descriptive single-case study was to provide insight into one prekindergarten school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. An embedded-descriptive single-case study was a suitable design for the study because the researcher could not manipulate the school's efforts; the setting was contemporary and involved real-world events. Servant Leadership Theory (SLT) was the theoretical underpinning of the study and the lens used to view the transition from the school's human capital resources to the implementation of methods, strategies, and activities to build teacher capacity. Montessori instruction served as the platform for teaching foundational skills.

Prekindergarten principals are instructional leaders charged with the responsibility of building teacher capacity (Principal Certificate, 2018) to ensure students leave prekindergarten ready for the rigor of kindergarten. Building teacher capacity in foundational skills is critical (Raver & Blair, 2014, 2016), and these skills lay the foundation for the acquisition of standards-based cognitive skills (Becker, Miao, Duncan, & McClelland, 2014; Cameron, Cottone, Murrah, & Grissmer, 2016; Nesbitt, Farran, & Fuhs, 2015). Foundational skills include executive function and fine motor skills. Executive function skills include inhibitory control, working memory, and attention to task (Becker et al., 2014; Prager, Sera, & Carlson, 2016). If children do not have well-developed inhibitory control, they often disrupt the classroom environment (Becker et al., 2014; Cameron, Brock, Hatfield, Cottone, Rubinstein, LoCasale-Crouch, & Grissmer, 2015). Children lacking cognitive working memory have difficulty following classroom instructions (Becker et al., 2014; Toll & Van Luit, 2014). Additionally, children having difficulty attending to task often display disruptive behavior and cannot complete assignments (Kim, Byers, Cameron, Brock, Cottone, & Grissmer, 2016). Prerequisite fine motor integration skills are necessary for writing, coloring, and cutting with scissors (Bhatia, Davis, & Shamas-Brandt, 2015; Kim, Murrah, Cameron, Brock, Cottone, & Grissmer, 2015).

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

Caught in limbo between building teacher capacity in foundational skills as well as standards-based achievement goals, the prekindergarten instructional leader contends with the verisimilitude of serving a vulnerable population. Current research indicated that the performance gap begins early, more evident among high-risk, disadvantaged children, and if below grade level in third grade, the children are unlikely to catch up with his or her peers (Coffman & Kauerz, 2012; Fiester, 2013). Melding a developmental approach to learning to foster foundational skills with the standards-based curriculum is a challenge for prekindergarten principals. There is an urgent call for well-trained leaders to build teacher capacity to address foundational skills of our nation's most high-risk and vulnerable population (National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2014; Phillips et al., 2017; Stipek, Clements, Coburn, Franke, & Farran, 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this embedded-descriptive single-case study was to provide insight into one school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills in an urban southeast Texas school district's Montessori prekindergarten Head Start program.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of Servant Leadership Theory (SLT; Greenleaf, 2002) was the theoretical underpinning of this study, and the lens used to view the transition from the school's human capital resources to the principal's efforts to implement methods, strategies, and activities to build teacher capacity. Montessori instruction served as the platform for teaching foundational skills. The researcher viewed the transition from the human capital resources of the principal and Head Start teachers to the activities and strategies through the servant-leader attributes (Table 1) identified by Spears (2010).

Table 1
Servant-Leader Attributes and Descriptions

Attribute	Description of Attribute
Listening	Intense desire to listen to others resulting in knowledge of the group's desires and clarifying and operationalizing those desires.
Empathy	The ability of a leader to accept others and be a skilled, empathetic listener.
Healing	The ability of a leader to recognize the people they come in contact with may hurt emotionally and take the opportunity to minister to others and begin the healing process.
Awareness	An awareness involving ethics, power, and values that help one in understanding issues.
Persuasion	The art of persuasion and consensus-building.
Conceptualization	The ability to conceptualize the problem as well as operationalize the problem.
Foresight	The ability of a leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the consequences of a decision for the future.
Stewardship	The commitment to serving the needs of others.
Commitment to the Growth of People	Nurturing the personal and professional growth of people.
Building Community	The leader seeks to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution.

