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The NCPEA International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation is a nationally refereed journal published annually in the Spring by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration.

Note from NCPEA Publications Director, Brad Bizzell

The International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation is NCPEA's contribution to the Open Education Resources (OER) movement. This contribution to OER will be permanent.

In August, 2005, NCPEA partnered with Rice University and the Connexions Project, to publish our IJELP as open and free to all who had access to the Internet. Currently, there are over 400 peer-reviewed research manuscripts in the NCPEA/Connexions database. The purpose of the NCPEA/Knowledge Base Connexions Project is to “add to the knowledge base of the educational administration profession” and “aid in the improvement of administrative theory and practice, as well as administrative preparation programs.” Our partnership continues but a new door has opened for NCPEA Publications to join the OER movement in a more substantive and direct way. In March 2013, NCPEA Publications and the NCPEA Executive Board committed the IJELP to the OER movement.

What are Open Educational Resources (OER)?

Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching and learning materials that you may freely use, adapt and reuse, without charge. Open Educational Resources are different from other resources an educator may use in that OER have been given limited licensing rights. That means they have been authored or created by an individual or organization that chooses to provide access to all, at no charge. NCPEA Publications is committed to providing access to all, while assuring author/s of full attribution as others use the material.

The worldwide OER movement is rooted in the idea that equitable access to high-quality education is a global imperative. To NCPEA, this is a moral/ethical responsibility and issue of social justice. Open Educational Resources offer opportunities for systemic change in teaching and learning through accessible content, and importantly, through embedding participatory processes and effective technologies for engaging with learning. The OER Commons project aims to grow a sustainable culture of sharing among educators at all levels.

What is the OER Commons?

The Institute for the Study of Knowledge in Education (ISKME) created OER Commons, publicly launched in February 2007, to provide support for, build, and make available to all, a knowledge base around the use and reuse of open educational resources (OER). As a network for teaching and learning materials, the web site offers engagement with resources in the form of social bookmarking, tagging, rating, and reviewing. OER Commons has forged alliances with over 120 major content partners to provide a single point of access through which educators and learners can search across collections to access thousands of items, find and provide descriptive information about each resource,

and retrieve the ones they need. By being "open," these resources are publicly available for all to use.

What NCPEA OER is Not!

NCPEA open educational resources are not an open door at the NCPEA Publications submission and review stages. We have always insisted on and will continue to require very thorough peer reviews (double-blind). NCPEA Publications is fortunate to have a cadre of professional reviewers (university professors), numbering over 300. Editors first consider a submitted manuscript, and if appropriate, selects/assigns two reviewers who also have the expertise/interest in the manuscript's specific topic. This process assures that reviewers will read an author's manuscript with expertise/experience in that area.

The "openness" of the IJELP OER comes at publication stage. Once the issues are published, they are formatted/published in an open access website, indexed by Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), catalogued as a "commendable journal" in the Cabell's Directory, and provided to the Open Educational Resource database. The IJELP is currently viewed and read by educators from over 72 countries (many 3rd World) and all 50 U.S. States (data provided by Google Analytics).

Read More at: <http://www.oercommons.org>

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The manuscripts in Volume 11, Number 2 (Fall 2016) have been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration as significant contributions to the scholarship and practice of school administration and PK-12 education.

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Stakeholder Experiences in District-University Administrator Preparation Partnerships

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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Our qualitative study explores the lived experiences of district stakeholders in university-district leadership preparation programs. Collaborative partnerships between school districts and universities focused on developing quality school leader are a part of recent efforts to provide the field of public education with exemplary leadership. The stakeholder experience in these partnerships is a little understood phenomenon lacking research. Thirteen district stakeholders in grant funded leadership development partnerships participated in the phenomenology informed study. Findings show that prior experiences, trust, issues of time, sustainability, and the power to build bridges were critical components of the district stakeholder experience in partnerships.

The need for the development of educational leaders equipped to tackle the challenges evident in American education has spawned a plethora of school district–university partnerships focused on developing quality school leaders (Fultz & Davis, 2014). As early as 1987, education reformers asserted that as difficult as partnerships can be to create and sustain, quality reform requires community collaboration (Comer, 1987). Spurred by higher expectations and shrinking resources educators were motivated to give every consideration to the benefits of utilizing the power of inter-organizational collaborations (Goldring & Sims, 2005), such as district–university partnerships.

School district leaders possess an institutional knowledge of the district itself to help inform the development of the partnership and an understanding of the administrative practices necessary for principals and assistant principals to be effective in their schools, whereas university personnel possess expertise in the realm of research and theory (Belle & Sanzo, 2014; Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2003). The process of developing effective district–university partnerships focused on administrator preparation must include the selection of representatives from each organization to design, build, and facilitate the partnership activities (Sanzo, 2016). These representatives, or stakeholders, are key to the successful development and implementation of the joint educational leadership development ventures (Mast, Scribner, & Sanzo, 2011). Selected stakeholders are presented with a unique opportunity to create, define, and shape these partnerships; bringing with them to this collaborative effort their varied ideals and values (Mast, Scribner, & Sanzo, 2011). However, there is a dearth of research examining the critical role of district-level stakeholder and the stakeholder experiences in these partnerships (Sanzo, 2016). Therefore, an investigation of education partnership stakeholders’ unique relationships and experiences in this meaningful type of work forms the foundation for our research.

This paper provides the findings from a qualitative study informed by the phenomenological methodology examining the lived experiences of district stakeholders in university-district partnerships. The following provides our conceptual and theoretical background, the methods for the study, findings, and discussion.

The Need for Effective School Leadership Preparation Programs

The demand for effective school leadership has been tied to research that often portrays principals as the linchpins for school improvement (Belle & Sanzo, 2014; Leithwood, Seahore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011; Burt, Shen, Leneway, & Rainey, 2014). Lashway (2003) noted that as standards-based school reform neared its 20th anniversary, policymakers continued to assert the need for strong principal leadership. The job of the principal is constantly evolving, while the number of prepared and qualified applicants are decreasing. Myung et al. (2011), in their study of the principal pipeline, reported that “Although the need for effective school leaders has intensified based on the current performance of schools, many school districts across America struggle to find qualified candidates to fill vacant school leadership positions” (p. 696). Retirements, career options, and the constantly publicized ills of the nation’s educational system are among the factors that exacerbate this phenomenon. Furthermore, this problem has been found to be even more pronounced in communities serving large proportions of students attending secondary schools, students of low socioeconomic status, large populations of minority students, or students who do not speak English as their first language (Myung et al., 2011).

A close examination of the literature on principal school leadership shortages reveals the problem is much more complex than just an inadequate supply to meet the growing demand of school leaders. Districts are not facing a labor shortage inasmuch as they are facing a shortage of laborers with the right skills (Myung et al., 2011). This unparalleled demand for effective leadership in education requires a multitude of high quality leadership preparation programs.

University-District Partnerships

The continued search for an effective mechanism to assist with the preparation of school administrators has led educational leaders to critically examine the concepts of collaboration and partnerships (Belle & Sanzo, 2014; Burt, Shen, Leneway, & Rainey, 2014; Sanzo, 2016). The development of meaningful collaborative partnerships has now become a common interest of many universities and community entities (Belle & Sanzo, 2014; King, 2014; Sanzo, 2016; Strier, 2011). Federal, state, and foundations have funded research projects to explore different approaches to leadership preparation in recent decades, looking especially at the extent to which school districts influence the critical work of their university collaborators (Fultz & Davis, 2014; Browne-Ferrigno & Barber, 2010).

The Need for Partnerships

Developing sustainable partnerships in the business community has been an important strategy to effectively meet company goals. This strategy has increasingly seen more prominence in the education community as well. According to Barnes and Phillips (2000)

Most public sector organizations, including higher education institutions, now operate within a framework reliant on partnerships for the successful delivery of service and projects. In a complex and diverse world, in which power is diffused, it has been argued that effective governance may only be achieved by building on formal inter-sectoral partnerships. (p. 184)

Research supports the effectiveness of partnerships with institutions of higher learning as a strategy for a community wanting to improve the quality of life for its citizens (Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2004). This marriage of community–municipal organizations and universities allows both entities to bring their knowledge, experience, and resources to the problem-solving arena. The ability of a partnership to understand and address complex problems, however, is related to who is involved in the partnership, how community stakeholders are involved, and the leadership and management of the partnership (Lasker & Weiss, 2003).

School Leader Development Partnerships

Proponents of university–district partnerships profess that for redesigned leadership preparation programs to be maximally effective, development of the partnership of the school district with the university is one of the most important contributing factors (Harchar & Campbell, 2010; Sanzo, 2016). This joint effort, combining research-based theory with on-the-job practice, provides the best possible combination of experiences to promote job success (Davis, Leon, & Fultz, 2012). Also, this two-tiered approach provides participating individuals with meaningful, contextually, relevant and well-focused intent (Kin, 2014; Mast, Scribner, & Sanzo, 2011; Sanzo, Myran, & Clayton, 2011) as it effectively helps participants span the chasm between theory and

practice. This type of partnership is not successful without collaboration between both university and district level stakeholders.

Faculty members possess the research skills necessary to conduct rigorous research and connect their findings to PK-12 practice; but the active engagement of practicing school leaders to serve provides authenticity (Sanzo et al., 2011; Sanzo, 2016). Active involvement of both school district and university personnel avoid the questions of authenticity and provide a vital connect to “real practice.” University–district partnerships provide opportunities for both colleges and school districts to bring their strengths to the problem of building an adequate cadre of school leaders. Storms and Gonzalez (2006) noted that building relationships between school districts and universities that are perceived by both entities as effectively meeting their needs is central to the work of forming these partnerships.

Stakeholders

Our goal was to begin to understand the district stakeholder experience in university-district partnerships, as this is a poorly understood and critical group involved in leadership development partnerships between universities and districts. To help us understand the stakeholder experience better, we drew upon business literature, including research and theory, as both conceptual and theoretical underpinnings for our study. For the purpose of this study, we have operationally defined *stakeholder* as a person selected by either a PreK-12 school district or university to help develop the framework and implementation plan for a district–university partnership, focused on school leadership while representing the interests of the school district or university. Stakeholders possess three attributes. The first is power, or the extent to which a stakeholder has or can gain access to coercive, utilitarian, or normative means to impose his or her will in the relationship. The second attribute is legitimacy, the degree to which a stakeholder relationship is seen as appropriate, proper, and desirable in the social context. The third attribute is urgency, when the work to be done is of a time-sensitive nature and when the work is important or critical to the stakeholder (Oates, 2013).

Stakeholder Theory

The actions of stakeholders in collaborative partnerships are not random, having their basis in many years of stakeholder theory research. Drawing on sociology, economics, politics, and ethics, stakeholder theory provides the research background to support how stakeholders with similar interests form and operate as groups. This theory of stakeholder action is recognizable in the interactions between stakeholders selected to represent school districts and universities in their collaborative partnerships. According to the work of Mainardes, Alves, and Raposa (2012), the core assumptions of stakeholder theory include the following: Organizations engage in relationships with groups that influence or are influenced by them; relationships are examined through process and results; the interests of legitimate stakeholders are of intrinsic value and no single set of interests prevails over others; an ultimate focus on managerial decision making; stakeholders seek to influence organizational decision-making processes, so they become consistent with their needs and priorities; and organizations must strive to understand, reconcile and balance the needs of all stakeholders.

Myllykangas, Kujala, and Lehtimäki (2011) stated the core assumptions of this theory help create value for stakeholders. In the stakeholder literature, value creation is examined as a

relational, rather than a transactional, exchange. In partnerships, such as those that exist between universities and school districts, this stakeholder value creation is challenged and extended to the development of relationships that are manifested through cooperation, collaboration, and network influences. The development and maintenance of favorable and productive stakeholder relationships is regarded as essential in creating real value in successful partnerships. Frooman brought forth the idea that “though stakeholder theory has traditionally emphasized the individuals in the relationships, and not the relationships themselves, the relationships developed between stakeholders may tell as much about how the actors will interact as the individual attributes of the actors” (Frooman, 1998, p. 192).

Stakeholder Experience

The competing interests that stakeholders bring to a partnership can make it difficult for them to balance their responsibilities with their assigned tasks. Organizational performance is related to organizational objectives, and such objectives are partly determined by the organization’s response to conflicting stakeholder demands (Oates, 2013). Stakeholders not only are judged by organizations and partners based on the social constructs of their legitimacy, but they are also classified in the literature by their respective levels of importance, or stakeholder salience. This classification structure takes into account aspects of the stakeholder’s role as it relates to effectiveness in partnerships.

Trust in Stakeholder Relationships

New approaches to problem solving are required for partnering arrangements, such as district–university partnerships, to be effective. Problem solving in the context of partnerships rests not on traditional authority structures and systems, however, but on the foundation of relationships and trust (Getha-Taylor, 2012). Trust, a morally desirable characteristic of relationships (Jones & Wicks, 1999), is a key feature impacting the success of stakeholders in working collaboratively as partners and is a foundational aspect of cross-sector partnerships that must be preserved to maintain them. Countless efforts by companies and organizations to work together to tackle some of the most complex challenges of the day have failed because of competitive self-interest, a lack of a fully shared purpose, and, most importantly, a shortage of trust (Nidumolu, Ellison, Whalen, & Billman, 2014).

Greenwood (2006) added that trust also entails an expectation of morally correct performance, guiding the trusting parties to place themselves in positions of dependence and vulnerability because they believe the trusted party will act for the greater good. Greenwood and Van Buren (2010), in their review of trustworthiness in organizations and its connection to stakeholder theory, noted that there had been considerable academic work within the business literature focusing on trust and fairness in stakeholder–organization relations. Although organizational trustworthiness does not create an ethical obligation for stakeholders to hold fast to the objectives and interests of their parent organization, it does provide a means by which ethical obligations are more likely to be positively discharged. This idea of stakeholder management has long been recognized as a central part of any organization’s effectiveness, especially in building partnerships.

The process of building and sustaining collaborative trust in developing and maintaining partnerships can be complicated by a host of issues. Some of these potential challenges include

prior conflicts, hidden or different agendas, personality clashes, competition among partners, lack of accountability, lack of information sharing, and power differentials (Getha-Taylor, 2012). These challenges to developing trust can be overcome as leaders of organizations share information, work on building relationships, model openness, offer assistance, make good on commitments, and earn others' support by sharing credit, keeping confidences, and being trustworthy (Getha-Taylor, 2012).

Methods

The goal of this study was to examine the professional lived experiences of school district stakeholders involved in creating and implementing school district–university leadership development partnerships. Our research was guided by the following question: What is the experience of primary stakeholders (school district) in the development and implementation of school–university partnerships focused on administrator preparation? As phenomenology is rooted in examining the essence of direct lived experience, this qualitative research study is informed by this research tradition; its tenets meld easily with the investigation and its research questions. Phenomenology guides the researcher to explore and understand the everyday experiences of others without presupposing knowledge of those experiences (Converse, 2012).

Participants

Thirteen participants were selected through purposeful sampling. The directors of district–university partnership programs funded through the United States Department of Education's School Leadership Program (SLP) grants were contacted to obtain information about district stakeholders currently or recently working with their partnerships. Once confirmed as district stakeholders by the partnership directors they were invited by email to participate in our qualitative research study. Represented are four rural school districts with 1,000 to 2,300 students, six suburban school districts with 5,500 to 20,000 students, and three urban school districts with 39,000–640,000 students. Of the 13 participants in the sample, four currently participate or recently participated in school district–university partnerships in rural settings, seven currently participate or recently participated in partnerships in suburban settings, and two currently participate or recently participated in partnerships in urban settings.

Data Collection and Analysis

We used an open-ended interview protocol (Appendix A) as a framework for the interviews, allowing participants to share information from their viewpoints and experiences. We encouraged the participants to become involved in the structure and process of the interviews, which potentially gave rise to a more robust representation of their voices, thereby providing more reliable, comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). During the recorded interviews, each participant was prompted by questions designed to gain information about the historical perspective of the stakeholder, the stakeholder experience, the stakeholder role in starting partnerships, the stakeholder role in sustaining partnerships, interactions between stakeholders, trust between stakeholders, and challenges for stakeholders.

Data collected through the 13 semistructured interviews were reduced to patterns and themes through the process of coding. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and then shared

with the participants for confirmation that they adequately represented the interview sessions. The research team met to discuss the protocols for the data analysis process, and then shared the participant-reviewed transcriptions. The transcriptions were initially reviewed by the research team for content and then reviewed again for the selection of key words and phrases representing the experiences of the participants. This process of horizontalization served to provide initial open codes, which were discussed in the context of both the individual interview questions and the interview questions categories (background, behavior, opinion, knowledge, feeling, closing question). The research team for consensus coding critically reviewed the open codes. Through the process of consensus coding the research team merged codes based on interpreting the transcripts and research team discussions, leading to the emergence of themes and subthemes. The coding process concluded when the researcher team reached the point where no additional themes emerged.

Findings

The Value of Prior Experiences

Most participants had some level of prior experience with universities. Whether having served as adjunct or part-time teaching staff, or in some other capacity, there was an established connection that supported the willingness of university staff to partner with the school districts. One southwest stakeholder, Dr. Willie Sauer, boasted strong connections with universities,

I've had personal relationships with the universities because I've taught at them, so I've had partnerships. I've done other things with universities through my affiliations as a part-time faculty member. I had connections, so when we had this need then I called people I knew at the university who might be able to help us!

One theme that emerged from the interviews was the impact of career experiences to each stakeholder's role in district-university partnerships. Comments were shared such as, "This came into my lap because of other work that I had been doing in the field," and "Because I was already working as a director supervising those principals, I believe I was asked to be a part of the initiative." The career pathways indicated were varied but all shared common opportunities to develop as education professionals, while gaining valuable knowledge and skills critical to working collaboratively with universities. Dr. Eliza Baugher, a retired administrator from a Midwest urban district, was working with administrator preparation in other localities across the United States. When the position to work with her home district and the local university around the concept of creating an administrative pipeline was posted, application was eminent, with Dr. Baugher coming into the position with a thorough knowledge of the infrastructure of the school district, and with a past relationship with the university. She shared,

So there are lots of different pieces and parts that fit together. It's been an evolving process. This work has been a passion of mine throughout my career; to help others, to be able to mentor and coach people to help them be successful. It's hugely rewarding.

Dr. Cristin Barraza, another urban district stakeholder from the southwest, was serving as a lecturer at the university, and co-teaching in a principal institute program, forging a strong

connection to the university that could only support the development of a district-university partnership. She stated, “These relationships start in working with universities to design curriculum for improving leadership development, leadership skills, and then the relationships extend to other projects.” Because these professionals were already involved with their partnering universities in many different ways, they were easily and purposefully drawn into the district stakeholder role, maximizing the power of their prior connections.

Additionally, several of the respondents were involved in administrative leadership organizations or district leadership development initiatives prior to their roles as district stakeholders. One midwestern district stakeholder, Dr. Ivonne Blanke, was involved with a center for school effectiveness and education policy organization, when the district-university partnership opportunity surfaced.

Dr. Elihu Lynch, another midwestern district stakeholder served on a district level principal redesign committee in the role of assistant superintendent representing the district’s interests. In both instances, these professionals were intensely connected to the work of administrator preparation, but through alternative organizations. Their routes to the district stakeholder role were presented as direct and intentional, as they reported being already immersed in much of the work of the partnerships.

Trust As A Lever To Building Partnerships

Many of the school districts represented in this research study have been actively involved in collaborative relationships with universities for years. For example, Dr. Ava Turner, a veteran district stakeholder stated:

I think that the university and our school district have been engaged for over 100 years, so we don’t even think about it being a trusting relationship anymore. It’s just always been; you know what I mean? Like peanut butter and jelly, we go together. But if I ever had to think about why it seems right and comfortable and appropriate to do things with them, then the word trust would probably be what comes out, but it’s just because it’s historic that you don’t think about it. It just exists.

Because of the historical relationship that is already in existence, the partnerships serve to deepen the trust between the school districts and universities.

Most of us know our stakeholders at the university level, and also in the surrounding districts. So, I don’t remember trust being an issue just because we’ve worked together on so many other things. We have to, and when you’re a small, rural school districts like we are, you have to work together.

As the district stakeholders shared the specifics of their prior relationships with the universities serving as partners in their SLP grant programs, it was evident these experiences were key to establishing an environment of trust. Having a professional relationship with the partnering university was paramount to building the trusting relationships necessary for the development of a successful partnership. Dr. Duggan shared, “Trust was visible in our commitment to the work...we were clear about what the outcomes were going to be.”

Some school district stakeholders did not have a longstanding relationship in place between the district and the university. These stakeholders also viewed trust as imperative, but realized the additional responsibility of helping to build positive working relationship between the two participating entities. In the words of southwest district stakeholder, Dr. Cristen Barraza,

Trust is definitely a factor. I think a lot of it is unspoken. It has to do with building relationships through meetings, through face time. You need a venue that is pleasing and welcoming, with food provided. These are the kinds of things that, on a human level, on an interpersonal level, become very important for building trust.

Dr. Lynch, an assistant superintendent serving as a district stakeholder from a suburban midwestern district added, “The quality of the interactions, and the way we worked with each other that helped to pull people to the other side of the street, to begin to pull them over to say, let me get on board.”

Collaboration required trust in these partnerships and several barometers to measure the level of trust surfaced in the conversations. The visibility of trust in the commitments was evidenced through all parties meeting deadlines, having agendas for meetings to focus the work, and always having clarity about expected outcomes. Transparency was presented as an important indicator of trust in action in district-university partnerships. “A component of having trust is transparency. When I referenced that session where we were co-constructing goals, I think that was crucial as an example of how transparency was enacted,” said Dr. Barraza. The sentiment of the district stakeholders was that all stakeholders must make a conscious effort to always be clear and upfront about their expectations and determine shared goals so that the work remains focused on program development and implementation. Dr. Candi Cybulski, a midwestern district stakeholder, confronted this issue saying,

I think you realize a level of trust when people are comfortable coming to the table and laying their agendas there, instead of hiding them and trying to manipulate the system into what they need. You have to be really honest about what your needs and what your challenges are, and what your opportunities are if you want to be really transparent.

The quality of personal interactions is another strong indicator of trust suggested by the respondents. “Everybody has to be face to face at the conference table, to share what our respective goals are, and try to come to terms with how we’re going to align all of that,” Dr. Cristen Barraza contributed. Time together, sharing ideas, and working toward common goals is a large part of what was shared as critical to building the kind of trusting relationships that will yield high performing district–university partnerships. The reality of building trust and its role as a lever was presented by the participants as each entity openly expressed needs and wants, with decision making occurring in a spirit of collaboration.

Issues Of Time

District stakeholders stated they were often confronted with solving problems around competing schedules and ability to find time to complete the program activities for their district employees in the preparation partnership. This was an area of tension for the stakeholders, often being

“caught in the middle” between the university and their own supervisors, whether that was a superintendent, a school board, or another leader in the district.

Selected aspiring administrators in the partnership programs were already full-time employees serving in a variety of roles in the districts. In one of the midwestern partnerships, the district stakeholder informs that participants in their program are offered a 16-week immersion in a school, and a substitute takes their classroom.

The substitute must be highly functioning and highly engaging to make sure that the children are reached and that they have a chance of doing well! That’s the only drawback to this. The positive is that the aspiring administrator gets a really authentic experience being with the principal day to day, and they love it.

Dr. Ava Turner, representing a suburban school district, shared:

Even though we want authenticity, having interns complete their program requirements while missing time with their students will not work. We must always meet our responsibility to the students in the classrooms. I am absolutely supportive of redesign and the internship, but there has to be another version, another iteration.

The stakeholders were challenged by district leaderships’ inquiries into the amount of time the partnership activities would take. District stakeholders expressed their leaderships’ concerns, with one stakeholder stating, “There were several times when events were scheduled during the regular school day, and we had recommended they try not to pull teachers from the classroom.” Superintendent Dr. Mandel Strieff remembers being asked by the school board, “How much time was it going to require for teachers? How much time is it going to require of them outside of the classroom and affect their instructional day-to-day job?” The school board also wanted to know how involved the superintendent was going to be in the process: “How much of your time was this going to take?” Dr. Strieff responded,

I had to explain the benefits that this brings back. If you have a superintendent who is also enhancing his or her instructional performance levels, they are constantly bringing the research back to the schools to help build teachers’ and principals’ abilities, and hopefully this will result in better student achievement.

The school board accepted the superintendent’s explanation, but this issue of real organizational commitment in terms of time continues to sometimes be a challenge for district stakeholders.

This issue of time was not limited to the smaller school districts in the southeast. Dr. Barazza, representing a very large urban southwest school district, was challenged with related concerns. Due to the size of the metropolitan area in which the school district resides, effectively scheduling activities that can be accessible to all participants was difficult. “On a simpler, logistical level, the ability to meet face to face is a challenge. In our district in K-12 education, our days are very structured, very limited – kind of inflexible time,” the urban district stakeholder, shared. Dr. Eliza Baugher, also from a large urban district, has faced the same challenges. Issues of time continue to be mentioned by district leadership. Concerns about staffing the programs and pulling staff away from their “primary duties” are issues that have to be addressed if the partnerships are going to continue and be successful.

Sustainability

District stakeholders were forthright in sharing their thoughts about the continuation of currently successful administrator preparation partnerships. Dr. Elihu Lynch described the concern about sustainability: “How is this going to be sustained over time? Will we have the dollars to continue to pour into not only what we do with interns, but pouring into our own administrators?” Dr. Eliza Baugher, representing her state’s partnership included in the sample shared similar concerns: “We have the same concerns that probably everybody involved in working in education have—that would be time and money. This work is now totally supported by SLP. There’s hands-on and support like office space—that kind of thing.” Dr. Lynch expressed staffing concerns that loomed around the continuation of the collaborative district–university partnership: “But the other prevalent concern, probably even beyond funding was, how is this going to be overseen or supervised or monitored or taken care of in our own district? Somebody will always have to take responsibility for it!” Commitment by participating school districts and universities has to equate to budgeting for these administrator preparation programs, and to providing the infrastructure to support the effort. “Hopefully, the formal, legal memoranda of understandings signed by both the districts and university partners outlining roles and responsibilities will provide guidance to district and university leadership,” shared partnership stakeholder, Dr. Annmaria Lakey, as they look at the future of the great work of district–university partnerships in supporting the professional learning of aspiring administrators.

Power of Building Bridges

District–university partnerships were reported as good experiences by all of the district stakeholders interviewed. The essence of the positive experiences and positive feelings presented by the participants in the study comes from a deep belief in the power and common sense of relationships to enhance the work of the stakeholders. Dr. Mortie Kieran brought home this concept of power in relationships, sharing that

When you start looking at that it makes all the sense in the world that if you get an opportunity to work that closely with somebody from higher learning, then you take it. There was no reason not to take it in my opinion. We went forward with it as we always look for opportunities to partner with them or any university. We all benefit from joint efforts between LEAs and universities to develop and provide opportunities for folks.

This idea of building bridges between organizations defines the intent of the district stakeholders as they entered into collaboration with their partnering universities. Southeast stakeholder, Mrs. Erin Walker shared,

We were able to build relationships with the people at the university. So it seemed really smooth. It was really seamless as far as how we implemented the process. There was no stress in trying to meet the requirements that they had, because of the regular interactions we shared. It was professionally satisfying, continuing ... We had a lot of latitude in helping to shape the partnership. As far as developing and providing opportunities for folks and then helping to monitor the process, helping the placement process; all of that

was definitely a joint effort between the LEAs and the university. We all benefitted from that.

The perspective on building bridges from one of the southwestern urban districts was different, but connected to the southeastern experience, as shared by Dr. Barraza:

What I love is seeing a different pair of eyes. When I come to work with university professors, what I find is a lot of openness. I like the dialogue that we have with the university professors. I like their ability to question what our practices are, what we're doing, and for what purpose. I think it brings a greater level or richness to the work that we are doing. Sometimes we become a little bit insular, and this is a way for us to open up and expand our thinking and our own learning. I really enjoy it.

Defining and implementing district-university partnerships focused on administrator preparation require, from both entities, a commitment to creating connections or expanding prior connections. These "bridges" provide the framework on which the collaboration and programming can be constructed. Dr. Annmaria Lakey gave another perspective to the concept of building bridges between organizations in district-university partnerships. She credits the stakeholders as the connection that makes the partnerships work:

I think one piece that we found out through this partnership and myself getting to play the middleman, that there has to be a bridge between the university and the school district, and both have to learn and grow together if we want to produce highly effective school leaders to impact student growth and achievement, and shape what we are going to have in the future of education.

With SLP grants providing the initial funding to support the efforts, district and university leadership continue to look at building the capacity needed for the partnerships to impact school leadership preparation for some time to come.

Discussion

The stakeholders presented themselves through the interviews as agents of change in collaboration with their university counterparts. The business literature documents the significance of the stakeholder role to the ultimate success of partnerships like joint ventures, alliances, and consortia within the public sector. Stakeholders are often the risk takers or influencers in situations where decisions are being made by collaborative partnerships and the interviews supported this (Mitchell et al, 1997).

Supporting the concept that some problems are best managed through a collective effort (Savage et al., 2010), the district stakeholders' efforts, in part, resulted in school districts and universities coming together through structured collaboration to serve as a problem solving mechanism, focusing on issues like the effective use of resources, uniting theory and practice, and enhancing work in the field through innovation. While always serving in the role of a claimant, maintaining a stake in the organization, these stakeholders also effectively serve as influencers, reinforcing the assertion that in district-university partnerships both the role of the claimant and influencer have merit.

District stakeholders have power - the ability to exercise their own will in the face of making decisions that will support the goals of the school districts (Neville & Mengué, 2006). It was also shown that the stakeholders have legitimacy – from observations of their behavior throughout the partnership efforts and the nature of the individual and his or her knowledge (Santana, 2012). Lastly the stakeholders exhibited urgency – demanding the attention of those they represent with motivation to take action as warranted (Myllykangas et al., 2011).

The Value of Prior Experiences.

Our examination of the professional world of the participants revealed they all arrived at their district stakeholder partnership role following an array of professional opportunities. Despite the diversity in their past experiences, there were common threads that were evident based on the location of their school districts (rural, suburban, or urban), prior connections to universities, and other vital connections to their communities. District stakeholders having pre-partnership relationships and experiences with university colleagues were able to come into the district-university partnership effort with a direct connection to the culture and protocols of the university already in place. This impact was in place across all represented school districts, rural; suburban; or urban. Pre-partnership relationships discussed included serving as adjunct faculty, working with teacher education programs, or serving as a superintendent invested in a prior relationship with the university. Prior experiences were most impactful in helping to develop the skills needed to construct positive working relationships with colleagues. These skills were found to be maximally transferable to the role of building collaborative working relationships with university stakeholders.

Trust as a Lever to Building Partnerships.

In all aspects of the partnership effort, trust was evident as an integral part of the fabric of the collaboration. For district stakeholders who presented as having historical ties to universities through other projects and activities, trust was a key component of the ability of the school district to successfully work in collaboration with the university. When trusting relationships were already present, the developing partnership around administrator preparation served to deepen the trust making it easier for partnerships to extend to solving new problems. Similarly, for stakeholders whose school districts presented as having limited to no prior connections to universities, trust was offered as important for the development and implementation of partnerships, with the stakeholders giving special attention to creating the conditions that foster trust.

In situations where trust was not initially in place, both the school districts and the universities made concerted efforts to develop positive working relationships and build trust. The spirit of cooperation, that trust supports, facilitates human interaction and makes collaborative partners much less willing to act in ways that express self-interest. This was evident through the comments and shared anecdotes presented by the district stakeholders, supporting the contention that trust matters (Ossola, 2013).

Issues of Time

The district stakeholders represented in this research, provided through their interviews, evidence of their commitment to the work of improving K-12 administrator preparation. They also provided evidence of reasons to be concerned about the total organizational commitment of their school districts to this work; issues of time reference providing aspiring principals adequate release time for professional learning sessions, without them having to worry about classroom coverage. Also, program activities have to be scheduled keeping in mind the fact that program administrators and aspiring administrators already have full-time jobs with full-time job responsibilities.

The Power of Building Bridges.

Partnerships have their best chance to be successful when stakeholders focus their efforts on the common elements that connect their work. Stakeholder theory asserts the actions of stakeholders in collaborative partnerships is not random, with the theory identifying how they seek to influence organizational decision making connected to needs and priorities (Mainardes, Alva & Raposa, 2012). Critically examining these needs and aligning organizational priorities is much of the work of building bridges between school districts and universities. Building bridges between school districts and universities does require from both organizations a commitment to creating connections and maximizing the opportunities provided by expanding former associations. Each organization is challenged to put in place and maintain the structures needed to insure that collaboration is a part of its culture. Through the development of meaningful, trusting relationships, the conditions for building the bridges needed for district-university partnerships to thrive are stimulated.

Implications

Themes generated from this research provide insights into the professional lived experiences of district stakeholders as they work in collaboration with their university counterparts. We examined the value of district stakeholders having prior experiences with universities as a factor in their ability to effectively collaborate with university stakeholders, discovered the role of trust as a lever in building the relationships needed for effective collaboration between school districts and higher education, and uncovered issues of time and funding as factors impacting the ability of stakeholders to implement effective partnerships. We also discovered the power of building bridges between organizations as pertinent to collaborative partnerships meeting their goals.

There are a number of implications for school district and university stakeholders as they seek to continue to partner in the name of K-12 administrator preparation. These implications are rooted in the value of organizations intentionally creating opportunities for their stakeholders to build relationships with each other. For this to happen, prior connections have to be maximized as occasions for school districts and universities to further engage with each other. In situations where adequate connections do not exist, school districts and universities have to actively seek out opportunities to connect and share their expertise. District stakeholders articulated through their interview responses that the development of collaborative partnerships was much more efficient and effective when school districts and universities have a historical

relationship. School districts and universities must use the power of their combined areas of expertise to collaborate.

Trust has tremendous impact on the ability of stakeholders to work collaboratively in partnerships to problem solve and overcome obstacles. Throughout the interviews, the respondents hailed the importance of trust to successfully implementing district–university partnerships and lauded its role in constructing opportunities for effective collaboration. In situations where there has been a historical relationship between school districts and universities, trust is easier to foster than those that did not. When the institutions do not have a historical relationship, however, the stakeholders of both entities must actively work to build a trusting working relationship. Implications for developing trust with other partnering organizations include a focus on transparency in all aspects of developing and implementing partnerships, working to have quality personal interactions with the other stakeholders, and developing common goals with shared decision-making. For university leaders, the implications are similar, as their willingness and ability to build trusting relationships with school district leadership will help define the quality and success of partnership efforts.

The discussions around time and funding focused on dimensions of sustainability. Partners must be aware of the complexities of each other’s schedules and to schedule activities so they do not interfere with the primary job responsibilities of the participants. Failure to be aware of this can cause the initiative to fail. Additionally, early success of a partnership can be derailed if there is not attention given to the long-term funding implications for the partnership. Implications include ensuring program activities fit within the district’s instructional program and organizational commitment to leadership development and ensuring there is the support of the school board and superintendent required for long-term partnership effort. The power of “building bridges” can support sustainability of the partnership, too. Bridges, or connections between organizations, provide a framework for fostering collaboration and partnerships. Implications further include school districts and universities actively looking for reasons to work as a team, through grants, community development needs, and internal program improvement efforts. Building bridges can help organizations build capacity, leading to increased opportunities for building collaborative partnerships.

Recommendations for Future Study

Future research should focus on extending this research into non-grant funded partnerships. Additionally, an exploration into site specific partnerships (rural, suburban, and urban) can help partnership developers better understand the unique needs of each district type. Additionally, future research could also support extending the data collection sample to include not only school district stakeholders, but also the university stakeholders serving as collaborative partners. Interviewing stakeholder pairs would provide, for the researcher, both perspectives on the stakeholder experience as the culture of each partnering organization impacts the lens of the stakeholders as they answer the interview questions.

Conclusion

Our investigation into the lived professional experiences of school district stakeholders participating in partnerships sheds light into a little understood stakeholder group in leadership preparation programs. The respondents shared their joys, their fears, and their struggles in

pursuit of designing and implementing administrator preparation programming to support the ongoing needs of leadership development in their school districts. Despite the work and uncertainty that often engulfs the world of district-university partnerships, the district stakeholders reported they felt highly valued and appreciated for all of the work they were doing to further the cause of administrator preparation. They also expressed the work provided, for them, opportunities for continuous learning and that the relationships that they developed with other stakeholders and program participants were vitally important to the success of the partnerships.

