

Title: Closing The Principal Professional Development Gap: Educational Law Capacity Enhanced Through Learner-Centered Leadership Practices.

Abstract

There is growing awareness that professional development for educational leaders must evolve to better provide administrators with a well conceived career-long focus. With growing demands going well beyond traditional instructional leadership expectations, administrators also require continuing and current exposure to an expanding range of advanced topics, especially including the legal developments that are increasingly and so significantly impacting education. This paper focuses on the already established efforts and experiential methodologies employed for the past ten years by the Northern Arizona University/Arizona School Risk Retention Trust Law and Leadership Academies. Providing both statistical and descriptive indicators, this review further examines the Trust's efforts within both the context of professional standards, and also from the point of view of emerging insights into adult learning theory and professional education for educational leaders.

Introduction

There are numerous written accounts in the professional literature that document the expanding range of challenges and expectations being leveled at today's educational leaders. Hughes (2014) forecasted future changes where the complexity, pace and vastness of challenges to educators would likely exceed what is even imaginable today. While there is legitimate reason to be concerned with an overall changing landscape in the future, there is justification even today for more intense attention to administrator preparedness as the literature increasingly recognizes how the unique professional development needs of today's educational administrators are commonly ignored (Grissom & Harrington, 2010).

This lack of attention continues though over ten years ago many including Zimmerman (2002) identified professional development, including that which is specifically directed at the unique needs of administrators, as being an essential part of the foundation for ongoing improvement in schools. Though the literature in the past ten years has supported Zimmerman, and directs more attention to this topic than in the past, Grissom and Harrington (2010) acknowledge that the fund of information on professional development needs and best practices for supporting the unique needs of school administrators is still lacking. This need is becoming particularly evident when it comes to matters framed in a legal reality. This need, both in a general sense initially, and more so as it relates specifically to legal training will be examined in this paper.

Closing The Professional Development Gap

Zepeda, Parylo and Bengston (2014) worked specifically through an adult learning construct as they completed a detailed analysis of professional development for principals. One of the most

evident concerns they identified was what they termed a ‘deficit model’ wherein those responsible for providing instruction, education and ongoing development were always reacting to ‘gaps’ in areas where building leaders were already demonstrating marginal performance (Zepeda et al, 2014). The deficit model or ‘gap approach’ to professional development should be of concern clearly due to the delay in providing needed preparation. It should also be of concern because it likely also results in a reactive approach to training, as opposed to a well thought out or research supported approach that would take additional time to develop and implement effectively.

Among their criticisms of currently available practices and focuses, Zepeda et al (2014) included the tendency for preparation programs to be too managerial and theoretical in focus, which may or may not be a result of reactive tendencies. Not mentioning the lecture format anywhere when describing beneficial approaches for developing leadership qualities and professional understanding, they instead reported findings of better success with focuses that were much more experiential and action based. One of their primary findings was beneficial experiences need to involve the learner in making sense of their own learning, and provide opportunities for application into their ongoing professional practices (Zepeda et al, 2014).

Best Practice For Principal Professional Development

Attempting to focus through a lens of foresight instead of the deficit model and the associated reactivity, Petersen (2002) provided an illustrative accounting of characteristics that should be found in high quality professional development offerings for building leaders. Petersen (2002) stressed that efforts need to be focused on an entire career, be job embedded, need to involve

active problem solving with peers, and would strongly benefit from a coaching approach.

Stressing active participation in one's own learning, along with the value of receiving coaching along the way, Petersen reported ongoing feedback and reflection were significant aspects to any successful professional development endeavor. Further, Petersen (2002) noted that simulations and role playing or working within a case study approach were more valuable for the learner than traditional reading or 'listening to lecture' approaches which fit within a more traditional model of instruction.

Learning Centered Leadership

Working from the perspective of Learner-Centered Leadership (LCL) where professional development and learning are the central function of school leadership, Danzing, Bormman, Jones and Wright (2007) refined and articulated a model of professional growth that addresses the expectations voiced by Petersen and actively engages administrators in their own continued development. LCL begins with an understanding that learning is social. Learning is influenced by social interactions, interpersonal relationships, and communication with others. Learning is enhanced when the learner has an opportunity to interact and collaborate with others, on meaningful tasks.