Servant-leader attributes were the principal's motivation and impetus to provide the transition from the school's human capital resources to the implementation of methods, strategies, and activities that built teacher capacity in foundational skills. The primary method used by the principal was the rigorous implementation of the weekly Montessori Professional Learning Community (PLC). During the weekly PLCs, teachers practiced the Montessori lessons for the next week. The PLCs also served as the arena for staff coaching, mentoring, and reflective practices. Through these activities, the principal demonstrated a servant-leader's desire to listen to others. Through coaching, mentoring, and reflective practice, the principal valued the voice of the teacher, and through her stewardship, displayed a commitment to the professional growth of

teachers. One outcome of the PLC was the principal's decision for children to spend a longer time on practical life skills after Hurricane Harvey devastated the area. Extending the time spent on practical life skills was a monumental decision and demonstrated her ability to conceptualize and operationalize a problem and her commitment to serving the needs of the children. Foremost, one could view the decision to spend additional time on practical life skills as the ability of a foresightful leader to understand that if children did not master foundational skills, cognitive learning in prekindergarten would be difficult and impact future academic success.

The principal provided training opportunities from outside consultants, a book study, and a professional development library that validated the importance of Montessori instruction. Committed to the professional growth in Montessori instruction, the principal purposefully selected these opportunities to build a community of learners. The professional development opportunities served two purposes: to legitimize and validate the emotional feelings of the staff that resulted from Hurricane Harvey and to implement Montessori instruction with fidelity and integrity.

Meeting the diverse needs of a susceptible, vulnerable four-year-old population might be, according to Greenleaf (2002), the difference between leaders that first serve and then lead. Greenleaf asked leaders to consider the effect on the underprivileged. The goal of a prekindergarten principal is to ensure that high-risk students benefit or do not suffer further deprivation (Greenleaf, 2002) and narrow performance gaps due to the disparity between the wealthy and impoverished (Parris & Peachey, 2013). The theoretical proposition that the principal's efforts were responsible for building teacher capacity guided this study, and SLT was the lens used to confirm or contradict the premise that the school's principal exemplified the qualities of a servant-leader. The principal's efforts to build teacher capacity and servant-leader attributes guided the methods, strategies, activities, and the perception of the importance of foundational skills.

Literature Review

Researchers indicated that many impoverished children experience delays in executive function skills and fine motor integration skills (Bhatia et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Mathis & Bierman, 2015; Raver & Blair, 2016; Sasser, Bierman, & Heinrichs, 2015; Stosich, 2016). Struggling students who begin his or her school career in the nascent performance gap continue to spiral downward academically when faced with challenging cognitive demands (Nesbitt et al., 2015). Raver and Blair (2016) noted that as schools become more academically challenging, well-developed executive function skills are necessary for academic success. Executive function skills are the manifestation of higher-order cognitive processes that enable students to function successfully in a classroom environment. Empirical studies on executive function skills supported a positive relationship between executive function and academic success (Becker et al., 2014; Cameron et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2016; Prager et al., 2016).

Consequently, researchers agreed that very few prekindergarten programs teach non-cognitive skills that develop executive function skills (Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). Teachers seldom have the knowledge and skills to teach executive function skills in the context of the classroom environment (Moreno, Shwayder, & Friedman, 2017). However, research indicated that the Montessori curriculum purposefully teaches executive function skills (Fitzpatrick, McKinnon, Blair, & Willoughby, 2014) and fine motor integration skills (Bhatia et al., 2015). Without essential prerequisite foundational skills, children struggle in prekindergarten

and beyond (Lipsey, Nesbitt, Farran, Dong, Fuhs, & Wilson, 2017). Children's mastery of fine motor skills such as cutting paper with scissors, holding a crayon or pencil, and self-help skills are essential prekindergarten skills and seldom taught as part of the prekindergarten curriculum (Bhatia et al., 2015). These researchers validated that high-risk prekindergarten students benefited from a school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills.

Methodology

The theoretical proposition that the principal's efforts built teacher capacity in foundational skills was the basis for the review of the literature, the research questions, and the design of the study. Four research questions guided the study:

1. What is the prekindergarten principal's perception of the necessity or importance of building teacher capacity?
2. What method or strategies does a prekindergarten principal use to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?
3. How does on-going prekindergarten assessment data influence the prekindergarten principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?
4. How does the beginning of the year kindergarten readiness assessment data influence the prekindergarten principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?

Sample and Participant Selection

The researcher selected a Montessori Head Start prekindergarten center located in a large, urban, southeast Texas school district for this study. According to current research, many impoverished children experience delayed executive function skills (Mathis & Bierman, 2015; Raver & Blair, 2016; Sasser et al., 2015; Stosich, 2016) and fine motor skills (Bhatia et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2015). Consequently, it was essential for the researcher to gain an understanding of the prekindergarten principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills.