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Appendix A – Interview Questions

- Q1 - What is your experience level as a participant involved in developing a school district–university partnership focused on administration preparation?
- Q2 - How were you selected to serve in the capacity as a stakeholder representing your school district in this partnership effort?
- Q3 - What is it about the school district–university partnership concept that interests you?
- Q4 - Describe your experience as a selected stakeholder for the (school district) in the development of this partnerships focused on school administrator preparation and development?
- Q5 - What common concerns did the (school district) stakeholders share about the process of developing this partnership?
- Q6 - What common concerns did all of the stakeholders share about the process of developing this specific partnership?
- Q7 - How was this school district–university partnerships started? Were the stakeholder groups assembled and given explicit direction? Was the process open ended?
- Q8 - What defines the mission and objective(s) of this partnership?
- Q9 - Describe the connection between the stakeholder group and the school district and university in terms of progress monitoring the work of the group. How is this handled?
- Q10 - As a (school district) partnership stakeholder, how did you feel about your role in helping to shape the developing collaborative partnership?
- Q11 - Was trust a factor in the development and success of this partnership? How was trust realized in this partnership?
- Q12 - Do you have any closing thoughts about school district–university partnerships and stakeholder groups?

Variations in Form and Skill: Supporting Multiple Orientations to Reflective Thinking in Leadership Preparation

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Drawing on data collected as part of a qualitative action research study, our analysis examines the reflective thinking skill of candidates as they begin a two-year principal preparation program. As leadership educators, we noticed that our highest performing students were also the most skilled at thinking reflectively. Using candidates' writing samples as a proxy for reflective thinking, we looked systematically at students' written work to assess their skill at engaging in reflective thinking. Using Valli's (1997) "Orientations to Reflective Thinking" as an analytic frame, we found that candidates varied in their readiness to engage in reflective thinking. We now use this framework with candidates to assess and guide their development as reflective practitioners. We believe that aspiring leaders need robust practical and conceptual tools for anticipating and solving the complex problems and challenges they will ultimately face. Given the difficulty that our students demonstrate when asked to reflect on their learning and development as leaders, reflective thinking can and should be one of those tools.

Candidates in principal preparation programs often see experienced school administrators as having developed an elusive and mysterious black box of understandings and skills for successfully meeting the complex challenges that face school leaders. As their coursework unfolds, candidates often share a curiosity about how they will acquire a reasonable level of skillfulness. Some ask directly: *How do I learn to think like that?* Although it is argued that leadership can be taught, we recognize the inherent difficulty of preparing teachers to assume the complex, multiple, and overlapping roles and responsibilities of school leaders. As leadership educators, our aim is to help prospective leaders learn to think and act in ways that may not come easily.

In this paper, we present findings from a qualitative action research study designed to inform the continual improvement of our master's level principal preparation program (Carver & Klein, 2013). As leadership educators, we observed that our strongest students routinely demonstrated the ability to think reflectively. For example, these students were able to deconstruct complex problems and apply creative problem solving. Conversely, those who struggled to grow into a leadership identity and practice similarly struggled when asked to reflect on their own or others' ideas and actions. Using candidates' writing samples as a proxy for their skill at reflective thinking, we examined students' written reflections for evidence of skillfulness at reflecting in and on leadership practice. Our analysis found that candidates varied both subtly and significantly in their readiness for engaging in flexible and sophisticated reflective thinking.

Although the leadership preparation literature consistently notes the importance of reflective thinking for school leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe & Orr, 2009; McCotter, 2009; Short, 1997), we remain surprised at how little has been written about efforts to teach and encourage reflection during leadership preparation. As leadership educators, we believe one of our primary responsibilities is developing in prospective leaders the skill to reflect in and on practice. We further believe that aspiring leaders need robust practical and conceptual tools for anticipating and solving the complex problems and challenges they will ultimately face. Given the difficulty that our students demonstrate when asked to reflect on their learning and development as leaders, our research suggests that reflective thinking can and should be one of those tools.

Preparing Reflective School Leaders

Given the attention on school quality and accountability for improving student achievement in the United States, it comes as no surprise that the literature on school leadership preparation has become increasingly clear as to the critical skills and dispositions needed by emerging leaders (e.g., Darling-Hammond, et al, 2009; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2003; Southern Regional Education Board, 2006; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Despite this growing drumbeat, however, little is known and even less is documented about how prospective school leaders learn these skills and dispositions (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2004; Preis, Grogan, Sherman & Beatty, 2007). In particular, we have limited empirical research on how prospective and practicing leaders learn the skills of reflective thinking (McCotter, 2009; Short, 1997).

Reflective Thinking and School Leadership

The practice of reflective thinking can be traced to the writings of John Dewey (1904/1965; 1933) who argued that systematic and reflective thinking is a worthy educational aim as it moves us beyond impulsive and automatic action, to deliberate and intelligent action. In Dewey's (1933) words,

Thinking enables us to direct our activities with foresight and to plan according to ends-in-view, or purposes of which we are aware. It enables us to act in deliberate and intentional fashion to attain future objects or to come into command of what is now distant and lacking. By putting the consequences of different ways and lines of action before the mind, it enables us to know what we are about when we act. It converts action that is merely appetitive, blind and impulsive into intelligent action (p. 17).

In short, reflective thinking gives meaning and value to experience; it informs our actions; and it provides insight to the beliefs that drive our actions.

Donald Schon (1983; 1987) expanded on Dewey's ideas by contrasting routine or automatic action, which he termed technical rationality, with reflective action, which he described as the process of reflecting in and on professional practice. For both Dewey and Schon, the mark of a skilled professional was the ability to systematically and consciously deliberate on one's experience in order to improve future practice. In doing so, one avoided the traps of blind experimentation, arbitrary decision-making, and rote habit (Dewey, 1904).

Today, as outlined in national leadership standards, school leaders in the United States are expected to "model principles of self-awareness, *reflective practice*, transparency, and ethical behavior" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 33). Similarly, it is widely recommended that coursework in leadership preparation be designed to facilitate reflective thinking (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009). How leadership educators make this happen, however, is not well understood.

Teaching Reflective Thinking

Seminal ideas about reflection and reflective thinking have served as conceptual anchors for the development of many U.S. teacher education programs (e.g., Jay & Johnson, 2002; Rodgers, 2002a; Spaulding & Wilson, 2002; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). These programs aim to prepare reflective practitioners who are skilled at examining their instructional practice and committed to making the necessary improvements so that all students achieve at high levels. Yet for all the attention on reflection in teaching, much less has been said about the link between reflection and leadership practice. That which has been reported is largely set in the context of ongoing professional development efforts, particularly the coaching and mentoring of practicing school leaders (e.g. Barnett, 1995; Rich & Jackson, 2006), or in the context of focused interventions where reflective thinking is the catalyst for the development of expert thinking and problem-solving in leaders (e.g. Hart, 1983; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1992; Short & Rinehart, 1993). Reflective thinking has also been linked with the development of ethical and moral dispositions in administrative leaders (Arrondondo-Rucinski & Bauch, 2006; see also Branson, 2007) and reflective leadership practice more broadly (McCotter, 2009).

In the studies cited above, authors uniformly agree that instruction in reflective thinking for school leaders (e.g., journal writing, problem-based learning, self-assessment, and reflective dialogue) requires sustained time and attention from both students and faculty. As Hart (1983)

first discovered when analyzing data from a design studio for leadership candidates, problem-solving errors were surprisingly frequent. These errors highlighted the difficulty some candidates had in identifying and processing appropriate information, untangling the complexity of problems, and practicing patience during the problem-solving process. As a result, such individuals were prone to misdiagnose problems and struggled to re-frame problems as they sought “right” answers. Subsequent studies have found similar results (McCotter, 2009; Short & Rinehart, 1993).

Recognizing the difficulty of teaching reflective thinking, Schon (1987) suggests that professional education “combine the teaching of applied science with coaching in the artistry of reflection-in-action” (p. xii). This coaching, according to Schon, is deliberately designed to support the habits of reflective thinking when applied to professional practice. The research on teacher preparation confirms the importance of ongoing guided practice, as well as the difficulty of helping individuals grow and develop as reflective thinkers (e.g., Jay & Johnson, 2002; Rogers, 2002b; Spaulding & Wilson, 2002). In reference to teachers, Linda Valli (1997) notes, “We cannot take for granted that prospective teachers will become reflective practitioners with experience. There are too many experienced teachers who have not become expert at their craft, who do not carefully think about their work or try to constantly improve” (p. 79). We might assume that prospective school leaders will similarly struggle with reflective thinking. Leadership educators can address this challenge, however, through intentional opportunities for guided practice (Bond, 2011; McCotter, 2009).

One particular challenge of teaching reflective thinking is the tendency to over simplify the process as a set of easily mastered steps, rather than a stance on professional practice (Jay & Johnson, 2002). Programs that teach reflective thinking through a single, targeted instructional intervention run this risk. It is also important to recognize that reflective thinking occurs in two distinct contexts: individual and collective (Lyons, 1998). Candidates should thus be given the opportunity to practice and gain confidence with reflective thinking when done independently, but also in the context of group processing. Additionally, the skills of reflective thinking develop over time with practice and feedback (Lyons, 1998). One does not wake up thinking reflectively one day; rather, one gradually develops the ability to think and act in more sophisticated, thoughtful, and principled ways over time. Perhaps most importantly, however, is for faculty to share a common understanding of reflective thinking that is used consistently across the program (Rodgers, 2002).

In sum, reflective thinking can help school leaders manage the complex, messy, and uncertain nature of work in schools. By routinely practicing reflective thinking, school leaders gain skill at examining issues, anticipating problems, questioning assumptions, weighing alternatives, and deliberating on future actions. As Arrondondo-Rucinski & Bauch (2006) note, this skillfulness can help school leaders take responsibility for and learn from their actions.

When educators make decisions or take actions, they must not deny responsibility for those actions, blame others, nor intentionally screen out criticisms. Such defensive behaviors indicate a lack of openness and a lack of desire to reflect on one’s own experiences and interpretations and thus to become transformed by one’s everyday learning on the job (p. 491).

Although the leadership preparation literature has begun to outline practical instructional strategies for promoting the development of reflective thinking in school leaders (McCotter, 2009; Short, 1997; Short & Rinehart, 1993), additional models and strategies are warranted given the aforementioned challenges.

Research Method and Study Design

To inform our instructional practice and to guide curricular improvements, we designed a qualitative action research study for the purpose of following two cohorts of candidates through our U.S. based master's level principal preparation program (Carver & Klein, 2013). Unlike research designs conducted for purposes external to the programs or practices under investigation, action research enabled us to practice bi-focal vision as instructors *and* researchers, resulting in pedagogical and programmatic adjustments in light of what we were learning, as well as support for theoretically driven understandings of our work.

Action research falls under the same umbrella as practitioner inquiry, teacher research, and self-study methods in a PK-12 context (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008; Samaras, 2011) and the scholarship of teaching in higher education (Boyer, 1990; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999). Action research is the process by which practitioners (e.g., teachers, principals, graduate students, university faculty) systematically examine authentic problems of practice using the inquiry process of problem posing, data gathering, data analysis, and data reporting for the purpose of improved practice. Theoretically, action research stems from the belief that teaching and leading are highly reflective practices (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983; 1987).

In this paper we share our analysis of candidates' written reflections, completed during their first semester in the program, to illustrate the nature of reflective thinking during early leadership preparation. We defined reflective thinking as the process of examining the implicit assumptions and consequences of leadership issues and practices. Our assumption was that sustained practice with reflective thinking would lead to "the evolution and integration of more complex ways (or processes) of engaging in one's [leadership] practices" (Lyons, 1998, p. 1).

This study was designed to broadly examine the nature of a candidate's development as a leader across the program and to identify predictable turning points that seemed to prompt changes in thinking and/or behavior. It was in the process of identifying such turning points that we began to notice that candidates' initial performance varied with their skill at reflective thinking. This observation prompted further inquiry into students' practice of reflective writing, which ultimately led to instructional adjustments designed to support the development of candidates' skill as reflective thinkers and leaders.

Program & Participants

The program studied is a university-based principal preparation program in the Midwest region of the United States. As a state-approved principal certification program, the curriculum is aligned with state and national leadership standards. Two features set the program apart from other universities in the area. First, candidates complete the program as a cohort, taking courses as a group. Secondly, the required internship runs across the nearly two-year program. A typical cohort enrolls 12-15 candidates. Located in a suburban community, the university draws students from a wide variety of school contexts: public, private, parochial, and charter, as well as urban, suburban, and rural.

Two cohorts of students were invited to participate in this multi-phased study and twelve candidates ultimately signed statements of consent. Despite coming from a variety of school settings and backgrounds, candidates were similar in that most were early career teachers with

varied leadership experience. Among the group of twelve candidates, eight were male. All expressed interest in becoming a school administrator.

Data Collection & Analysis

The data collected for the larger study included print artifacts completed naturally as part of coursework and included reading reflections, course projects, internship plans-of-work, and a culminating e-portfolio. Additionally, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with study participants four months after program completion. The study findings reported here are primarily drawn from an analysis of written reflections prepared during candidates' first semester in the program. Specifically, candidates were asked to complete eight reflections across a thirteen-week term. In both sections of the course, these written reflections were designed to be short (2-3 pages in length) and address two or three critical ideas of their choosing from the assigned reading. As an introductory course, assigned readings aligned with the ISLLC 2008 Standards, which served as the framework for course content. Over 250 pages of data were collected and reviewed.

The analysis of candidates' written reflections started with thematically coding the text for self-reported turning points, e.g., changes in belief, understanding, and/or behavior (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The coded data was then compared and contrasted across the semester and across individuals (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the first stage of analysis, three sets of student profiles emerged that supported our observation of candidates' varied skill with reflective thinking. To better understand this variation, we employed a reflective thinking typology developed by Valli (1997) for use with teacher education candidates. (Note: Other researchers have similarly adapted teacher preparation frameworks for examining reflective thinking in aspiring leaders, but ours is the only application of Valli's framework in a leadership context. From our perspective, Valli's work had the most direct application and relevance for our research.) As Valli explained, reflective thinking can be separated into at least five orientations: technical reflection, reflection in/on action, deliberative reflection, personalistic reflection, and critical reflection. Our initial application of Valli's typology as a coding scheme found that these five orientations were comprehensive when situated in the context of school leaders' work, and thus could be adapted for the purpose of leadership preparation. See Table 1: Typology of Reflective Thinking for definitions of each orientation and our adaptation for school leaders.

Table 1
Five Orientations to Reflective Thinking

| Orientation | Valli (1997) Definition | Adapted for School Leaders |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Technical Reflection | Focus on narrow domain of teaching techniques & skills; straightforward application of research. | <i>Reflections are de-contextualized from leadership practice, drawing on abstract or generalized understandings of leadership.</i> |
| Reflection In/On Action | Looking back to engage in "retrospective thinking" after a lesson has been taught; or making conscious and deliberate decisions | <i>Reflections are of lessons learned from observing, experiencing or imagining leadership practice.</i> |

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| | during teaching. | |
| Personalistic Reflection | Linking episodes from one's personal and professional life to make meaning of new experiences; includes reflection on the source of personal beliefs and attitudes. | <i>Interrogating personal beliefs and assumptions for purposes of personal or professional learning and development.</i> |
| Deliberative Reflection | Informed decision-making based on prior experience and/or the weighing of different points of view. | <i>Acknowledging the complexity of a situation and demonstrating openness to weighing competing alternatives prior to decision-making.</i> |
| Critical Reflection | Reflection on the ethical decisions made in schools, as well as the impact of those decisions on students, programs and society broadly. | <i>Discussion of critical social issues; demonstrates political savvy and ethical decision-making.</i> |

We found Valli's typology uniquely useful as a lens for examining candidates' transition from practicing teacher to prospective school leader, and for understanding the nature of their thinking as reflective practitioners. Speaking in the context of teacher preparation, Valli (1997) argued that teaching all types of reflective thinking is useful, as "*It can help teachers consider different types of decisions that need to be made, different sources of information for good decision making, and different ways of relating those sources of information to teaching practice (p. 6)*". Unlike earlier approaches that stressed the development of an information-processes approach to problem-solving by principals (e.g. Barnett, 1995; Hart, 1983; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1992), Valli's typology provided us with the means to examine candidates' understanding of and skill at using various forms of reflective thinking. Furthermore, her typology provided a window through which to examine the alignment of candidates' learning during leadership preparation, thus building upon any conceptual foundation of reflective thinking established during initial teacher preparation.

Research Findings: Variations in Form and Skill

Early in the study we identified three groupings of students across the two cohorts: students highly reflective and open to learning and able to think organizationally; students with less developed reflections and less experience to frame issues and problems, but who were also open to learning; and students either not yet open to learning or not yet able to shift attention from the classroom to the organizational level. As described elsewhere, these profiles were based on three characteristics: 1) skill at thinking reflectively, 2) openness to learning, and 3) the ability to shift perspective from the classroom to the school or district (Carver & Klein, 2013).

To gain greater insight on any qualitative differences in reflective thinking between and among candidates in these three groupings, we used Valli's typology to code and categorize

candidates' written work during the first semester of the program. Our intent was to capture student performance prior to any formal instruction in reflective thinking, thereby capturing candidates' natural disposition to think reflectively. Below we describe candidate responses across the five orientations, looking first at the form or orientation of their responses, and then commenting on their skillfulness. To illustrate the findings, we focus on three of the twelve candidates, one from each identified grouping. To create consistent comparisons, all three were male elementary teachers from the same district and cohort. Candidate 1 entered the program with the most classroom and leadership experience.

Reflective Thinking: Variations in Form

Technical reflection. Valli (1997) describes the content of technical reflections as focusing on the “narrow domain” of technique or skill and “directing one’s actions through a straightforward application of research” (p. 74-75). To code for technical reflection, we looked for instances where candidates reflected directly on a reading or activity with no reference to personal experience or local context, and no direct application to practice. In the data excerpts that follow, candidates reflect on their reading of Elizabeth Hebert’s (2006) memoir, *The Boss of the Whole School*.

Table 2
Technical Reflection Data Excerpts

| CANDIDATE 1 | CANDIDATE 2 | CANDIDATE 3 |
|---|---|--|
| <i>The book was an easy read that gives a great deal of insight into the psyche of what an administrator may be thinking as they begin their career in administration... I found Elizabeth’s perspective about ‘who needs to know’ and ways to create community particularly appealing.</i> | <i>While reading this chapter, many things became a reality that I really had not thought about. It is interesting to be working as a teacher and reading about administrators who we see from time to time. I know they are very busy, but things that I have read about are making it clear as to what is going on behind the scenes.</i> | <i>I really liked the title of this first chapter, the “Importance of Simplicity, Clarity and Priority”. This was perfectly followed up with simple, well-known strategies about how structure drives improvement in any organization.</i> |

Among the five orientations, technical reflection is considered the most matter-of-fact and uncomplicated. These three excerpts, however, illustrate the nuances that can be found within this category. In the reflections of both Candidate 1 and Candidate 2, we see a curiosity for digging deeper into the ideas presented in the reading, although Exemplar 1 is more specific as to what he found interesting and insightful in the readings. We also see a willingness to view the world with new eyes. In contrast, Candidate 3 offered a descriptive summary of the reading’s content, as opposed to a discussion of the ideas embedded in the reading. In this student’s response, we see little curiosity or interest in the reading. While there are multiple explanations for a given response (e.g., the student was rushing to complete the task before deadline), this observation provided a useful window into students’ flexibility as thinkers in a

given moment. Observed over time, common patterns of thinking did emerge across our participant pool.

Reflection in and on action. Drawing directly on the work of Donald Schon (1983), Valli (1997) defines reflection-on-action as the “retrospective” thinking that follows an activity, and reflection-in-action as the “spontaneous” thinking and decision-making that occurs during an activity. To code for reflection in and on action, we looked for instances where candidates learned from experience, either by observing other leaders or by engaging in leadership themselves. We also included de-contextualized references to future leadership activity, as well as instances where candidates’ reflections were based on their teaching practice. Note: because this data was collected during the first semester of the program, we did not expect to see many references to reflection on-action, nor did we distinguish our coding by instances of reflection “in” or “on” action.

Table 3
Reflection In and On Action Data Excerpts

| CANDIDATE 1 | CANDIDATE 2 | CANDIDATE 3 |
|---|--|---|
| <i>As I read this article, I could not stop thinking about my leadership vision and the school improvement team I am a part of.</i> | <i>With the constant room circulation and frequent checking for understanding, students achieve and perform better. I noticed my classes struggling in the beginning of the school year because I was not using enough of this practice.... I will continually use this practice. The amount of interaction, focus and comprehension were night and day.</i> | <i>[This week’s reading] reminded me of a program we are attempting to implement at one of my current schools...and Chapter Five helped me analyze how I want to be, how I want to act and what I want to accomplish as a leader.</i> |

In these excerpts, we see that Candidates 1 and 3 reflect directly on leadership, whereas Candidate 2 connected new insights drawn from the readings to his teaching practice. Candidate 2’s response is reasonable, as we would want to see from practicing teachers a commitment to developing as educators. Over time, however, we would expect to see candidates place more of their attention on leadership practices, whether their own, or of those with whom they work. Thus, this category offered an interesting perspective on candidates’ readiness to shift from the perspective of a teacher, to that of a leader.

Personalistic reflection. According to Valli (1997), linking episodes from both one’s personal and professional life assists educators in making meaning from their own experiences, which then assists their professional development. In personalistic reflections, the writer examines such experiences and explores the source of their attitudes and beliefs. In coding the data, we looked for instances where candidates were reflecting on their future actions as a leader in a clearly established role and context, or where students were interrogating their own beliefs

and assumptions about leadership. The following excerpts represent typical examples of personalistic reflection.

Table 4
Personalistic Reflection Data Excerpts

| CANDIDATE 1 | CANDIDATE 2 | CANDIDATE 3 |
|--|---|---|
| <p><i>As I read, I seriously questioned why I would want to be an administrator. ...The article does explain that super-principals do not actually exist.... This article made me consider why I would want to be an administrator and while I felt anxious as I read it, it gave me a reason to reflect on who I will be as a leader... I look at an administrative position as one that may have a lot of demands, but one that will be well worth it as success after success is achieved. Leading is a part of who I am and it is something I will do very well.</i></p> | <p><i>It really does take a special person to be an effective principal because there is a TON of balancing, and if you can manage that and stay true to your values, one can be a successful leader and principal.</i></p> | <p><i>I... was able to compare pieces of the section to instances in my career so far... In order to create change we need to have our best educators working with our most challenging students. If our best educators are not willing to take on that responsibility, then that in itself says a lot about those educators.</i></p> |

Of the five types of reflection, we assumed that personalistic reflection would come easily to candidates. While it was common to see self-references across the written reflections, these excerpts illustrate the difficulty many candidates had with engaging in personalized reflection. Whereas Candidate 1 demonstrated the skill of reflection reasonably well by connecting future leadership practice to leadership lessons learned over the years, Candidates 2 and 3 connect to the literature in a more abstract manner, thus raising questions about whether or not they truly warrant coding as personalistic reflection.

Deliberative reflection. As Valli (1997) notes, the content for deliberative reflection is taken from a broader range of experience and often incorporates disparate points of view. Hence, there may not be agreement about how to best make a decision, so the educator is called upon to make the most informed choice. To code for deliberative reflection, we looked for passages where candidates were clearly weighing their options as they decided how to proceed. We were unable to find any clear examples of deliberative reflection in our profile student data set and only a handful of under-developed examples in the larger data set.

As we considered this observation, we began to realize that course readings were largely absent complex issues and problems needing resolution. Rather, assigned readings advocated perspectives that were highly congruent with one another. The one task during the semester where we did encourage and support deliberate reflection was a policy activity where candidates

were asked to explore competing positions on a current policy topic, then argue for the topic from one of those positions. This activity was not, however, connected to a reflective writing task.

Critical reflection. In this final type of reflection, Valli (1997) proposes that educators be encouraged to consider the impact of their beliefs and decision-making on individual students, school programs, and society at large. To code for critical reflection, we looked for instances where candidates were beginning to see the ramification of their decisions on other students, teachers, parents, and community members. We also looked for instances of political consciousness. We were especially interested in reflections that supported issues of diversity and equity. Typical examples of critical reflection included the following.

Table 5
Critical Reflection Data Excerpts

| CANDIDATE 1 | CANDIDATE 2 | CANDIDATE 3 |
|---|---|---|
| <i>I'm not sure how the Common Core Standards will impact teachers, what new laws will impact the way a special education program is carried out, or what the expectations will be for me as an administrator, but I know that whatever the case I will be ready to take it day by day and hit the ground learning.</i> | <i>We need to make sure students are also in a positive learning environment where hard work is rewarded. I know at times teachers tend to focus on students who are successful. But we, as teachers, need to make a point to encourage EVERY one that hard work will pay off. Now some students may take a little more encouragement than others...but I believe that is why we got into this business.... to make a difference and help students be successful.</i> | <i>I would also only ask for major changes of my staff if I was confident that it had value to all of the students and stakeholders involved.</i> |

Again, we see varied skill at reflective thinking in these excerpts. While Candidate 2 connects strongly to the assigned reading and to the idea of holding high expectations of all children (albeit in the context of teaching, a pattern that emerged across Candidate 2's writing), Candidates 1 and 3 are much less committed, speaking in generalized comments about their future practice as school leaders. As instructors, we were also hoping to see stronger evidence of a commitment to social justice leadership from all three candidates.

Reflective Thinking: Variations in Skill

As we looked across our coded data, we came to a better understanding of our students as reflective thinkers. As demonstrated through our three candidate profiles, we found strong and weak evidence of reflective thinking (and writing) in the written work each produced. Further,

no candidate reflected equally well in all five categories. For example, we noted that Candidate 1 was more likely to reflect on leadership practice and not teaching practice; Candidate 2 was equally likely to reflect on leadership and teaching practice, and Candidate 3 was more likely to reflect on teaching practice than leadership practice. This might be explained by Candidate 1's prior experience as a teacher leader and Candidate 3's relative inexperience in school-based leadership roles. Most notable, however, was candidates' inability to reflect consistently across the five orientations.

We also noted that, across the typology, the vast majority of excerpts fit the categories of technical reflection; reflection in and on action; and personalistic reflection. We had no excerpts fall definitively in the deliberative reflection category and very few that were coded as critical reflection. In looking back at our list of assigned readings, we saw missed opportunities to scaffold students' experience with different kinds of reflection. This suggested to us the importance of providing candidates with structured and/or guided opportunities to reflect in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes, something that we are now more mindful of as course instructors.

Finally, when using the Valli typology, the differences that led to our initial identification of three distinct student profiles diminished when we looked at the data through this lens. Where Candidate 1 was weak, Candidate 3 stood out. And while Candidate 2 demonstrated skill at technical reflection, he was less accomplished at personalistic reflection. This observation highlighted for us the complex nature of assessing candidates' skill and flexibility with reflective thinking. Specifically, candidates may not be evenly skilled and/or consistent in their use of various forms of reflective thinking. Admittedly, it is much easier for a highly accomplished and confident writer to appear skilled at reflection. It is also likely that some students engaged in the level of thinking that we desired, but were unable to skillfully put that same thinking onto paper. We also suspect some of the differences that emerged in our sample stemmed from varying degrees of leadership experience. As a broad observation, the more leadership exposure and experience one had, the deeper the observed reflection.

Discussion: Application to Leadership Preparation

Using the Valli (1997) typology for reflective thinking provided a fresh lens for viewing the written reflections of our graduate leadership students. With a clearly delineated frame of reference for examining written reflections, differences in candidates' patterns of thinking could be identified, monitored, and assessed. Differences that we first observed (e.g., strong to weak skill) diminished as we saw how challenging reflective thinking across a range of orientations was for each of our sample students. As a result, this research highlighted for us the importance of teaching the value of and techniques for reflective thinking, and, more fundamentally, of helping candidates develop a reflective stance toward leadership practice. Reflective thinking is more than thinking and writing at length, but doing so in increasingly flexible and sophisticated ways (e.g., writing within and across orientations).

Although not the only model for teaching reflective thinking, Valli's (1997) typology has provided us with a practical tool for helping aspiring leaders build and refine their reflective thinking skills. To illustrate, instructors now introduce Valli's (1997) typology in the first semester of the program. To reinforce understanding, candidates are asked to complete a self-assessment documenting their skill at the five thinking orientations (adapted from Arrondondo-

Ruckinski & Bauch, 2002; Spaulding & Wilson, 2006). Further guidance is given as candidates discuss how to approach writing their weekly reflections.

As candidates’ progress through the seven-semester program, they experience all five types of reflective thinking through a variety of in-class presentations, discussions, and assignments, e.g., case studies, in basket activities, policy roundtables, written reflections. Instructors are also encouraged to use the five orientations as a tool for assessing and providing feedback on the quality of candidates’ work. During the final semester of the program, candidates take the self-assessment survey again in order to chart their self-reported growth and confidence in reflective thinking over time.

To gauge our success at teaching reflective thinking, we recently outlined the behaviors and skills that serve as evidence of candidates’ willingness and ability to engage in reflective thinking (see Table 6: Critical Thinking Behavior & Skills). Over time, we expect to see candidates engage in behaviors that we can document through coursework and through the required internship, e.g., increased ability to move from concrete description to meaning-making when reviewing events and experiences; and increased ability to transfer understanding across events, settings, or issues.

Table 6
Critical Thinking Behaviors & Skills

| Critical Thinking Behaviors & Skills |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Increasing ability to move beyond description to meaning-making</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Expanding forms and contexts where reflective thinking is practiced</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Increasing skill at using reflective thinking to connect coursework with the field, and theory with practice</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Increasing skill at analyzing an issue or problem prior to decision-making</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Increasing understanding of how and why other school leaders in their district have identified particular goals, strategies and outcomes for school improvement</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Expanding competence and confidence in both anticipating and resolving challenges in their day-to-day practice</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Willingness to take responsibility for more complex decisions and be accountable for decisions made.</i> |

In designing these activities and assessments, we looked to the literature on reflective thinking for guidance. For example, rather than present school leadership as an easy-to-follow sequence of steps, we were careful to introduce reflective thinking as a way of anticipating and thinking through complex issues and problems (Jay & Johnson, 2002). Assigned tasks and experiences were structured to elicit differing orientations to reflective thinking, and to occur in varied settings so that candidates had opportunities to practice individual and group-oriented

reflection (Lyons, 1998). Moreover, we embedded reflective thinking in our program's conceptual framework (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009; UCEA, 1998). We wanted incoming students to see reflective thinking as a central characteristic of effective school leaders and give them sufficient time and feedback to develop as reflective practitioners (Bond, 2011; Hart, 1983; Jay & Johnson, 2002; McCotter, 2009; Short, 1997; Spaulding & Wilson, 2006).

Since implementing these interventions four years ago, we have growing evidence to suggest our efforts are making a positive difference. Scores on the reflective thinking self-assessment survey show positive gains from year one to year two, and the range of reported year two scores by question (e.g., Do you ask questions of your perspective on an issue?) is smaller, suggesting greater consistency in candidates' reported use of reflective thinking behaviors. Finally, although candidates' written definitions of reflective thinking have not changed substantially across the pre and post versions of the survey, reported confidence in using reflective thinking in a variety of contexts has increased. Of note, we are seeing similar gains when using the "Critical Thinking Behavior and Skills" criteria (described in Table 6) to assess the quality of candidates' written reflections.

Additional evidence supporting our interventions come from semi-structured phone interviews conducted with study participants four months after completing the graduate program. In these interviews, graduates were asked which program activities (e.g., reflective writing and discussion, group, or individual presentations; development of a leadership vision statement and e-portfolio) they considered most important to their learning and development as a school leader. The most often mentioned activity (along with leadership vision and e-portfolio) was preparing written reflections, regardless of whether these reflections addressed assigned readings or internship activities.

When asked what made reflective writing a powerful experience, graduates consistently described the benefits of "looking inside myself to find what qualities as a leader I had and maybe which ones I needed to blossom a little bit more." Some attributed reflective thinking to helping them adapt a balcony view of leadership and school improvement. One frankly suggested that had reflective thinking not been assigned, she probably wouldn't have found the time to practice this new skill.

The reflections for me, started out like a blank sheet of paper, where I had to really sit down and think about where I was going, how I had gotten there, and what I still needed to improve on. And it's very hard to do that unless you sit down and take the time to reflect, and had I not had those opportunities, I probably would not have been as self-reflective.

Another graduate credited the program's frequent and ongoing opportunities to engage in reflective thinking as the key to better understanding himself as a future leader.

Implications & Limitations

Despite the efforts of well-intended reformers, university-based programs continue to come under fire for failing to prepare principals for the challenges faced by today's school leaders. Those who are critical of traditional leadership preparation cite a number of persistent problems, including weak selection criteria that fails to screen for leadership potential; a curriculum that is fragmented and disconnected from the reality of practice; the priority of facilities management over instructional leadership; limited opportunity for candidates to practice and apply new learning; plus internships that lack rigor and focus (e.g. Cheney & Davis, 2011; Hess & Kelly,

2007; Levine, 2005). These critiques share the belief that traditional programs are out-of-date and out-of-touch.

While action research has been widely used by teacher educators to inform their instruction, we argue that the use of action research *by leadership educators* represents a new and promising practice for informing and guiding leadership preparation. As we demonstrate in this paper, study findings offer practical guidance for the content and structure of leadership preparation as it relates to developing reflective practice. Specifically, our analysis highlights the difficulty early-program candidates may have with reflective thinking, while also offering a practical tool that can be used by instructors and candidates for examining the sophistication and flexibility of one's skill at reflective thinking. In short, engaging in the action research process has made both of us more attentive to our teaching, to students' learning, and to the evidence upon which we make claims regarding either. In concrete terms, this study has highlighted for us the critical importance of being deliberate in teaching the skills of reflective thinking.

Still, this study is not without limitations. Our findings are limited to candidates' skill at reflective thinking at the beginning of a single graduate program. Future research is needed that looks at the impact of efforts to coach reflective thinking over time and in diverse settings. There are also practical constraints that stem from studying your own teaching. Care is needed to control for researcher bias. Gaining consent from students requires thoughtful planning. Balancing the dual roles of instructor and researcher requires extra time and attention. In sharing our story we hope readers appreciate both the potential and the rigor of action research. At the same time, we are mindful of what this approach to supporting and assessing reflective thinking is not able to accomplish. Valli's (1997) adapted typology provides a useful framework for deconstructing one's skillfulness and repertoire as a reflective thinker, but it cannot predict or anticipate one's actions in the field. Additional questions remain as to whether the disposition to engage in reflective thinking can be nurtured and taught (Nelsen, 2015).

Conclusion

As Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue, becoming a professional involves acquiring the "ability to make discretionary judgments" in situations where not all facts are known, rules or evidence are not clear, and ambiguity or uncertainty prevail (p. 93). They go on to underscore the importance of reflection as critical to professional practice, noting that reflective thinking provides a lever to examine and improve on one's own practice. Given the difficulty that incoming leadership students may have with engaging in reflection, we join others in arguing that the development of reflective thinking be a required component of educational leadership programming (Bond, 2011; McCooter, 2009; Short, 1993). Doing so will help to equip aspiring leaders with the robust tools needed to deliberate on their experience and improve future practice.

Aspiring school principals need to be conversant not only with the content covered in their coursework, but also able to use reflective thinking across the range of school-level decisions that require their attention. School principals need to think critically and reflectively when developing or responding to educational policy and school redesign questions. Often, principals are called upon to share the implications of new research for local practice. Acquiring the necessary skills for evaluating, as well as applying the lessons and findings of these studies to improve student achievement is yet another important outcome for graduates of school leadership programs.

We believe rigorous and relevant experiences with reflective thinking during school leadership preparation will increase the likelihood that prospective administrators will make stronger decisions after they leave the university. We further believe that reflective writing strategies and tools, designed to identify and assess candidates' capacity for a reflective stance toward leadership, and used program-wide to build skillfulness in the practice of reflective thinking, ultimately support efforts to produce competent and effective leaders for our nation's schools.

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Utilizing Professional Learning Community Concepts and Social Networking for State Advocacy: The Arkansas Case

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This article provides an overview of National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) state affiliate, Arkansas Professors of Educational Administration's (ARPEA), activities, accomplishments, and advocacy efforts. Faced with numerous changes being implemented in education in the state, it became imperative for ARPEA's Executive Board to overcome barriers standing in the way of sharing information in a timely manner, developing a collective viewpoint, and advocating on behalf of the state's leadership preparation programs. As with most state affiliates, geographical distance between institutions, finding common time to meet regularly, and learning collectively about state-wide issues constituted the a need for pre-service programs to develop a unified voice. ARPEA began to take advantage of social networking technologies and professional learning community practices on a statewide level. ARPEA began using an online meeting system to build collegial relationship with one another, to provide representation on department of education/state association committees/ad hoc tasks forces, and to collectively advocate for the state's leadership preparation programs.