Settings and opportunities that effectively stimulate and encourage this type of learning not only allow for social interactions, but deliberately and distinctly build these critical learning opportunities into the core design and delivery of the program. This interaction provides much needed opportunity to explore and address necessary concepts including respect as well as

diversity, and to encourage flexible thinking and social competence which are additional components advocated by the approach (Danzing et al, 2007).

Professional development along the lines of the LCL approach meets the needs outlined by Petersen (2002) and is critical for the entire spectrum of challenges and responsibilities facing today's school administrators. Nowhere is this ongoing, dynamic, and highly active engagement more beneficial than the legal arena, where one of the originators of LCL has been applying it for years. What follows first is information illustrating the growing needs associated with improved professional development for those in any way connected to education law. This demonstration of need helps to link LCL methods to the legal discussion, and is followed by an illustrative attempt to help the reader envision just what such a highly interactive learning environment and professional learning experience targeting education law could look like.

New Standards For Administrative Excellence

As education law is a longstanding and significant facet of virtually any administrative training program, it is important to explain why there is additional need for Learning Centered styled training. Recognizing the critical role building leaders play in shaping and inspiring educational success across the nation, the Council for Chief State School Officers has long been involved in ongoing efforts to develop and promote updated professional standards that can serve as a framework for preparatory instruction as well as ongoing induction and professional development efforts (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014). As challenges and expectations along with awareness of growth opportunities continue to expand, the resulting

product of their work, the Interstate School Leaders Licensing Consortium (ISLLC) Standards also continues to evolve.

In the original 2014 draft version of the proposed ISLLC Standards there was an attempt to address expanded challenges as the overall number of standards increased from six to the then proposed eleven standards that were offered for consideration. Not only did the number of standards increase with the original attempt at updating, but within those standards, the expectations for growth became specific as well. To better appreciate these recent efforts, it helps to compare the new ideas to the older more established practices.

In the most recently approved 2008 version of ISLLC Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008), there already was wording that started to touch on the importance of building understanding and capacity in areas where educational law impacted school operations.

Specifically, in Standard Five which reads “An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner” there already was wording in Function D which called for administrators to “Consider and evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision-making” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008).

In addition, Standard Six reads, “An educational leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). While there is not a specific function within this standard that further spells out these expectations, it is clear from the 2008 ISLLC

update that external factors including the impacts of legal considerations were already of growing significance when the standards were being refined.

Increased Legal Capacity

The original 2014 proposed draft update of the ISLLC Standards went further to define expectations associated with the legal domain of educational leadership. This draft version called for more comprehensive and meaningful professional development. In Standard Two, there was specific reference to promoting success through deeper commitment to professional development with reference to “enhancing instructional capacity.” Targets for administrative growth that were identified in the functions include developing “individual and collective capacity of staff” and ensuring “on-going and differentiated professional learning” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014). Statements like these, though found only a draft version, represent proposed supportive action aimed at broader and more meaningful professional development that was advocated by Zepeda, et al. (2014) as well as Grissom and Harrington (2010).

The Latest ISLLC Standards

While the proposed expectations covered within the proposed draft version of ISLLC 2014 are highly appropriate and perhaps even a bit overdue, they were actually removed in the draft 2015 ISLLC version which was circulated for commentary and input in May of 2015. To speculate as to why they were removed, or to review ISLLC 2015 further in that regard would be beyond the scope of this paper and would be a subjective journey to what appears to be a likely dead end.

Rather than head in this direction, the clear direction to take is to reaffirm why the originally proposed wording and the ensuing professional development was so important in the first place.

Why Do We Need LCL Oriented Professional Development?

Whereas the draft version of ISLLC 2014 finally took the topic of increased legal knowledge and operational capacity seriously, and put it out front for professionals to briefly see, those involved in the law and leadership academy have long been aware of the critical need to engage practicing administrators in real-life ‘capacity building’ situations since the academy originated in 2006. In deciding to undertake the establishment of a professional development offering based on adult learner needs, and to deliver it to an often ignored administrative group, originators of the academy first asked themselves, “Why do we need this in-service?” The immediate answer to that question was realizing the first problem that school administrators have with legal issues is that the landscape is always changing. They must make time in their busy schedules to research and study new changes to state laws.