The researcher used purposeful criterion sampling to select the prekindergarten principal and Head Start teachers for this study. The inclusion criteria for the principal was a minimum of two years experience as a principal at the site and experience as a Montessori teacher. There were seven Head Start teachers at the site during the 2017–2018 school year, and the researcher recruited all seven Head Start teachers.

Evidence

The researcher gathered three types of evidence to support the findings of this embedded-descriptive single-case study: document review, interviews, and observations. Relevant to this study was the collection of participant demographic data. Demographic information for all participants included the number of years in current position, degrees held, additional certifications, years of experience in education, and work experience. The collection of demographic data ensured experienced, credentialed participants with the expertise to contribute in-depth knowledge and insights into the study. The researcher requested professional development calendars, training agendas, and PLC meeting agendas for document review.

The researcher used trend data from the 2017–2018 Frog Street[®] curriculum (Schiller, Ada, Campoy, & Mowry, 2017) prekindergarten assessment administered at the end of each nine-week

sessions. The researcher also considered the 2018 beginning of year (BOY) kindergarten assessment data for the students at the prekindergarten site during the 2017–2018 school year. The results of the assessments guided some of the interview questions and allowed the researcher to probe deeper into the school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills.

The second method of collecting data for this study was an interview with the school's principal, seven individual Head Start teacher interviews, and a Head Start teacher focus group interview. Yin (2018) recommended a conversational format for the interviews, and he made a distinction between the research questions and the actual interview questions. According to Yin, the interviews operate on two levels. On one level, the verbal line of inquiry is open-ended and non-threatening. Yin advised the researcher to word the open-ended interview questions so that the researcher appears naïve about the topic to allow the participants to provide new insights. The second level is the mental level, with the researcher being mindful of the research questions that guide the study. For example, the researcher was interested in the school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. By using open-ended questions, the researcher honored the participants' voices by allowing participants to speak freely.

The researcher used a third method of collecting data, direct classroom observations, to observe the practical classroom application of pedagogical teacher capacity building efforts from the previous year (Moreno et al., 2017). Yoshikawa et al. (2016) noted that one measure of program quality is the interaction between children and teachers and children with other children. Teacher capacity building operated on two levels, pedagogical knowledge and practical implementation of pedagogical knowledge in the classroom context (Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2002). The observations were two 15-minute classroom observations of each Head Start teacher. The classroom observations occurred during the first and second nine-week sessions. Consequently, two classroom observations of each teacher participant provided a valuable data source for the practical application of pedagogical knowledge.

The researcher aligned the observation indicators with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) instrument (Planta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Direct observation of children interacting with each other was also crucial because children use executive function and social skills when interacting with each other (Becker et al., 2014; Prager et al., 2016). As the teacher interacted with children and children interacted with other children, the researcher made notations of the interactions and conversations.

The researcher observed two of the weekly PLC meetings. The Head Start lead teacher conducted the PLC, and teachers reviewed the Montessori lessons taught the following week. The interaction during the PLC allowed for coaching and mentoring opportunities, reflective practice, and fidelity in the implementation of Montessori lessons.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher used data triangulation to analyze the three methods of data collection (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) described data triangulation as a convergence of numerous sources of data to create an in-depth, real-world understanding of the case study. Data triangulation strengthened construct validity (Yin, 2018). According to Yin, the researcher is responsible for ensuring fidelity when triangulating multiple sources of data. Fidelity occurs when the researcher makes a conscious effort to distinguish between evidence that converges and non-convergence of evidence (Yin, 2018). Data triangulation is an iterative process that results in a comprehensive, in-depth description of the single-case study.

Data collection and analysis of data coincided. The individual logic model (Yin, 2018) represented the researcher's theoretical proposition, research questions, and the progression of data analysis. The researcher examined how the contextual and environmental factors in the community affected the school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills as well as rival explanations identified before the study began. Consequently, the researcher viewed the school's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills through a multi-faceted lens from the evidence gathered through document reviews, interviews, observations, contextual and environmental themes, and potential rival explanations. During the data collection phase, the researcher addressed construct validity by gathering multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). To ensure reliability, the researcher crosschecked the information collected for potential bias, a deeper understanding of the perspective, and checked for completeness of data collected (Yin, 2018).