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Educational reform in Arkansas and the nation has been moving at an unprecedented pace. Ed HomeRoom (2013) reported that over the last five years, states and school districts across America have been dealing with an enormous set of urgent challenges. Those challenges include common core standards to better prepare young people to compete in the global economy, developing new assessments, rebuilding accountability systems, and adopting new systems of support and evaluation for teachers and principals (Ed HomeRoom, 2013). Most recently, Arkansas has developed a common superintendent evaluation system based upon the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium 2008 standards (Arkansas Department of Education, 2014; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2008). Meeting this historic set of challenges asks more of everybody, including higher education. These state changes necessitated conversations leading to an alteration in the way professors in pre-service preparation programs in the state of Arkansas work with one another to advocate for policy and program development on behalf of the state's future leaders. The National Council of Professors of Educational Administration's (NCPEA) state affiliate, Arkansas Professors of Educational Administration's (ARPEA), made a commitment to adopt characteristics and practices of a professional learning community to meet these challenges.

Theories of situated learning in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger (1991), where learning is developed through social contexts, grounds nearly three decades of research on professional learning communities (PLCs) and provides the theoretical framework for this paper. Stein (1998) defines situated learning as follows:

- (1) Learning is grounded in the actions of everyday situations;
 - (2) knowledge is acquired situationally and transfer only to similar situations;
 - (3) learning is the result of a social process encompassing ways of thinking perceiving, problem solving, and interacting in addition to declarative and procedural knowledge' and
 - (4) learning is not separated from the world of action but exists in robust, complex, and social environments made up of actors, actions, and situations.
- (para. 2)

Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015) offers the following description of communities of practice "as groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). Communities of practice, in the context of this paper are PLCs who are actively learning together and working to address real-world problems.

Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006) posit, "There is no universal definition of a [sic] professional learning communities" (p. 222). The authors go on to suggest PLCs are "...a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive learning-oriented growth-promoting way...operating as a collective enterprise" (pp. 222-223). Although there is not a universal definition of a PLC, researchers have identified common features: shared values, mission, beliefs, and understandings; interactions, participation, and interdependence; reflective professional inquiry, individual and group learning; collective responsibilities, and collaboration; meaningful relationships, mutual trust, and respect; continuous improvement with a focus on results; and supportive conditions to sustain the PLC (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2006; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Eaker, 2004; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Feger & Arruda, 2008; Hord, 2004; Louis, Kruse, & Bryk, 1995; Stoll, et al., 2006).

This article focuses on how ARPEA Executive Board members applied common features of PLCs. First is a brief review of the literature, followed by a statement of the problem, methods

used to address the problem, the support structure to sustain ARPEAs commitment, the results, conclusions, and implications of ARPEA's efforts to function as a PLC.

Review of the Literature

In the face of compelling evidence of collaboration and distributive leadership best practices in the PK-12 educational setting (Elmore, 2000; Marks, & Printy, 2003; Spillane & Diamond, 2007), these concepts have not carried over to higher education practices in a robust way. A review of the literature on universities' collaboration efforts are mostly focused on partnerships with P-12 schools or with community organizations (Fullerton, 2015; Grunwell & Ha, 2014; Hopson, Miller, & Lovelace, 2016; Lewis, Kusmaul, Elze, & Butler, 2016). Many higher education professors work in isolation from one another, oftentimes within an institution but most commonly among other state-level higher education institutions. Horn (2001) observes isolationist behaviors often result in "regulatory agencies mak[ing] the basic policy decisions and the educational preparation programs must react to them" (p. 2). Not only are universities operating in isolation from one another, many are not collaborating as a collective unit with professional associations at a state level.

Young, Petersen, and Short (2002) identified factors impeding collaborative practices among institutions. One such factor noted is preparation programs in a state may be competing with one another to attract potential candidates from a small pool, which may result in "little or no room for collaboration and no sense of collective responsibility" (Young, et al., p. 147). Furthermore, Young, et al., (2002) goes on to call for universities to emulate leagues where...

...individual faculty members, departments of educational leadership, academic organizations, professional organizations, and field-based administrators concerned with the development of educational leaders must recognize their collective responsibility for forming an association or alliance with the goal of preparing competent, compassionate, and pedagogically oriented leaders. (p. 158)

The dilemma of isolation among higher education's professors in preparation programs can be countered with their commitment to developing collaborative relationships among state institutions and associations. The conceptual framework for creating opportunities for collaboration and community development among professors of educational leadership in the state of Arkansas reflects the theoretical concepts of DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker's (2008) notion of professional learning communities. DuFour's (2004) notion of PLCs describes various groupings of individuals who have a stake in education. Although DuFour's concept clearly has PK-12 educators in mind, the author's ideas are transferrable to professors in higher education forming PLCs, as well. DuFour (2004) articulated three main ideas of a PLC: a) ensuring that students learn, b) a culture of collaboration, and c) a focus on results. Professors of educational leadership programs typically have student learning at the forefront of their efforts. Therefore, adopting the PLC mindset to focus on a culture of collaboration at the higher education level is necessary to advance the practices and policies in pre-service educational leadership programs (Horn, 2001; Young, et al., 2002). It becomes incumbent upon professors in educational leadership programs to develop a collective advocacy to support pre-service leadership students and practitioners and to help shape policies and practices for the best learning and professional opportunities.

With the rapid advancement of technological tools, multiple mechanisms are now available to remove many of the barriers hindering the work of a PLC, particularly when members of the learning community reside in multiple locations across the state. According to Dixon (2011), “[S]ocial [networking] is the use of web-based technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue. A key component of social [networking] is the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (p.4). Vital to the work of a PLC is reliance on dependable mechanisms and support structures to develop its organizational intelligence, to engage in problem-solving, and to support knowledge management (Perkins, 2003; Stoll, et al., 2006). With today’s technological advancements, there are multiple social networking tools available to sustain a PLC’s collaborative efforts.

The rest of this article provides a picture of the problems ARPEA encountered and the steps the professors took to overcome the following challenges: staying connected, sharing information in a timely manner, and developing a unified voice on state-wide issues impacting leadership preparation programs.

Statement of the Problem

The ARPEA Executive Board members found it difficult to communicate effectively with one another when working with the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and other state entities. Sharing a voice at state level organizations was not always representative of all higher education leadership programs in the state. Some professors served on statewide committees in which vital issues were being decided that would have a tremendous effect upon both university students and educational leadership programs. Oftentimes, communication was not shared in a timely manner among all the state’s institutions. Furthermore, there were times when some of the universities were not represented during important state-wide discussions. With the demands from national and state entities on higher education to prepare leaders to meet the needs of PK-12 schools, it became increasingly evident that a single individual or institution cannot, nor should not, influence statewide policy development.

Geographic restraints, time limitations, and lack of funding for travel to planned meetings made it difficult for the state’s leadership professors to develop its unified voice. The result of these barriers was a decrease in the professors’ ability to give timely responses to policy and rule-making bodies. In many instances, there was no collective advocating for the leadership programs and students. The barriers became fully realized during fall, 2011, when ADE requested the nine universities to collaborate on a statewide initiative to identify and align each university’s courses in their licensing-only programs of studies for students who held a master’s degree and wished to add an administrative license to their teaching certificate. ARPEA was given the charge to identify and organize each university’s course work, align those to the ISLLC (2008) standards, and attempt to make the programs of study close to the same number of credit hours. This effort was intended to allow students to begin and complete a program of study at any university and not lose hours if they had to transfer to another university within the state. After much time spent on trying to find a mutual date, time, and place for ARPEA Executive Board members to complete the work, it became quite clear physically meeting was not feasible if all nine universities were to be represented to accomplish the charge given to them.

From that point on, Arkansas professors from the nine higher education institutions with school, district, and central office leadership programs, made a renewed commitment to develop its collaborative and collective advocacy for “the improvement of education in Arkansas, the

region, and the nation” (ARPEA Constitution and Bylaws, n.d., para.2). To accomplish this aim, ARPEA’s Executive Board members began to rethink how to conduct their work and renewed commitment.

Methods to Address the Problem

Collaboration is one of the core beliefs of ARPEA’s constitution; it states, “The faculty in member institutions will provide improved programs of study through the collaboration with the ARPEA membership” (ARPEA Constitution and Bylaws, n.d., para. 2). This organization is also committed to collaboration with appropriate professional organizations and agencies that include Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Association of Education Administrators, and the Arkansas Leadership Academy. ARPEA members have found this to be especially necessary when the state adopted recent initiatives such as new teaching standards, common assessments, and state-wide teacher, principal, and superintendent evaluation systems.

One key support structure for ARPEA board members to successfully function as a PLC depended on utilizing an online learning environment. Researchers of online environments and PLCs have stressed the strong connection between the theory of situated learning in communities of practice and developing online learning environments to support the social processes needed for collective learning among adults (Collis & Margaryan, 2004; Henri & Pudelko, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Drawing from the ideals embedded in professional learning communities and social networking, the ARPEA board members began offering ideas and access to resources that could be used to accomplish its commitment to become a professional learning community. Capitalizing on social networking tools, the following systems facilitated board members’ work: Google Docs (a space for sharing group work on projects), ooVoo (an online synchronous meeting space), Doodle (a tool for scheduling meetings), and the ARPEA web site (a repository for meeting minutes, by-laws, and membership information). These tools saved time, improved communication, and facilitated the board’s productivity. As a result, ARPEA members were able to meet regularly to discuss state-wide issues and initiatives. Additionally, the board began to invite individuals from Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) to the universities closest to Little Rock to attend ooVoo meetings for information sharing. When ARPEA began to include ADE representatives in meetings, a stronger presence and collaborative relationship with ADE emerged. Employing Dixon’s (2011) concepts of social networking, adopting DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker’s (2008) notions of PLCs, and practicing Perkins’ (2003) characteristics of organizational intelligence, problem-solving, and knowledge management moved ARPEA board members closer to applying Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theories of situated learning in communities of practice.

ooVoo as a Collaboration Tool

ARPEA held its first ooVoo meeting in January of 2012. One university has a professional ooVoo account that allows for desktop sharing for up to 12 individuals. The remaining universities participate at no cost. ooVoo is a video chat and instant messaging client developed by ooVoo LLC for Microsoft Windows, Windows Phone, Mac OS X, Android and iOS. It is similar in some respects to Microsoft's Skype. ooVoo allows registered users to communicate through free instant messaging, with high quality video and audio calls with up to twelve locations with real-time high resolution video and desktop sharing, and PC- or Mac-to-phone

calls to landlines and mobile phones for a fee. In this venue, minutes, agendas, and other documents can be viewed during discussions. The majority of meetings are held utilizing this format allowing ARPEA members to promptly respond to current issues and changes.

Doodle Scheduler

The board members spent long discussions and multiple email communications on just deciding meeting dates the majority of members could agree upon. With busy schedules and nine universities, it is difficult to find common times to collaborate. Doodle scheduler is a free tool that is extremely simple to use. After everyone responds, it is a much more efficient way to determine the best date for any event among a group of people. This tool can be found at <http://doodle.com/>

Google Docs

The professors used Google Docs to review and edit many different documents. For example, Google Docs has been a platform utilized by all nine universities for creating the final document for the work previously shared concerning the common programs of study for educational leadership among the state's universities. Each Executive board member worked from their institutions where they could collaborate with their own faculty before entering their university's program of study aligned with the appropriate ISLLC 2008 standard. Work was done individually by each university's faculty and then meetings were held through ooVoo in which the documents were viewed and discussed as a group. Google Docs can be effectively used by all members with a gmail account. Documents can be shared with anyone who has a gmail account and can be edited by all parties.

ARPEA Web Page

ARPEA's web page is located on the website of the University of Arkansas, Department of Educational Leadership. It can be found at <http://arpea.uark.edu/> This web page serves as a historical perspective of events that the organization has undertaken, as well as a listing of the current Executive Board and its membership. The by-laws of the organization and minutes of all meetings can be found at this site.

These tools have significantly changed the way ARPEA approaches issues and deals with problems. Through the use of these tools ARPEA has experienced a shift in the influence on issues that affect university leadership programs. ARPEA has developed a unified presence with a common language as an organization.

Results

When ARPEA Executive Board members began using social networking tools, it resulted in its ability to set up meeting times more easily and to meet more regularly, even on short notice as necessary. One benefit of using the ooVoo system is it eliminates travel, lodging, and meal expenses that were once incurred to attend meetings at least two to three times in an academic year. The tools enabled the board members to collaborate more often, more freely, and to move

more quickly on potential legislation or state department actions that had an impact on the state's leadership programs.

Approximately two years ago, several changes to administrator licensing were passed by the legislature. The ARPEA Executive Board requested a meeting with personnel in the Arkansas Department of Education's (ADE) licensing division to meet and discuss the interpretations of the legislative changes. The Department of Education's personnel traveled to a nearby university and participated in an ooVoo meeting, which allowed the ARPEA board members to voice their concerns and to hear ADE's message simultaneously as opposed to getting the information second-hand or one institution at a time. This invitation led to several other collaborative opportunities for shaping and clarifying changes to licensure at that time and this relationship with ADE continues.

An executive board member represents the collective voice of ARPEA on the Professional Licensure Standards Board, an advisory committee to the ADE Assistant Commissioner. Additionally, the board member also represents ARPEA on the state's sub-ethics committee. Another board member serves on Arkansas' Act 222 committee to strengthen educational leadership development in the state. This School Leadership Coordinating Council reports directly to the state's Joint Education Committee. In addition to these standing appointments, board members have also served on ad hoc committees. These included the ADE Licensure Task Force, which was convened to review and suggest changes to teacher and administrator licensing rules and regulations, and the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrator's Mentoring Program committee. Additionally, board members served on three advisory committees to define the state's licensing-only programs of study for building administrators, curriculum/program administrators, and district administrators. As previously noted, the social networking tool, Google Docs, was extensively used to coordinate the work and collective thinking toward defining the state's licensing-only programs. Other task forces in which board members served were to develop the statewide principal and superintendent evaluation systems. In all of these appointments, board members represented the collective voice of ARPEA. In our ooVoo meetings, updates are provided to the board members to discuss and to establish where ARPEA stands on issues so these may be upheld in their various appointments.

Following is one example of ARPEA exercising a unified position. Legislation was proposed that would disallow leadership candidates to complete internship in academically distressed schools. Using ooVoo for the meeting, the Executive Board developed its collective position to this piece of legislation that would limit leadership candidates' opportunity to fulfill program requirements:

Arkansas Professors of Educational Administration (ARPEA) is concerned with section 7.07.6 which states, "Field experience and internship placements for candidates in a traditional program of study for educator licensure shall not include priority schools, school districts in academic distress, or school districts under administrative takeover for violations of the Standards for Accreditation of Arkansas Public Schools and School Districts." We believe this rule will place an undue hardship on many leadership candidates in university programs throughout the state. According to Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC), Standard Element 7.2, leadership programs must require candidates engage in the following: "Sustained Internship Experience: Candidates are provided a six-month, concentrated (9–12 hours per week) internship that includes field experiences within a school-based environment." Because our candidates

are most commonly classroom teachers, administrators, or other school personnel working full-time in their classrooms/school settings, it is possible they could be working in a school/district as described in the rules. If this is the case, it is highly unlikely a leadership candidate will be able to leave their schools during the day or week to seek internship experiences in non-priority/non-distressed/non-taken-over schools, particularly in rural and/or isolated areas throughout the state. We argue that leadership candidates are receiving standards-based knowledge, dispositions, and skills and bring these best practices to bear in their school settings while engaging in their internship experiences and field-based learning projects under the supervision of a university. We ask this rule be revised to allow leadership candidates to complete their field/internship experiences in the school district in which they work, and where they have an opportunity to make improvements through their work as interns.

This statement was uploaded onto the public comment web page for this piece of legislation to register ARPEA's collective voice in dissent to this rule. While ARPEA did not succeed in fully turning this piece of legislation around to what was preferred, ARPEA did win one concession in that language was included to allow for waivers based on hardship cases.

Other ways access to social networking tools facilitated ARPEA's mission as a professional learning community is in planning for ARPEA's annual conference. Because of the collaborative efforts with ADE, the Executive Board has built relationships with licensure and other support divisions and these relationships have benefited ARPEA members. In recent years, the state adopted the Teacher Excellence Support System (TESS), a teacher evaluation process based on Charlotte Danielson's (2007) work. In 2012, all K-12 educators in the state were in the process of receiving training on TESS. Executive Board members of ARPEA approached the state department with the proposition of providing professors of educational leadership programs similar training during its 2012 conference. Their argument rested on the need for each institution's curriculum to be aligned with state expectations. As a result, the state department provided all materials and the services of one of their two statewide trainers to provide training to ARPEA members. The following year, the state provided materials and services of one of the two trainers for the newly adopted principal's evaluation system (of which ARPEA had a voice in creating). As a result of these collaborative efforts, all leadership programs are now equipped to prepare its candidates to implement the state's evaluation systems. Work in this area continues with ARPEA's input on the state's current work with the superintendent evaluation system.

In addition to the standing and ad hoc committee work and the continuous learning opportunities through its annual conferences, ARPEA continues to collaborate and address pressing issues related to leadership and preparation programs throughout the state. No matter where the work takes them, ARPEA has established a statewide professional learning community and collective voice built on a common purpose, trust, and mutual respect (Bryk, & Schneider, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991) to advocate for practices and policies that advance leadership preparation efforts in Arkansas.

Conclusions and Implications

In early 2000, Arkansas professors from nine institutions established ARPEA to serve as representation for the profession of preparing educational administration in the state. Trust is a key element to building a collaborative culture. Over the past decade and a half, ARPEA's

commitment to establish a professional learning community has made manifest a trust relationship among its members. Bryk and Schneider (2003) avow that in organizations characterized by high relational trust, members were more likely to work together to advance improvements. The evolution of ARPEA to where it currently stands has not been without its struggles over the years. There have been times when members have had disagreements. Individually, members may not always agree with one another philosophically, or on specific practices or particular policies, and oftentimes may find themselves competing for students from the same pool of potential candidates. However, where trust exists, members are more inclined to stay engaged with one another and work through differences. According to Carmeli and Schaubroeck (2006), trust contributes to innovative behaviors enhancing the sharing of information more freely and making decisions together. As trust is reinforced, participants are more likely to debate the issues and resolve conflict more effectively. Through it all, ARPEA members have made a strong commitment to put individual differences aside and agree to come together as a unified voice at the state level to collectively influence legislation and to provide advocacy on state rules and regulations impacting the state's leadership preparation programs.

Implications for university leadership programs already organized as state affiliates of NCPEA, or those who are considering becoming an affiliated state, are to intentionally work toward developing a strong, unified voice to advocate for leadership students and programs in respective states. In many states, public confidence in traditional, university-based leadership preparation programs is waning, and alternative preparation programs are being promoted. When professors of leadership programs are fragmented or remain isolated from one another, their sphere of influence is limited to representing and advocating for a single university's interests.

In efforts to organize into a PLC, it is suggested state affiliates formalize procedures with a constitution, bylaws, mission, beliefs, etc. (Feger & Arruda, 2006; Stoll, et al., 2008) to provide structure for its organizational efforts. Utilizing social networking tools facilitates communication and productivity. However important these processes, a strong commitment to organizing and developing a unified voice to advocate for what is in the best interest of students in leadership preparation programs is a key ingredient. As with any professional learning community, it may become necessary to set aside personal philosophical differences in collective efforts to unify on issues for the greater good of leadership programs in the state.

This discussion concludes with 2015 NCPEA President, Dr. Carleton Holt's advice in his blog reviewing NCPEA's state affiliates. He states: "If this review of NCPEA's State Affiliate information appears to be of value to circumstances occurring in your location, please consider talking with other institutions in your state, taking a look at the Arkansas Professors of Educational Administration's website, and start a joint effort to meet the challenges facing Educational Leadership Programs of Study" (2014, ¶13).

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Successful Innovations in Educational Leadership Preparation

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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The purpose of this study was to identify and describe successful innovations in educational leadership preparation programs. Professors of educational leadership from across the nation nominated innovations of 12 programs. Based on review of descriptions of the innovations provided by nominees, further documentation on the innovations was requested from the programs. Various stakeholders in the programs with the most promising innovations were interviewed to gather additional data on those innovations. Data analysis in relation to three criteria for selection—fidelity of implementation, positive student learning outcomes, and adaptability to other programs—resulted in the identification of six successful innovations.

Research studies and reviews of research have concluded that school leaders have significant direct effects on teacher performance and significant indirect effects on student learning (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNutty, 2005; Orr, 2006; Orphanos & Orr, 2013). According to Orr (2006), “Evidence suggests that, second only to the influences of classroom instruction, school leadership strongly affects student learning” (p. 3). Moreover, despite the need for more research on the relationship of school leadership preparation with the leadership capacity of program graduates, “Available research has been promising, showing positive relationships between innovative, research-based leadership preparation approaches and graduate outcomes (Orphanos & Orr, 2013, p. 3). One problem that educational leadership preparation as a field needs to address, however, is the reality that there still are many programs that are not “innovative and research-based.”

Reformers recommend that innovations be incorporated across at least seven components of traditional educational leadership preparation programs, including (a) recruitment and selection procedures (Green, 2013), (b) program structure (Everson, 2006), (c) curriculum (Perez et al., 2010), (d) instructional strategies (Doolittle, Stanwood, & Simmerman, 2006), (e) field experiences (Perez et al., 2010), (f) student assessment (Knoeppel & Logan, 2011), and (g) school-leader induction (Daresh, 2004). McCarthy and Forsyth (2009), however, conclude that the field lacks any “systematic research examining the recruitment and admission of school leaders” (p. 89), the leadership preparation curriculum has been “relatively stable since the 1970’s” (p. 91), and leadership programs “often lack focus and relevance for particular leadership positions” (p. 94). According to McCarthy and Forsyth, instructional delivery in educational leadership preparation programs, is “as traditional as instruction in other university departments” (p. 97), there has been “little credible research on field learning and preparation of school leaders” (p. 99), and the research that is available indicates that field experiences have been “seriously flawed” (p. 99).

Relevant Literature

Despite the concern by many policy makers, scholars, and practitioners that educational leadership as a field has not been open to change, Orr (2006) maintains, “We have compelling evidence that significant innovation exists in the field and positively influences graduates’ leadership practice” (p. 493). Orr concludes that these innovations are grounded in new conceptions of educational leadership and leadership preparation by the programs that are adopting the innovations. The reconceptualization described by Orr has led to a variety of innovations, including those described below.

Partnerships

Darling-Hammond and associates cite university-district partnerships as an important feature of the exemplary programs they studied (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). Benefits of university-district partnerships include linking theory and practice, meeting specific needs of the partner district, combining expertise of university faculty and practicing administrators, and a maintaining a pipeline for successful school leadership (Brown-Ferrigno, 2011; Gooden, Bell, Gonzales, & Lippa, 2011; Simmons et al., 2007).

In authentic partnerships the partners are considered equals, respect each other, assume a moral commitment to the partnership, and share accountability for the aspiring school leader’s success. Furthermore, in true partnerships collaboration takes place at each level of the university

and school district (Simmons et al., 2007). Browne-Ferrigno (2011) notes, “A partnership typically has well defined organizational structures, established practices and procedures, and parity among partners—all of which can take considerable time and effort to achieve” (p. 736).

Davis and associates report that in successful partnerships the university and district collaborate in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the leadership preparation program, with district administrators serving on the program’s advisory board, assisting in recruitment and selection of students, sometimes teaching courses, mentoring students, and participating in student assessment (Davis, Darling Hammond, LaPointe, & Myerson, 2005).

Innovative Recruitment and Selection

Many educational leadership preparation programs are developing new, rigorous selection criteria, and asking school districts to assist in identifying and recruiting potential educational leaders who appear to meet those criteria. Criteria might include not only successful teaching experience, but also successful experience as an instructional leader (Darling Hammond et al., 2007). Some programs now are including critical thinking, problem-solving skills, civic engagement, an orientation toward social justice, and a commitment to educational change as selection criteria (Bartee, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2008). Increasingly, programs are adopting a two-phase selection process, with phase one a review of application materials submitted by the candidate. In addition to traditional application materials, the application packet might include an autobiographical essay, philosophy statement, or written reflection on a critical incident. Review of the application packet, often accompanied by rating on an assessment rubric, leads to the selection of a subset of candidates for phase two of the selection process. Phase two, often referred to as an assessment center, typically includes an interview as well as a variety of performance-based activities such as role plays, simulations, and group discussions on educational issues. A team of assessors that includes both faculty members and practitioners usually rates phase-two candidate performance on the various assessment activities, with selection for the program based on that performance (Darling Hammond et al., 2007; Gooden & Gonzales, 2015)

Cohort Model

The cohort model is the most widely adopted innovation in recent years—presently used by so many programs that it is quickly losing its status as an innovation. Cohorts have the potential to become strong learning communities focused on specific goals throughout the program, promoting long-term group and individual development in relationship to those goals (Griffin, Taylor, Varner, & White, 2012). The mutual support provided by cohorts in traditional classes can extend to internships and even into networks of school leaders providing support to one another (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Simmons et al., 2007).

Content

The content of educational leadership preparation is in the midst of a shift from content based on management and social science to emphases on instructional leadership, school improvement, and social justice. Professors and practitioners identified as experts on instructional leadership have recommended instructional leadership functions that should be addressed in leadership preparation, including professional development, curriculum development, clinical supervision, action research, teacher evaluation, and group facilitation. Another suggested content area is school improvement, built around the study of educational change, capacity building, and sustainability, and including the examination of specific school improvement models that have led to positive change (Backor & Gordon, 2015).

Furman (2012) proposes that content be taught across the personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological dimensions of social justice. Theoretical perspectives needed for learning about social justice, according to Brown (2004), are adult learning theory and development, transformative learning theory, and critical social theory. Three social justice content areas suggested by McKenzie et al. (2008) are critical consciousness, knowledge and skills regarding teaching and learning “that reach beyond the traditional notion of instructional leadership” (p.124), and the capacity to both eliminate systemic and structural barriers to student learning and create new systems and structures that promote learning for all students.

Pedagogy

Innovative pedagogy in educational leadership preparation is centered on facilitating active learning, collaboration, reflection, and dialogue (Orr, 2006). In a recent survey of graduate students by Gordon and Oliver (2015), the respondents expressed little value for traditional lecture, but did perceive class discussions to be of value, including those that alternate between small and large-group, allow students to share personal experiences, allow every student to have a voice, focus on the extant research on a particular topic, and discuss how to apply the topic to practice. The students valued other in-class activities like problem-based learning, simulations, sharing of personal and professional stories, and case method. Along with the aforementioned emphasis on social justice content comes new pedagogy on social justice. General strategies recommended by Brown (2004) include critical reflection, rational discourse, and policy praxis. Specific classroom activities focused on social justice include activities like guided discussions, diversity panels, and role-playing; and assignments include cultural autobiography, readings on social justice leadership, and research on cultural groups other than the student’s own (Brown, 2004; Furman, 2012).

Innovation in pedagogy is also concerned with course-embedded field experiences. Field experiences connect theory to practice, make coursework more relevant, and allow the student to develop as a reflective practitioner (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Course-embedded field experiences include inquiry activities like observations, interviews, and action research as well as leadership activities such as coordinating professional development or curriculum planning. The emphasis on social justice in content and pedagogy extends to course-embedded field experiences, with activities such as neighborhood walks, cross-cultural interviews, equity audits, and equity-oriented action research (Brown, 2004; McKenzie et al., 2008; Furman, 2012).

Internships

Internships connect theory to practice, allow students to work and learn in an authentic setting, provide a protected transition from preparation to practice, and build students' confidence as leaders (Cunningham & Sherman, 2008). Because of the power of the internship, many leadership preparation programs have extended them from a semester to a year or more. Some programs have procured external funding or made arrangements with school districts to allow full-time internships, and some have integrated coursework and the internship throughout the program so that course learning is applied immediately in internship activities (Bartee, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Some programs follow a medical model, with interns rotating to multiple sites, one of which may include the central office (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Successful internship programs require an equal partnership between the university and district, with collaborative planning and coordination, and a clear understanding of each stakeholder's role and responsibilities. Quality internships also provide for individual reflection on internship activities, and group reflection among those assigned to the same university supervisor (Cunningham & Sherman, 2008). The mentor is a key player in the internship. In the best mentoring programs, an effort is made to find a good personality and leadership match between the mentor and intern, the mentor and intern make a mutual commitment to a successful internship, and there is ongoing communication between the mentor and the university's intern supervisor (Bartee, 2012; Cunningham & Sherman, 2008; Davis et al., 2005).

Portfolios

Although the precise purposes of portfolios vary from program to program, general purposes include student reflection, student evaluation, providing feedback to students to promote student growth, and providing feedback to faculty to improve the program. Programs that require portfolios typically use them as part of the program's comprehensive examination, and rate portfolios and portfolio presentations based on rubrics designed by the faculty (Hackmann & Alsbury, 2005; Janosik & Frank, 2013; Knoepfel & Logan, 2011). Portfolios typically include artifacts of and reflective writing on learning activities and outcomes (Hackmann & Alsbury, 2005). Knoepfel and Logan (2011) argue that for a successful portfolio component, all faculty members must be committed to the portfolio concept and engage in collaborative planning and implementation of the portfolio system, with one person assigned to coordinate portfolio review. Janosik and Frank (2013) maintain that students need orientation sessions on portfolio requirements as well as ongoing feedback and assurance as they develop their portfolios.

Principal Induction

Preparation programs can facilitate cohort support groups, provide professional development, or contribute to mentoring or coaching programs for new principals (Authors, 2014). Consistent with our earlier discussion of internships, the type of beginning principal support most often discussed in the literature is mentoring. Daresh (2004) argues, "Mentoring is an absolutely essential part of socialization and professional formation" (p. 502). Mentors of new principals can assist the beginners to develop, implement, and assess professional growth plans; engage in two-way shadowing followed by reflective discussion; participate with new principals in collegial learning groups or workshops; and provide ongoing consultation (Palmer, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe successful innovations in educational leadership preparation programs so that information on those innovations can be shared with the field. We believe that making descriptions of these programs accessible may encourage and assist program improvement across the nation.

Research Methods

Data gathering and analysis were guided by three criteria we established for the selection of successful innovations, including the following:

1. The innovation, as described by the program, is being implemented with fidelity;
2. There is evidence that the innovation is making a major contribution to positive graduate student learning outcomes; and
3. The innovation can be adapted to other educational leadership preparation programs that are based on values consistent with the innovation.

We initiated the research by contacting members of various associations and groups of professors of educational leadership, providing them with a brief description of the project and criteria for successful innovations, and asking them to nominate programs with outstanding innovations that were already in place. Twelve programs were nominated for the study. Data gathering and analysis were iterative and focused on determining whether the aforementioned criteria were present. We established contact with a representative of each nominated program and asked them to provide us with descriptions of the program in general and the innovation in particular. Initial review of the material the programs sent us allowed us to determine what additional information and materials to request. Based on additional review, we selected programs with promising innovations to move on to the next stage of the process, a series of interviews with program stakeholders. For each program we selected for interviews, we interviewed multiple stakeholders in various roles inside and outside of the program. The specific interviewees depended on the nature of the program and the innovation under study. Interviewees included faculty members, students, graduates of the program in school leadership positions, and district administrators who mentored or supervised students or graduates. The interviews were individualized, not only for each program, but also for each type of interviewee (faculty member, student, graduate, etc.). The purpose of the interviews was to gather additional data to assist with (a) making a final decision as to whether the component met all criteria, and (b) developing full descriptions of selected innovations for dissemination.

We analyzed program documents and artifacts by reading through those data several times while writing analytic memos, developing diagrams, and building matrices summarizing the data and comparing them to the selection criteria. We analyzed interview transcripts, first through line-by-line open coding to identify basic concepts, then through axial coding to identify categories and themes. As we analyzed the transcripts, we continued to create memos, diagrams, and matrices to summarize the data and relate it to selection criteria. We carried out two types of triangulation of the data on each innovation: (a) triangulation of interview data from different stakeholders within a given program and (b) triangulation of themes running through interview data with data from documents and artifacts provided by the program. Based on data analysis and comparison with the pre-established criteria, we selected six successful innovations.

Findings

In general, most of the six innovations we describe below can be classified within one or more of the broad categories of innovations found in the literature and discussed earlier in this article. However, specific aspects of each of the program components we report on are unique, and thus we judge all of the following to be authentic innovations.

The University of Alabama: Course-Embedded Field Experiences

The University of Alabama's educational leadership program has made a commitment to integrate theory and practice through a three-phase field component. Phase one involves embedding field experiences in traditional coursework throughout the program, phase two consists of a two-semester internship, and phase three is a full-time residency of at least ten days. By tying coursework to field experiences, the faculty aims to make their curriculum more relevant. And integrating coursework with field experiences ensures ongoing input from the practitioners who are involved in the field experiences.

Courses in the new curriculum at UA were co-designed by UA faculty and practitioners. The design teams decided that both coursework and field experiences would shift from an emphasis on management to instructional leadership, and that courses would be co-taught by professors and practicing administrators. Examples of embedded field experiences include the following:

- School/Family Partnership Plan and Sociological Inventory
- A Plan for an Effective Professional Learning Community
- Clinical Supervision
- Professional Development Activity
- Personal Code of Ethics
- Management of the Learning Organization
- School Cultural Analysis and Action Plan

The two-semester internship builds on the earlier course-embedded field experiences, but allows for long-range, integrative field experiences. The internship experiences are more individualized than the course-embedded activities, and are based on an individualized needs assessment completed by the student as well as the needs of the school where the internship is taking place. The residency typically is 10 full days, with students who are teachers encouraged to complete their residency in a school other than the one in which they teach, allowing total immersion in leadership activities in a novel setting in which the resident is viewed and treated as a novice leader rather than a teacher.

The course-embedded field experiences are preceded by learning activities designed to prepare the students for those experiences. For example, a faculty member discussed how students are prepared in class for leading a professional development activity in a school:

The content taught in the class would include information on adult learning strategies, high-quality professional development, and strategies for tying professional development to student learning.... And then in their field experiences they each design a professional development experience for a school, based on a needs assessment.

For another example, class activities preceding the student providing cognitive coaching to a teacher in a school setting include discussing the underlying theory and the structure of the coaching cycle, viewing a video of a coaching cycle, and practice coaching in the university classroom. Faculty members, fellow students, and the school mentor are available to assist students as they carry out their embedded field experiences. A graduate of the program explained, “We all kind of talked about these things and supported each other and got support from the professors as we went through these experiences.”

A variety of student products result from various embedded field experiences, including recordings, reports, planning documents, and written reflections. After students have completed an embedded field experience they typically debrief that experience in their graduate class. During these debriefings, a student noted,

We could learn from each other; learn what worked and what didn’t work. Everybody was in a different setting; some were in high schools, some were in elementary schools.... We had the benefit of a different lens for the same experience.

Stakeholders who we interviewed agreed that the field experiences help the program to successfully integrate theory and practice, demonstrate rigor, and provide authentic learning for aspiring school leaders. Stakeholders also agreed that the field experiences, in combination with other program components, result in graduates with high capacity for instructional leadership, reflective practice, collegiality, and collaboration.

The University of Washington: Competency-Based Guarantee

The goal of the Danforth Educational Leadership Program at the University of Washington is to prepare leaders who will provide equity to every student. Cohorts complete the program in one year of study, which integrates coursework with a 1000-hour internship. A key feature of the program is a guarantee to superintendents that, if they are not satisfied with the performance of a graduate in a leadership position, the program will provide assistance to raise the leader’s performance to an acceptable level. The performance guarantee is based on the concept of reciprocal accountability: the university believes that, just as principals are accountable for teacher performance and the superintendent is accountable for principal performance, so the university should be accountable for the preparation of competent educational leaders. Although the program is prepared to offer special assistance to graduates experiencing difficulty, the real power behind the guarantee is the competency-based design of the program and the quality learning experiences aligned with core competencies.

All of the archival data we reviewed and stakeholders we interviewed agreed that the cornerstone of the program is equity for all K-12 students. With that cornerstone as a starting point, experts from around the nation, local superintendents, and university faculty were called together to develop a set of six core competencies:

- Building Instructional Capacity;
- Marshaling Resources and Improving Systems;
- Advocating with Students, Families, and Communities;
- Committing to Ethical Practice;
- Driving Improvement with Data; and
- Shaping Culture and Leading Change.

Once the six competencies were established, an advisory board including educational leaders from local school districts and faculty was formed to continue program development. Based on the extant research on the competencies, and state standards that the advisory board needed to enfold within the competencies, the board developed specific elements for each competency. The advisory board also developed four performance levels for elements within each competency: knowledge, application, collaboration with others, and cultivation of leadership with others. Rubrics for each competency were developed and are available to assist in the evaluation of course products, internship observations, and student portfolios.

With the core competencies and performance measures in place, the advisory board began to design other program components that would support the university's guarantee. The guarantee for the competency *building instructional capacity* was the only one that had been operationalized at the time of our study, thus our examples focus on that competency.

The first program component supporting the guarantee is the recruitment and selection process. Teams of faculty members, educational leaders associated with the program, and current graduate students review application materials and interview applicants. The applicants are asked to discuss their experiences as instructional leaders, including observing and providing feedback to teachers. Applicants also are asked to view a video of a teacher's lesson and write a response to the lesson, with the response assessed by reviewers for the applicant's use of data, feedback focus, quality of communication, and suggestions for professional development. Applicants who do not have strong potential for instructional leadership are less likely to be admitted to the program than those with a strong background in improving instructional practice and student learning outcomes.