Legislative Intrusion

In Arizona, this is a particular challenge. In a typical legislative session, which starts in January and can run through the end of the fiscal year, there are frequently over 1,000 bills introduced. As many as 300, or at times even more, of all bills introduced by the Arizona Legislature are in some manner targeted toward education. If even a fraction of these proposals pass, the affect on public education is beyond significant. Title 15 of the Arizona Revised Statutes contains most, but not all, of the laws that govern public schools. After six months of political fighting in the

legislature, a typical year will see 60 plus bills that change the laws governing schools. In addition, there are “rules and regulations” from a number of legal entities such as the State Board of Education, Library and Archives, Building Codes, Transportation laws, that school personnel must abide by. There are also 45 different legal codes in Arizona that cover these basic areas, all of which change on a yearly basis. Arizona is a highly prescriptive state, and being in touch with legal realities is a highly significant part of an educational leader’s role.

Increasingly Litigious Environments

The second major challenge that school administrators face is an increasingly hostile litigious environment, including personal risk of decertification and criminal penalties for failure to comply with new laws, as well as personal responsibility for violation of civil rights. The power to “decertify educators” is something that has only been used in modern times with the first decertification occurring in Arizona in 1952. The power of the Arizona State Board of Education (ADE) to grant certificates was given to them in the State Constitution. This power has always included the power to revoke certificates; however, state statutes were remarkably quiet on this issue. In 1994, as part of an ADE initiative, legislation was passed that required mandatory reporting of unprofessional, immoral, or illegal behavior on the part of certified employees. Since the mandatory reporting requirements have been implemented and an investigator hired, the (ADE) has seen a geometric rise in the number of teachers and administrators who have been disciplined for violations of these statutes

Safety First

The other part of this hostile environment that has compounded the risk for school administrators

has been lawsuits that bring damage claims for failure to protect children. Last year alone Trust lawyers successfully defended lawsuits against Arizona's public schools that could have cost millions of dollars. The most common form of litigation comes from students suing school districts and educators because they were injured at school. These plaintiffs seek to prove "negligence" on the part of educators or school districts. In general educators are held to a higher standard of care when they are on the job than the typical worker. Courts expect that 'reasonable and prudent' care will be taken with regard to the safety of students. These cases are especially difficult to defend if the student has been harmed by a sexual assault by a teacher, staff member or student.

Capacity Building Focus

One of the primary responsibilities of the Law and Leadership Academies has been to educate school personnel to understand the laws and how to prevent incidents like those just mentioned from happening. It is also, in a broader sense, an opportunity to deepen participants' understanding of the vital connection between law and leadership. In addressing the leadership and legalities relationship, the academy strongly emphasizes the importance of sharing this new knowledge with others upon return to the work setting. And participants indicate that they do in fact collaborate and consult with others to share the important information they have received. By design then, and as carried out by participants, the Academy has done far more than update attendees on the latest changes in law. Going beyond this, the Academy has long been in the business of helping to develop the increased legal capacity that was briefly called for in the 2014 draft version of the ISLLC standards. The opportunity to get a flavor of an Academy and its focus follows next.

The Setting

You are the Superintendent of Post Oak Unified School District. This is your first year with the District; you were hired coming from an assistant superintendent's position in a large urban school district in another state. On July 31, 2014, The Valley View High School band is away at a camp just before school starts. Students stay in dorm rooms at the camp. Chaperones are also in attendance. Tradition has it that most freshmen band members are targeted for the "duct tape treatment." The freshmen are well aware of this rite of passage, which involves taping freshmen band members to their beds early in the morning. The task is to break free before breakfast is served. Most get out fairly quickly, but on this occasion the upperclassmen tape freshman STAN STILL so tight he cannot free himself.