The use of an analytic strategy and analytic technique enabled the researcher to make analytic generalizations from the findings of the case study (Yin, 2018). An analytic generalization enabled the findings to be generalized and applicable to other situations with similar theoretical propositions (Yin, 2018). The theoretical proposition that the principal's efforts built teacher capacity in foundational skills followed a progression of sequential events that began with the principal's perception of the importance of foundational skills (Research Question 1). If theoretically, the principal considered foundational skills necessary, the principal provided methods and strategies to build teacher capacity (Research Question 2). As the sequential events progressed, children with well-developed foundational skills achieved academic gains throughout the school year as measured by the beginning, middle, and end of year Frog Street® curriculum (Schiller et al., 2017) assessments and the assessment data influenced teacher capacity building efforts (Research Question 3). Theoretically, the outcome was that children are ready for kindergarten, as measured by the BOY kindergarten readiness assessment (Research Question 4). The individual logic model framework allowed the researcher to stipulate theoretically predicted events related to the research questions and then operationalize the series of events over time as triangulated evidence either confirmed or contradicted the model and research questions. The researcher examined the relevant real-world contextual influences and the rival explanations that might influence the case study. The individual logic model represented the initial proposition and research questions about the case study and provided a framework for analyzing the data gathered. The adaptation of Yin's (2018) individual logic model illustrates the framework used to analyze the data collected (Figure 1).

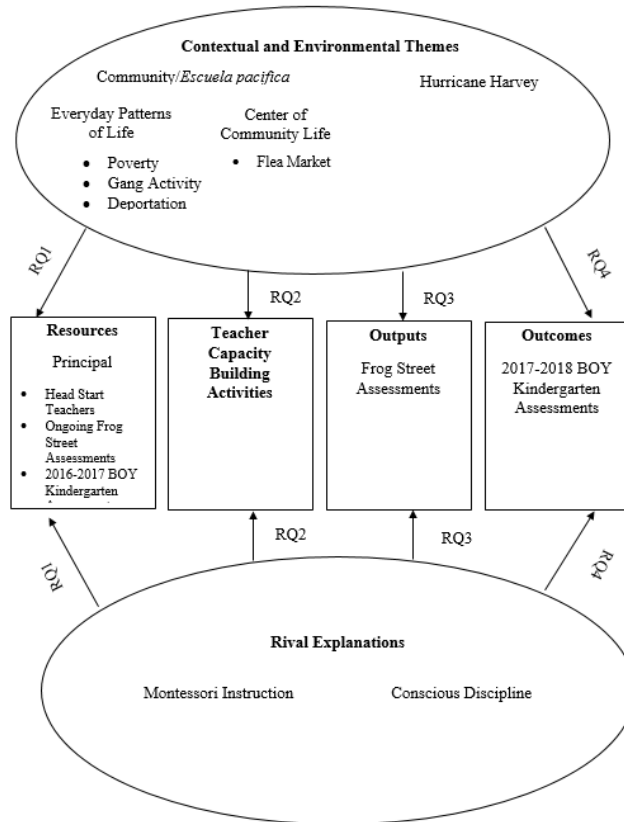


Figure 1. Individual logic model showing the progression from the resources to the outcomes.

The researcher examined two rival explanations to determine if they were plausible and credible explanations for teacher capacity building in foundational skills as opposed to the original proposition that teacher capacity building in foundational skills was a result of the principal's efforts. One plausible rival explanation was the implementation of the Montessori instructional method. A second rival explanation was the implementation of the social-emotional curriculum, Conscious Discipline® (Bailey, 2017).

Findings of the Study

The findings of this study provided insight into one prekindergarten principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills that included executive function and fine motor skills. According to Becker et al. (2014), Cameron et al., (2016), and Nesbitt et al. (2015), academic success in cognitive standards-based learning is challenging for a prekindergarten student without these skills. Some of the factors that impact children's delayed foundational skills are poverty (Mathis & Bierman, 2015; Raver & Blair, 2016; Sasser et al., 2015; Stosich, 2016), families at risk of deportation (Rojas-Flores, Clements, Koo, & London, 2017; Zayas, Aguilar-Gaxiola, Yoon, & Rey, 2015), and natural disasters such as hurricanes (Sprung & Harris, 2010, Wright & Ryan, 2014). The findings from this study indicated that the principal and Head Start teachers recognized that the contextual and environmental influences of the community could adversely affect learning.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 was, “What is the prekindergarten principal’s perception of the necessity or importance of building teacher capacity?” The principal understood the importance of building teacher capacity in foundational skills. Building teacher capacity was a priority of the principal, and she recognized that students might come to school with underdeveloped executive function and fine motor skills. Evidence gained from interviews indicated that during the 2017–2018 school year, the community experienced Hurricane Harvey, gang violence, poverty, and fear of deportation. The principal understood the importance of a caring, well-trained staff, and a calm school environment, and that these elements could mediate the effect of potentially traumatic events. The principal said:

One of the things we appreciated, even more than before [Hurricane Harvey], was the benefit of a calm environment. We all had to reframe the way we thought about what these families had gone through. I think as a school, we were always sensitive about the circumstances these children came from. Poverty, violence, gangs, parents deported, but with the hurricane, we had to really focus on what we could do to get these children back on track.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 was, “What method or strategies does a prekindergarten principal use to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?” The purpose of this research question was to determine the methods, strategies, and activities to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. The principal devoted herself to providing activities and strategies that implemented Montessori instruction with fidelity and integrity. The lead Head Start teacher stated that “the Montessori method teaches executive function and builds up the small hand muscles every time we do an activity.”

The principal used the weekly Montessori PLCs to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. Referring to the PLC, one Head Start teacher said, “it is so important to practice what you are going to do. Even after you have been teaching a while. At this school, we never lose sight of it’s the teacher that guides learning.” The PLC built teacher capacity by building a community of learners. The Head Start lead teacher reflected on the PLC, “At this school we have Montessori, but you also have our PLC, which is part of that Montessori idea of being in a community with each other.”

With intentionality, the principal refocused the teacher’s attention from Hurricane Harvey back to the reasons the school implemented Montessori instruction. Outside consultants built teacher capacity by focusing on Montessori instruction and the importance of addressing misbehavior and developing self-regulation skills in children. The principal established the professional development library with Montessori resources to build teacher capacity in this instructional method.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 was, “How does on-going prekindergarten assessment data influence the prekindergarten principal’s efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?” The purpose of this research question was to determine if the Frog Street assessment data influenced the principal’s efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. The teachers administered the

Frog Street[®] (Schiller et al., 2017) assessments mandated by the district with the knowledge that the students might not do well on the assessments until the end of the year. District personnel provided training on the Frog Street[®] Press curriculum (Schiller et al., 2017) materials at the beginning of the year and provided a timeline for administering the assessments. The principal submitted the assessment data to the district office. However, the Frog Street assessment data did not influence the principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 was, "How does the beginning of the year kindergarten readiness assessment data influence the prekindergarten principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills?" The purpose of this research question was to determine if the kindergarten readiness assessment data influenced the principal's efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. The school district assesses kindergarten students at the beginning of the kindergarten year. The principal did not receive the kindergarten readiness scores administered in the fall of 2017 or the kindergarten readiness scores administered in the fall of 2018. The data from the kindergarten readiness assessment did not influence the teacher capacity building activities.

Conclusions

This case study began with the premise that the principal is a servant-leader, and the leader is a servant first and foremost (Greenleaf, 2002; Spears, 2010). The researcher gathered evidence that would either confirm or contradict the premise that the principal exemplified the qualities of a servant-leader by her perception of the importance of foundational skills and her efforts to build teacher capacity in foundational skills. The principal perceived that foundational skills were essential and necessary for student success in prekindergarten. The servant-leader attributes were the over-arching theoretical lens used by the researcher to view the transition from the school's human capital resources to the implementation of the methods, strategies, and activities to build teacher capacity.

The principal implemented methods, strategies, and activities that built teacher capacity in foundational skills. The efforts to build teacher capacity provided the opportunity for the principal to exhibit servant-leader attributes. For example, the PLCs became a way for the principal to build a community of dedicated teacher-leaders and to encourage professional growth. The PLCs provided the principal the opportunity for teacher coaching, mentoring, and reflective practice. The interactions at the PLC allowed the principal to conceptualize and operationalize the efforts needed to build teacher capacity. The principal's servant-leader attributes were the catalyst for these opportunities, and she understood the possible future outcomes because of the implementation of these strategies. The weekly Montessori PLCs were a powerful tool implemented by the principal that valued building teacher capacity in foundational skills. The PLC was the primary activity used by the principal to build teacher capacity and demonstrated the principal's commitment to implement a Montessori program with fidelity and strict adherence to the Montessori philosophy. Additional activities included consultants and a professional development library that focused on the importance of Montessori instruction as a method to build teacher capacity.