The required 1000-hour internship includes 400 hours of instructional leadership. To find the time to complete the internship, most students are either provided leadership positions by their district (as instructional coaches, academic deans, curriculum developers, and so forth) that include flexibility for intern activities, or shift to part-time teaching for the year with a reduced salary. A variety of learning experiences have been developed to help students achieve the competency on building instructional capacity. Students visit cohort members' schools to do learning walks and analyze the instruction they have observed. Students regularly observe classroom lessons, videotape themselves giving feedback to the teacher they have observed, and share their videos with a critical friend who provides feedback on their performance. Each student is required to complete an inquiry project with colleagues in their school focused on a learning problem being experienced by students. The project involves gathering classroom data on the problem, determining how changes in teaching practice can improve student learning, and presenting results. Mentoring by the principal is a critical aspect of the Danforth program. A graduate of the program and new principal described her internship mentor: "She just made sure I had every opportunity to be there with her during the process.... I was essentially like her shadow."

All of the stakeholders we interviewed agreed that the rigorous selection process, clearly defined competencies and performance measures, strong partnerships with local districts, intensive coursework and internship, and expert mentoring made the competency-based guarantee a strong one. However, provisions are in place to provide support to any graduate who experiences difficulties in her or his leadership role. If a complaint is received from a superintendent, the first step is an individual needs assessment to identify the specific elements of a competency that are absent. A personalized support plan might consist of visits to the leader's school, learning walks, one-to-one consultation, readings, or attendance at university

classes. Despite the provisions for individualized assistance, stakeholders agreed that the most important aspects of the new program were the partnerships, curriculum, pedagogy, and field experiences in place to support the guarantee.

The University of Tennessee: Recruitment and Selection

The University of Tennessee's Center for Educational Leadership has developed leader preparation partnerships with a number of area school districts, and the leadership preparation program coordinated by UT and Knox County Schools is the focus of this report. The Leadership Academy is a competency-based principal preparation program that admits a new cohort of students each June who complete a 33 credit-hour program over a 15-month period, with courses co-taught by UT faculty and Knox County school administrators. Students in the program are placed in the position of assistant principal and provided an appropriate salary. During the school year, the academy includes a four-day-a-week residency, with classes every Friday. Students also take classes during the summers before and after their residency. Additionally, students attend an "aspiring leaders seminar" in which they complete and report on an online personal learning portfolio, a capstone project, and an action research project, as well as prepare for Tennessee's School Leader Licensure Assessment.

The component of the leadership academy that we examined in-depth was the program's recruitment and selection process. The university and school district share responsibility for recruitment. The recruitment effort is intense, with wide distribution of information on the program throughout the district and personal recruitment efforts by current students, alumni, and Knox County administrators. At the same time, communication concerning the academy makes it clear that the university and school district are looking for candidates with instructional expertise who have already demonstrated a capacity for leadership. The excellent reputation of the program within the district and the 100 percent placement rate for graduates are compelling reasons for applying to the academy.

Approximately 100 educators apply to the academy each year, and its acceptance rate is approximately 10 percent. The admissions criteria reflect the competency-based nature of the program, with application materials and activities used to determine the applicant's capacity to develop or enhance the desired competencies. In addition to the traditional application materials, applicants must complete an essay addressing the following questions:

As a principal, what would your role be in supporting teachers to improve their instructional practice? How would you do this effectively? How would you determine if you have been successful in these efforts?

Applicants also complete the online version of the Gallup Principal Insight, which is based on characteristics of outstanding principals related to achievement drive, planning, and relationship building.

Based on the candidates' application portfolios and Gallup Principal Insight profiles, approximately 45 candidates are selected for a two-day selection process. At the beginning of the two-day process, a team consisting of UT faculty and Knox County administrators interviews each candidate individually. The interview questions are structured around McREL's 21 leadership responsibilities (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003), and ask candidates how they would address specific situations. The interview team listens for particular indicators of McREL's *balanced leadership* in the applicant's response to each question.

The rest of the first day consists of the first part of NASSP's *Selecting and Developing the 21st Century Principal Assessment Center*. The assessment center is intended to measure the candidate's potential in the areas of educational leadership, communication, and development of self and others. The first day of the assessment center includes an in-basket activity, a role-play, and a group activity—all providing the selection team with indicators of the applicant's potential. The second day consists of the applicants receiving individual feedback on their performance on the previous day's activities.

The final part of the selection process for those who remain in the applicant pool after the assessment center is a personal interview with the district superintendent and the director of the Center for Educational Leadership, followed by a decision on whether to select the applicant for the next cohort. Due to the popularity of the program, those who are not selected the first year they apply often apply again in the future. A faculty member commented on the expected relationship of those selected with those who are not:

One of the things that I really stress with those who are selected is that it's your job—among your colleagues who have not been selected—to coach them, to mentor them, to give them feedback and to help them along. We have applicants who have applied three years in a row and, you know, that third year, they're selected.

Although all of the stakeholders believed that it was the quality of the overall program that was responsible for numerous positive outcomes, they agreed that the recruitment and selection process contributed to a number of positive aspects of the academy. Those we interviewed agreed that the recruitment and selection process contributed to:

- Students responding positively to rigorous coursework, and supporting each other through that coursework;
- A high level of individual assistance from faculty based on the small size of each cohort and diagnostic information about each student developed during the selection process;
- The ability to explore educational issues from different perspectives, based on the diversity of students selected for the cohort;
- Considerable “outside-the-box thinking” by students;
- Willingness and ability of students to engage in collaborative learning; and
- Students focused on high levels of achievement.

Stakeholders we interviewed also reported that the recruitment and selection process contributed to academy fellows and graduates being respected by their colleagues in the district, the academy fellows' chances of being hired as administrators, the ability of academy fellows and alumni to network across the district, and a stronger focus on curriculum and instruction in the district. The stakeholders also agreed that the recruitment and selection of the type of educators completing the program was in part responsible for improved student achievement in the schools where graduates of the program were serving as school leaders.

California State University Fresno: Equity Audit

Many graduates of California State University Fresno's (CSUF) Educational Leadership Program serve schools with high numbers of students of color, low SES students, and English language learners (ELLs). The program integrates equity and social justice throughout its

coursework. Students have already studied extensively about equity and social justice when they enter the course Instructional Systems and Equity, which serves as a vehicle for them to apply learning from earlier courses. According to the course description, all of the assignments in the course are based on the premise that “All students are entitled to a quality education that provides them with the opportunity to reach their fullest potential, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.”

During the course each student conducts three related audits, at the school, subgroup, and student level. The audits thus move from the macro to the micro level. The purpose of assigning the three audits is to help the student to develop generic skills for conducting an equity audit as well as an understanding of the relationship of the school and subgroup systems to the treatment and learning of the student.

The school-wide audit consists of three steps, including auditing teacher and instructional quality, programmatic equity, and achievement equity. The purpose of the teacher and instructional quality audit is to determine how teacher quality is distributed within the district or school. Data is gathered on teacher educational level, experience, mobility, and certification. The data is disaggregated by courses taught, academic level of courses taught, academic level of students taught, and so forth. The program audit seeks to assess the quality of programs and whether certain student groups are under- or over-represented in particular programs. Examples of programs examined include bilingual education and limited English proficiency, special education, gifted and talented, advanced placement, student discipline, and alternative education programs. The student disaggregates the populations of these programs by gender, ethnicity, race, and SES, and compares the numbers and percentages of each group in each program to school demographics. In the achievement equity audit the student examines student achievement test scores, dropout rates, graduation rates, and college admissions test scores, and disaggregates those data by gender, ethnicity, race, and SES.

Based on the school-wide audit, the student next identifies a subgroup for the next audit. In the subgroup audit, the student (a) develops a set of guiding questions, (b) gathers data on the subgroup beyond the data gathered in the school-wide audit (thorough surveys, observations, interviews, review of assessment data, mining of documents and artifacts, and so forth), (c) analyzes and triangulates the data to identify inequities based on race, ethnicity, gender, language, and so on, (d) identifies necessary instructional or programmatic improvements, and (e) develops an action plan to increase equity.

For the individual audit, the graduate student uses the subgroup data to identify an at-risk student (based on academic achievement and/or behavior) for study. The graduate student develops guiding questions for the audit, gathers data by observing and interviewing the student and reviewing student records, and analyzes data for relationships between and among the student’s gender, race, ethnicity, SES, coursework, participation in special programs, academic achievement, behavior, and so on. Based on the data analysis, the graduate student then identifies the student’s individual needs and designs an action plan to meet those needs. The stakeholders we interviewed agreed that this is the most compelling of the three audits for the graduate students because it brings the process to a very personal level and also illuminates the relationship among inequity at the school-wide, subgroup, and individual levels.

We asked Isabel, one of the program graduates we interviewed, to discuss the value of doing the equity audits. She responded that the audits allowed her to look at school systems through a critical lens, and helped her and others to identify biases of which they were previously unaware. Isabel also reported that the audits had caused her to become a more reflective

educator. We also asked Isabel if completing the audits had influenced her as a new principal. She responded that she focused on matters of equity in her classroom observations, and that she believed she had helped the teachers at her school to become more culturally aware.

A faculty member shared a variety of positive outcomes of the equity audits. She stated that most of the aspiring principals in the program are teachers, and that as result of the preparation program in general and the equity audits in particular, they begin to change their approach to teaching, becoming more culturally responsive to their students. Also, the graduate students begin to discuss matters of equity with their principals and other teachers in their school, and they become more vocal about the need for equity. Students in the program also begin to visit the communities their schools serve, and to develop partnerships with parents. These new perspectives and behaviors can then be incorporated into leadership for increased equity when the students graduate and become school administrators. The faculty member summed up her perception of the value of the equity audits as follows: “Once you’ve gone through this, you can’t look at students the same way.”

Manhattanville College: Peer Coaching Certification Program

The Educational Leadership Program at Manhattanville College offers a 15-credit certification program in partnership with neighboring White Plains Schools for the district’s teachers to become certified peer coaches. The idea for a peer coaching certification program was sparked by changes in New York State’s teacher evaluation system, the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR). Through a new agreement with the teachers’ union, school districts were required to develop and implement a system to support teachers functioning at the “developing” or “ineffective” range on the APPR’s continuum of teacher effectiveness. Manhattanville College and White Plains collaborated to address this new requirement by developing a peer coaching program that moved beyond the traditional mentoring program the district already had in place, with an understanding that training would be necessary to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to support other teachers. A professor we interviewed stated, “We felt that if we were going to institute a peer coaching program, we needed to make it much more systematic and provide a foundation for the coaches so that they would feel comfortable conducting coaching.” Though the program was initially conceived as a support for struggling teachers, the key stakeholders involved in its development were clear that they did not want this to be solely a “union issue,” and instead wanted the program to be based on a collaborative coaching model that could support all teachers at all levels of the teaching performance continuum.

The certification program consists of five courses. The first course is focused on basic instructional skills and language about instructional practices. Students completing the course should be able to identify good teaching and use common language that demonstrates their understanding of good teaching. In the next course, students learn how to gather, analyze, and discuss data. This class is intended to help teachers use objective measures to recognize and then bridge the gap between desired outcomes and results. In the third course the students move into actual classroom observations, including observing for the elements of quality teaching. For their first assignment in this class, the students watch a video of a classroom lesson and then rate the teacher in terms of teaching effectiveness on a scale of 1-10. The initial ratings range from 3-8. By the end of the class, the students’ responses are within one place of each other. This class also focuses on how to have conversations with teachers that support their reflection on their teaching

practices. Students practice these skills during mock post-observation conferences with each other, and these sessions are videotaped and then reviewed and evaluated.

The fourth course is The Danielson Workshop, based on the Charlotte Danielson Framework, the rubric used during classroom observations. The rubric includes four domains: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Teachers use the Danielson rubric to collect evidence during a classroom observation and reflect on the teacher's performance. The final class in the program is a seminar, during which the seminar instructor observes the peer coaches doing actual observations and conferences at their respective schools, and then holds discussions with the coaches about those experiences.

Current students in the program who we interviewed explained that one of the most important things they had learned was how to construct and deliver authentic feedback by having nonjudgmental, data-based conversations with teachers to draw the teachers' attention to things they might not otherwise have realized about their teaching practices. Having concrete evidence of what occurs in a classroom is "really helpful for the teachers because when you're in the moment and you're teaching, you're not always aware of how it's coming across." Reviewing videotapes of mock conferences helped the students to hone their conferencing skills. The students we interviewed also highlighted the importance of gathering objective data during classroom observations. By practicing how to gather objective data on what the teacher and students say and do, the coaches learn to observe without bias. A graduate student stated, "There's nothing about, 'I think,' or 'I feel,' or 'I would've done this.' You remove all of that from the equation."

Although the students we interviewed had not yet completed the program, they had already experienced some coaching successes. During the coursework, one student worked with a teacher with over 25 years of experience who had never been particularly effective. As a result, the teacher began to implement new strategies that the teacher and coach worked together to develop, and the teacher saw growth in her students that she had never seen before. Another student in the program worked with a strong teacher who asked for help to implement some new strategies, and the student was thrilled to help an already proficient teacher to expand her repertoire. The student believed that she and the teacher she was assisting both grew in the process. The students reported that peer coaching provides them with an avenue to learn new things, share their expertise, and help motivate and inspire people, and they appreciated the sense of community that this program was providing for them. The risk-free, supportive atmosphere of the program was allowing them to share ideas and offered a great opportunity for growth.

The University of Pennsylvania: Mid-Career Doctoral Program and Lifetime Support

The University of Pennsylvania's mid-career doctoral program in educational leadership has set up a dynamic interaction of networking opportunities that provide people with resources and support to make direct impacts on the educational landscape. The program addresses the ongoing transformation of public and private educational organizations from a leadership perspective by focusing on four core areas: instructional, organizational, public, and evidence-based leadership. The curriculum emphasizes inquiry-based leadership for educational leaders at all district and organizational levels.

The mid-career doctoral program is highly selective, admitting twenty-five students each year. Students attend coursework three days each month in the fall and spring semesters and one week during the summer. The faculty fosters a reflective and collaborative learning community of students within a cohort model. These collaborative learning communities enhance students'

ability to problem solve as well as to create and implement innovative, research-based educational approaches.

The mid-career doctoral program faculty considers how graduates can contribute to the communities they serve and the wider field of education. From the beginning of the program, students consider important issues and problems in education, and consider how they could contribute plausible solutions through their dissertation research. The program structures the curriculum in ways that provide mid-career professionals with new capacity building skills as well as support from other educational leaders to examine and address issues of practice. The faculty is very intentional about supplementing what the university can provide by creating a dialectic relationship between the university and the larger educational community. The program director stated, “We provide students with a wide range of educational contexts and take advantage of expertise embedded in various leaders.”

The program views students as generators of knowledge in their practice, and thus is purposeful in its facilitation of collaboration among students, the university, program alumni, and the community to generate appropriate solutions to educational problems. The program takes a collective approach to developing educational leaders by supporting both student and alumni efforts to impact the wider field. Alumni serve as clients for mid-career doctoral students’ dissertation research, and the mid-career doctoral students serve as clients for educational leadership master’s students’ applied research. The program emphasizes developing and sustaining supportive learning environments for students while they are in the program and after they graduate. The specific innovation we reviewed was the lifetime support the program provides. The lifetime support includes a number of specific structures that we describe below.

Cohort support. With each new cohort the faculty spends a significant amount of time creating an environment grounded in trust, support, and collaboration. A student commented on the effects of developing a collegial cohort:

Every single person in the program—I know all 25 of them—I know them really well, and I know I can call them any time and say “Hey, what do you think of this?” or “Can you help with this?” or “Can I use you as a reference?” There’s just a whole bunch of time put in at the beginning to make sure that the human aspect of it is really strong, and then that is nurtured throughout.

The cohort model helps students embrace shifts in their learning and practice, and creates a level of camaraderie that facilitates ongoing critical feedback from colleagues and professors. Students reported that the cohort model helped them to become better informed, more confident, and more engaged as leaders because they were gaining a global perspective on education rather than a narrow, insular focus supported solely by individual practices and beliefs. Students shared that this global perspective was paramount in conceptualizing their dissertations.

Dissertation support. Students are able to complete their coursework, state certification requirements, and dissertation within 36 months. The dissertation is grounded in the students’ program of study and their use of their workplaces for applied study and data collection. Upon entering the program, students identify an issue that is of interest. From that moment on, students spend significant time planning for their dissertations in structured and supervised settings, particularly within the applied research sequence that spans the program. This systematic approach to the dissertation allows students to defend their dissertation in their last semester of the program. Students and graduates appreciate that they are allowed to base their research on

problems within their own districts and schools. A student we interviewed stated, “I was really impressed with the fact that all of the research that we did was job embedded, so I was able to answer some of the questions I had about our district.” A graduate of the program shared, “I wanted my dissertation to focus on something that would directly impact my job and the issues I saw in schools.”

Coaching and mentoring. A writing coach provides assistance with academic writing throughout the student’s doctoral program. A research coach assists students and alumni with research design, data gathering, and data analysis. An innovation coach delivers workshops and provides individual assistance to help students and alumni develop skills in social media. Additionally, alumni volunteers serve as mentors of current students.

The Saturday Commons. During monthly cross-cohort meetings, students and alumni engage in focused discussions of work-based questions and discoveries, including live cases from practice, mentoring around career decisions and trajectories, and ideas for networking between current and former mid-career students. The program provides support through web interfaces allowing remote participation of alumni and invited guests.

Innovations lab. The Mid-Career Innovations Lab is geared to assist doctoral students and alumni to become proficient with the latest innovations in social media. The lab is also a vehicle for students and alumni to disseminate their experiences, ideas, and research to the larger educational world. A doctoral student discussed learning in the lab:

It’s helped me with hard and soft skills—hard skills being my ability to negotiate a blogosphere, Twitter, Facebook, and social media. I now understand what everything is.... And I know when and how to use it for different things.

The student also described benefits of the lab that went beyond personal learning:

It benefits children and families and communities because they are able to use the technology that I learned directly as part of the Penn program.... [For example,] at all my school board meetings we do Google Hangout, and the community member who is sitting in their living room at home can type in questions when we have an open forum.

A faculty member reported that the lab has enabled reflective conversations among doctoral students, alumni, and the communities they serve.

Simulations program. The Penn Educational Leadership Simulations Program (PELS) is a researched-based collaboration between the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and three major professional associations for K-12 school leaders (AASA, NAESP, and NASSP). The PELS program works to capture knowledge of experienced practitioners, alumni, and others through web-based multimedia simulations. The goal of PELS is to develop human capital in school leadership through blended peer-to-peer professional development. Specifically, PELS trains school and district leaders to author computer-based simulations, drawing out each leader’s own experiences to tackle real-world challenges. Each scenario requires decisions on how to react to daily challenges, as well as consideration of the consequences of those decisions. The program is cost-effective and highly scalable, with the potential to reach thousands of principals and superintendents. A faculty member stated, “PELS works to build the complexity of leaders. It attempts to actually build in event-based situations that can help educational leaders recreate the experience of that human situation.”

Fellowships. The purpose of the Alumni Fellowship Program is to keep mid-career graduates involved with the program and provide them support for their personal leadership initiatives. The program offers a forum for dialogue among students and alumni on educational issues and best practices, professional development and mentoring for both students and alumni, and support for entrepreneurial and research projects. Each year, the program offers two alumni fellowships for service to the Mid-Career Network in the form of research, instruction, or coordinating a network conference, and mid-career doctoral students are often involved in the resulting projects and events.

Discussion

We begin this discussion by reflecting on the unique aspects of each innovation, and then identify themes shared by the six innovations. Although there are calls in the field for full-time internships, they are not possible for many aspiring principals with families to support. The University of Alabama's three tiers of field experiences address this problem. Each tier provides experiences unique to that tier. The course-embedded field experiences allow just-in-time, in-class preparation for field activities, with those field activities then followed by in-class debriefing. The two-semester internships allow for long-range development matched to both individual and school needs. And the 10-day residency is an affordable way for working educators to get a taste of full-time leadership in a school other than their own.

The University of Washington's competency-based guarantee is a groundbreaking and perhaps trend-setting innovation. Also unique is the way that the guarantee is aligned with other aspects of the program. Indeed, the guarantee is the natural outgrowth of a whole series of developments in the program, beginning with the commitment to equity and including the development of six core competencies, district partnerships, performance measures, coursework, internship, and mentoring—all supporting the equity goal. Should a graduate of the program serving as an educational leader need support in order for the guarantee to be upheld, the assistance offered is also aligned with the goal of equity and corresponding competencies.

The University of Tennessee presents a unique combination of recruitment and selection strategies: massive recruitment efforts involving faculty, students, alumni, and district practitioners leading to a very large number of applicants, combined with an extremely rigorous selection process resulting in the admission of a small number of new students. The selection process integrates a number of standard selection instruments and activities that, considered individually, are not unique, but when used in combination with each other and with considerable time and energy of faculty and practitioners create a complex and comprehensive selection process that is truly impressive. The feedback and support given to applicants who are not selected in the hope that they will be admitted to a future cohort is also unique to the Tennessee program. All of the stakeholders we interviewed agreed that the recruitment and selection process contributed to the program's rigorous coursework, student collaboration, individualized assistance, diverse perspectives, creative thinking, and high achievement levels.

Although a number of educational leadership preparation programs require their students to complete equity audits, the three-tiered nature of California State University Fresno's equity audit is novel. Equity audits are complex undertakings, and completing the general process three times develops the students' question asking, planning, data gathering, data analysis, and reflective skills. Additionally, the movement from the macro to the micro by doing audits at the school, subgroup, and individual student levels reveals the relationship of the three levels and the

ultimate effects of inequity on students that a single, school-level audit is less likely to do. Finally, while students in many programs complete equity audits and report results, the students in the CSUF program also develop an action plan for increasing equity in their schools. The CSUF equity audit clearly has had the intended effects on students who complete it: the graduates we interviewed were committed to leadership for equity and social justice, and credited the equity audit with inspiring that commitment.

A number of educational leadership preparation programs in the U.S. offer programs in teacher leadership that are distinct from their principal preparation programs, but Manhattanville College's program is unique in its concentrated focus on peer coaching. Given the popularity of peer coaching in school districts across the nation, it will be interesting to see if more partnerships between higher education and school districts develop around the preparation and certification of peer coaches. The 15 credit hours of coursework in the program provide more content on effective teaching, classroom observation, and conferencing than most principal preparation programs do, and the Manhattanville-White Plains partnership, although still in its early stages, has the potential to serve as a model for preparing and supporting peer coaches.

The University of Pennsylvania's mid-career doctoral program provides myriad supports for both students and alumni, including a number of creative formats for students and alumni to support each other. Although, for the purpose of discussion, we described the different types of support—cohort support, dissertation support, coaching and mentoring, Saturday Commons, the innovations lab, the simulations program, and the alumni fellowship—separately, in fact these structures are interactive and synergistic in their support of mid-career doctoral students, alumni, and the school districts that both mid-career doctoral students and alumni serve. Moreover, several of the supports have the potential to develop networks and assist educational leaders at the regional, national, and global level.

Although at the start of this study it was not our intent to identify themes cutting across the very different innovations we examined, we were struck by several broad themes that are present in the findings. All of the innovations were based on university-district partnerships. Student or applicant assessment associated with the innovations was primarily performance-based. Five of the six innovations included field experiences that assisted the integration of theory and practice. Mentoring or coaching by practitioners was associated with most of the innovations. Each of the innovations included a focus on instructional leadership, and the gathering and analysis of data in support of instructional improvement. Finally, authentic learning, inquiry, reflection, collaborative learning, and peer support were fostered by all of the innovations.

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The Praxis of Gandhi's *Satyagraha*: The Scholar–Practitioner Educational Leader as Moral “Truth Holder”

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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Through contemplation of a drastic divergence in thought from a paradigm of physical discipline and retaliation in learning environments to one of a peaceful demonstration of reflection and respect the authors construct a framework of spiritual leadership. From this framework a metaphor of satyagraha emerges as a means of leading schools and modeling meditative behavior for all—students, staff, and stakeholders. This alternative metaphor of educational leadership is based on the truthful speech of Gandhi, MLK, and Nelson Mandela—each with their own radical take on creating counternarratives to violence through non-violence and peaceful resistance. These counternarratives form four principal themes that require some degree of contemplation: truthful speech and teaching, authenticity of leadership, reality of experience as education, and goodness as advocacy and activism for social justice, equity and care. In conclusion, the authors explore how this connects the scholar–practitioner to the Satyagrahi—practitioners of “truth-holding.”

Truth (*satya*) implies love, and firmness (*agraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement Satyagraha, that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence . . . (Gandhi, 1968a, pp. 106-107)

Our human history—as well as our current condition—has been riddled with violence. Whether manifested as civil or world wars or the murders of individuals in local assaults, violent acts are constant and consistent and outside the constraints of time and space. Mass murders, terrorist attacks, and school shootings have taken their place among the societal ills of American experience and U.S. education. Since 1900, depending on sources, between 232 and 312 school-related shootings have occurred in the U.S.; these acts of violence have resulted in approximately 400 deaths with upwards of 450 others wounded (TimeToast, n.d.; Lankford, 2013; Kierz, 2014). This does not include the violence of rape and sexual harassment that occur on elementary and secondary school grounds. Nor does this include the failures to exercise due process for students, endless accounts of academic abuse, and acts of hazing, harassment, and bullying as well as other forms of physical violence.

Moreover the views on dealing with violence are numerous and nuanced. Today's educational leaders P12-and-beyond must embrace a robust culture of diversity and negotiate a complex network of interactions on subjects such as violence in schools (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Presently, educational leaders at all levels handle issues in schools and learning organizations that run the gamut of the human condition. Typically, the responses to such acts employ techniques and tactics of more violence—in some places, corporal punishment and removal from the learning environment, in others microaggressions and administrative disciplinary acts rooted in power and physical control (Durrant & Smith, 2011; Farmer, Neier, & Parker, 2008; Portela & Pells, 2015). In the minds of many U.S. citizens, leaders should fight fire with fire, some seeing retaliation and retribution as a means to combat violence in any social setting, including primary and elementary schools (Giroux, 2015; Kozy, 2016).

Notwithstanding, we aim here to contemplate an alternative—a more spiritual and moral way of *countering* violence. As scholar-practitioners, educational leaders require a deep understanding of *thinking* and *doing* that find roots as much in Dewey's (1938) instrumentalism and inquiry as in Freire's (2005) criticality and consciousness. Implied in these epistemological stances are an understanding of varied methods of inquiry and an acknowledgement of various types of acquisition and experience. Among these diverse methods—this praxis—of thinking and doing, reflection and action, theory and practice, are ideals relevant to discussions of peace education and leadership for critical spirituality (Dantley, 2009, 2010). Based on these theories we “hold” and offer an alternate “truth” to the current narrative of fighting violence with violence.

Our previous article put forth a notion of spiritual leadership through consideration of the Buddha as a metaphor for the scholar-practitioner educational leader (Lowery, Gautam, & Mays, 2015). We contemplated the symbolism and mythos of the Four Sights and the Enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama as the Buddha. For us these revelatory excursions of the young prince represented the enlightenment that the three of us experienced as doctoral candidates being exposed to the notion of the scholar-practitioner educational leadership model. Here we extend the idea of a spiritually responsive and non-violent school leader in the person of the scholar-practitioner.

In this current work we apply that same notion into our respective lifeworlds as scholar-practitioners engaged in 21st century academia and public schooling. In this article we embrace the idea of a leadership of critical spirituality and an education of peace by exploring the example provided by Mohandas Gandhi and Gandhi's ideal of *Satyagraha*. Similar to our previous work, we are concerned with the ethic and values of leadership at the nexus of diversity and democracy within the spiritual dimensions of educational leadership through scholarly practice. This exercise in reflexive intentionality continues in examining education-based recommendations for leadership through metaphor and critical theory-based counterperspectives on violence, especially school-related atrocities, which include hate-crimes and microaggressions.

At this point in our collective studies and our respective lives we are occupied with turning the 8-spoke *dharma* wheel—in search of our authentic selves and the truth or truths that have been placed in the trusteeship of the educational systems of our world. At its foundations this is a theoretical study of humanity and humility in moral leadership and ethical sensitivity. Educational leadership—and education generally speaking—is a “people work,” of people, for people, by people. Therefore the work of education speaks to the politics and problems of the public realm of schooling and deals with what we view as the three-fold fundamentals of scholarly practice—social justice, equity, and care. Our belief is that these principles cannot be fully or effectively achieved without a deeper understanding of the spiritual aspect of leadership and transformation.

Turning the Wheel of Truth and Compassion, our personal and professional *dharmacakra*, gives us pause to reflect profoundly on issues of educator obligation, social justice, ethics sensitivity, and moral imagination in our researcher lives, teacher lives, and leader lives. We see these as issues that relate directly to metaphors in Buddhism's 8-Fold Path, the Christian Beatitudes, the Muslim's 5 Pillars, and the Hindu's Four Goals of Life (*kama*, *artha*, *dharma*, and *moksha*). From this juncture of understanding we find an applicable connection between the provinces of academia as it relates to scholarly leader preparation and the pragmatic motives within the daily service of leadership in the field. The province that emerges is one where the scholarly meets with the pragmatic—where the spiritual connects with the mundane.

In making this connection we encountered two exemplars to help exemplify our understanding of Gandhi's teaching of *satyagraha* and the “Salt March” as a metaphor for scholarly practice and critical spiritual leadership for education—Mandela's moral sacrifice and moral selflessness and MLK's moral commitment and moral courage. As with “The Buddha Metaphor” (Lowery, Gautam, & Mays, 2015), we engage in a reflective and reflexive inquiry into the values and ethics of the doctrines of these men as metaphors for scholar-practitioner educational leadership. We see this metaphoric structure as a means to investigate with critical consciousness and intentionality a spiritual praxis for advocacy and transformation through a model of leadership founded epistemologically on a system of non-violence.

In considering this drastic divergence in thought from a paradigm of physical discipline and retaliation to one of a peaceful demonstration of reflection and respect we begin with a framework of spiritual leadership. From this framework we move into a description of the metaphor of *satyagraha* as a means of leading schools and modeling meditative behavior for all—students, staff, and all stakeholders. Next we draw from the truthful speech of Gandhi, MLK, and Nelson Mandela—each with their own radical take on creating counternarratives to violence through non-violence and resistance. These counternarratives form four principal themes that require some degree of contemplation: truthful speech and teaching, authenticity of

leadership, reality of experience as education, and goodness as advocacy and activism for social justice, equity and care. Before concluding, we look at scholar–practitioners as *Satyagrahi*—practitioners of “truth-holding.”

A Framework of Spiritual Leadership

Houston and Sokolow (2006) propose their own 8-fold path to enlightened leadership. Their eight principles are intention, attention, unique gifts and talents, gratitude, unique life lessons, holistic perspective, openness, and trust. We believe that integral to an insistence on truth are elements of all of these principles, but especially a leadership approach that embraces democratic openness, holistic and holographic perspectives, and trustworthiness. Houston and Sokolow affirm that

Spirituality can be seen in countless ways, but perhaps, it can best be expressed as each human beings personal relationship with the Divine. Spirituality connects you with the divine energy. This is an energy that can help you to grow and evolve into better and better versions of yourself. . . . Cumulatively, it is the energy that has the power to transform our world and truly make it better for us all. (p. xxiii)

Satyagraha, literally “truth holding” or “insistence on truth,” was for Gandhi a spiritual force of peaceful resistance. For Gandhi and the people of India under British rule it was a means of altering the world. To speak of satyagraha is to consider ways in which leaders maintain peace in times of strong resistance and great transformative change. We situate this same spiritual worldview at the crossroads of divinity and diversity, turning a critical lens on how democratic leadership in education may possibly hold the potential to create spaces for accessibility and acceptance, community and collaboration, innovation and integrity, and moral literacy coupled with emotional, economic, and ecological resilience. Ultimately, a divine-inspired understanding of educational environments as democratic spaces in which diversity and differences are acknowledged, allowed, and accepted stands counter to the privileged elitist and status quo conceptions of longstanding educational models and state-mandated systems of assessment and accountability.

Considering the tensions caused by diversity in democracy in *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, Palmer (2011) explores some practical and relevant ways to engage our differences and expand our civic and civil capacity. He suggests embracing a spiritual counterclaim that would encourage educational leaders to “know how to hold conflict inwardly in a manner that coverts into creativity, allowing it to pull them open to new ideas, new courses of action, and each other” (p. 15). Likewise we propose a spiritual democratic leadership, grounded on ethics, values, and morality has no need of a legislated liability that imposes measures that are punitive and counterintuitive to authentic learning, critical thinking, and problem solving in P16 learning. Satyagraha as a metaphor of leadership does not seek the truth, it *insists* upon the truth. The “truth”—*sat*—that satyagraha mandates is founded on an enduring and essential, virtuous and valued spirituality. To the ancients, it was Brahman. In other words, it is Universal. Satyagraha echoes the sentiment of Freire’s (2005) *conscientização*—a critical consciousness for repairing the injustices in the world (Lowery, 2015).

With this conceptual framework underpinning our line of inquiry, we attempt to speak to the idea of satyagraha as a concept and a metaphor for a critical spiritual leadership empowered

to counter aggressive thinking and violent acting. From this we develop a connection of Gandhi with Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela, providing through this connection a basis for resisting violence as a means of teaching and leading for non-violence. Consideration is given to truthful speech and teaching through authenticity and creating democratic spaces through social justice and care, to existence and reality in experience through educational endeavors that teach and model embracing and “reading the world,” and to goodness as advocacy and activism for resisting and provocative peacefulness, devotion to emancipation, and service as community. Finally, we offer a model of the scholar-practitioner educational leader as a *satyagrahi* dedicated to holding or preserving truth and participating in advocacy for social justice, equity, and care.

***Satyagraha* as Metaphor of Leadership**

Gandhi’s work in India can be viewed from many different perspectives. However, any examination of the relevance of leadership of Gandhi’s work should question, what was Gandhi’s driving force? As with the story of the Buddha, Mahatma already had a comfortable life. He had been educated abroad. He had practiced law successfully. Why did he not take the path that other ordinary individuals would have taken? The argumentative response to the question could be *the moral inner drive of Gandhi for abolishing the immoral social, economic, and political architecture of India*. We posit that this same drive can help to empower educational leaders to model and teach others—students, teachers, parents, and colleagues—the same moral selflessness, sacrifice, courage, and commitment.

Translated, *satyagraha* implies existing through a truth on which an individual politely insists. Braatz (2014) defines *satyagraha* as “a method of nonviolent conflict resolution that approaches conflicts as opportunities to reduce violence of all types and also as opportunities for transformation of all parties involved” (p. 106). It is derived from the Sanskrit root meaning “insisting for truth” or “the moral truth.” Gandhi’s resistance to violence was a non-violent act, grounded in the concept of “holding firmly to the truth” and allowing such an insistence on truth to become for him a “truthforce.”

The Salt March (or Dandi March) is in many ways an active manifestation of Gandhi’s teaching, concerned with holding firmly to the truth of non-violent. This notion serves as a metaphorical representation of leadership for social and ecological justice, activism for equity and equality, advocacy for caring about and caring for students as children, emerging adults, and adult learners, ethical decision-making and morally imaginative problem solving. We further explore this metaphorical structure through the persons and sayings of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson “Madiba” Mandela.

Mahatma, MLK, and Madiba

Reflection on Gandhi’s *satyagraha* leadership, which inspired MLK in the U.S., Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and many others, requires reflection on what Nix (2014) put forth in the following questions: What were the claims about the moral architecture of Gandhi’s circumstances (i.e. the field of practice)? What were the flaws or distorted logics behind his claims (i.e. the assumptions or presumptions)? Why and how should people, following Gandhi’s model, question or present a counterclaim about the structure/design of the state of things in their circumstances (i.e. the architecture of politics, problems of the public, and asymmetrical systems in schooling)?

Also we must consider, how can modeling such strategies impact our stakeholders? Can the exemplars of teaching with truthful speech and authentic decision-making impact those in our surroundings and inspire them to act likewise? Will the violence learned through the examples of some be overcome by the non-violence offered by others? In other words, does the truthforce presented in Gandhi's Salt March offer an adequate metaphor for a leadership of peace through non-violent examples?

Quite possibly the Mahatma would have viewed his counter claims as moral propositions. However, perhaps *satyagraha* was and arguably still is the best way of eradicating immoral architectures in socio-political settings (which for us is the educational environment). Gandhi stated, "[T]his much I can say with assurance, as a result of all my experiments, that a perfect vision of Truth can only follow a complete realization of *ahimsa*" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol.11, p. 752).