Chaperone NICK O. TIME recalls that Stan had been taped and notices that he is not at lunch, so he goes to check and finds him crying hysterically in bed. He frees Stan and tries to console him, but to no avail. Band Director MAJOR DEE is furious upon learning of the report, because he knows that Stan is mildly autistic and has problems with claustrophobia. Stan Still's mom files a hazing complaint; the complaint alleges violations of the hazing policy, resulting in harm to Stan. Ms. Still wants an investigation into the involvement of the other students and the chaperone. She is also demanding that the District pay for Stan's psychological counseling bills.

Northern Arizona University/Arizona School Risk Retention Trust, Inc., Law Academy

This scenario represents a typical setting and legal issue for the Arizona School Risk Retention Trust's (The Trust) Law and Leadership Academy. Following the introduction of the setting, an entire school year of legal issues unfolds typical of the events represented above. In a typical

school year simulation, there will be one 120 plus incidents with over 80 plus legal issues involved. Participants are immersed in these situations while they are coached and work in small groups to identify both the legal issues, and the leadership failures imbedded in the “setting.”

Participants continue to work in small groups to prepare a presentation to the conference regarding how each group would solve the problems of Post Oak Unified School District. Each of four overall groups is comprised of fifteen to eighteen participants, three university faculty, and one experienced attorney currently practicing within the realm of educational law in Arizona. It is clearly understood from the outset, and highly valued by participants, that the day’s focus is not based on a lecture format. Rather, following introductory comments and occasional opportunities to tie together the learning that is taking place, the participants work with expert coaches who guide and ultimately facilitate participants’ understanding of and ability to work within and successfully lead within the complexities presented to them by the legal realities facing our schools.

Experiential Learning In The Law Academy

It has already been documented that traditional methods such as lectures, essays and private study do not compare favorably to approaches that employ more active approaches to learning such as role playing, case-study, group reflection and professional application (Zepeda, et al, 2014; Grisson & Harrington, 2010; Petersen, 2002 and Zimmerman, 2002). However, the dominant method for teaching law to school administrators both in the preparatory programs and in professional development is still largely drawn from the experience of lawyers. Law professors rely primarily upon traditional educational approaches, which have already been

described, and help to set the standard for professional development in this area. Counter to this tradition, however, Gershuny, McAllister, and Rainey (2012) have identified active practices already described here within as being more effective in the instruction of business law.

Findings like this support the original beliefs that served a foundational role in the development of the Trust Academy, and help justify the application of more adult learner friendly approaches in place of instruction in law that has long been pursued through very traditional means.

Blending Law And Leadership

Instead of lecturing about legal developments, Lawyers for the Trust incorporate the issues already mentioned, and along with faculty explore the countless incidents of leadership failure into a broad case-based scenario that encapsulates a school year in a fictional school district in Arizona. Out of the events in the 30-page encapsulation of a school year in this school district, there are legal issues where administrators erred in their handling of the situation. Crucial to the success of the academy, and the applicability of concepts being addressed, is the manner in which NAU Educational Leadership faculty help participants explore invaluable leadership considerations as part of the overall effort to help administrators avoid mistakes and help to increase legal understanding. The Trust lawyers then reinforce this learning by participating in discussion at a small group level, then ultimately providing an analysis of the law behind the issue and present a legal conclusion concerning the possible actions of the district.

Quality Initial Design Made Better

Prior to a point in time wherein professional leadership standards were even initially calling for any increased attention at all to this topic with ISLLC 2008, the Trust Academy was effectively

incorporating modern adult learner educational approaches in its practice of developing greater understanding and overall organizational capacity in this highly volatile segment of educational operations. Though grounded in solid emerging adult learning theory, and refined through field-tested practices including requiring instructors to experience the academy as a participant, the determining factor that demonstrates the of overall effectiveness of the program, and guides in its approach to continuous improvement, rests within the data collection that is completed at the conclusion of each and every institute.

Though interaction between staff and participant regularly demonstrates that the greatest kudos are reserved for the interactive and authentic feel of the simulations, good design is only made better by consistent and valid collection of feedback. In addition to the regular feedback collected three times each year after each institute, a more recent longitudinal study was completed to assist in refinement of the program being offered through the academy. The information obtained from the surveys and derived from the analysis will be shared next.