The interviews, document review, and observations indicated the school used Montessori instruction and materials. The principal and Head Start staff stated that the district trained the

prekindergarten teachers on the Frog Street® curriculum materials (Schiller et al., 2017) and Conscious Discipline® (Bailey, 2017); however, the staff did not implement the curriculum materials. The school followed the district guidelines and administered the Frog Street® (Schiller et al., 2017) assessments at the beginning, middle, and end of year. Evidence gained from the interviews indicated that scores were below the district expectations at the beginning and middle of the year and met district standards by the end of the year. The principal justified the lower assessment scores at the beginning and middle of the school year because of the different sequence of learning objectives:

Montessori teaches foundational skills. Because we start off teaching foundational skills, meeting children where they are. Frog Street® begins with letter recognition. We begin with letter sounds because children read with sounds, not calling out letters. But at the end of the day, we always come out scoring higher on the end of the year test than our counterparts. Because we've built that foundation and that's what it's all about.

The Frog Street® assessment scores did not influence teacher capacity building efforts at the school.

Another disconnect was the beginning of the year kindergarten readiness scores. Kindergarten students take the assessment at the beginning of the kindergarten year. The principal and Head Start teachers indicated that the district did not distribute the scores to the prekindergarten principals. According to the principal, there are six different feeder schools for the school. The principal stated that this made district distribution of the scores difficult. The schools with the kindergarten program received the scores; however, the district did not distribute the scores to the specific prekindergarten schools. Participants agreed that the results of the beginning of the year kindergarten readiness scores would not change the way the school taught the students. The lack of disaggregation and distribution of the kindergarten readiness assessment data to the prekindergarten principal was a finding of the study.

The researcher concluded from the evidence gathered during the interviews, the principal's and Head Start teachers' laissez-faire perspective on standards-based testing exemplified the chasm between a Montessori instructional program's unique educational approach and a school district's emphasis on high-stakes testing and data-driven instruction (Block, 2015). The Montessori instructional method is a child-centered classroom, and the teacher acts as a facilitator and "frees herself from all preconceived ideas concerning the levels at which children may be" (Montessori, 1995, p. 276). Teachers organize materials on shelves, and children work at different levels based on his or her needs. The environment, self-respect, and respect for others are essential social skills. The academic content is interconnected, interdisciplinary, and embedded in the Montessori hands-on activities (Lillard, 2012, 2013). Multiple levels of learning, individualized pacing, and specific Montessori learning materials create a challenge for educators to align the Montessori curriculum with the content and format of standards-based assessments.

Educational Significance and Implications

Informing instructional leaders of one prekindergarten principal's efforts, as a servant-leader, to build teacher capacity in foundational skills informs an instructional leader's vision and decisions to provide prekindergarten professional development that closes the achievement gap and provides an equitable education for all students. The significance of this study was essential to prekindergarten principals and teachers as the findings contribute valuable insight into one school's efforts to build teacher capacity to remediate foundational skills. Cognitive standards-based

learning is difficult if a child enters prekindergarten without well-developed executive function and fine motor integration skills (Becker et al., 2014; Cameron et al., 2016; Nesbitt et al., 2015). Specifically, the lack of these skills contribute to later academic achievement gaps if not addressed early (Mathis & Bierman, 2015).

Nationally, approximately one-fourth of students are entering kindergarten without the required readiness skills, regardless of whether or not they attended a public prekindergarten program, Head Start program, or no program at all (Becker et al., 2014). With intentionality, campus leadership must address building teacher capacity to target early intervention and subsequently narrow gaps in achievement between student groups. Such change in the professional dynamic of schools requires a fundamental shift in how schools are led, grow, and thrive. First, schools must move from inauthentic teacher evaluation systems to a mindset of continuous analysis of learning. The fundamental question then becomes, “Is what we are doing working?” Secondly, communication between leadership and the classroom must become authentic, as the goal of teacher self-empowerment invites mutual responsibility for teaching and learning (Marshall, 2013). And finally, school leadership must not only define the roadmap for rigor, they must also strengthen culture and instruction with hands-on professional training (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018). Learning thrives when learning is nurtured; therefore, creating a strong culture where learning can thrive requires high-impact practices—plan, roll out, execute and monitor.

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