Pava (2011) stated, "Most moral criticism is only partially heard and usually misunderstood" (p.100). Educators and community leaders, embracing their spiritual self, combat and contest immoral, inauthentic, and insincere claims in education today. These spiritual beings—*Satyagrahi*—carry the weapon of Satyagraha in an endeavor to disturb, deconstruct, and tear down the immoral architectures bound up in status quo educational systems, in order to reconstruct a new moral system. In this sense, Satyagraha is a moral action. It is the praxis of moral critique (Nix, 2014) and critical consciousness (Freire, 2005).

Satyagraha, as Gandhi, MLK, and Mandela put into practice, now inspires scholar-practitioners to be the *Satyagrahi* in education as spiritual leaders. In this work, we present this in four actions that modern educational leaders engaging in scholarly practice can embrace: 1) truthful speech and teaching, 2) authenticity of leadership, 3) existence and reality in education (or in other words, reality of one's existence as education), and 4) goodness as activism and advocacy for social justice, equity, and care. Together these form the basis of the work of the scholar-practitioner as *satyagrahi* engaged in a march against violence in her or his schools. First, we look at truthful speech and teaching and examples from Gandhi, MLK, and Mandela.

Truthful Speech and Teaching

For Gandhi the act of truthful speech and teaching (critical aspects to *satyagraha*) was not separate from non-violent praxis (*ahimsa*). Humanity has lost its hold on the truth that speaking peace to others is speaking peace to us ourselves. We have become divided creatures—separated from our own spiritual identities. If all humans are created in the divine image, to harm another is to harm oneself. How we behave toward humanity speaks to our understanding of moral duty as an educational leader. In many ways, both literally and figuratively, truthfulness was God and therefore humanity is truth. Implicated in this axiom is the deep spiritual dimension of *satyagraha* leadership. As the Mahatma (1968b) stated,

One cannot reach truth by untruthfulness. Truthful conduct alone can reach Truth. Are not Non-violence and Truth twins? The answer is an emphatic 'No'. Non-violence is embedded in Truth and vice versa. Hence has it been said that they are faces of the same coin. (p. 112)

According to Gandhi, praxis of *satyagraha* could only be achieved through a way of daily living or everyday doing. Truth and non-violence do not represent a dyad or binary. Instead each is

dependent on the other—of, for, and by the other. Satyagraha emerges as a routine collaboration of our authentic selves with the world around us—the community, the stakeholders, the nation, the environment. Represented for the educational leader is an incontrovertible integrity in his or her daily dealings with stakeholders (a resistance to reacting, a commitment to responding through reflection).

Schools are places of community and characteristic of the society in which they are situated, public places with public problems. Anger, frustration, instinctive response, confusion are natural and normal human characteristics in such settings. Recognizing this, school leaders must exude a peacefulness in their words and their deeds that surpasses policy and politics, that overcomes underlying issues of frustration and anger, that counters ill intentions and unfounded prejudices. According to Gandhi's teaching in *The Voice of Truth*, educational leaders must understand that . . .

The very first step in non-violence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving-kindness. Honesty, they say in English, is the best policy. But in terms of non-violence, it is not mere policy. Policies may and do change. Non-violence is an unchangeable creed. It has to be pursued in face of violence raging around you. (p. 127)

Satyagraha, for Gandhi, held a transformational and liberatory aspect in its educative process:

The outward freedom that we shall attain will only be in exact proportion to the inner freedom to which we may have grown at any given moment. And if this is the correct view of freedom, our chief energy must be concentrated on achieving reform from within (Gandhi, in Narayan, 1995, vol. VI, p. 441).

By this direct connection of truthful speech and teaching to the notion of freedom and reform, Gandhi was embracing the idea that the articulation of vision and mission of one's cause could be articulated through more than words, that a leader's theory and practice could manifest in meaningfully symbolic modeling engaged in throughout the day. For example, Gandhi's resistance and non-violent activism was manifested in the symbol of wearing *khadi*, a handspun Indian textile. In Mahatma's words:

Therefore I consider it a sin to wear foreign cloth. . . . Economics that hurt the well-being of a nation are immoral and therefore sinful. . . . On the knowledge of my sin bursting upon me, I must consign the foreign garments to the flames and thus purify myself, and thenceforth rest content with the rough khadi made by my neighbours. . . . I venture to suggest to the Poet that the clothes I ask him to burn must be and are his. . . . (Gandhiin Bhattacharya, 2008, p. 90).

For the scholar-practitioner educational leader, the khadi (and later the *dhoti*) metaphorically states her or his association to the context in which practice is analyzed and applied. The statement is one of humility and integrity that stand in an unambiguous contrast to violence and microaggressions in schools. This same humility and integrity can be seen in the model of leadership represented by MLK.

As an educational leader in his own right, Martin Luther King, Jr. consistently conveyed messages of hope for his followers. In his commitment he modeled nonviolent actions that inspired others to act peacefully even against the desire to react out of “justifiable” anger and frustration. According to Walker (2007), after King’s home was bombed, the spiritual leader addressed to his supporters and affirmed,

If you have weapons, take them home; if you do not have them, please do not seek to get them. We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence. We must meet violence with nonviolence. . . . We must meet hate with love. Remember, if I am stopped, this movement will not stop, because God is with the movement. (p. 216)

While many individuals could have understandably turned to violent acts to rage against injustice, to seek revenge and retaliation, King, Jr. instead called for authentic peaceful resistance—*satyagraha* leadership.

Nelson Mandela an activist, who earlier in his life viewed violence as a defensible approach to resisting injustice, presented his own exemplar of non-violence. In Doeden’s (2014) account of Mandela’s trial, he writes,

Mandela looked out at the courtroom. A group of white onlookers sat before him. His black supporters, forced to sit apart from the whites, were off to the side. He addressed the court, sharing his vision for South Africa:

During my lifetime, I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunity. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die. (p. 8)

Madiba’s words echoed those of the Mahatma’s in *Gandhi*, “They may torture my body, break my bones even kill me. Then they have my dead body not my obedience” (Attenborough, 1982).

Authenticity of Leadership

For so-called scholars including us, the *agraha* (the insistence or the “holding onto”) has to be lived. According to Braman (2000) . . .

. . . the question of the constitution of authentic human existence is a question of a moral ideal that ought to be taken seriously because the meaning of authenticity has shaped, and continues to shape, our understanding of what it means to be human. (p. 224)

Freire (1970) suggested that critical awareness, praxis, and struggle are synonyms (p. 51). Freire wrote, liberation from oppressive forces can only be accomplished “by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 51). This connection of one’s personal praxis in the struggle of *satyagraha* in our postmodern context can be seen in Pava’s (2011) *Jewish Ethics in a Post-Madoff World*:

It is true that we are products of our own culture and society, but it is also true that culture and society are accountable to the individual no matter how unique or idiosyncratic we may be. Every voice counts and every voice is crucial. In speaking from our own perspectives, inside our own histories, and experiences, each of us possesses an irreplaceable and infinitely valuable point of view. You are the only one with your exact set of values, desires, goals, and skills. *You* are the only one that has lived *your* life, experienced *your* experiences, and seen and heard what *you* have seen and heard. As the great philosopher Immanuel Kant noted you are not only a means to the ends of others you an end unto yourself. (p. 93)

If this passage is true, it is the work of the educational leader to respect and represent the multidisciplinary of our contemporary context. This means not only *holding* onto truth, as some personal reality, but *insisting* on the truth of our collective and democratic experience. To understand the complexities that will surface in such work requires that leaders routinely and rigorously engage in scholarship that informs and practice, and stepping back to examine practice in a way that illuminates scholarship. Otherwise the practice becomes commonplace and taken for granted. Educational dilemmas such as school violence are met with an artificial or perfunctory deliberation lacking ethics sensitivity, ethical reasoning, and moral imagination (i.e. moral literacy) (Tuana, 2007). Decision-making becomes careless, loses its authentic status as an act of leadership and fails as a model of *satyagraha*.

Existence/Reality in Experience

In April of 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. (1994) uttered the words, “Now we’re going to march again, and we’ve got to march again, in order to put the issue where it is supposed to be” (p. 9). These words imply a current and continuous struggle—a march that was (and is) ongoing. Additionally, “the march” indicates a means “to put the issue where it is supposed to be.” Inferred is not merely a method of “setting things right,” but also indicates a work that “brings things to light.” Underlying these words is a leader’s realization that the problems that exist and the reality of one’s struggles are embedded in our independent and collective experiences.

As Fletcher (2013) acknowledged,

People lead authentically moral lives when they reflect their individuality in their actions while also recognizing their potential and their limitations as agents existing in a relational context. Aware that their social relationships and interactions help define their identities, relationally authentic people create life projects that simultaneously support their individuality while complementing, if not supporting, others’ flourishing projects. (p. 84)

Regarding Mandela’s own model of existence and reality as an experience of truthholding, Derrida (1987) wrote,

What is obvious right away is that Mandel’s political experience or passion can never be separated from a theoretical reflection: about history, culture, and above all jurisprudence. An unremitting analysis enlightens the rationality of his acts, his

demonstrations, his speeches, his strategy. Even before being constrained to withdraw from the world into prison, and during a quarter of a century of incarceration, he has been acting endlessly and giving a direction to the struggle. Mandela has always been, like all the greatest politicians, a man of reflection. . . . (p. 14)

For these exemplars, existence and reality as education was a matter of being in the world, embracing our place in the world, and employing our moral literacy to read the world. When it comes to Gandhi the major practice comes to leading the grassroots by converting yourself morally and authentically to accept the challenge of standing (i.e. *being*) for social justice. The model of both King and Mandela—an archetypal model of *satyagraha* seen in the work of Gandhi—is in the manner that they used their states of affairs, their existences, their struggles as a means of teaching others, of holding firmly to truth, of demonstrating a dedication to peace in the middle of the reality of turmoil.

If for Dewey purposeful experience was education, for the satyagraha leader reality and existence are education. By being and being in the world, we are learners. When we fail to recognize our state as learner we lose our identities to greed, anger, hatred, fear. When we fail to appreciate our existence and be conscious of the realities that make up our world we fall victim to ignorance and become morally illiterate. The satyagraha leader sees existence and reality in experience and the experience in education. Such a leader sees the potential of modeling a way of living, the demonstration of peaceful resistance to oppression and injustice, as a means not only of being in and reading the world but also as a way of educating others. To be a Satyagrahi is to teach others non-violence.

Goodness as Advocacy/Activism

Gandhi, King, and Mandela stood for truth as a way of education, advocating for an activism against status quo through passive resistance through education. Although their lives evolved very differently they exhibited a common devotion to emancipation and empathy. Fighting injustice by voluntarily submitting the self to suffering—suffering as pathos/passion—compassion as passion for and with others each worked toward their goal with unadulterated determination. As Gandhi has been quoted, “Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.”

In satyagraha leadership, advocacy and activism is a form of service and service manifests as an essential aspect of community. If we do not start a community event as scholar-practitioners, if we do not step out from our comfort zone and dissolve the status quo, we fail to hold the truth in true sense. As MLK proclaimed,

I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I would like you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I’m happy tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. (Carson, 1991, p. 419).

King’s words, “. . . as a people. . .,” speaks to his advocacy for his work to ensure the rights of his associates in the civil rights movement was the goal—satyagraha is not an individual goal or an individualistic work. It is a work for the community, for the collective reality of all human beings. Similarly, the advocacy and activism of educational leaders are not

for personal glory or fame, but such societal engagement works for the good of the community as a service for social justice and care. As well this is or should be an aim of democracy.

Palmer (2011) advocates the following for leaders:

- To listen to each other openly and without fear, learning much we have in common despite our differences;
- To deepen our empathy for the alien “other” as we enter imaginatively into the experiences of people whose lives are radically unlike our own;
- To hold what we believe and know with conviction and be willing to listen openly to other viewpoints, changing our minds if needed;
- To see out alternative facts and explanations whenever we find reason to doubt our own truth claims or the claims made by others, thus becoming better informed;
- To probe, question, explore, and engage in dialogue, developing a fuller, more three-dimensional view of reality in the process;
- To enter the conflicted arena of politics, able to hold the dynamics of that complex force field in ways that unite the civic community and empower us to hold government accountable to the will of the people; [and]
- To welcome opportunities to participate in collective problem solving and decision making. . . . (p. 15)

Palmer’s recommendations elucidate the intense power of satyagraha leadership. As scholar–practitioners the satyagrahi seeks ways of exemplifying these tenets in their study and in their practice, they serve as fundamentals of thinking and doing, they frame the theoretical and the pragmatic provinces of their lifeworlds.

Scholar-Practitioners as *Satyagrahi*

In a rather intriguing article, “The Satyagraha of John Brown,” Braatz (2014) wrestles with the intents and actions of activist and abolitionist John Brown. While Brown’s violence does not align with our philosophy non-violent modeling in leadership or Gandhi’s peaceful resistance, Braatz’s article reveals some profound and relevant observations about *satyagraha*. Braatz states,

For Gandhi, Truth meant *ahimsa* (without harm or coercion), and universal Truth is God. Put another way, the interconnectedness of all living things is ultimate reality. A *satyagrahi* is a person committed to Truth, both as a goal (the integration of all humankind) and a means to that goal (non-harming). In A.J. Muste’s perfect phrase, “There is no way to peace—peace is the way.” Satyagraha—persistence in Truth—is a way of life, one that rejects all forms of violence, but not one that ignores conflict. (p. 105)

Informed leaders are not so presumptuous to think that conflict can be ignored or even avoided. However, conflict in the mind of a leader engaged in scholarly practice does not equate anger or violence. While frustration is normal and being passionate about one’s cause is hopeful, scholar-practitioners as *satyagrahi* embrace a divine or righteous indignation—one that is not personal but centers on issues of justice and fair treatment of others. This outrage may be passionate but it is patient; it certainly may even be intense but it is never irrational. As spiritual leaders there is a warrior mindset without the need for war. An adversary is seen not as an

enemy but as a democratic voice and a particular need—a need that may be uninformed or formed out of ignorance, one that may be instinctive and irrational—that should be heard and considered as a human thought.

Then it is the obligation of the leader to “resist” unawareness and animosity with peace and patience and to embrace a moral autonomy that demonstrates selflessness and courage. Being an educational leader may in fact insinuate bravely being the educator of everyman—especially of those who are oppressed by hatred and threatened by harm. This means manifesting and modeling a sense of self-reliance. Braatz (2014) avers,

To break away from dehumanizing relations, a satyagrahi seeks to develop power over Self, or *autonomy*. This includes fearlessness, to neutralize threat power; self-reliance, to eliminate vulnerability to exchange power; and self-respect, to rise above the power of persuasion. Autonomy works on either side of a bad relation: power over Self rather than *submission to Other*, and power over Self rather than *power over Other*. (p. 105)

Moral courage and moral selflessness when linked with moral autonomy frames the practice of the educational leader with the spiritual willingness and strength to confront (that is, to resist nonviolently) the violence of terroristic threats in their communities, bullying in cyberspace, and microaggressions in the classrooms. Such activism is can take shape as a pedagogy of leadership—a leadership pedagogy deeply seeded in spiritual criticality and a Freirean liberation theology and the resistance of oppression through liberatory dialogue (Stenberg, 2006). Once more turning to Braatz’s (2014) article, we can better understand the scholar-practitioner educational leader’s moral obligation in this way:

By holding firmly to Truth, by being willing to absorb suffering but refusing to inflict it, by showing respect and concern for Other, Self employs *integrative power*. Simply put, integrative power is the ability to attract empathy, and the surest method is by expressing empathy. . . . Integrative power means appealing to the universal human need for interconnection, hoping this will inspire others to move in a similar direction. Gandhi called it “soul force.” (p. 106)

Critical spiritual leaders engaged in *satyagraha* are compassionate advocates and activists who model thinking and doing, inquiry and action, scholarship and practice that work against violent tendencies in their students, community members, and other constituents. They stand over and against, in contrast to practices and policies, standards and strategies that do harm to and dehumanize students as individuals. Opposition to physical violence notwithstanding, scholar-practitioners have an obligation to oppose other “nonphysical” forms of aggression and assault as well. In K12 this may take the form of misuse and overuse of testing, microaggressions in the classroom, unjust discretionary disciplinary placement of marginalized students, or failure to create inclusive environments on campuses or in classrooms. At the post-secondary levels of learning, examples may present as practices that hinder students’ academic progress based on assumptions, the profiling of international or immigrant that are rooted in fear and xenophobia, or the coercion of students into transactional interactions that benefit administration or faculty over the students educational experience.

As well, turning a blind eye is a veritable contradiction to holding firmly to the truth of *satyagraha* leadership. Administrators and educators that avoid dealing with situations due to

fear of public perception, as an act of social protectionism, or because it creates an uncomfortable circumstance are similarly guilty of violence. Complicity is a non-truth and therefore negates peacefulness or any non-violent philosophies. By ignoring or refusing to confront issues of violence is not conducive to *satyagraha* and is in fact no less an act of violence itself.

In a sense, the scholar-practitioner's obligation is one of resistance—resisting temptation to not act, resisting the status quo of protectionism, breaking out of the molds of prejudice and presumptions. Satyagraha leadership is not conforming to the oppressive force of societal norms that disenfranchise others—whether in deed or by denial or disregard. In the motion picture, *Gandhi* (1982), the Mahatma delivers his speech of resistance:

I am asking you to fight, to fight against their anger, not to provoke it. We will not strike a blow. But we will receive them, and through our pain we will make them see their injustice. And it will hurt as all fighting hurts. But we cannot lose. We cannot. (Attenborough, 1982)

Resistance is neither “inactivity” nor “movement.” To fight with satyagraha leadership not physical violence but spiritual strength—to accept physical pain and swallow personal pride that others may move forward toward liberation. It is not provocation but peaceful provocation through resisting—resisting both violence and status quo.

In our original proposition of *satyagraha* we conceptualize a stance not determined to confront or counter violence but to create a spiritual ecology in which violence cannot thrive—in which anger and aggression cannot exist. Confronting and countering are movements that name violence—that define and identify it. Confronting and countering work to limit violence that already subsists as a reality within a given system. Fomenting peaceful and non-violent systems is the aim of educational leadership as *satyagraha*.

Conclusion

We do not naively assert that cultivating peacefulness through education or exercising non-violent activism that advocates for environments of truthfulness and goodness will completely eradicate societal ills in schools and other educational settings. On one hand, changing habituated thinking or cultural ways of doing does not happen overnight; no change is immediate. On the other, K12 schools and institutions of higher education account for only one of many agents of socialization in society. Issues of economic asymmetry and symptoms of poverty will always create frustrations and feelings of desperation. Unjust social and ecological tensions will persist in corrupting the hopes of our fellow human beings and polluting the air we breathe and the earth that nourishes us. Mental health concerns resulting from faulty, failed, or compromised healthcare programs will neglect too many citizens who could benefit from social services. Neoliberal promises and market-driven greed will remain a constant obstacle to collective and social viewpoints of a caring and equitable society. Racism and fundamentalist bigotry will still be spewed forth from divisive ideological factions, publishing and propagating misunderstandings and pseudo-interpretations of spiritual tenets and holy writings. Likely these factors will continue to contribute to fear, hate, ignorance, racism, profiling, war, murders, and terrorism.

Instead we call for an ideal for scholar-practitioner educational leadership that supports

social justice, equity, and care in the development of schools as democratic spaces. We aver that inherent to our program of scholarly practice is a “spiritual” and therefore very “human” understanding of the lived experiences and storied narratives of others and ourselves. Therefore, we recommend a scholarship and a praxis that is founded on the following:

- Embracing moral imagination to make ethical decisions in leadership (Jenlink, 2014);
- Generating an atmosphere of gratitude, fostering a holistic perspective in educational settings, and exhibiting trust and a mindset of openness; (Houston & Sokolow, 2006)
- Exercising a praxis of critical consciousness grounded in faith and hope (Freire, 2005); and
- Endeavors that serve to repair the world by countering fear and hatred with hope and faith. (Lowery, 2014)

Within this construct of scholar–practitionership we have acknowledged numerous parallels of Gandhi’s notion of *satyagraha*. As such we view *satyagraha* as a fitting metaphor for scholar–practitioner leadership in educational settings. Only non-violence and peaceful resistance against acts of hate and anger can counter and ultimately re-culture the societal ills that foster the modern calamities we suffer as a people, that have claimed the lives and the innocence of our children and students.

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Towards Project-Based Learning: An Autoethnographic Account of One Assistant Professor's Struggle to be a Better Teacher

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This paper outlines an approach to incorporating project-based learning (PBL) in a master's level educational administration diversity course. It draws on the qualitative methodology of autoethnography, and details the characteristics of this technique. In alignment with that method, the author discusses his positionality and engages in self-reflexivity throughout. Further, the paper provides a conceptual definition of PBL, examines theories recently used in its study, highlights the struggles of the professor-researcher in his first time teaching the course, and describes the path he took to improve his instruction and his students' learning. Mistakes made and lessons learned are shared as well. Providing a space for self-reflexivity and autoethnographic research, particularly for new faculty members, is recommended.

Project-based learning (PBL) is an instructional approach rooted in collaboration, student-led discussion, and real-world problem solving (Bender, 2012). Its emphasis on resolving practical problems has been routinely connected to John Dewey's *pattern of inquiry* model (Allison et al., 2015; Lam, Cheng, & Ma, 2009; Wurdinger, Haar, Hugg, & Bezon, 2007). Therein, learners are presented with an everyday quandary, plan possible solutions, test them, and reflect—not unlike the scientific method. Others have asserted that PBL predates Dewey, and traces back to the architectural and engineering schools of 17th century Italy and 18th century America, respectively (Fallik, Eylon, & Rosenfeld, 2008). Whatever its roots, its primary purpose is to make learning active, thereby engaging students in a manner beyond traditional lecture-discussion formats (Wirkala & Kuhn, 2011).

Several pathways to PBL are illustrated in the empirical and practitioner-oriented literature. However, the consensus is that it consists of (a) introducing a topic, (b) engaging in initial research, (c) creating an initial presentation and artifacts, (d) returning to the research, (e) revising the presentation and artifacts, and (f) presenting and publishing the findings (Bender, 2012; Parker et al., 2013; Wurdinger & Rudolph, 2009). Most of these components require student collaboration and are student-led, with the teacher's role shifting towards that of a facilitator whose principal responsibility is to provide mini-lessons and offer guidance.

In effect, PBL seeks to disrupt the “extraordinary sameness” of school (Goodlad, 1984; as cited in Parker et al., 2013, p. 1430). As such, standard lecturing-questioning-quizzing formats are eschewed (Wurdinger et al., 2007; Wurdinger & Rudolph, 2009). In their place, students are tasked with reading primary source documents, holding small group discussions, and engaging in self-directed learning that results in the creation and presentation of a project. At first glance, it may appear that PBL is an instructional approach that offers minimal guidance for learners and that may be detrimental to students without sufficient background knowledge. However, this is incorrect, as effective PBL is often meticulously designed. It requires considerable teacher planning and coordination, and includes a wealth of supports and scaffolds (e.g., rubrics, directions, prompts, exemplars, mini-lessons, tutorials, project feedback) (Wirkala & Kuhn, 2011).

The purpose of this paper is to outline an approach to incorporating PBL in a master's level educational administration diversity course. Because it is intentionally positional and self-reflexive, this work draws on autoethnography (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), which will be discussed further below. An overview of relevant theories, the researcher's course, and the project—the student-planned and facilitated Equity in Education Conference—will also be discussed. A critical reflexive stance will be taken throughout the paper. By doing so, it is hoped that the fallibility and incompleteness of the author's thoughts and experiences will be made transparent.

Relevant Theories

In addition to Dewey's pattern of inquiry framework (see above), other theoretical lenses have been applied to the study of PBL. Inquiry-based learning was the guiding frame in Parker et al. (2013) investigation of the effects of PBL instruction in high school advanced placement courses. Arguing that PBL is inherently inquiry-based, they hypothesized that such an approach would better develop students' conceptual knowledge, lead to increased engagement, and result in similar or better AP test scores. This was because of the emphasis on student collaboration, problem posing, problem solving, engaged discussion, debate, reflection and revision, and the

creation of authentic products in inquiry-based approaches. Inquiry-based products are considered authentic because they are akin to those that might be created by professionals in the real world, by teams of engineers, scientists, members of congress, or architects, for example. Ultimately, they found that students who received PBL instruction did better not just on AP exams, but also on the Complex Scenario Test, which tested the depth and quality of students' thinking in real world scenarios.

Two studies of Chinese teachers' motivation to implement PBL (Lam, Cheng, & Choy, 2010) and students' motivation to engage in PBL tasks (Lam et al., 2009) borrowed from self-determination theory. The theory posits that motivation is a function of one's personal mastery, autonomy, and connectedness to others and to attachments. With this lens, the researchers' surmised that if schools provide explicit supports in these areas, it could lead to a positive effect on teacher and student motivation. This was bolstered by their path analysis and structural equation modeling results, which showed that as perceptions of supports increased, so did students' motivation and teachers' commitment to PBL pedagogy. Moreover, the studies acknowledged a host of similar motivation theories that are steeped in social-cognition and that lay the groundwork for PBL instruction: Atkinson's (1964) value-expectancy theory, Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy, Weiner's (1986) attribution theory, and Dweck's (1986) goal orientation theory.

Moving from motivation to health and wellness, Allison et al. (2015) loosely tied PBL to "interdisciplinary approaches to learning" (as well as to Dewey's pattern of inquiry), and vaguely defined such approaches as emanating from "liberal and constructivist philosophies" (pp. 207-208). Their goal was to determine if PBL instruction in an outdoors environment proffered tangible health benefits. The authors conducted a series of interviews with 40 high school students who participated in a 12-day active lifestyle PBL program. The students completed PBL tasks that were based on a myriad of physical activities, such as archaeology, sailing, mountain climbing, mountain biking, and bird watching. Interviews suggested that students grew more confident, had greater self-esteem, developed meaningful relationships with other students, developed coping skills, and became more responsible.

There are clear connections between the above theories, which were used in studies where children were often the unit of analysis, and andragogy, or adult learning theory. Given the focus herein on adult graduate students—some with careers that have spanned decades—Knowles' (1973) four assumptions of andragogy also informed this work. In short, Knowles argued that adult learners differ from children in that they (a) tend to be more self-directed; (b) are more experienced, and have identities that are tied to their experiences; (c) have a social role-based readiness to learn; and (d) have a problem-centered orientation to learning. Because of their shared emphases on inquiry, authentic problem-solving, creating authentic products, engaged discussion, and self-directed learning, andragogy seems highly compatible with PBL. The section below provides an overview of autoethnographic methodology. Though this paper is not a pure empirical autoethnography, it is based on some of its components.

Autoethnography as a Qualitative Methodological Approach

Figure 1 illustrates some common characteristics of autoethnographical research (Burdell & Swadener, 1999; Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012; Jackson & Mazzei, 2008; Wall, 2006). As indicated above, addressing one's positionality and subjectivity, the limitations therein, and self-reflexivity are among the principal characteristics of the approach. It is important to

distinguish self-reflexivity from self-reflection (Cunliffe & Jun, 2005; Kempster & Iszatt-White, 2012). Self-reflection entails thinking about one's experience with some phenomena (e.g., events, texts, outcomes) to aid sense making. When teachers ask students to *consider* their papers in light of some criteria (e.g., a rubric), this creates opportunities for self-reflection. (For rigorous empirical investigations into the benefits of self-reflection on learners, see McDonald and Boud, 2003; and Sato, Wei, and Darling-Hammond, 2008.)

Self-reflexivity, however, may be thought of as an advanced stage of self-reflection (Quinn, 2013; Ryan, 2014). It entails thinking about oneself *in relation to* some phenomena in order to better understand the phenomena, oneself, its impact on the self, and how one has (or has not) changed as a consequence (Kempster & Iszatt-White, 2012). It is a more complex and action-oriented process than self-reflection—one that requires a questioning of “the ends, means, and relevance” of one's practice (Cunliffe & Jun, 2005, p. 227). Whereas the goal of self-reflection is to better understand something, the goal of self-reflexivity is to question its underlying assumptions, as well as our own, in order to see and think anew. When teachers ask students to *evaluate, critique* and *revise* their papers in light of some criteria, this creates opportunities for self-reflexivity. Methodologically, there are ample opportunities to apply self-reflexivity in research: when designing and conducting a research project, when analyzing data, and when writing and presenting findings (Valandra, 2012).

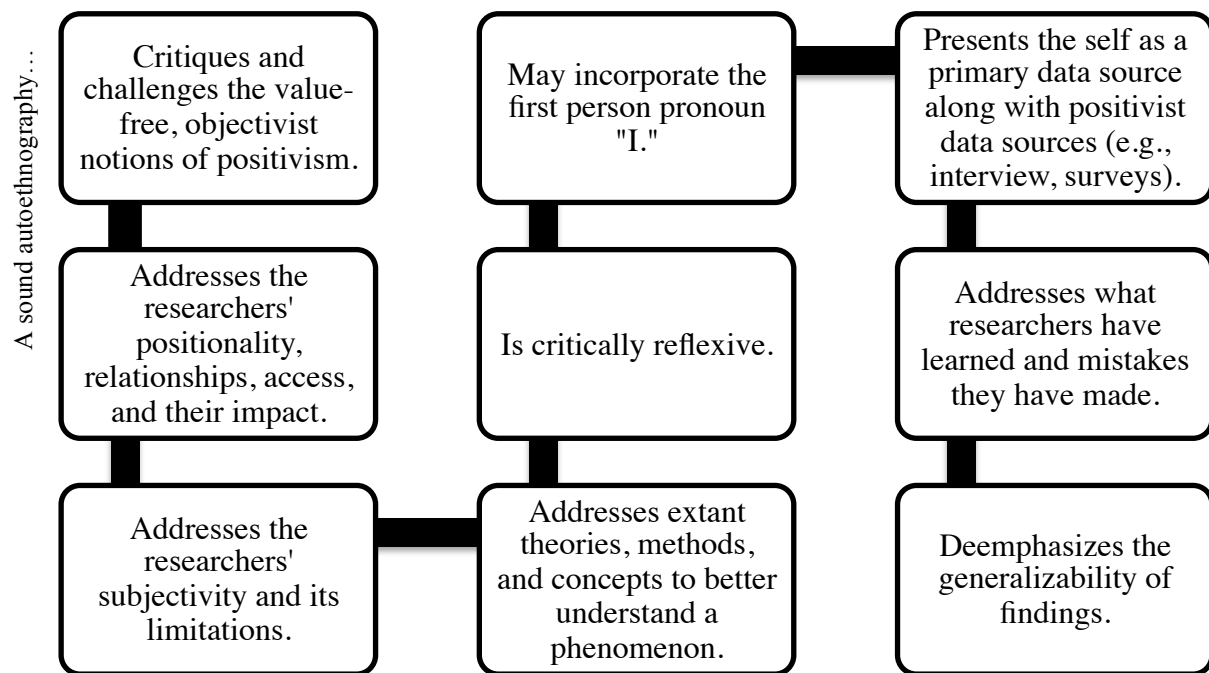


Figure 1. Characteristics of Autoethnographies

Positionality, another key construct in autoethnographic research, involves the full disclosure of the researcher's position and positioning (Anthias, 2002). Its purpose is to explicate one's subjectivity, and acknowledge the interplay of factors (e.g., social, cultural, economic, political, educational) that influences researchers and subjects (Relles, 2016). Implicit here is the postmodern notion that research is rarely value-free (Cunliffe & Jun, 2005; Hughes et

al., 2012; Wall, 2006). Indeed, exposing one's positionality is to recognize the multidirectional nature of research—an autoethnographer is simultaneously the “subject, object, and researcher” (Deutsch, 2004, p. 889). Methodological approaches for addressing positionality might include the use of reflexive journals, providing interview subjects with verbal and written statements of the researcher’s bias, and revealing the author’s subjectivity throughout manuscript drafts (Relles, 2016).

In this article, considerable efforts will be made to engage in self-reflexivity and to disclose the author’s positionality. To be clear, the direction of this work is more self-reflexive than traditionally empirical by positivist definitions. As such, the author is the primary data source, though students’ unedited course evaluation and reflection feedback will be drawn on at times. Consequently, the “findings” herein may not be widely generalizable. Still, it is hoped that this account provides a useful frame for other junior faculty members who are similarly wrestling with their own positionalities, students, course prep, and contexts. In keeping with established autoethnographic practice (e.g., Hughes et al., 2012; Jackson & Mazzei, 2008; Wall, 2006), the first person pronoun, “I,” will be subsequently used throughout.

EADM 607 and How I Bombed Teaching it the First Time

During the 2015 winter quarter I taught EADM 607, a class for the educational administration masters degree and credential at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). This was during my first year as an assistant professor, and this particular class was held at our satellite campus in Palm Desert. With just six students, the class size was very small. Two of the students were male, two were African American, one was Latina, and three students were White. They all taught at schools in the Coachella Valley, in districts where student poverty rates are above 90% and where 25-50% of the students are English-learners.

The course surveys the influence of society, culture, politics, and diversity on K-12 schools. One of the foremost objectives of the course is to help students become *culturally proficient*, which can be defined as the ability to serve and interact effectively with a variety of diverse groups (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, & Terrell, 2009). Cultural proficiency implies forming alliances with and advocating for underserved students, as well as ongoing, independent education of self and others. It is often presented on the farthest right end of a continuum, with cultural destructiveness, incapacity, blindness, pre-competence, and competence preceding it. Sadly, I am pretty confident that I did not meet this objective as the course instructor.

For starters, I had no idea how to organize the course or its goals. It seemed (and still does) like a massive undertaking—getting a group of people to be culturally proficient in 10 class sessions. My undergraduate training was in sociology and ethnic studies, and I spent years as a school district program specialist designing and delivering professional development on meeting the needs of culturally diverse learners. As a researcher, my chief area of interest is equity for underserved students, particularly African American males. Though this may seem to provide a strong foundation, it did not provide immediate direction on where to begin. Should we focus on the history of inequity in American schools, strategies of effective urban teachers, or on problems plaguing low-income students and the notion of cultural capital? What about gender issues and Title IX, or the discrimination LGBT students routinely face? Which specific laws and policies should we give attention? And how would I even assess their cultural proficiency?

With no coherent, unifying theory of action, I capitulated. My response was to simply cover—not necessarily teach—a somewhat neutralized, antiseptic concept of equity that would be largely agreeable and inoffensive. I went about this fairly haphazardly, with no connections to larger concepts or towards a particular point. So, in the second week of class, we took a fieldtrip to see the movie *Selma*, which had just been released. That provided, I thought, a safe historical overview of racial inequality. After that we perused state and district achievement gap data. In another session I gave a meandering lecture on terms and theories like *equality*, *equity*, *deficit deprivation*, *establishment bias*, and *structural inequality*. Weeks later, I discussed the concepts of male and White privilege, as presented by Wellesley professor Peggy McIntosh nearly 30 years prior. Because half of my students were White, some were male, and I was not sure how the content would be received, I set out to tread lightly, daring not to offend or seem accusatory.

Disconnected, even dispirited lectures on general concepts ostensibly related to the course were fine, in my mind, because they were merely a side dish, not the main entrée. My real goal was for students to read current research relating to underserved students and write, in a 10-week quarter, a “mini-literature review.” By reading empirical, peer-reviewed research and having to write a synthesis, students would become “masters” of a given topic. And because they were free to choose from a list of several topics (e.g., culturally responsive teaching, disproportionate student discipline, closing achievement gaps), I also believed they would be more authentically engaged. But this was a fool’s errand. Though I created several supports to help scaffold the project (e.g., rubrics, exemplars, directions), I did not fully appreciate (a) the general difficulty of the task, and (b) the real time needed to develop the range of skills necessary for writing a quality 8-10 page literature review.

Several data points made this evident. There were the audible groans and facial contortions students made whenever we talked about the literature review, the considerable amount of time I was spending each week delivering lessons on research writing instead of on school culture and diversity, and, of course, students’ course evaluations. Despite many students remarking that they enjoyed the class and learned a lot, others were critical of the literature review project and the time spent there. One student wrote flatly, “I think that the course should be focused on policies and not on how to write a literature review.” In agreement, another wrote, “Wish course had focused more on content and less on how to write Lit Review.” Somewhat more gently, one student said, “I would have only liked to receive more ‘how to’ activities and ideas on building culture awareness in the school.”

After initially blaming the students, the quarter system, and other irrelevant factors, I finally looked inward. If there was anyone to blame, it was me. Though several students had written very worthy papers, the task was too time-consuming, and could have been better aligned to a clear, coherent theory of action for the course. Frustrated, I scrapped the assignment. I held firm to my belief that masters students working to become school administrators should know how to read and understand research. Doing so would strengthen their knowledge of research-based practices, and would equip them to make evidence-based decisions. However, I had no positive strategy for achieving this goal, and had just spent a quarter swimming upstream, staring into the faces of annoyed, unhappy students. I wrestled with this duality for about a year.