Survey Approach

The following information shows the results of a survey conducted with participants of all of the academies during a seven (7) year span. A total of 66 former participants were located and all were sent a survey that was developed and refined by NAU faculty with expertise and teaching responsibilities in the area of research methods. Fifty-five (55) of the contacted participants completed surveys resulting in a return rate of 83.3%, which is highly impressive in and of itself and lends to the validity of the findings generated through this investigation.

Survey Results

Tables 1 through 5 (Below) contain the absolute frequencies (totals) and relative frequencies (percents) for the survey items clustered by the following overall themes: registration and advance information (Table 1); print materials (Table 2); staffing and functions (Table 3); relevance of program and information (Table 4); and Academy experience (Table 5). Following each table is a summary of key trends apparent in these summary descriptive statistical results.

Table 1.

Registration and Advance Information (Items 1 and 2)

Item	SD	MD	NN	MA	SA	Avg.	Total
1. The advance information I received about the Trust Academy was clear and helpful to me.	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	1.9% (1)	43.4% (23)	49.1% (26)	4.30	53
2. My Trust Academy registration was processed in an efficient manner.	3.8% (2)	3.8% (2)	1.9% (1)	9.4% (5)	81.1% (43)	4.60	53

SD = strongly disagree
MD = moderately disagree
NN = neutral/no response
MA = moderately agree
SA = strongly agree
Avg. = average

Table 2.

Print Materials (Items 3 and 4)

Item	SD	MD	NN	MA	SA	Avg.	Total
3. The Trust Academy print materials (scenario, legal analysis, leadership materials) were relevant and informative.	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	7.5% (4)	86.8% (46)	4.70	53
4. The Trust Academy print materials (scenario, legal analysis, leadership materials) provided me with information that I will be able to apply directly to my administrative job duties.	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	1.9% (1)	11.3% (6)	81.1% (43)	4.62	53

SD = strongly disagree

MD = moderately disagree

NN = neutral/no response

MA = moderately agree

SA = strongly agree

Avg. = average

Table 3.

Staffing and Functions (Items 5 through 7)

Item	SD	MD	NN	MA	SA	Avg	Total
5. The presentations by the Trust Academy lawyers were relevant and informative.	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	1.9% (1)	5.7% (3)	86.8% (46)	4.68	53
6. The leadership presentations were relevant and informative.	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	3.8% (2)	7.5% (4)	83.0% (44)	4.62	53
7. The Trust Academy faculty members facilitated the small-group sessions well and were knowledgeable about Arizona legal issues.	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	11.3% (6)	83.0% (44)	4.66	53

SD = strongly disagree

MD = moderately disagree

NN = neutral/no response

MA = moderately agree

SA = strongly agree

Avg. = average

Table 4.

Relevance of Program and Information (Items 8 through 11)

Item	SD	MD	NN	MA	SA	Avg	Total
8. I will be able to directly apply what I learned from the Trust Academy faculty presentations to my administrative job duties.	3.8% (2)	1.9% (1)	3.8% (2)	13.2% (7)	77.4% (41)	4.58	53
9. I will be able to directly apply what I learned from the Trust Academy lawyers and their presentations to my administrative job duties.	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	3.8% (2)	5.7% (3)	84.9% (45)	4.64	53
10. The large-group sessions reviewing the scenario legal issues with the Trust Academy lawyers were relevant and informative.	5.7% (3)	1.9% (1)	1.9% (1)	17.0% (9)	73.6% (39)	4.51	53
11. The Trust Academy lawyers communicated effectively with school administrators in both the small groups and large groups.	5.7% (3)	1.9% (1)	3.8% (2)	5.7% (3)	83.0% (44)	4.58	53

SD = strongly disagree

MD = moderately disagree

NN = neutral/no response

MA = moderately agree

SA = strongly agree

Avg. = average

Table 5.