A Chance for Redemption: Planning to Teach EADM 607 Again

Later that year I was informed that I would be teaching EADM 607 again, this time in the

2016 winter quarter, again in Palm Desert. Ambivalently, I was grateful for the opportunity to redeem myself, yet fearful that I would once more struggle to help my students meaningfully connect theory and practice while deeply expanding their knowledge of school diversity. After several enlightening conversations with senior faculty members, Drs. Todd Jennings and Louie Rodriguez both pointed me toward the concept of *intersectionality*.

Intersectionality was developed out of feminist theory, and was architected by brilliant women like Patricia Hill Collins (1986), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) and others. It affirms the varied identities of women of color as women, people of color, and as people who may be lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. The theory supports and creates a safe space for a range of other identities as well (e.g., religious, economic, political, ability). Moreover, it shines a light on the structural experiences of women of color who are attempting to navigate various social systems, the political experiences of women of color who are attempting to navigate the politics of race and the politics of gender, and the representational experiences of women of color who are routinely devalued by popular representations of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991).

Eureka! Organizing course content through the lens of intersectionality gave me a coherent framework for teaching and learning. This led to two epiphanies. First, the goal of developing cultural proficiency might be attainable after all if we closely connect it to this frame. To do so, I would have to tie course readings and all of the relevant themes (e.g., race, racism, racial disparities, class, inequality, cultural capital, gender, gender discrimination, gendered approaches to leadership, sexual identity, the bullying and victimization of LGBT students, the importance of gay-straight alliances, applicable state and federal laws) to students' evolving cultural proficiency (figure 2). Second, by establishing intersectionality as our underlying theory of action, and cultural proficiency as our goal, I could use an andragogy-informed version of PBL as an instructional approach to help us get there (figure 3). This would allow me to maintain a focus on developing students' research skills while respecting their experience, supporting more self-directed learning, and ensuring their authentic engagement.

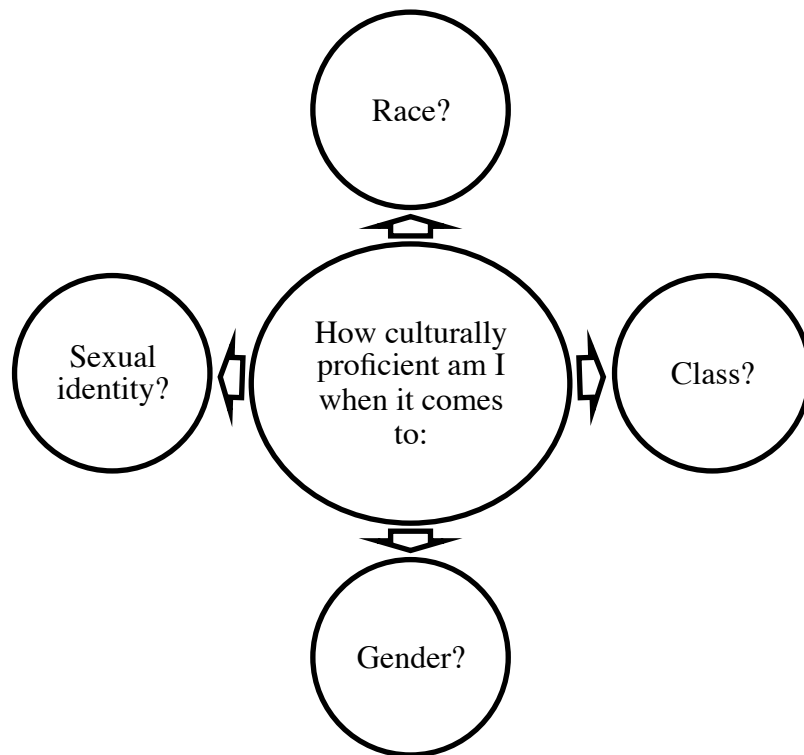


Figure 2. An Intersectional Approach to Assessing Cultural Proficiency

With a much more coherent plan in place, I excitedly went to work organizing the components. Backwards mapping the course, I first designed the summative assessment, the Equity in Education Conference (EEC). This conference would be wholly student-facilitated and student-led. It would require students to collaborate, engage in research, create a presentation and artifacts, and present their findings publicly. This was my PBL component. Believing that the work would be most efficient if students worked in three subcommittees—a management subcommittee, a marketing subcommittee, and a speakers subcommittee—I drafted a set of tasks and rubrics for each group. The task lists specifically outlined which jobs needed to be completed and their due dates. For example, by the third class session the marketing subcommittee had to have a draft of the EEC flyer. By the fourth class session the management subcommittee had to complete and submit a grant application to the University Diversity Committee. This subcommittee would use any funds granted to pay for refreshments, parking and room rental, and any other costs. The speakers subcommittee was expected to have the keynote speaker secured by session five. Given that the students in this group were also the workshop facilitators, much of their time was spent developing presentations. The task lists also included the names, email addresses, and phone numbers of helpful faculty and staff (e.g., the associate dean, parking services manager, technology specialists). The rubrics delineated the expectations for each task and how students would be graded on them. Each task earned a score between *Missing* (0 points), *Beginning* (2 points), *Strong* (3 points) and *Superior* (4 points). The

EEC would be held on the final class session, and all subcommittees were expected to submit a 2-3 page post-conference reflective paper afterwards.

Next, I worked on reorganizing the curriculum. The first time I taught this class I assigned just one reading—a quantitative study on the Black-White gap in student suspension rates, which we used as a sort of primer on reading and understanding research. This time, I spent days poring over peer-reviewed studies, book chapters, policies, and video clips. My goal was to identify those well suited for learning about race, class, gender, sexual identity, urban schools, and as much as possible, their intersections. Eventually, I settled on seven studies; two book chapters (one on race and one on class); two videos; Titles I, II, and IV of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (President Obama’s reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act); and several sections of the California Education Code (see figure 3 on the following page). In addition to these readings, students were required to choose a topic related to the course, use the CSUSB online library to download four empirical studies of their choosing, read, and outline them.

Instructionally, I planned a series of whole and small group mini-lessons. Whole group mini-lessons would focus on helping students understand larger concepts (e.g., intersectionality, cultural proficiency, privilege) and would be used to teach explicit skills (e.g., using Microsoft Excel to graph student data, reading and outlining research). Conversely, I planned to be much more of a participant and a learner in small group mini-lessons. With their subcommittee members and I, students would share their initial flyers, conference objectives, shopping lists for refreshments, grant applications, social media pages, press releases, and presentation drafts. In the small groups, I would occasionally ask clarifying questions and offer guidance only when asked.

To bolster our learning on the needs of LGBT students, I organized a panel discussion with local LGBT youth advocates during our seventh class session. This was as much for me as it was for my students. Though I am comfortable discussing and teaching about issues related to race, class, and gender, I have very little research-based knowledge of sexual identity issues. My goal was to be a participant and a learner here as well. After planning the instruction, smaller formative assessments were designed to scaffold the EEC and to help develop key PBL skills, like research, use of technology, and presentations. The class was organized and seemingly improved. Yet I still did not know if it would matter.

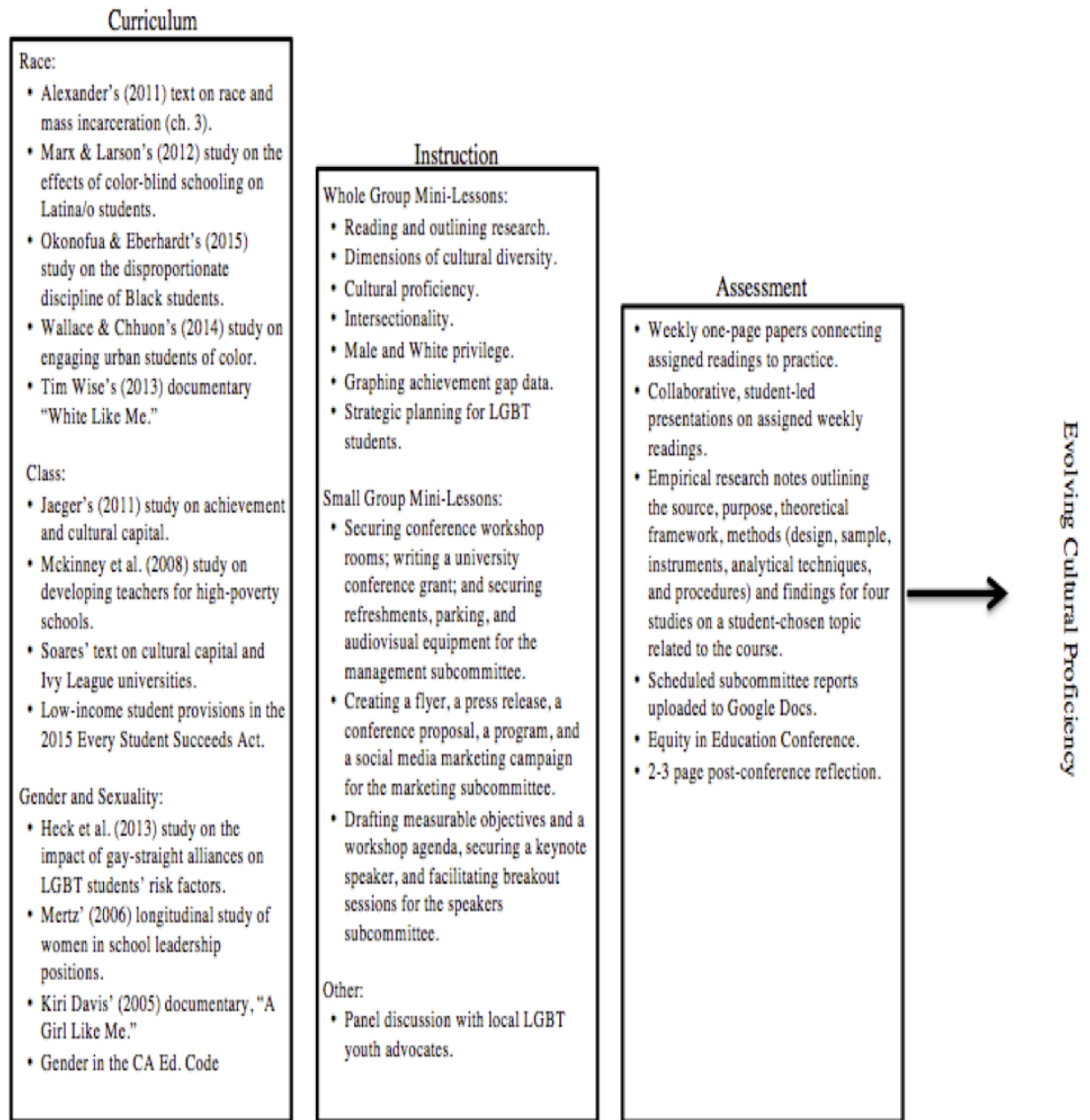


Figure 3. Intersectionality as a Theory for Organizing EADM 607 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Act II: My Second Time Teaching EADM 607

With 13 students the 2016 class was considerably larger than the one I taught the year before. Yet, it was also more diverse. Five of my students were males, six were Latina/o, one was Asian, six were White, five were English-learners, and almost all of them were first-generation college students. They taught in the same Coachella Valley districts as my students from 2015, and in schools that had a number of challenges.

On the first night of class, after some icebreakers and an introductory discussion of cultural proficiency, we reviewed the syllabus and the EEC assignment. I stated the objective, described the three subcommittees and their related tasks, and used the rubrics to clarify how students would be graded. Despite feeling confident in my preparation, I was concerned that students would not want to engage in such an extensive, laborious undertaking. After all, these are adult learners. They work full time jobs as teachers, counselors, and specialists. Many of them have families and some have been quick to tell me that they have children my age. What if they rebelled and complained en masse that the expectations were too great, or if they simply resisted organizing the conference? With no backup plan in place, I was entirely unprepared for a mutiny.

Thankfully, there was no uprising. Students quickly signed up for subcommittees and used the remaining time allotted to meet with their groups and begin planning. A few students did not hesitate to share their anxiety over the magnitude of the task—and they were probably speaking for many others who were not comfortable speaking out in our first session. However, their anxiety dissipated over the coming weeks. We repeatedly engaged in whole group mini-lessons that defined major concepts and ideas; small group discussions that allowed students to reflect, plan, and get clarification; and we were immersed in course content that increasingly underscored the need for a conference on better serving diverse students. The weekly readings helped provide a foundation for the completion of tasks, and for the conference generally. This was particularly true for the marketing subcommittee. As we read about and discussed issues of class or sexuality, for example, it was common to see related posts, resources, and websites shared on the EEC Facebook page.

Also helpful was the succession of small successes my students had along the way. The management subcommittee was able to secure grant funding for the conference, a feat that marked their first time writing a successful grant. They also collaborated effectively with university staff to secure rooms, parking, and equipment. The marketing subcommittee designed a creative and eye-catching flyer that was prominently displayed on the CSUSB marquee and website. They drafted a press release that was published in local newspapers, and used social media to reach hundreds of educators and community members. The speakers subcommittee landed an incredible keynote speaker. They also created presentations on social justice leadership, the disproportionate assignment of students of color to special education, and regional resources for low-income families. Their successes seemed to be contagious.

Whereas the literature review assignment evoked dread among my students in 2015, the 2016 EEC generated more energy, excitement, and enthusiasm with each passing week. The project took on a life of its own. Students continually amazed me with their creativity, problem solving, novel thinking, and commitment to each other. On their own, they often met before class, after class, and on weekends to ensure tasks were being completed—and this was in addition to the 30-60 minutes I was allotting for them to meet during each session. The experience was similar to what Knowles (1973) described when the Boston University graduate program in adult education was reorganized: “I was amazed at the difference in spirit with which the students entered problem-centered units in contrast to their feelings about subject-centered units” (p. 48). It appeared that my fears were unfounded. Not only were my students up to the task, they excelled, and were authentically engaged throughout.

More importantly, we did not have to dilute course content or forsake the teaching of other relevant, graduate-level skills. They candidly discussed issues of race and institutional racism as they saw it on their campuses and in their communities. Students talked openly about

the ongoing problems affecting English learners, students of color, low-income students, and LGBT students. Because of their experiences, clusters of students gravitated more strongly to some readings and course concepts (e.g., students who grew up poor could relate to the readings on low-income students, students of color related to the texts on race). Whenever this was evident, I attempted to use these instances as teachable moments. I repeatedly explained the concept of intersectionality, and the importance of using their particular lenses as entry points toward a better understanding of what our diverse K-12 students face. The readings and discussions were critical scaffolds in developing our cultural proficiency, mine included.

Table 1 outlines categories of descriptors that were used by students in their course evaluations. To create this table, I recursively read students' comments in their course evaluations, coded what appeared to be 19 categories, read them again, and recoded them into the 14 categories below (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Their feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Table 1

EADM 607 Winter 2016 Students' Evaluative Course Descriptors

| Descriptor Categories: Professor and Course | No. of References |
|--|-------------------|
| Engaging teaching and discussions | 9 |
| Contributed to student learning | 8 |
| Knowledgeable | 7 |
| Well-prepared and organized | 6 |
| Motivating and inspiring | 4 |
| High expectations | 3 |
| Helped me develop research skills | 2 |
| Grading was too subjective, or took too long | 2 |
| Supportive | 1 |
| Professional | 1 |
| Authentic personality | 1 |
| Lots of work | 1 |
| Discussions were too long | 1 |
| Didn't provide enough information | 1 |

My 13 students used terms like *variety of activities*, *great teaching style*, *good delivery*, and *great discussions* in nine different comments. In six distinct comments, students referred to the professor or course as *well prepared*, *well-organized*, and *clear* in terms of assignments and expectations. To this point, one student noted in the final reflection:

I appreciated the fact that the rigor of this class was high, but more importantly, I really benefited from the obtaining the sentence starters, paper exemplars, and detailed rubrics. Having all of these items on the first day of class allowed me to understand the expectations for each assignment. When I became confused or didn't understand an assignment, I referred to the rubric and examples for guidance.

Expounding on the skills gained by connecting research to practice, another student wrote:

Through the review the empirical research and through the analysis of relevant studies regarding the achievement gaps, cultural capital and social differences I can now make data-driven decisions to properly respond to cultural differences in a manner in which I would otherwise not be able to. I found great value in completing the argumentative papers because it helped me develop important skills in reading, researching and make connections between theory and practice. This course was the first time I really had a chance to look at scholarly studies from an informational aspect to implement in my practices at school. I teach in a high poverty school and have discussed with my administrators and grade level members the finding of some of the studies, specifically the ones on successful high-poverty schools and have recommend we implement some effective strategies for student achievement found in the studies.

As for the EEC, one student aptly captured what others shared in their reflections, and confirmed that the course goals had been met:

The event was a creative approach to having our cohort demonstrate proficiency for our class as a final project. The conference discussed topics about disadvantaged youth and shifting the focus in education from equality to equity. The disadvantages due to race, gender, class, and sexual identity impede the success and education of many students in the K-12 system, thus affecting their success in college and beyond... The process of organizing the event was a great opportunity for our cohort to work on team-building, collaboration, communication, and application of knowledge.

This lay in sharp contrast with how several students perceived the course in 2015.

On the other hand, there were two references across the 13 evaluations to grading being too subjective, or taking too long. One student recommended “adding numerical values to rubrics.” Given that the rubrics did indeed contain numerical values I was unclear how to interpret this at first. But after revisiting the assignment rubrics, I realized that numerical values were more clear for some projects (e.g., EEC subcommittee tasks) and less so for others (e.g. empirical research notes). Within this comment, the student also wrote, “Additional information should have been provided for the subcommittee.” Though the class feedback was primarily positive, the course was not at all perfect. This will be discussed further below.

Mistakes Made, Lessons Learned

The conference went off without a noticeable hitch. We had what appeared to be over 100 people in attendance, many of them were the high school pupils of my grad students. The Associate Dean, Dr. Doris Wilson, opened with warm, spirited welcoming remarks that set a good tone for the event. Our keynote speaker, Dr. Len Cooper, a local educator-turned-entrepreneur, gave an amazing speech—one that was off the cuff, because we told him his audience would be mostly adults, and it turned out to be mostly youth. He talked about the transformative, life-changing power of education, and when he was finished, he received a resounding ovation. Around this time, the students in the speakers subcommittee quietly slipped away to their assigned rooms so they could facilitate their workshops. Throughout the evening attendees, students, faculty and staff members remarked about how positive the event was.

Nevertheless, there were some glaring problems, and most of them had roots in my course planning, three months prior. For one, there was a lack of communication between subcommittees. Though students worked and communicated well within their subcommittees, I did not think to plan opportunities for them to talk across groups. There were times when, say, the management subcommittee needed to collaborate with the marketing subcommittee so they could use information in the press release for their grant, or when the marketing subcommittee needed guidance from the speakers subcommittee on the specifics of the workshops they were planning. Unfortunately, there was no express time during class meetings that was devoted exclusively to cross-group communication. I should have planned for this.

Another problem was the limited support and guidance I gave students in the speakers subcommittee. The work of the management and marketing groups was much more immediate and concrete, like having a conversation with Parking Services to secure event parking, or creating a flyer, or creating an event Facebook page. Consequently, it was easier to support and oversee their work. Students in the speakers subcommittee, on the other hand, were given most of the quarter to work on their conference workshop presentations. These were more fluid, and were expected to evolve as students read more research and learned more about course concepts. Additionally, they had no template to follow, or specific instructions other than having workshop objectives, knowing their content, and engaging the audience (which were on the rubric).

As a result, some students never got comfortable with their presentations and made drastic changes, even right before the conference. In hindsight, I should have made it more clear that students' presentations needed to be research-based and tied to their four empirical research outlines. I could have then scheduled benchmarks for presentation completion, like having a Power Point slide overviewing the topic by session three, a few slides detailing the problem and ways it has been studied by session six, slides outlining the research findings by session seven, and slides with recommendations for practice and policy by session nine. Beyond this, the conference would have run more smoothly had I assigned a designated master or mistress of ceremony. Though the event and the quarter were, by most accounts, a success, I see ways to improve both next time.

Conclusion

Project-based learning combines student collaboration, discussion, research, and presentation. Its goals are to authentically engage students and resolve real-world problems. By redesigning the EADM 607 course within the framework of intersectionality (Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 1991), I was able to use PBL to engage my students in a manner far greater than in the previous year. It should be noted, however, that there is one key recommendation for PBL instruction that I did not closely follow—allowing for student choice in the final project (Fallik et al., 2008; Lam et al., 2009). In many cases, either the teacher or the students develop a question that drives the project, and students have latitude to design projects that uniquely address and resolve the question. In contrast, I told students what the project would be on the first night of class, and I did not provide them with a specific driving question. Though it may be just a matter of preference and planning, there are some who would argue that student choice is essential to an effective PBL unit (Bender, 2012).

Clearly, my positionality had an impact on the PBL assignment as well. My position as the course instructor made it so that students would have to participate in the conference if they wanted to do well in the class. They were not participating purely by choice. In fact, this was

true of nearly every decision that was made regarding course content, instruction, and student assessment. As an African American male who was born in the United States, I also prioritized some curricular topics over others. For example, I assigned a study and showed a video that addressed the impact of racism on African American students, despite there being few African American students in the Coachella Valley. One student picked up on this, and wrote in the final reflection that it would have been helpful “to study the challenges migrant students face on a daily basis,” as well as “the obstacles undocumented students face,” especially because there are so many of them within the region. When I teach this class again I will absolutely revise the curriculum to incorporate research on migrant and undocumented students.

The autoethnographic approach taken herein allowed me to play both researcher and subject. It enabled and even pushed me to consistently employ a self-reflexive lens. Furthermore, it provided a unique opportunity to juxtapose untraditional data sources (e.g., the researchers’ memories, thoughts, reflections) alongside those that are more classically positivist (e.g., students’ written evaluations, coded by the researcher), interrogating them all as credible. Such exercises and forms of scholarship seem particularly useful for new professors. Simultaneously trying to navigate the academy, develop as a scholar, publish, engage in meaningful service, and, of course, be a good teacher, demands frequent bouts of reflection and self-reflexivity. Being granted the space for this important self-work can only improve the skill sets and long-term output of junior faculty members.

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Launching a Principal Preparation Program for High Needs Rural Schools

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This paper describes the first two years of planning and launching a full scholarship principal preparation program aimed at developing leaders to work in poor rural schools throughout Arkansas. The founding principles that guided the program are explored as well as how those principles were challenged and retained from the initial proposal through funding and implementation. Ultimately the program launched with \$1,954,129 in funding over a four year period and was able to remain innovative while still leading to traditional licensure, remaining consistent with NCATE standards, working within the bureaucratic requirements of a university course delivery model, and meeting the needs of participants and stakeholder in poor rural communities.

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The principal shortage is a national problem that is felt most deeply in the poorest and most geographically isolated corners of the country (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, & Foleno, 2001; Author, 2009; Pounder & Crow, 2005; Roza 2003; Whitaker 2001). Communities that struggle to attract outside talent also tend to have difficulties developing their own home-grown leadership pipelines (Author, 2009). However, our understanding of how candidates are placed and retained in their initial leadership positions indicate that graduates are most likely to be working in leadership positions more quickly if they work in rural areas (Bathon & Black, 2011). Those candidates that are tapped for future leadership positions are often offered limited opportunities to engage in deeply engaging and diverse internships as part of their pre-professional development (Author, 2009). Moreover, it is the depth of those internships and the strong working relationship with a supervising principal that most interns point to as the most valuable part of their internship experience (Geer, Anast-May, & Gurley, 2014). To address these obstacles to ameliorating the principal shortage the University of Arkansas created a pilot program aimed specifically at addressing the needs of poor rural communities.

In 2009 a large scale study of the principal shortage in Arkansas showed that candidate pools for the principalship are more than half what they were ten years ago (Author, 2009). Additionally, there has been a tremendous turnover rate among school leaders in the state. The most dramatic change is among middle school principals who showed an 80% turnover rate over a three year period. The initial draft of the proposal to fund the Principal Fellows Program at the University of Arkansas was drafted in response to the 2009 study on the principal shortage.

As candidate pools for the principalship are shrinking, the problem is exacerbated by number of candidates who are not qualified for the job. A closer look at the quality of candidate pools reveals that of the approximately fifteen applicants urban schools receive (on average), less than half (seven) met the minimum criteria to be considered for an interview. By comparison, close to five met the minimum criteria in rural districts. When superintendents were asked to consider the number of principals hired in the past three years that met all the criteria they were looking for in their search, schools in the Southeast region of the state responded that none of them did.

The sobering reality of the leadership crisis on our horizon is more critical when we consider the important role school principals play in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, promoting student achievement, and establishing a safe learning environment for children. Research consistently shows a positive connection between effective leadership and student test scores, teacher perceptions of working conditions, retention, school safety, and a variety of measures indicating positive school climate. The state of Arkansas needs more experienced and successful educators with outstanding leadership qualities who are willing to take on school leadership roles.

Purpose of Program

The Principal Fellows program was designed to improve upon current school leadership development efforts in and around the state of Arkansas by working closely with school districts to identify prospective leaders and create rich, meaningful and diverse internship experiences. What makes the Principal Fellows program unique even among the most creative, alternative leadership development programs is that it is built to be brought to scale and easily disseminated to existing leadership preparation programs. In other words, it is designed to be an evolution in how leadership preparation is done at its current institution rather than an alternative program

operating alongside a traditional leadership preparation program. Graduates of the Principal Fellows program will earn a traditional school administrators license and the program itself will be NCATE accredited.

The Principal Fellows program was designed to assist high-need local educational agencies (LEAs) in recruiting and training principals (including assistant principals) through such activities as:

- Building a curriculum that moves beyond the knowledge base of school leadership, and focuses on the skills and dispositions of highly effective leaders.
- Embeds the learning experience in a diverse and relevant internship practice - modifying the traditional three credit hour course based approach to meet the needs of working professionals.
- Providing financial support to aspiring new principals.
- Providing stipends and training to principals who mentor new principals.
- Encouraging partner districts to support more site based control.
- Implementing ongoing leadership development programs.
- Assisting school districts in the selection of prospective leaders who show great promise to succeed and persist in a school leadership role.
- Engaging in a rigorous program evaluation to identify best practice in the recruitment and retention of new principals.
- Offering fiscal incentives (scholarships) tied to future service commitments as leaders in persistently low achieving schools.

Preparing for Launch

To accomplish the primary launch goals of the Principal Fellows Program the University of Arkansas hired a staff that included an Executive Director and a Director of Outreach for the Principal Fellows Program whose primary functions were to cultivate Principal Fellows partnerships and program delivery. Among the earliest actions was to identify persistently low achieving, high-need schools as partners. This proved to be elusive at first even though the state offered several school communities that fit the criteria. The initial recruiting efforts were met with skepticism as one superintendent summed up by explaining that the last program that came through to “help” them trained their best teachers to become administrators, and then all of that local talent soon left for better paying jobs elsewhere. It was only after working together to better understand that this program was intended to be a partnership, not an intervention, and that the program’s primary goal was placing the graduates in local leadership positions that strong partnerships emerged.

As partnerships with school districts were forged, the directors began the important process of recruiting a cohort of students. This recruiting process focused not only on advertising the program directly to prospective students, but working closely with current school leaders to develop a process for identifying and encouraging talented educators to consider pursuing a leadership path. The initial proposal called for 20 new students each year to earn a state license in educational leadership through a hybrid-online delivery format offered by faculty at the University of Arkansas and adjunct instructors who were current practitioners.

Students and school districts were offered funding to support richer and more diverse internship experiences in several ways. One of the drawbacks of the traditional internship

experience is that it took place almost entirely in a teachers current school and there was little or no release time provided so it was squeezed into prep periods and time spent after the traditional instructional periods ended. To address that issue, resources to release internship students from their current school were provided so they may spend full days working on their internship in various school settings. Funds were also dedicated to recruit, train, and compensate mentor principals for supervising internships and to support graduates through ongoing mentoring in collaboration with the Arkansas Leadership Academy. Students were also provided with a full tuition scholarship titled the IMPACT Arkansas Fellowship.

Partnering with the Arkansas Leadership Academy

Initially the Arkansas Leadership Academy's Master Principal Program was enlisted as a resource to support the post-placement mentoring and pre-professional onsite supervision of principal candidates. However, as that relationship grew it became clear that the experience, established partners, and core curricular and pedagogical principles of the Arkansas Leadership Academy strengthened the entire program from recruitment through post-placement mentoring.

The Master Principal Program (MPP) was established by the 84th Arkansas General Assembly in the Second Extraordinary Session of 2003 and signed into law as Act 44 by the governor (An Act to Improve, 2004). Act 44 outlined the goals, target population, and financial incentives of the program which was developed and is administered by the Arkansas Leadership Academy (ALA). The rules and regulations for the program were subsequently promulgated by the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE). Because of the success of ALA with Individual, Team, Teacher, Principal, and Superintendent Institutes, state funds were awarded to the Academy to design and implement the MPP. Each Arkansas General Assembly since 2004 has funded the program.

The Master Principal Program is intended to improve principal leadership in Arkansas through professional development and by identifying Master Principals who will serve as role models and serve high-needs schools. The professional development offered by the Master Principal Program consists of three phases, or years, for a total of 10 multi-day residential setting professional development institutes, with work assignments between institutes for job-embedded application of learning. Three to four institutes occur in each of the one-year phases for a cohort of principals. The participants must submit evidence of implementation to proceed through this three-year, state funded, voluntary program. Since change occurs over time and implementation in diverse school settings requires flexibility, the three-year program may be completed within a six-year window.

The Master Principal Program, through the use of research and best practices, delivers innovative approaches which connect principals from across the state into professional learning communities, develop leadership skills, and impact learning for adults and students in Arkansas schools. It is a three-phased program built on five areas of leadership which improve school performance through expansion of the influence of effective leadership with each phase. Successful completion of the program and the evidence based evaluation process results in designated Master Principals who demonstrate leadership taken to scale in the performance areas and an upward trajectory in student achievement.

Legislators (An Act to Improve, 2004) established the Master Principal Program in response to the state's need for improved principal leadership and student achievement results. Now led by graduates of the Master Principal Program, ALA has over twenty years of experience and culture that has been experienced by over 10,000 institute participants. Evidence

of success and a strong reputation of effective professional development practices led to the Academy's influence in leadership development programs in other states and organizations (ALA, 2006).

The ALA Partner Organizations, which include fifteen universities, nine professional associations, fifteen educational cooperatives, the Arkansas Departments of Education, and many others, create support for the Academy and participants in numerous ways from learning activities to political influence. Both Arkansas public schools and the Partner Organizations respond to and influence the context within which all flourish or fail. From its inception, the ALA was designed to drive positive systems change. For schools, that includes changes in the leadership of the school board, superintendent, central office staff, principals, teachers, students, and local stakeholders. The Partners represent the external systems context. As the Partners change their own internal leadership practices, they conversely influence the context for the other Partners and the ALA.

Through a systems approach to leadership development and organizational change, Partners of the Arkansas Leadership Academy represent a diverse group of stakeholders interested in improving school leadership and student success in Arkansas' schools as well as the leadership capacity of their own organization. Both Arkansas public schools and the Partner Organizations respond to and influence the context within which all flourish or fail. From its inception, the ALA was designed to drive positive systems change. For schools, that includes changes in the leadership of the school board, superintendent, central office staff, principals, teachers, students, and local stakeholders. The Partners represent the external systems context. As the Partners change their own internal leadership practices, they conversely influence the context for the other Partners and the ALA.

The research-based curriculum and constructivist approach to learning create an environment for professional growth that is unlike others the principals have encountered. The Master Principal Program Rubrics clearly describe what leadership looks like along the way toward proven successful practices in five performance areas. As a quick-response organization, the Academy and its programs are innovative and adaptive to the changing needs of educational leaders. The five performance areas of the Master Principal Program that drive the curriculum are:

1. Creating and Living the Mission, Vision and Beliefs
2. Leading and Managing Change
3. Developing Deep Knowledge about Teaching and Learning
4. Building and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships
5. Building and Sustaining Accountability Systems

These performance areas capture the essence of what the ALA has identified as best practices in educational leadership. The curriculum activities are designed to build the knowledge and skills of the principals in each of the performance areas through a spiral curriculum. Implementation through a systems approach to change takes the principal and the school community closer to scale in each of the areas.

Staffing

The Principal Fellows model includes four primary groups: The University of Arkansas, the Arkansas Leadership Academy, the school system partners, and the Principal Fellows staff. The staff was initially designed to include three primary people: The Executive Director, the Director of Outreach and the Director of Support. The Executive Director oversees the entire operation and manages the relationships between the various stakeholder groups.

The Director of Outreach for the Principal Fellows Program develops, communicates, invests others in, and manages the delivery of the internship and cohort training, and the ongoing professional development program for new and existing Principal Fellows. This position was designed to be centrally based in the Delta Region of Arkansas so they would be closer the communities this program will serve. The Director of Outreach for the Principal Fellows Program ensures the success of the fellows by fostering close working relationships with the University of Arkansas Principal Fellow leadership team. Responsibilities include traveling to and observing fellows' internship experiences; providing detailed oral and written feedback; communicating with principals, mentors, and other stakeholders regarding fellows' progress; and assisting fellows with long-term goal-setting and monitoring progress towards goals. This individual is also called on to assist with the recruitment and selection process of the fellows.

The Director of Outreach's primary responsibilities include:

- Developing strategies and calendars for accountability in curriculum design, logistics, culture building, recruitment and the application process, and any outside research or public communication needs of the program.
- Overseeing the development of the curriculum (including design or managing the outsourcing of qualified designers).
- Managing the acquisition and proper distribution of resources including training materials and schedules for mentors, fellows, lecturers, workshop facilitators, and other jobs.
- Managing internship and training school sites and resources.
- Proposing and/or verifying all documents, deadlines, schedules, and tasks regarding the planning and facilitation of the training.
- Serve as the go-to and sign-off person for issues in managing and facilitating the training.

The Director of Support is responsible for monitoring the fellow training and individual progress of fellows who receive the IMPACT Arkansas Fellowship. Primary responsibilities include traveling to and observing fellows' professional development; providing detailed oral and written feedback on lesson delivery, classroom observations, and professional development delivery; communicating with professors, Arkansas Leadership Academy facilitators, principals, and other stakeholders regarding fellows' progress; and assisting fellows in implementation of research proposals. The Director of Support may be called on to assist in recruitment, selection, and professional development.

The Four-Stage Student Selection Process

It was determined early on in the process that a heavy emphasis should be placed on the candidate selection process. It was believed that this early investment in recruiting and screening would not only yield a more talented pool of applicants, but also help ensure the program was attracting a strong commitment to work with high needs rural schools after graduation.

Stage One

Applicants were asked to fill out an online application and respond to each of the following questions (200-500 words each).

- Why (do you want/did you choose) to be in school leadership?
- What are two vital traits of an effective leader?
- What teacher practice has the biggest impact on student achievement?

Applicants were then asked to create a 5 to 8 minute video of themselves teaching a lesson and send that as part of their initial application packet. Coaches applying to the program prepared a 5 to 8 minute video of a lesson observation debrief.

The final piece of the initial application was to have their principal send a letter of recommendation to the Director of Outreach for the Principal Fellows Program. This was required not only because it was believed that the principal would be in a strong position to speak to their readiness to pursue a path to leadership, but also because we wanted to ensure buy-in at an early stage so the candidate had solicited and received the principal's support.

Stage Two

Candidates selected to continue to stage two are scheduled for a phone call centered around feedback of the supplied video of a lesson and more conversation regarding leader mindsets. This interview may be conducted by the executive director, the director of outreach, or a University of Arkansas professor. During this one hour interview candidates are told they can expect to discuss their educational experience, philosophies, and aspirations. They discuss their reflections regarding their video feedback and their Myers Briggs results. The Myers Briggs is completed via an electronic link that is provided to the candidates upon transitioning to stage two of the application. They also discuss any questions they may have about the program or the process. Prior to the phone call they receive the following message:

We will be accepting 12-20 candidates for the first IMPACT Arkansas Fellowship cohort. Those accepted will participate in a fifteen month development program. The development will be delivered by professors at the University of Arkansas' College of Education and Health Professions and our partners at the Arkansas Leadership Academy. Fellows will take part in project-based course delivery for many of the credit hours required for the M.ED. in Educational Leadership. We're also working in close collaboration with the Arkansas Leadership Academy. The ALA has developed outstanding and innovative training programs for teacher-leaders and administrators. Fellows will support each other throughout the process and will be supported by IMPACT staff as they implement what they're learning at their respective campuses. This

is a brand new approach to leadership development in the state of Arkansas. We're very excited to pioneer this new, hands-on approach.

Stage Three

This stage features in depth reference checks and a school visit from IMPACT staff and partners at the Arkansas Leadership Academy and the University of Arkansas' Educational Leadership professors. These visits serve two purposes. The first is to get to know the candidates better as educators, and to see the roles they play on their campuses. Staff spend time talking with students, colleagues, and administrators. This will also give the staff a chance to observe candidates in action as educators. The second is to begin to get a picture of how the program can fit in supporting their respective schools. Staff sets up meeting time with administrators about existing systems for staff development, collaboration, and community involvement. This will inform what kinds of projects and proposals might best benefit their respective schools.

Stage Four

The final stage of the application process brings all the finalists together at the same time. The finalists are divided into groups of approximately six each. Each group is given a scenario of a struggling school and asked to come up with short and long term solutions. The group then presents their solutions to a panel made up of faculty, program staff, and experienced educational leaders. Half of the panel observes the brainstorm process, and the candidates presents to the other half of the panel. After both portions of the group exercise are completed the candidates take turns meeting the joint panel for individual interviews. Before calling the candidates in for their individual interviews, the panel meets to compare notes regarding how the candidate conducted him or herself during the collaboration and presentation portions of the day. At the end of this process the panel discusses the entire process and makes recommendations for admission to the program.

Measuring Success

To evaluate the program and its progress towards program goals an outside evaluation team will measure student performance and school climate over the tenure of each Principal Fellow. Standardized tests and End of Course (EOC) scores will be collected to measure student performance and a school climate assessment will be customized for evaluating the impact of the fellows from the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI).

To determine if principal fellows are as effective or more effective in increasing student achievement as leaders with similar students in similar districts, the evaluation team will use a "virtual twin" method. Using this analytic strategy, they can conduct an "apples-to-apples" comparison of the students in schools with Principal Fellows and similar students in similar schools from across the state. The quality of this particular type of statistical analysis is dependent on the quality of the comparison groups used. They will carefully develop a comparison group of students from the school districts with similar demographics and then match each student in a school led by a Principal Fellow to a specific peer student (or a virtual twin) with similar or identical starting test scores and similar demographic characteristics from the comparison group. The comparison student will be in the same grade, with the same test scores, free and reduced lunch status (FRL), race and/or ethnicity, and gender.

Sample Outputs:

1. **Conduct Training:** The Principal Fellows program will train 20 Fellows each year, for a total of 60 fellows, to work as school building leaders in high need schools, as recorded in program admissions, enrollment and advising reports.
2. **Curriculum and licensure:** By the admission of the first cohort, the Principal Fellows program graduates will qualify for traditional state building level licensure and the program will be eligible to be NCATE and ELCC accredited as documented by the dean's office in the College of Education and Health Professions.
3. **Provide Pre-Service Mentoring:** By admission of the first cohort, the Principal Fellows program will train experienced and successful school leaders to provide at least 45 hours of mentoring to each Principal Fellow during the training program as documented by internship logs.
4. **Provide In-Service Mentoring:** Upon completion of the first cohort, the Principal Fellows (in collaboration with the Arkansas Leadership Academy) will train experienced and successful school leaders to provide at least 45 hours of mentoring to each Principal Fellow during their first year as a school leader as documented by mentoring logs.
5. **Recruitment:** In advance of admission of each cohort the Principal Fellows program will engage school district leaders throughout the region to join in a rigorous, targeted recruitment and selection process to seek out expert teachers with leadership potential and a commitment to leading in a high need school system as evidenced by the number and engagement of partner districts who nominate potential candidates.
6. **Meaningful internship:** Prior to the start of each cohort's program of study the Principal Fellows program will develop (in partnership with exemplary school systems) a well designed and supervised leadership internship that will serve as a primary delivery mechanism for all training and allow candidates to engage in leadership responsibilities for substantial periods of time under the tutelage of expert veterans as demonstrated by the program curriculum.

Sample Outcomes:

1. **Academic Value-Added:** Student performance will improve after the first year in both reading and math relative to what we would predict it would have given the prior year test score and the background characteristics of the students.
2. **Continuing School Improvement:** Student performance will improve continually over the tenure of the principal as measured by the value added student achievement in reading and math after three full academic years of leadership. The school in each year under the principal's leadership will meet all state Annual Measurable Outcomes (AMO's).
3. **School Climate:** Each academic year, at least 90% of teachers, parents and students will report moderate to high levels of satisfaction on measures of safety, communication and

positive working/learning conditions as reported in a school climate survey conducted by an external evaluator.

4. Principal Fellows, upon completion of their fellowship, will serve in schools where 70% or more of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch according to demographic reporting provided by the Arkansas Department of Education.

Looking Ahead to Program Sustainability

After the conclusion of the grant period, there are several options that will be explored to ensure program's sustainability. The first option would be for the organization to seek a multi-million dollar endowment (from multiple partners) that would fund the program for an indefinite period of time. This would be a long-term solution that would allow the Principal Fellows program to continue to place leaders in districts as long as they are needed. With the anticipated success of the first four years, we hope for the state of Arkansas to also express interest in the program. Similar to programs like the North Carolina Principal Fellows Program, the Arkansas Principal Fellows program can petition the state of Arkansas to fully fund the program within the Department of Education. If the state does not cover the full balance of the expenses of the program, we may ask that the founding funders or other organizations contribute to fill any gaps in funding. Ultimately though there are components of this pilot program that can have an impact on how school leaders are prepared even if future funding is not available. The opportunity to experiment with new methods of identifying talent and cultivating leadership succession pipelines in rural communities holds great promise for future practice. Moreover, this program will have developed four years of experience in how to more thoughtfully integrate meaningful internship experiences through the curriculum rather than as an add-on to a traditional university preparation program.

Roadblocks to Success

There are two major risks to the success of the program once it is launched:

- Lack of support from school districts
- Low impact of leaders

The Principal Fellows program relies on school districts working with us during three key phases of the project:

1. Identifying potential future leaders
2. Supporting fellows as they take substantial release time from their current duties for their internship experience.
3. Hosting a rich, high quality internship experience.

There is little direct incentive for rural districts to support the Principal Fellows program because, unlike efforts like this in large urban districts, the graduates of the Principal Fellows program are likely to continue their career as educational leaders elsewhere. Fostering a sense of community among partner districts and publicly recognizing their contributions to this effort will

help develop a culture of shared goals and responsibility among districts to promote the development of the next generation of high impact school leaders.

The ultimate goal of the program is not just to address the shortage of high quality leadership candidates in high needs districts, but to develop and support the ongoing development of leaders that will have a strong positive impact on student learning and school climate. While the greatest impact of leadership on learning happens over time as a leader has the opportunity to understand and address the strengths and weaknesses of their staff there are also opportunities early on in a leaders tenure to impact learning and climate. The Arkansas Leadership Academy will be a critical partner in supporting Principal Fellows graduates during their first two years on the job.

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System-level Instructional Leadership – A District-level Leadership Case: Implementing PLCs in Schools

This instructional module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



Doug Archbald
University of Delaware

Objective of the Case - *The is a large volume of theoretical and “how to” literature on professional learning communities (PLCs), but little documenting the challenges of implementation and even less on the challenges of system-wide implementation of PLCs. This case is about the role of the central office in initiating and supporting system level change to improve student learning through the implementation of PLCs. Change of this nature and scope raises many difficult challenges – decisions affecting resources, staff relationships, union policies, school scheduling, curriculum, professional development, and instruction – and these are challenges and decisions that prospective school and district leaders need to understand and anticipate in order to lead successful change.*

This case is intended to deepen learners’ understanding of the theory and research behind PLCs and the complexities and challenges of implementing change at the district level. The case is also intended to promote skill development: in communications (writing, speaking, tailoring messages to specific audiences), strategic planning (clarifying objectives, analyzing options and consequences, allocating resources, budgeting, adapting to stakeholders’ interests, establishing timelines), instructional leadership (professional development, curriculum improvement, best practices for instruction) and human relations (empathy, supportiveness, self-efficacy).

The case has three main portions: (1) theory and research background; (2) the case narrative concerning the initiative to implement PLCs in Marshall County School District; (3) and the list of discussion questions and tasks to extend and apply the learning from the case. The case could be covered in three class sessions: the first session, discussing the background readings and understanding the theory and research related to system level leadership and implementing instructional change; the second, discussing the case narrative and the end-of-case discussion questions; and the third, presenting and debriefing on tasks selected for more in-depth assignments to complete.

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Synopsis of PLC Theory

The concept of professional learning communities (PLCs) in schools stems from theory and research dating to the 20s when organizational psychology emerged as a field of study. One question central to this field is, “how does organizational structure affect productivity?” For instance, where in the hierarchy should decisions be made? What kinds of decisions should be made at which levels? And who (or what entity) should make the decisions? A related question is, “how does organizational structure relate to organizational culture (beliefs and attitudes)?” People are interested in these questions because there are so many different ways an organization can be structured, because structure affects culture (and vice versa), and because both structure and culture are drivers of productivity.

This case explores challenges of changing organizational structure and culture at the building level with a central office-driven initiative – PLCs. PLCs are viewed as a means to change structure and culture to improve productivity – student achievement. Since advocacy of any solution presumes a problem, it is helpful to consider how the problem is viewed.

Advocacy of PLCs reflects a perspective that schools have a problem of structure and culture: too much teacher isolation and too little collaboration (Conley & Cooper, 2013; Cookson, 2005; Davidson & Dwyer, 2014; DuFour, 2011; Mirel & Goldin, 2012; Moir, Barlin, Gless, & Miles, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Rogers & Bubinski, 2002; Samuelson-Wardrip, Gomez, & Gomez, 2015). What is structural isolation? It means that most teachers work by themselves. They have little contact with other adults at work. A typical teacher is by himself or herself almost all day long. “Too often in the history of schools, teachers have worked alone with discrete groups of students in separate classrooms with little time to engage in dialogue with colleagues about teaching practice” (Samuelson-Waldrip et al., 2014 p. 448). A recent Gates foundation study conducted Scholastic indicates teachers are involved in collaborating with peers for only about 3% of their workday. Workers in other professions, by contrast, spend much more time engaged in teamwork, joint planning, or other forms of collaborative interaction. It is not just the limited time that teachers spend with other adults that is striking; it is also that much of the time that is spent with other adults, isn’t really “teamwork” or “joint planning” or other types of interaction we would think of as professional collaboration. It is likely to be during breaks, lunch duty, or in the teachers’ lounge.

DuFour (2011, p. 57) a former superintendent and leading proponent of PLCs, writes:

Teachers work in isolation from each other. They regard their classrooms as their personal domains, have little access to the ideas or strategies of their colleagues, and favor being left alone rather than engaging with their colleagues or principals. Their professional practice is hidden in a veil of privacy and personal autonomy and is not a topic for collective discussion or analysis. Their schools provide no infrastructure to support collaboration or continuous improvement, and in fact the very structure of their schools acts as a powerful force for preserving the status quo. This situation will not change by simply encouraging teachers to collaborate and will require embedding professional collaboration in the routine practice of the school.

One barrier to collaboration is architectural: schools’ “egg carton” structure. Each teacher is sheltered within four classroom walls for most of the day. Compounding this are

master schedules that do not make collaboration easy to accomplish. Think of other organizations and the relatively easy opportunities they provide for meetings and informal discussions. In business, law offices, government agencies, or university departments for instance, people meet frequently and often on short notice to discuss ideas and get group work done. In schools, with each teacher tethered to the classroom and unable to leave, it is hard to have these kinds of meetings, collaborations, and impromptu discussions.

Also, there is the matter of collective bargaining contracts. These agreements always stipulate prescribed working hours. A typical contract will specify the length of the work day and the allowed minutes per week for planning, preparation, and after school meetings. If, for instance, a bargaining agreement specifies 250 minutes per week for planning, preparation, and meetings, and of this 250 minutes, teachers spend 90% of their time doing individual prep and catch up work, this leaves little time for professional collaboration.

Norms of teacher autonomy also play a role, first spotlighted in Lortie's (1975) seminal study, *Schoolteacher*. This study and many others since have documented compellingly the paradox of staff cultures that protect teachers' dominion over the classroom, but at the same time can foster detachment from the school community as a whole (Conley & Cooper, 2013; Davidson & Dwyer, 2014). "Professional autonomy" and "academic freedom" are principles of pride and self-efficacy for teachers, ideals often celebrated in stories and part of professional lore (e.g., Jaime Escalante).¹ Autonomy for teachers is certainly important, but can be counter-productive when used to justify detachment from organizational priorities.

Advocates of PLCs view teacher isolation as a problem and professional collaboration as a solution (Cookson, 2005; Conley & Cooper, 2013; Davidson & Dwyer, 2014; DuFour, 2011; Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, & Box, 2014; Hord & Tobia, 2015; Lippy & Zamora, 2012; Moir, Barlin, Gless, & Miles, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Roby, 2011; Rogers & Bubinski, 2002; Samuelson-Wardrip, Gomez, & Gomez, 2015; Schlichte, Yssl, & Werbler, 2005). Research – not just in schools but in other organizations as well – shows that working in a group can heighten productivity in several ways. First, reflecting the adage, "two heads are better than one," groups can make better decisions because combined expertise is better than individual expertise. We all know and do some things well, but everyone has gaps. For teachers faced with classrooms of diverse abilities, behaviors, and personalities and with covering a broad curriculum, exchanging tips and techniques can be valuable. But it is more than just exchanging ideas on classroom practice. Group-based work can lead to superior quality designs for curriculum, plans for staff training, and analyses of productivity data. While group work like this may not have direct and immediate effects on practice, it builds group and organizational capacity – what some call "organizational learning" (Kearns, 2014; Kirwan, 2013; Senge, 2014; Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002).

The second rationale behind PLC advocacy is based on research on worker motivation (Braun, Peus, Weisweiler, & Frey, 2013; Katz & Miller, 2013; Körner, Wirtz, Bengel, & Göritz, 2015; Malone & Gallagher, 2010; Muindi, 2011; Rosen, 2014; Tam, 2015; Yoon & Kayes, 2016). A PLC is intended to motivate productive work by strengthening teacher-to-teacher social ties and creating an emotional connection to a small group. Ideally, workers should be individually motivated to deliver maximum effort "for the organization" with each individual motivated by and loyal to the entity that is the organization. Some organizations are able to generate this kind of commitment and motivation, like championship sport teams or small

¹ Movies like, "Stand and Deliver," "Mr. Holland's Opus," "Dead Poet's Society," "Dangerous Minds," and "To Sir With Love," are among the better known.

² There is a large literature and many different theoretical orientations on the role of schools in society, on schools

schools with strong identities and stellar leadership, but in typical schools, especially in large schools, this ideal is hard to reach. There are not enough leaders of this caliber, and, anyway, most schools are too large and have too much turnover in leadership. So if a school can get a lot of teachers affiliated with groups and the groups function well, then that means there are a lot of teachers motivated to achieve goals of a small group they identify with. They will work hard and do tasks because they want to cooperate, help colleagues, and do meaningful work (Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Conley & Cooper, 2013; Cranston, 2011; Dussault, Deaulelin, Royer, & Loisel, 1999; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005).

Third, productive group work contributes to individual learning. It is not just that better decisions can be made by the group; it is that the experience – the process – of intellectual collaboration is edifying. Hearing other peoples’ ideas, having our own ideas challenged, presenting and defending our ideas, thinking long and hard about ways to solve problems – these and many other ways of doing intellectual work in groups strengthens individual capacity. Key to the theory behind PLC is the teacher returns to the classroom better off from four one-hour PLC meetings than, say, one four-hour workshop – especially because the PLC work is likely to be focused on salient, immediate, and localized concerns as opposed to a “topic” treated relatively abstractly in a workshop. Thus, PLCs are heavily promoted as an instrument of professional development.

In theory, then, PLCs can get people to work smarter and harder which should translate into greater student learning. That is the theory anyway and there is research to support it (Ferguson, 2013; Fulton, Doerr, & Britton, 2010; Smith, 2012; Vescio, Rossa, & Adams, 2008; Wells & Feun, 2008); research and experience also warns us that PLCs do not automatically produce great results (DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Elbousty & Bratt, 2010; Kilbane, 2009; Stanley, 2011; Wood, 2007). If group leadership is weak, if a group’s objectives are ill-defined, if a group’s objectives are unrelated to larger organizational goals, if group members are not given time and support for their work, then time spent in group work can be unproductive, failing to benefit either the participants or the organization. Worse, unproductive group work can be detrimental – a bad experience damaging morale and souring people to future collegial efforts. The important question is how to implement PLCs to create and sustain good results for the individual, the organization, and the bottom line, students.

Large, Decentralized Organizations and the Challenge of Planned Change

Our thinking of PLCs must also take into account research on the challenge of organizational change in schools and districts. Change in any large organization is never easy; it is especially complicated in school districts due to organizations characteristics making change inherently difficult.

Years ago, Weick’s (1976) influential research developed the conception of educational organizations as “loosely-coupled systems,” a term much used ever since (Fusarelli, 2002; Louis, Thomas, & Anderson, 2010; Wanat & Zieglowsky, 2015; Young, 2006). On the one hand we think of the school district as a bureaucratic organization: hierarchically organized to achieve production goals; centrally controlled with executives, managers, professional workers, and production processes (i.e., instruction). On the other hand, there are these realities: teachers and schools do their work with a great deal of autonomy and are not easily controlled by district and state authorities; classroom and school “output” (productivity) is intangible and difficult to measure; education goals are subject to much interpretation, subjectivity, and dispute; and we

often do not know in any given situation (e.g., this school, this subject, this district, this community, this time) what is the most effective approach to management or instruction because each situation is complex. These conditions justify the term, “the challenge of change.”

Here are key characteristics that make educational organizations difficult to manage:

1) Multiple goals, diffuse goals. Many think of schools as technical enterprises – an organization that develops basic, academic, and vocational knowledge and skills. However, this a incomplete perspective, for schools have multiple functions and goals, some clearly enunciated, some more covert, and some in competition with others (Ball, 2012; Newberry, Gallant, & Riley, 2013). Schools must teach all students an academic curriculum, but also try to insure graduates are prepared for employment and schools must cover well the “core” academic subjects, but also insure that students participate in art, music, health, and physical education. Schools must instill values of academic cooperation and teamwork, but at the same time students are in competition against each other for grades, academic rankings, and high test scores. Schools must develop students’ independence and creativity, but also teach obedience and conformity; teach critical thinking, but be politically neutral; teach diverse cultural values, but try to instill a common “American” culture. Schools seek to adhere to principles of equal treatment of all students, but at the same time schools differentiate students into different classifications for remedial or gifted program, special or regulation education, vocational or college preparatory curriculum, and lower or upper track courses. These different goals, functions, and values are in tension with each other and make managing schools difficult and political. That schools have so many goals and functions and different constituencies prioritize them in different ways insures that schools are organizations perpetually in flux. At the local level, this is manifested in the ongoing politics impacting schools and the periodic eruption of significant tensions and conflicts.² School leaders are frequently in the middle of all this.

2) Open systems, porous boundaries. As alluded to above, schools are among the most “open systems” of organizations (Scott & Davis, 2015). By definition an “organization” has a boundary demarcating the organization as an entity separate from its environment. In some organizations that boundary is very clear and well controlled. In schools the boundary is porous; the line, blurry, between “the organization” and “outside the organization.” From the U.S. President to the neighborhood parent, everyone has influence over what happens in schools (Anyon, 2014; Epstein, 2004; Hess & McShane, 2014; Howell, 2005; Kearns, 2014; Manna, 2006; Wanat & Zieglowsky, 2015). Business people, community leaders, politicians, lobbyists, researchers – a long list of constituents and stakeholders are involved in schools and have a say in the educational process and mission. This situation insures dispersed control, unpredictability, and unceasing change – the unending “waves” of education reform and, within states, the constant parade of new education programs and policy. Leaders at the building and district level must become adept at mediating between frequent policy changes and need for stability and continuity among the practitioners within their organization.

3) Decentralized structure. The organizational chart in education looks hierarchical. Hierarchical control operates – to a degree. But there is a great deal of dispersed decision

² There is a large literature and many different theoretical orientations on the role of schools in society, on schools and cultural socialization, and on education reform and politics. Important contributions have been illuminating connections between social, political, economic, and cultural forces, education reform policies, and the organizational structures, policies, practices, and outcomes within schools and districts. It makes clear how schools are buffeted by many forces and how goals and functions of schooling are manifold and often in tension or conflict. See, for instance, Ball (2012), Fusarelli & Boyd (2004), Kerckhoff (2000), Kliebard (2002), Manna (2006), and Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Wirt (2004).

making and autonomy at the classroom, school, and district level. There is a lot of variation across schools and, within schools, across classrooms in curriculum, instruction, school culture, management styles, and student achievement (Louis, Thomas, & Anderson, 2010; Mada, Halverson, & Gomez, 2007; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004; Rowan, Harrison, & Hayes, 2004; Smith, Lee & Newmann, 2001; Young, 2006). Dispersed, decentralized decision making results from many factors: traditions of local control, norms of professional autonomy, physical isolation of classrooms and schools, minimal monitoring of performance, and the unpredictability of events on the ground. The system looks and acts hierarchical in some ways; but control over what goes on in schools and classrooms is much more limited and dispersed fragmented than hierarchical charts suggest (Bauer & Brazer, 2013; de Lima, 2007; Cohen, Moffitt, & Goldin, 2007; Elmore, 1989-1990; Werts & Brewer, 2015).

Compared with the degree of production control by management in other types of organizations, principals' direct control over teachers is very limited. There are no "bonuses," or merit pay increases, profit sharing strategies to incentivize certain outputs or practices a principal may seek; and, conversely, dictates and "do this or else" commands lack force because, except for the most egregious forms of malfeasance or incompetence, teachers' salaries, employment conditions, and jobs are fixed by union contracts (though not so much in private or charter schools).

4) Large scale. Educational organizations are big. There are some small schools and districts, but most districts have student enrollments in the thousands and many are the size of cities. Almost three-quarters of high school students, for instance, are in schools with more than 1,000 students; many are in high schools with over 2,000 students (Cutshall, 2003; NCES, 2003). An average district with 20,000 students is likely to have over 1,000 teachers in 20 or more schools with annual expenditures of a quarter of a million dollars or more. A district this size may cover a dozen square miles. But that is just geographic scale: legally and officially, each district is a branch of its state education system, with the state education agency formally in charge. Add to this various other intermediate and municipal agencies providing services, regulations, and political pressure.

5) Uncertain "methods of production". Education is not manufacturing, engineering, or medical technology; it is about human psychology, cognitive development, values, and socialization. Teaching, leadership, and management are a *mélange* of art, craft, personality, and science. Children are enormously variable as amply demonstrated by the vast literature on learning style differences, multiple intelligences, individualized instruction, differentiated instruction, multicultural instruction, bilingual education, and special education. What is the implication of this human complexity and variation? Formal education methods are an imperfect and uncertain technology and even though education bureaucracies "manage" schools and deliver "instructional methods," the reality is that control over outcomes is far weaker and more unpredictable than most people think. The "command and control" model of management prevalent in corporations and other bureaucracies gets twisted and diluted by the loose-coupled structure of school system.

So, what are the implications for creating and managing change in school systems? Clearly, the district is *a system* and it needs to be managed; classrooms and schools need to follow policies set centrally and there needs to be the capability of efficient, coordinated, and goal-oriented action if the system is to operate as an organization; otherwise a school district is little more than a symbolic entity – a name given to collection of independently operating classrooms and schools. Change can happen at the system-level and it can be managed, but it is not easy and

success is by no means certain (Duffy, 2003; Elmore, Grossman, & Johnson, 2007; Supovitz, 2006). One of the biggest challenges facing districts today is initiating and leading structural and cultural changes in schools to develop well-functioning PLCs. Many are trying; only some are succeeding.

Most of the literature on PLCs is theory, advocacy, and “how to.” Absent from much of this literature is discussion of the great challenges in implementing harmonious and well-functioning PLCs in schools. Significant organizational structure and culture shifts must take place. Several studies bear this out (de Lima, 2007; DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Elbousty & Bratt, 2010; Ferguson, 2013; Smith, 2012; Stanley, 2011; Wells & Feun, 2008) – studies documenting, not glowing successes, but difficulties and uncertain outcomes. This brings us to the present case to understand and deliberate over the challenge of PLC implementation.

You are in a management position in a school district. (In this case, it is the character: Bob Hotchkins, Director of Curriculum.) You have many years behind you as a teacher and a building administrator. You know what schools are like. You know that right now in your district, some schools have few or no operating PLCs, others have some but are struggling, and still others PLCs function well. State and district leaders want to see ALL schools have well-functioning PLCs and want this soon as reflected in a recent state initiative. You are the point person to make this happen. This is the challenge of leadership for change.

**The Setting:
Marshall County Consolidated School District**

District Enrollment: 13,129 (2015)
 Percent eligible for free/reduced lunch: 34 %
 Percent ELL (English Language Learner): 5%
 Percent Special Education: 14%
 Racial/Ethnic Percentages:
 White 55%
 Black 31%
 Hispanic 12%
 Asian/Pacific Islander 2%
 Schools in the District (Table 1)

Table 1
Marshall County Schools School Academic Performance (SAP) Ratings*

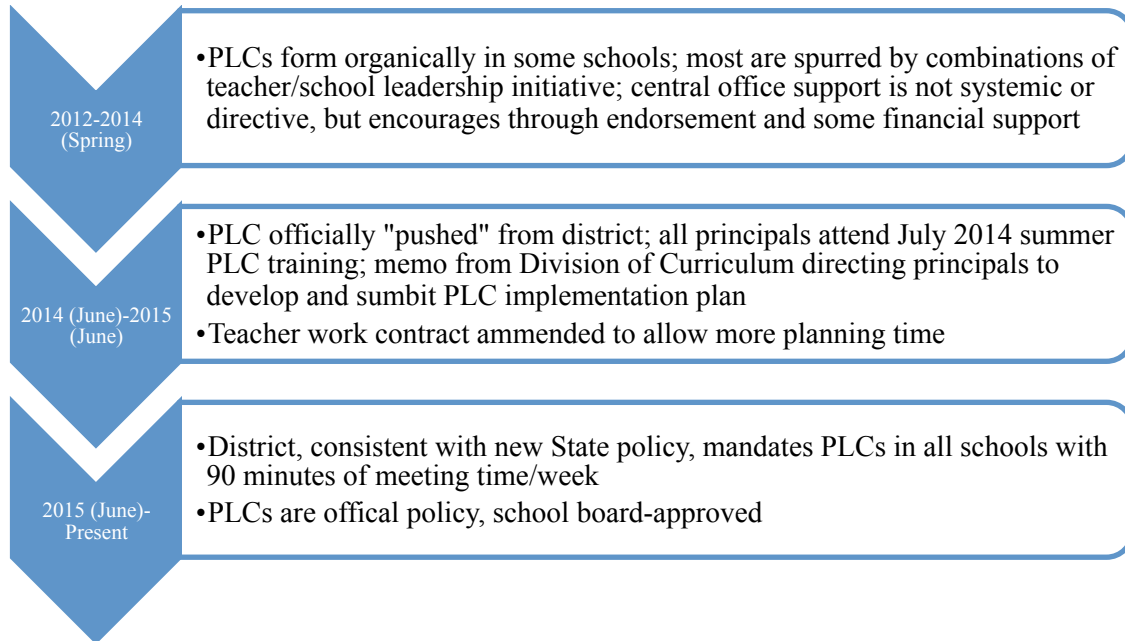
| School Name | Grade Level | 2015 Enrollment | 2014 SAP Ratings |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Johnson City High School | 9 – 12 | 2697 | Below Standard |
| Monroe High School | 9 – 12 | 1983 | Approaching |
| Canyon Middle School | 6 – 8 | 945 | At Standard |
| James H. Frost Middle School | 6 – 8 | 965 | At Standard |
| Frita Mayfield Middle School | 6 – 8 | 889 | Approaching |
| Rose Marino Middle School | 6 – 8 | 1286 | Approaching |
| Arcadia Elementary School | K – 5 | 651 | Exceeds |
| Chandler Elementary School | K – 5 | 829 | Approaching |
| Michael Madden Elementary School | PreK – 5; Special Needs; K – 12 | 716 | At Standard |
| Mount Olive Elementary School | K – 5 | 1294 | Below Standard |
| Windsor Hills Elementary School | K – 5 | 874 | Exceeds |

* Ratings issued by State Dept. of Ed based on testing at grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 in reading, writing, and mathematics. SAP rating utilizes a composite, scale-based score.

District Organization (Key Actors)

- School Board
- Superintendent
- Director of Schools
- Director of Curriculum
- Director of Human Resources
- Director of Finance
- Teachers’ Association Leader
- Principals and Assistant Principals

Timeline of Key Events in PLC Implementation



Superintendent Carter & CD Conversation in District Office (April 2015)

Superintendent: Dave Carter

Director of Curriculum Bob Hotchkins

“Hey Bob, DOE got the RTTT grant,” Superintendent Carter said, poking his head into Bob Hotchkins’s office.

Bob knew that the state department of education was a strong contender for the federal grant, but hadn’t heard yet the outcome. Bob knew the state had been working intensely since last year on the proposal and that preliminary reviews were favorable. The news of success in winning the grant was just reported.

Carter continued, “We’ll need to meet this week because there’s going to be a lot going on. We’ll need to figure out our next steps and prepare people. The state’s really going to push on the PLC initiative.” Carter, paused, and then added, “Let me think... by my estimate, we’re going to want to see about 50 well-functioning PLCs by next year at this time. That shouldn’t be too hard.”

Bob understood Superintendent Carter’s message, though it was laced with wry humor. Bob realized the PLC initiative was going to land largely in his hands.

One Year Earlier...

Summary of March 2014 “Directors Council Meeting” in District Office

Preface to March 2014 conversation: For several years (2012 – 2014), some of Marshall’s schools had planning teams of teachers who met regularly and focused on curriculum, instruction, and professional development. These teams at their inception were not called PLCs. They developed from the actions of school principals and the participation of teachers. In these schools, the team meetings and collaborative work became part of their culture. New teachers to these schools became part of the teams and learned the expectations, practices, and roles of these schools’ organizational culture. Leaders in the district office started to notice a positive change – both in school achievement and building culture.

Setting: A meeting of central office directors:

Superintendent: Dave Carter

Director of Schools: Sam Smith

Director of Curriculum: Bob Hotchkins

Director of Human Resources: Mary Gilford

Director of Finance: Joe Armstrong

After preliminary announcements, Superintendent Carter turned to Bob Hotchkins, the Curriculum Director, “OK, let’s turn to the first item. Bob’s going to talk about some ideas to support professional learning communities in the schools.”

“Aren’t the students supposed to be the ones doing the learning?” As he often did, Joe Armstrong (finance director) jumped in with a comment he thought humorous, but with a mildly sarcastic overtone. Joe had never heard of the term, “professional learning community.” Bob was familiar with the term, but he realized to some, it could sound like new jargon.

“I think,” Bob started, “we should move more assertively in developing PLCs in the schools.” Superintendent Carter paused for a second and responded, “I’ve been thinking about that too, Bob... what are your ideas?” “Yeah Bob,” Joe added, “what’s it going to look like?”

Bob started by describing two schools with strong cultures of collaboration, and how they developed. He emphasized that the principal dedicated time each week for teachers to discuss student work. Joe, skeptical, pressed Bob for details. “I’m not saying it was easy,” Bob added

as he recounted how the principals worked to persuade staff of the importance of collaboration and to adjust schedules to create time for meetings during the day. They even encouraged staff to stay after school periodically to finish their work. “If all teachers had 90 minutes a week for collaborative work and planning, that’d be pretty ideal. This wouldn’t have to be all during the day; some could be after the school day.”

“The union’s not going to go for that,” interjected Mary Gilford, the Human Resources Director. “That goes beyond that allowable time in the bargaining agreement.” Anticipating this issue, Bob replied that the district would need to discuss the matter with the union leaders to see if there could be some flexibility or exceptions made within the contracted hours. He was aware of being euphemistic in saying “flexibility” – more likely added planning time, if it was going to happen, would be made mandatory.

“Also, we should consider summer training for building leaders; I’ve got materials I could share with folks now. And, also I think we should have a communications plan so central office staff are on the same page – using the same language in messages to schools. “Bob continued with suggestions for communications over the next several months to be both informative and encouraging to building leaders to communicate that developing PLC in the schools was an emerging priority. “I think it is important that we communicate that this is for the long term.”

Joe then asked, “What’s this going to cost?” Bob hadn’t thought much about this, but added, “I see this as mainly a shift in building culture, but, yes, we’ll need to spend money on training and I’m sure other expenses will come up. I don’t know the details.”

The Schools Director then asked, “How will this impact each school’s master schedule?” Again, Bob had not yet thought this through in detail, but believed that the principals would be ultimately responsible for their own schedule. Bob knew that Sam Smith, the Schools Director, was sometimes difficult to work with; but at the same time, Sam was the main supervisor of principals. Sam would be pivotal in any initiative involving directives to principals and changes in school schedules. This concerned Bob because his division rarely collaborated with the Schools Division. “I’m not sure, but this will have to be figured out. They did it at Canyon and Marion, so we know it can be done. And other districts have figured this out.”

Superintendent Carter added, “You know, Parsons [the state education commissioner] has been talking about making PLCs a major state priority.” Bob, responded, “I know, I heard her talking about this last month at the university partnership meeting. She talked about PLCs and also about revamping the state’s testing system, improving teacher evaluation, and changing regulations for charter schools.”

“More charter schools... awesome!,” Joe exclaimed with unmistakable sarcasm.

Carter explained further, “These initiatives are probably going to be in a federal grant proposal the state is writing.” Bob added additional insights based on what he knew about PLC initiatives in other districts, although he admitted his information was fragmentary, at which point Mary Gilford, the Human Resources Director, recounted a conversation she’d recently had with someone from another district where they were experiencing “major pushback” from teachers. “I’ve got to admit,” she continued, “I’ve got some big reservations about this... sounds like it might be another fad.” Aware of this perception and sensing some apprehensiveness in the group, Bob tried to be reassuring: “It all depends on planning, being clear in our own minds about what we want to accomplish, and making sure we support the schools. Obviously doing something like this isn’t easy and there are going to be bumps, but it’s definitely the right way go. We need to have teachers taking more responsibility and having more say about training and curriculum and working more like teams. In some of the schools, you wouldn’t believe, there’s almost nothing going on between the teachers.... it’s almost like they work in separate little cells.” After more back and forth, a mixture of affirmation, cautions, and concerns, the group turned to other items on the agenda.

After covering the other agenda items, as the meeting drew to a close, Superintendent Carter concluded with a comment that Bob interpreted as supportive, but cautious: “Bob, why don’t you and the council talk more about what we can do this summer to lay some groundwork to support PLCs, and we’ll wait and see what happens with the state. I don’t want to get too far out in front and I think Mary’s got a point that teachers have a lot on their plate right now and aren’t always enthusiastic about this new stuff coming down from the central office. Anyway, let me know by next month’s meeting more about what you decide for the PLC stuff going on in summer.”

Back in his office, Bob reflected on the meeting. While he believed PLCs could help, he knew others in the meeting were less knowledgeable about PLCs, were not clear on what their own roles might be should the PLC initiative rise as a district priority, and were concerned about negative reactions from schools. Having been in the district for 22 years, Bob knew the challenges and the history of district led initiatives. It was a sparse history – neither successes nor failures. The district office never had been a major driver of school improvement.

In Marshall’s history, the central office focused on district management: payroll, personnel contracts, hiring, supplies, facilities maintenance, budget allocations, bond issues, federal programs, and transportation. Central office supervisors with responsibilities for overseeing schools mainly were concerned with insuring schools were clean and orderly, parent complaints were minimal, and teacher evaluations were in on time. Monthly principals’ meetings at the central office dealt mainly with issues related to staffing, schedules, budgets, facilities maintenance, and transportation. Rarely was there much focus on instructional leadership and improving teacher practices.

The central office was not an agent of change in curriculum or instruction. Superintendent Carter, now six years in his position, started with the district 25 years ago as a middle school

guidance counselor. He also worked as a coach, a building administrator, and human resources director. He had little background in curriculum; none in classroom teaching.

Both Bob and Superintendent Carter knew that a PLC initiative was going to be a big culture change in the district. Based on the council meeting, Bob knew there would be a lot of pieces to coordinate and that progress would depend heavily on his own leadership. This included maintaining the support of the superintendent and key central office colleagues, as well as aligning central office efforts and contributions productively. Bob also thought ahead about the key meeting between Carter and the teachers' union. He pondered the broad scope of his tasks and wondered how effectively he could manage all this while maintaining attention to his other duties and not giving up his family life. It was daunting to think about.

Communications Between Superintendent Carter & Bob Hotchkins (April 12-13, 2014)

Three weeks have gone by since the previous Directors' Council meeting. The April meeting is next week. Bob had spent a few hours a week gathering more information about PLCs, including published literature – research, case studies, and “how to” literature. This was not just to build his knowledge, but also to identify key readings to distribute to teachers and principals. Bob also spent time on the phone talking to colleagues in other districts to hear their ideas and experiences.

In preparation for the upcoming Directors' Council meeting Bob emailed Superintendent Carter with preliminary ideas for forthcoming communications to school leaders about PLCs and about summer training for school leaders.