General Relevance Information (Items 20 through 28 and 35)

Item	SD	MD	NN	MA	SA	Avg	Total
20. The opportunities to network with my fellow Trust Academy attendees were valuable.	5.7% (3)	1.9% (1)	11.3% (6)	15.1% (8)	66.0% (35)	4.34	53
21. The social activities were enjoyable.	5.7% (3)	3.8% (2)	3.8% (2)	13.2% (7)	73.6% (39)	4.45	53
22. The group leadership presentations (skits) were enjoyable.	7.5% (4)	3.8% (2))	0.0% (0)	22.6% (12)	66.0% (35)	4.36	53
23. I felt my contributions to the Trust Academy activities were valued.	3.8% (2)	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	18.9% (10)	71.7% (38)	4.49	53
24. I learned new information that I had not known before from attending the Trust Academy.	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	24.5% (13)	69.8% (37)	4.53	53
25. I made valuable contacts through my participation in the Trust Academy.	7.7% (4)	3.8% (2)	11.5% (6)	23.1% (12)	53.8% (28)	4.12	52
26. I plan to stay in touch with other Trust Academy attendees.	9.4% (5)	5.7% (3)	22.6% (12)	18.9% (10)	43.4% (23)	3.81	53
27. I would recommend the Trust Academy to others.	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	9.4% (5)	84.9% (45)	4.68	53
28. The Trust Academy is the best way to acquire information on legal issues in Arizona.	3.8% (2)	3.8% (2)	17.0% (9)	18.9% (10)	56.6% (30)	4.21	53
35. I am satisfied with my Trust Academy experience.	5.7% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	9.4% (5)	84.9% (45)	4.68	53

SD = strongly disagree
MD = moderately disagree
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Avg. = average

Discussion Of Survey Findings

The results of this recent data collection are largely in agreement with results regularly obtained at the conclusion of each academy, including a third spring academy which was introduced in 2013. The data was organized in its current format to help refine local understandings of program effectiveness. Beyond this, it is believed to be useful for others interested in updating approaches to professional development, particularly in the area of educational law as it relates to school administrators. In as much as the data is being offered in an effort to disseminate information, there are no reported working hypothesis offered on any specific survey questions or underlying constructs which serve in the makeup and delivery of the academy. While an extremely good return and good overall response to the vast majority of questions was enjoyed as result of this most recent collection of data, there was one area that stood out more than others when considering the research on adult learning and how it applies to professional development.

Though not information that ultimately questions the approach or the success of the academy, there were two survey questions that stood out and presented developers of the program with reason to reconsider obtained results in light of research on professional development best practices. Question 20 inquires as to the extent participants valued the networking opportunities afforded by the academy. Question 26 inquires as to whether participants intend to keep in touch

with other attendees. While neither question generated what investigators would report as a negative response, the responses of 4.34 and 3.81 respectively on a 5.0 point Likert Scale would clearly be counted as among the lowest of those insights shared by respondents. Though again, not offered as a criticism perhaps, those responsible for the academy are aware of best practices represented by Petersen (2002) who included development of cohort experiences and ongoing discussion groups as being among key components to effective professional development.

Another unique feature of the academy that should be included at this point in this discussion is the emphasis that is already devoted to encouraging professional interaction, networking and mutual support even outside of the completed event itself. These academies are held at various times at one of three locations across the state. Participants are housed, fed, and maintained onsite for the duration of the event in conference rooms or classrooms. The activities and schedule are designed to include time for social interactions after the ‘structured learning has been completed for the day. This social opportunity provides for more relaxed interaction on the topics being discussed, and also offers participants repeated access to attorneys, professors and other participants.

Feedback received through casual conversation and via formally sought after reflection supports the value participants place on this non-structured time. Beyond this, the format of the academy also actively encourages ongoing dialoguing to take place within a participant’s home setting. Whereas the formal feedback suggests there is possible work to do with this aspect of promoting sustained investment in this topic, and sustainability is always a key consideration for continuous focus, there are already multiple strong program components directed at achieving this desired

end result. Recently obtained data could reveal this to be an area to improve upon, or it could be that this area of focus just might not be as important to participants as it seems to be at times to originators of the program.

Continuing Qualitative Indicators

Numbers shared through survey results provide compelling support for the benefits of the Academy. That such a high number of participants think so highly of the program they receive is only reinforced by such a high percentage of graduates who identify the format as the very best approach to teaching law that they have ever been associated with. Beyond the numbers, however, are additional compelling ‘stories’ that are shared during breaks in the structured program. As recently as during the 2015 Summer Academy in Flagstaff, participants continued to freely voice their viewpoints on the benefits they were enjoying as attendees. Just a few of these insights will be shared here.

Several participants indicated that they return to the Academy, as opposed to pursuing other professional offerings, because of the unique format being offered. One said he ‘just won’t go’ to other offerings because he didn’t learn as much there. Other participants valued the approaches from more traditional conferences, but indicated preference for the more active involvement they received in Flagstaff. Another participant valued the manner in which all voices could be heard in discussions. And he indicated, as did many others, that the Academy format encourages active participation, beneficial risk taking, and active learning.

Summary And Recommendations

The origin of this innovative Academy is grounded in the concept of ‘common good.’ The Trust itself is a self-insurance public entity consisting of nearly 250 schools, school districts and community colleges that indemnifies the member schools. Recognizing years ago that there was a need for more effective professional development, The Trust initiated work with Northern Arizona University and its principal investigator, Dr. William Wright, to develop relevant curriculum that benefits adult learner needs specific to educational leaders.

These methods, and the overall approach employed by the Academy, are consistent with findings shared by Petersen (2002) who advocated offerings that involved problem solving and work with peers, were job embedded and applicable to current contexts, and involved coaching that included personal reflection and ongoing feedback. Further, and more specifically, the Academy is ultimately based on foundational work done in the area of Learner Centered Leadership advanced by Danzing, et al (2007).

While the Academy successfully served Arizona school districts for the past decade, the rest of the nation has become more aware of the growing expectations being placed on educational administrators who have to contend with increasing legal intrusion into school affairs. While ISLLC Standards only momentarily called for more in-depth capacity building with respect to educational law, there is plenty of evidence that supports the necessity of stronger standards in this area. There is also continuing proof that the program offered through the Trust Law Academy successfully and uniquely supports administrators who are facing the expanding realm of expectations while continuing to have to work with limited time and resources which only

makes quality professional development all the more crucial.

Considering the insights gained from experience, ongoing feedback and efforts associated with the design and ongoing refinement of the Trust Academy, the following recommendations are offered:

- Organizations that are tasked with providing more comprehensive and effective ongoing professional development in general, and specifically in this domain, would do well to look at the design and delivery of the model program represented in this paper, and in so doing not lose sight not only of the adult learner aspects designed into the academy, but also attend to the significance of blending both legal and leadership realities into the delivery of the institute.
- Persons interested in building upon or potentially expanding on the underlying constructs of the Trust Academy are encouraged to consider the data presented in this paper as a foundation for their development or potential investigation. Though the data was collected for ongoing program improvement purposes and not developed into any working hypothesis, it would provide an incredibly useful starting point for anyone interested in going further with either the topic of professional development for principals and or those looking further into preferred methods for improving individual and organizational capacity.
- In the absence of ISLLC Standards continuing to call for increased capacity building in the area of educational law, those involved with the operation and refinement of the Trust

Academy should increase their efforts to educate those within the profession.

Specifically, they should increase advocacy efforts concerning the need for and benefits of approaches employed by the Academy, and attempt to further disseminate information about capacity building in this critical area of administrative responsibility.

Conclusion

Expectations placed on administrators continue to expand, and the profession clearly needs to develop and promote successful professional development offerings that help our educational leaders to meet these demands. The goal of legal training in conjunction with leadership theory and best adult learner practice should be to better educate administrators, help prevent legal problems and leadership failure from occurring in the schools. Since 2006, the Trust and Northern Arizona University's Department of Educational Leadership have worked cooperatively to develop and provide such a service. Together, they maintain plans to continue to provide relevant legal training using real-life cases occurring in schools. It is anticipated that future academies will prove as interactive, successful and entertaining for the participants as the past academies have been able to deliver. Contacts and inquiries about the approach and delivery of this innovative program are welcomed and should be directed toward Dr. William Wright at Northern Arizona University.

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