To: David Carter
From: Bob Hotchkins
Date: April 12, 2014
Subject: PLC planning; prep for council mtg

There are two good choices for a summer PD training for building leaders on PLCs. One is a two-day conference event at the Sheraton Harbor in Baltimore and the other is a retreat DOE is hosting. I imagine most of the principals would prefer the Baltimore conference, but it's going to cost about three times as much. The DOE retreat is structured around four workshops at the Park Lane conference center on a Friday and Saturday on the weekend following the 4th.

Both have a pretty good line up of presenters and workshop trainers, but the Baltimore conference has a few of the “big names” nationally that people would probably like to see.

Also, I've been mulling over how best to communicate to the building leaders about this. The next principals' meeting is May 12th. If you want to announce this, I could follow with more about the district's PLC plans, the justifications, etc. If I'm going to be doing coordination and support down the line, it might be useful for me to start leading now.

On the other hand, maybe it's better coming from Sam as the Director of Schools. I'm not sure at this point how strongly he feels about supporting PLCs in the schools and dealing with the principals on this.

Let me know what you think

The next day, Bob received a reply from Superintendent Carter:

To: Bob Hotchkins
From: David Carter
Date: April 13, 2014
Subject: plans for council mtg

Thanks for your work on this. Both summer training options look great – I'll support whatever one you choose. Talk with Joe [finance director] and let me know the costs. Also, we need to make sure there is follow up after the training. What did the principals get out of the experience? What are they going to do to start working on this in their schools?

Concerning bringing up PLCs at the next principals' meeting. Email Sam with copy to me about the need to add announcements about PLC plans to the agenda for the principals' meeting.

Two days later, Sam Smith (Director of Schools) received an email from Superintendent Carter.

To: Sam Smith
From: David Carter
Date: April 15, 2014
Subject: Bob's role in PLC initiative; plans for council mtg

I'm asking Bob Hotchkins to oversee much of the PLC support from the district office. How about we meet and you and I can go over this and talk if you have any questions.

Dr. Carter's goal for the meeting was to explain to Sam why Bob would have primary responsibility for the PLC initiative – Carter wasn't sure how much Sam would care, but Carter felt an explanation was warranted – and to try to make sure that this decision wouldn't leave Sam feeling like his leadership was being questioned or that his authority was shrinking.

At the meeting Dr. Carter made several points: He explained the importance of Bob's curriculum background in the PLC initiative and the Bob knew a lot about PLC's "since Bob has been taking university courses and doing a lot of reading on PLCs." Carter also explained that he didn't want Sam's reputation and working relationship with the principals to suffer from the inevitable "bumps in the road" that would happen as schools implemented PLCs. "Frankly, I think this thing could raise a bit of trouble and it's better if Bob deals with this stuff since we need you to have their cooperation when and if we get into some of the redistricting and transportation decisions coming down the road."

Sam didn't say much during the meeting other than to communicate, outwardly at least, that he didn't have a problem with the superintendent's decision and with Bob Hotchkins' role as point person in leading the PLC initiative. In fact, as Carter anticipated, Sam was relieved that the PLCs wouldn't be a major responsibility for him.

At the same time, Sam left the meeting with some apprehensions. Sam didn't disagree that Bob's curriculum experience and knowledge of PLCs surpassed his own; but, at the same time, Sam knew the PLC initiative would consume significant resources and would cast the spotlight on Hotchkins – the curriculum director who was many years Sam's junior, who's profile had been rising in the district leadership ranks, and who Sam thought of in some ways as his competition. It didn't help Sam's undercurrent of concern that Bob was a hard worker and almost always gung-ho on new ideas and innovations.

Also, Sam wasn't fully convinced about PLCs. More than a few times his informal remarks to others included references to PLCs as “the latest fad.” In contrast to Bob's perspective, Sam was a strong believer in top-down management. He was unapologetically “old school” in his values, especially concerning the role of the principal. He viewed the principal as the “boss” of the school and saw in PLCs the potential for diluting the principal's authority and powers. Bob had, on occasion, communicated this perspective to principals. Almost all of them viewed Bob favorably – as an ally. Most of the principals had heard stories of Sam's legacy as a principal – a guy who “ran a tight ship,” who had little patience for “touchy feely” initiatives, and who in his tenure as principal had ousted more people from his school – staff and students – than anyone else in the district.

April 21, 2014 Directors Council Meeting:

Bob Hotchkins Reviews Plans for Upcoming Summer Training and Announcing PLC Initiative to Principals

After opening the meeting, Superintendent Carter announced to the council:

- that he was charging Bob with managing preparations for the summer PLC training for the building leaders;
- that Bob would present the long term PLC plans to the principals as well as summer training;
- that he would contact soon the teacher union leader to discuss a one year revision to the existing collective bargaining agreement – a revision that would create more planning time for PLC work, but without reducing teaching time.

Without much discussion, the meeting moved on to the next agenda item.

**May 12, 2014 Principals Meeting:
Bob Hotchkins Announces District Plans to
Encourage PLC Development in Schools**

Sam Smith, Director of Schools, opens the meeting and reviews the agenda. “Greetings everyone. Good to see you again. We’ll start with two items of old business – the air conditioner situation in the high schools and where we are with the new crisis response hotline – and then we’ve got two items of new business – the proposal to change the late bus out of the high schools and summer training on PLCs. Bob will talk about the PLCs.” Sam then proceeds with the agenda items. An hour later, he turns the meeting over to Bob.

Bob began with a 10 minute presentation announcing the initiative, discussing the summer training, and the expectation that principals develop PLCs starting as soon as possible the following school year. He also told the principals that they would need to submit a PLC implementation plan by August 5, 2014. Aware this would raise some anxiety, Bob offered some qualifying comments, saying, “I know it can be hard to predict how the implementation will unfold – everyone’s school is in a different place and has different challenges – but it’s really important to get a plan down on paper, to set goals and some benchmarks.” Several principals raised questions about the current collective bargaining agreement, explaining that it didn’t allow for adequate meeting time for PLCs. Bob responded that the superintendent was aware of this and that a meeting with the union was planned shortly to discuss what could be done.

Other conversations reflected principals’ concerns about current master schedules making common planning time difficult to accomplish. Bob replied, “difficult... yes, it can be; but do-able; we have schools in our district that have already gone down this path and we know it can be done; sometimes you have to think outside of the box.” He added that, “we will expect a building PLC schedule; this isn’t a request, it is essential. Please get it done by early August.” Bob noticed some principals glancing at each other and heard a few sighs.

**May 24, 2014 Meeting: Superintendent Carter, Director of Curriculum, Director of
Schools, & Union Leaders**

Superintendent Carter, Bob Hotchkins, and Sam Smith meet with the leadership of the teachers’ union to explain the need to modify the current collective bargaining agreement to permit increased “minutes per week” outside of classroom time.

The group reviewed the stipulations of the current agreement:
the teacher work day is 7.5 hours (2250 minutes per week)
planning and preparation allotment is 10% of work week (225 minutes per week)
approximately 1.6% (150 minutes) of per month contract hours are for after school meetings, such as faculty and departmental meeting.

The district leadership explained the priority of the PLC initiative and its potential benefits for student learning and teacher empowerment; they stressed that without a formal addendum permitting extra time for PLC work, the initiative would be severely hampered.

The superintendent also explained that these extra minutes would need to be without extra pay, but stressed that their request is for just a one year waiver of the collective bargaining agreement.

The meeting concluded with some discussion. The union leaders asked a number of clarifying questions, expressed their favorable opinion of the PLC concept, and stated their intention to try respond within a week with a draft “memorandum of understanding” (MOU).

June 1, 2014 Collective Bargaining Addendum is Developed and Approved

A week later, the MOU from the teachers’ union arrived agreeing to a one year addendum to the current collective bargaining agreement. The union agreed to a requirement that a portion of planning time during the week be used for PLC purposes and an added 30 minutes per month (no extra pay) be add to the existing 150 minutes per months allotted for after school meetings. See Appendix A.

June 4, 2014 Memorandum Explaining Collective Bargaining Addendum Sent to All Staff

On June 4th, a memorandum was sent from the superintendent’s office to all staff in the district explaining the district’s commitment to support PLCs in all schools and announcing the addendum to the collective bargaining agreement contract to increase time for PLC planning and use more of the existing time available for PLC planning. The memorandum also mentioned the summer training for principals.

July 29 - 31, Marshall Principals Attend PLC Training Conference

All but a few of the district’s principals participated in the two-day PLC training conference. Bob had requested that principals not able to attend notify him in advance and to participate in a locally sponsored series of workshops on PLCs. That the conference was held at an attractively located Sheraton, but not too far away, contributed to the high level of participation. The feedback on the conference was very positive.

August 15, 2014: Rose Marino Middle School

“Bye Dr. Allen!” Penny Chu shouted from the school foyer as she headed toward exit doors. She scurried to catch up with math colleagues Brandon James and Pam Stanley. The four of them just finished a 45 minute meeting discussing the math team’s new, and still developing, plan to help more 6th graders transition effectively into Algebra. Dr. Allen mostly listened, but his enthusiasm and promises of support left Penny energized about what they could accomplish.

Catching up with her peers, the three of them lingered in the parking lot and discussed “instructional innovation” grants program that Pam had recently found out about.

In Rose Marino Middle School, PLCs started to develop in the fall of 2011. While there was no single impetus, the arrival of a new principal was a key event. Dr. Jake Allen had recently completed a ten-day residential principals’ leadership academy affiliated with a major university; in this program he read extensively on the subject and networked with peers from other districts also interested and involved school PLC initiatives. A major theme of the academy was labeled “individualism to collegiality.” Dr. Allen then used his influence in hiring priorities to favor candidates committed to collaborative work and decision making; he also was lucky. Two teachers who he knew would not have been supportive were no longer on the staff – one retired and the other one transferred to a different school.

One of Dr. Allen’s first moves when he arrived at Marino Middle School was telling the faculty that he would have exploratory teachers create “time” in the morning for teachers in the content areas to meet. He also adjusted the building schedule to increase the amount of common planning time each day and distributed readings on PLCs.

The staff of Marino middle school understood clearly that having productive PLCs was a high priority. Dr. Allen attended many PLC meetings, routinely asked how each group was helping struggling learners in their area, and he held each PLC group to high standards.

August 15, 2014: Frita Mayfield Middle School

Joan Deerdorf walked into the teachers’ lounge, scanned the setting, and sat next to her good friend, Betty White. Joan sighed and asked loudly so others could hear, “So ... you excited? ... we’re all going to be in *pro...fes...sion...al* learning communities?” For effect, she stretched out the word “professional” emphasizing each syllable to insure others would not miss her derisive intent. Joan glanced around and noted a few approving smiles. Betty just groaned, “Oh lord, it’s always something isn’t it.” Joan replied, “I don’t know about you, but I’m not doing it. I can’t believe the union went along with administration on this. I didn’t even hear about it until a few weeks ago.”

“I got a letter in the mail about it in June,” another teacher piped in. “It’s an arrangement they made for one year – I guess the district wants to move forward on this – and then the new contract will be adjusted so we’ll be covered for the time.” “Well I hope so,” said Joan, “but I’ll believe it when I see it.” Another teacher added, “We’ll probably now spend three hours a week in circles sharing our feelings,” and then still have to do the same amount of teaching time and get no time anymore for prep work.” Other teachers nodded in assent and chimed in with similar comments, continuing the tenor of the conversation. After a few minutes, talk shifted to the traffic congestion due to construction on the road running past the school and after this to the state of the air conditioning in the building – some of the teachers felt the system was on its last legs because classrooms on their side of the building often got too hot during the dog days of summer.

Mayfield Middle School's staff culture is dominated by beliefs and attitudes of its veteran teachers, many of whom long ago became set in their ways; they are used to being left alone in their classroom and want to keep it this way. More than a few of them are counting down the retirement clock.

The teachers at Mayfield have gotten used to a large measure of curriculum freedom. This sentiment is embedded in the culture of the school. Several years ago there was much grousing when the district mandated that teachers use a pacing guide. The teachers feel they know what they need to do for their students and view directives from the district office as intrusive. There had not been a staff meeting focused on curriculum in at least three years.

In the principal's office, Sandra Jasper mulled over how to announce that she needed to develop and submit to the district a PLC implementation plan for her school. In a few days a staff meeting was planned and perhaps she would announce it there. Or maybe she would just send an email around. The main thing she wanted to let teachers know was that they needed to be prepared to spend time each week in a PLC, but she also wanted to make it clear that this wasn't her idea.

Jasper is aware from conversations with other principals that some schools in recent years have started to develop PLCs. She also knows that other schools have not made this a priority.

Jasper's leadership style can be characterized as "laissez-faire." She has chosen to let teachers be in charge of the curriculum and exercise dominion in their classrooms. In staff meetings, which are generally short, conversation is typically about upcoming school events, the operations of the school, and student discipline issues.

Principal Jasper is well liked by Mayfield's teachers, not least because she leaves them alone.

August 15, 2014: Canyon Middle School

Canyon Middle School has a largely middle income student body, above average annual achievement scores, and reputation for a hard working staff. The school has a lot of after-school programs with high attendance – academic, social and athletic programs. Parents are supportive of the school and active in a variety of roles.

Teachers' understanding of and attitude toward PLCs is mixed, but mostly accepting. Many view it as common planning time; they do not have a lot of experience working collaboratively on instructional improvement.

There is some grumbling about the amount of paperwork demanded by the principal, Mrs. Gallagher. They understood that teachers should get together, but not all understood why. Some teachers questioned the principals' personal commitment to the PLCs because Mrs. Gallagher did not attend PLC meetings.

At the same time, the PLC meetings were not particularly onerous and so the majority of the teachers had no problem with continuing the PLC initiative and remained committed to participate and plan together throughout the school year.

**Back to the Present (April 2015):
Bob Hotchkins Reflects on the Last Year and Contemplates Plans for PLC Implementation
Next Year**

Following his conversation with Superintendent Carter, and now alone in his office, Bob reflected on the recent year and what lay before him in the year ahead.

Superintendent Carter wanted Bob to develop a yearlong implementation plan. He communicated to Bob that “this will be one of your major priorities this coming year.” Bob knew that he was going to have to work with the School’s Division, but was still unclear of how much collaboration would be expected by the superintendent.

Over the past year, each school’s implementation of PLC’s was shaped by the unique structure, culture, leadership, and staff of each school. Directives from the district were minimal, other than the requirement that each principal had to submit a plan and commit to initiating PLCs. Beyond this, there was no central dictate as to how to construct PLCs and how they should operate.

Each school had the freedom to develop their own plan. Last school year, at principal meetings, the topic of PLCs was rarely mentioned or discussed. There was only one district-wide meeting in which PLCs were discussed. At a district-wide academic achievement meeting the prior November (where each school sends teacher leaders), Bob presented the “language” of PLCs. Participants were encouraged to go back to their school and continue the discussions. Some schools embraced the idea, others didn’t. Bob was aware that PLC implementation at many schools was minimal and many staff hoped that the initiative would go away.

Although no single person could know in detail the current status of PLCs among all the district’s schools, Bob had as good an understanding as anyone. In his three years as curriculum director, he visited all the schools multiple times. It was part of his job to ask questions and gather information. He knew there was progress, but most schools had a long way to go.

Bob contemplated the gap between the current conditions of PLCs in the district and the goal of full implementation in approximately 16 months. Bob wondered how much could be accomplished in this time frame (May 2015 through August 2016).

Sketch of Conditions and Progress (September 2014 – March 2015): Eleven Schools Implement PLCs

Table 2

Selected Characteristics of Schools: Demographic Percentages, Culture, Status of PLCs

| School Name | Scenarios |
|--|---|
| <p>Johnson City High School School SAP rating is “Below Standard.”</p> <p>Minority: 63 Free lunch: 22 SpecEd: 14</p> | <p>Very large high school with a diverse student population. There is a lot of frustration in the school and a lot of resistance to change. Administration has recently been changed in an attempt to drive school improvement. PLC groups have different agendas; outcomes are rarely measured.</p> |
| <p>Monroe High School School SAP rating is “Approaching.”</p> <p>Minority: 27 Free Lunch: 35 SpecEd: 9</p> | <p>Large high school with a mostly rural student population. If school achievement scores stay at same level for two more years (or drop), they are likely to drop into the “Below Standard” rating. If proficiency rates increase by around 15%, they will likely reach the “At Standard” rating. There administrative team has been in place for over five years and there is low turnover among the administration and staff. Teachers are willing to try anything and have embraced the PLC model; however, are unsure what to do.</p> |
| <p>Canyon Middle School Principal: Tracey Gallagher School rating is “At Standard.”</p> <p>Minority: 22 Free Lunch: 8 SpecEd: 6</p> | <p>Suburban school. Staff works hard and is willing to continue the PLC initiative. School has a lot of after-school programs with high attendance – academic, social and athletic programs. There is also a large amount of parental involvement.</p> <p>During the 2014 school year, the principal (Mrs. Gallagher) was directive and supportive of staff PLC meetings. She asked that the staff get together at least once a week as a department for at least 30 minutes. She required teachers to examine student data and made sure they documented their meetings and tried to develop a useful product from each meeting. To decrease the amount of extra work time, principal Gallagher had only two after school faculty meetings all year. All other faculty meetings were held during in-service days. The outcome of this first year of PLC was that the teachers collected a lot of data and submitted a lot of paperwork to the principal. They are, however, unsure of any actual impact on student achievement. They are not too worried as their school continues to be rated “At Standard.” They attribute a lot of that to students being “ready” for school and high parental involvement. The principal rarely attended any of the PLC meetings. As the school year went on, the meetings became less frequent.</p> |
| <p>James H. Frost Middle School Principal: Luanne Marinelli The school’s SAP rating is “At Standard.”</p> <p>Minority: 33 Free Lunch: 39 SpecEd: 10</p> | <p>The teaching staff is relatively young and willing to comply with the principal’s directives. They are unsure of what to do in PLCs but understand that it’s worth trying to improve student achievement.</p> <p>There were no formal PLC meetings in 2014 school year. Ms. Marinelli, in her first year as principal at this school, visited few PLC meetings and did not consistently monitor PLC work. The administration in this building has historically been “hands-off,” although not closed off to responding to teacher’s requests, concerns, and questions. The school recently hired five new teachers; most professional development time was dedicated to classroom management, learning new curriculum series, and scheduling issues. The building was unique in that it had a high number of Special Education and ELL students. Most of these students did not meet proficiency on state exams, and most were in their own separate programs. Principal Marinelli was not exactly sure what her responsibilities were going to be in this new school year with mandated PLC meetings. She also did not know how she was going to organize and manage the process.</p> |
| <p>Frita Mayfield Middle School Principal: Sandra Jasper The SAP rating school recently dropped from “At Standard” to “Approaching.”</p> <p>Minority: 26 Free Lunch: 34 SpecEd: 10</p> | <p>A middle school encompassing both rural and low-income residential areas. The large majority of the staff is tenured; the staff averages about 20 years of service. Teachers are reluctant to try new initiatives and a large contingent view the central office with a dismissive attitude. The culture is dominated by teachers who are prone to complain about “more work” when new initiatives are attempted. The principal has struggled unsuccessfully trying to change the culture of the building.</p> <p>During the 2014 school year, principal Jasper did not mandate any collaborative time, but simply told the staff at the beginning of the school year that they should “try their best to collaborate as much as possible.” She did not document any collaborative events. This principal rarely did “walk-through” visits to monitor teacher practice or student</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>achievement. At the end of the school year, she was surprised and disappointed that the school's SAP rating was "Approaching" and is now worried about what to do. Faculty meetings rarely mentioned student achievement or curriculum; they were always on student discipline and the operations of the school.</p> <p>The staff likes the principal. Jasper does not bother them in their classroom. Most teachers do not collaborate or do common lesson planning. A few new teachers in the building want to collaborate for improvement, but they are outnumbered by the large number of "strong personalities" of the teachers accustomed to the status quo. Principal Jasper has a history of good relationships with parents and promotes the school as a positive and safe environment for kids, but the recent lowered school rating looms as a problem.</p> |
| <p>Rose Marino Middle School Principal: Dr. Jake Allen The school's SAP rating is "Approaching."</p> <p>Minority: 69 Free Lunch: 65 SpecEd: 19</p> | <p>Marino middle school is the district's largest middle school; it has a diverse student population. The staff gets along well with the principals and has embraced the PLC model; almost all attend district professional development on a regular basis and commit well beyond the required 90 minutes of PLC time per week.</p> <p>The principal (Dr. Jake Allen) believes in the importance of teacher collaboration. During the 2014 school year he made master schedule changes to increase time for teacher collaboration. For example, all exploratory teachers rotated throughout the building for the first 30 minutes of the day and had "enrichment" time (outside of the actual exploratory classes). This allowed the core content area teachers, by grade level, to meet for two 30 minute periods per week. This way, no one had to stay after school and work "extra". He required each grade level team to develop both teacher and student goals. He collected monthly reports from each group. He attended many of the PLC meetings, making sure his assistant principals were managing the school during the morning. The staff knows that the school has many students struggling with math and reading and is concerned about this. The school recently dropped into the SAP rating of "Approaching." The staff has expressed determination to adjust some programs, continue the PLC movement, and help as many students meet standard as possible.</p> |
| <p>Arcadia Elementary School The school's SAP rating is "Exceeds."</p> <p>Minority: 24 Free Lunch: 17 SpecEd: 12</p> | <p>Teachers work hard and care about student achievement. There is a lot of parent participation. The school has many after school events with students and parents. Teachers are willing to use PLCs to collaborate and talk about student learning. They attend a lot of the district professional development and are eager to share their successes and failures.</p> |
| <p>Chandler Elementary School The school's SAP rating is "Approaching."</p> <p>Minority: 60 Free Lunch: 65 SpecEd: 20</p> | <p>Chandler has never met the "At Standard" SAP (School Academic Performance) rating in the Special Education category. They have made this their priority. They usually meet SAP in all other categories, despite the large and diverse student population. Teachers are generally favorable toward the PLC initiative, but also say that there's simply too much to do at the elementary level. They focus PLC meetings just on reading.</p> |
| <p>Michael Madden Elementary School</p> <p>Minority: 63 Free Lunch: 59 SpecEd: 81</p> | <p>This is a combined elementary school and special needs school for the most severe Special Education students. Most of those students take the alternative state exam. This building has a very positive school culture. Teachers are eager to work together and improve student achievement.</p> |
| <p>Mount Olive Elementary School SAP rating is "Below Standard."</p> <p>Minority: 41 Free Lunch: 50 SpecEd: 14</p> | <p>Mount Olive is the only elementary school with a "Below Standard" SAP rating. There is low parental involvement and a predisposition among many teachers to blame the community and parents for the low levels of student achievement and engagement. The teachers are generally compliant with the PLC initiative, having meetings and discussing work, but they do not take the extra steps to monitor student progress and attempt specific instructional interventions. Teachers from this building rarely attend district professional development.</p> |
| <p>Windsor Hills Elementary School The school's SAP rating is "Exceeds."</p> <p>Minority: 18 Free Lunch: 5 SpecEd: 3</p> | <p>Teachers are mostly tenured with about 20+ years of experience on average. Staff morale is good and the majority of teachers are very committed to their work and students, but not so convinced about the value of the PLC initiative, as their school achievement scores are already above average. The principal has not pushed the PLC initiative, either.</p> |

Discussion Questions

- How would you describe the PLC rationale? That is, what, specifically, is the *theory* about why this particular structure and process should produce greater levels of student learning? Could you create a causal map diagram to illustrate the theoretical concept of the PLC?
- How would you describe the problem PLCs are intended to solve? In other words, if a skeptical teacher were to ask – “What’s wrong with the old way? – how would you characterize “the old way” and how would you describe the limitations of the “old way.” If you were leading a school expected to implement PLCs schoolwide and teachers said – “We’re already doing this?” – what questions would you ask to see if this is true? What evidence would you want?
- Turning to the case of Marshall County, do you think the key central office administrators (the key characters) are managing well the beginning steps and processes of this initiative? Why or why not? Are there particular actions or decisions that you might have approached differently?
- What aspects of district culture, organization, or history in the Marshall County district do you see as helpful or as possible hindrances to the likely success of the PLC initiative?
- Do you agree with the teacher union’s actions in accepting the one year addendum to the collective bargaining agreement? Did the union have to accede to the administration’s request? How do you think the union leadership viewed the pros and cons of their various options? What do you see as the pros and cons of different positions the union leadership could have taken? What do you think are possible positions the union could take when a new contract is negotiated?
- If you were Bob Hotchkins and a community leader or board member asked – “How will you know whether or not this initiative has been successful?” – how would you respond? What type of data would you want (ideally) to measure the progress and outcomes of the initiative? What type of data do you think would realistically be available to measure the progress and outcomes of the initiative?
- If you were Bob Hotchkins and a principal asked you if only teachers should be involved in PLCs, what would your answer be? If your answer is people in other roles should also be involved, what, for instance, would a counselor, interventionists, or paraprofessional do? How should building principals handle PLCs with “singleton” teachers (health teacher, band teacher, etc.)?
- How would you (in Bob Hotchkin’s role) respond to Sandra Jasper, principal of Mayfield Middle School, if she emailed you and told you her school’s PLCs were not functioning well at all. She didn’t know what to do.

Creating a Plan for PLC Implementation

You are Bob Hotchkins and the superintendent has asked you to submit to him, in a page or two, a 16 month (May 2015 to August 2016) plan on how you will support district-wide PLC implementation. He's not asking for an elaborate plan because he knows that's not possible given the complexity and unpredictability of implementation. But Carter would like to know your intentions and ideas, so he is informed and can provide feedback.

You (Hotchkins) can commit about a third of your time to managing the PLC implementation. The rest of your time is spent on other job duties. You have secretarial assistance, a \$50,000 budget to use as you wish, and, for teacher training purposes, two half-days in the next six months: one in late August and the other during the fall semester (these are as part of the normal "inservice" days in the district).

For your plan, describe:

how you will spend your time and use your budget;

your sequence of steps and rough timeline;

what you will do, with whom (i.e. what schools or specific personnel); and what products and outcomes you are aiming for.

Also, provide explanation or justifications as needed where they will help Carter understand your reasoning and strategy. Reviewing the information in Table 2 will be helpful in formulating your plan; it has information on PLC outcomes to date as well as different schools' capacities and culture, demographics, and current academic ratings.

Persuasive Communications

A key element of leadership for change involves persuasion. As explained in the above section, "Large, Decentralized Organizations and the Challenge of Planned Change," school administrators do not have strong mechanisms of control like those available to managers in private organizations or many other types of public service organizations. Persuasion, therefore, is an important part of the principal's role. This becomes particularly important when strong leadership is required to change practices and culture in ways consistent with PLC theory. While a principal can change a master a schedule to increase meeting time among teachers (within contractual stipulations), the principal cannot "command" successful PLCs into existence. Training and support must be provided, but, at the end of the day, teachers must *want* to do what is required.

- *A speech or presentation to motivate teachers.* You are Sandra Jasper, principal of Frita Mayfield Middle School. It is late August, 2014. A faculty meeting is planned shortly, and you want to energize the staff about PLCs.

- *A brochure to inform and motivate teachers about PLCs.* Add a "FAQ" section (Frequently Asked Questions) that anticipates and answers the audiences' main questions and concerns. There should be 4- 6 FAQs with your responses.

Here are three basic principles to consider for constructing and deliver a good presentation³:

(1) Structure and organization. There is an old adage about public speaking that goes like this: “Tell'em what you are going to tell'em, Tell it to them, and then Tell'em what you told them.” In regular language, this means, (a) start with an introduction – an "agenda" or set of goals for the presentation; (b) then provide the content; (c) then summarize the presentation and reiterate key points (e.g., conclusion(s), lessons, “take aways,” next steps).

(2) Stories. Academic speakers, by nature, are disposed to present and cover a lot of information – arguments, facts, charts, tables. But audiences are people and people like stories. A story or anecdote is a good way to start presentation. A good anecdote can illustrate a problem with clarity, feeling, and impact in a way that simply “telling” the problem can't. Vignettes or anecdotes can be used in any part of a presentation – to illustrate a point, to teach a lesson, or to motivate action.

(3) Avoid the TMI problem. The audience's memory and attention are limited. Unless you're at absolutely riveting speaker, you can be sure that at any given time in your presentation, many in the audience are not paying attention. And even when paying attention, people don't remember a lot of what they have heard because of normal limitations of memory and the ability to comprehend new, complex information. Therefore, don't overwhelm people with too many disparate ideas and too many facts and details. Know exactly what your 3 to 5 main points are; make sure they stand out and are repeated and each key point has appropriate elaboration; and summarize at the end.

Additional Resources

Below are some resources to provide ideas and guidance for the exercises listed above.

Guidelines for Effective Central Leadership for PLC Implementation

Those at the district level responsible for overseeing and supporting PLC implementation should:

- Be able to explain exactly what model PLC practice looks like in high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools. It is reasonable to expect PLC teacher teams to (a) create a significant amount of common, standards-based learning expectations and assessment and (b) review assessment and other data to evaluate student progress and plan instruction
- Provide the necessary time, incentives, and support for building-level leaders to understand PLC theory and know what exemplary PLC practice looks like. District level officials should expect from principals periodic progress reports presented in face-to-face meetings with corroborating evidence (like curriculum artifacts from PLCs, meeting minutes, meeting protocols, etc.).

³ As the reader is surely aware, there is a vast literature and scads of YouTube videos on the “how to's” of effective public speaking and presentations.

- Restrict from interfering with PLC implementation other competing district initiatives, so building are not distracted or pulled away from PLC implementation
- Have a system to monitor the progress of PLC implementation, which requires monitoring the steps building level leaders are taking to implement PLCs

Also see: **Appendix b**

Your Professional Learning Community Implementation Rubric

Adapted from *National College for School Leadership, Nottingham, England.*

<http://www.upsd.wednet.edu/cms/lib07/WA01000687/Centricity/Domain/57/Professional%20Learning/PLC%20Implementation%20Rubric.pdf>

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Appendix A
Memorandum of Understanding
Marshall School District and Marshall Education Association

This will serve as an agreement between the Marshall School District and the Marshall Education Association to modify the current collective bargaining agreement which ends on June 1, 2015. The modification is to “Article 10 - Time Requirements.” Teachers will be required to attend 180 minutes per month of building meetings beyond the normal school day (changed from 150 minutes per month). This modification is necessary to create additional planning time to support a district initiative of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). These 180 minutes can be used for PLC meetings. In addition, a reasonable and appropriate portion of the 225 minutes of planning time per week will include PLC time, with, on average 45 minutes per week allocated to PLC planning. This is not be used as individual ("personal") planning time, but rather time for planning and preparation with respect to PLC tasks. EPER positions are not exempt from this modification.

Appendix B
Professional Learning Community Implementation Rubric
Adapted from *National College for School Leadership, Nottingham, England.*

| 5 ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A PLC | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| PLC Characteristics | Starting Out | Developing | Deepening | Sustaining |
| ONE: Shared Mission: Purpose, Values, Goals | Team members have diverse values and goals related to mathematics instruction. May still work in isolation, on lessons, assessments, and improving instruction. | An increasing number of team members share values and goals related to math instruction, and participate actively in collaborative work to improve student math achievement. | Most team members are committed to improving student math achievement. Most staff work collaboratively to improve mathematics achievement through the PLC structure. | High degree of commitment to continuously improve student math achievement. General agreement on best practices for math instruction, and eagerness to implement best practices. High degree of commitment to collaboratively improving math instruction through the PLC structure. |
| TWO: Learning-focused Collaboration | Many staff work in isolation. They focus on their own goals, value self-reliance, and rarely share practices and strategies. | Some staff work together across the PLC, with joint planning, sharing strategies, and engaging in whole- school-wide projects. | Staff increasingly plan together, collaborate and share ideas through meetings, website/e-mail resources, etc. | Collaborative planning of learning and teaching activities is taken for granted. |
| THREE: Collective Inquiry | There is little reflection or inquiry into practice. Data collection and the use of data to inform and develop learning and teaching practice are limited. Data may be seen as an end in itself and often as someone else's problem. | Some team members are involved in activities to investigate and improve learning and teaching (e.g. peer observation and coaching action research, review and moderation of pupils' work, etc.) Data collection and use of data to inform and develop learning and teaching are variable across the school. | Many team members are actively involved and show increasing confidence about using different methods to explore and improve learning and teaching. Data collection and the use of data to inform and develop learning and teaching are increasingly consistent across the school. | A questioning orientation to practice and 'need to know how we are doing and how we can improve' is pervasive. Team members confidently use a wide range of methods to investigate learning and teaching, using findings to inform and develop their practice. Data are collected, analyzed and used to support this process. |

| PLC Characteristics | Starting Out | Developing | Deepening | Sustaining |
|---------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| FOUR: Action Research | Team members resist changing their instructional practices in mathematics, even when evidence shows they aren't working. They may be reluctant to learn new strategies even when research supports them. Emphasis is given to how teachers liked various approaches, rather than if they improved student learning. | Some team members are changing their instructional practices in mathematics, and are willing to learn new research-based strategies. | Many team members are seeking better instructional practices for teaching mathematics, and working collaboratively with others to improve instruction. | Team members routinely seek to improve instructional practices for teaching mathematics, and work collaboratively with others to improve instruction. Effects on student learning are the primary basis for assessing improvement strategies. PLC members constantly turn their learning and insights into action. They rigorously assess their efforts, demanding evidence in the form of student learning. |
| FIVE: Results Orientation | Team members do not assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. They do not analyze results to find evidence of improvement, and do not use evidence of success to improve their practice. | Team members sometimes assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. Sometimes they analyze results to find evidence of improvement, and do not use evidence of success to improve their practice. | Most team members assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. Most team members analyze results to find evidence of improvement, and use evidence of success to improve their practice. | All team members routinely assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. They are hungry for evidence of student learning and use that evidence to inform and improve their practice. |

3 BIG IDEAS OF A PLC

| PLC Characteristics | Starting Out | Developing | Deepening | Sustaining |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| PLC Big Idea #1 What do we want students to learn, and what prerequisite skills do the students who aren't getting it need in order to learn? | Little or no focus on these questions in plc | Some focus on these questions in plc | Team is usually focused on these questions in plc | Strong focus on these questions in plc |
| PLC Big Idea #2 How will we know if students have learned? | Little or no focus on this question in plc | Some focus on these questions in plc | Team is usually focused on these questions in plc | Strong focus on this question in plc |
| PLC Big Idea #3 What will we do if students don't learn? How will we scaffold core instruction to better support them; how will we provide small group instruction so they can learn what they need? | Little or no focus on these questions in plc | Some focus on these questions in plc | Team is usually focused on these questions in plc | Strong focus on these questions in plc |

| OTHER | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| PLC Characteristics | Starting Out | Developing | Deepening | Sustaining |
| Collective Responsibility | Staff do not feel a sense of whole-team shared responsibility for ALL students. | Some staff members feel a sense of collective responsibility for ALL students in the school. | There is a growing sense of collective responsibility through the team and school for the learning, progress, development, and success of ALL students. | A desire to do the best for ALL students pervades the PLC team's work. |
| Positive Orientation | Lots of 'why we can't', complaints/blame about students, administration, parents, etc. | Some team members hold a positive orientation and 'can do' attitude toward helping all students learn; others are skeptical or resistant. | Most team members hold a positive orientation and 'can do' attitude toward helping all students learn; a few are still skeptical or resistant. | Positive focus on action oriented solutions. Strong collective belief that all students can learn what we are teaching them. |
| Mutual trust, respect, and support | Staff relationships highlight issues around trust and conflict. A blame culture may exist. Trust and respect exists among some members of smaller groups or departments, but staff may be defensive about classroom practice, and reluctant to seek team support for improvement. Improvement issues are viewed as a threat by a number of staff. | A moderate level of trust exists school-wide, with increasing mutual respect, although there is some anxiety about being open about practice and asking for team support for new learning. There is mutual trust and respect among some groups of staff who work closely together. | Trust, respect, and positive professional relationships are developing school-wide. Staff are increasingly open about their practice, and seek the team's support to improve practice. | Staff relationships are characterized by openness, honesty, mutual trust, respect, support, and care. Staff are very open about their practice, feel safe sharing their practice, and easily ask for the team's support for professional learning and improvement. |

| PLC Characteristics | Starting Out | Developing | Deepening | Sustaining |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| Established norms for procedures, including use of agendas, protocols, reporting mechanisms, etc. | The PLC team does not routinely follow an agenda, set and follow group norms, use protocols to foster collaborative work, or report and share progress with other teams, and building/district leaders. | The PLC team sometimes follows an agenda, sets and follows group norms, uses protocols to foster collaborative work, and reports and share progress with other teams, and building/district leaders. | The PLC team usually follows an agenda, sets and follows group norms, uses protocols to foster collaborative work, and reports and shares progress with other teams, and building/district leaders. | It is standard practice for the PLC team to routinely follow an agenda, set and follow group norms, use protocols to foster collaborative work, and report and share progress with other teams, and building/district leaders. |