

# SOCIAL JUSTICE, COMPETITION AND QUALITY: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership Challenges

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THE 2012 YEARBOOK OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
PROFESSORS OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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- 2010 Billy K. Cannady, Jr., Dean of Continuing and Professional Studies, University of Virginia School of Continuing & Professional Studies, *The Leadership Challenge: "Who" Meets ... "How" and "Why."*
- 2011 Rosemary Papa, Northern Arizona University, *Activist Leadership*, from book titled *Turnaround Principals for Underperforming Schools* (with Fenwick English)
- 2012 Robert Beach, Alabama State University

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

*Contributing Authors*  
*Yearbook Reviewers*  
*Living Legends*  
*Editors' Sidebar*  
*President's Message*

### PART 1 – INVITED CHAPTERS

Living Legend 2011, Sandra Harris, Lamar University	1
Cocking Lecture, Rosemary Papa	5
Morphet Dissertation, Lisa M. Evans, University of Nevada, Reno	15
Autumn Cyprès, University of Tennessee	29
Theodore J. Kowalski, University of Dayton	37

### PART 2 – PREPARATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL LEADERS

<i>An Examination of Individual and Collective Learning within a Cohort Model in Management Development</i> Lisa Rosh, Yeshiva University Jane McDonald, George Mason University	45
<i>Not Yet Bought: Bill Gates' and Secretary Arne Duncan's Vision of the Education Master's Degree</i> Louis Wildman, California State University-Bakersfield Anthony Van Reusen, California State University-Bakersfield Jianjun Wang, California State University-Bakersfield	57
<i>Perceptions of Practice: Enhancing Teacher Supervision and Evaluation</i> Jan Walker, Drake University	63
<i>Teacher Motivation in Alabama's Public Schools: Some Empirical Findings and Their Potential Implications for School Leaders</i> Ronald A. Lindahl, Alabama State University	77
<i>Quality Communication: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership Challenge</i> Carol Webb, Western Illinois University Mary Hogg, Western Illinois University Andy Borst, Western Illinois University Jaynie Orendorff, Western Illinois University	87
<i>Outperforming Demographics: Factors Influencing Nine Rural and Urban Schools' Culture of Student Achievement</i> Candace F. Raskin, Minnesota State University, Mankato Courtney Stewart, University of Montana Jean Haar, Minnesota State University, Mankato	99

PART 3 – ISSUES RELATED TO SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATIONAL  
ADMINISTRATION

<i>Leadership Dispositions and Skills for Ethically Diverse Schools</i>	117
Jeanne L. Surface, University of Nebraska at Omaha Peter J. Smith, University of Nebraska at Omaha Kay A. Keiser, University of Nebraska at Omaha Karen L. Hayes, University of Nebraska at Omaha	
<i>Preparing Educational Leaders in the Pursuit of Social Justice: Practices and Processes for Culturally Proficient Leadership Development</i>	129
Julia W. Ballenger, Texas Wesleyan University Betty J. Alford, Stephen F. Austin State University	
<i>Realizing Higher Education’s Humanizing Potential: Assessment as a Dialogical Act</i>	145
Matthew B. Fuller, Sam Houston State University	
<i>Racial Disparities in School Discipline: A Matter of Social Justice</i>	157
Fred C. Lunenburg, Sam Houston State University	
<i>Factors that Increased Black Student Scores and Narrowed the Achievement Gap at One High Performing High School</i>	171
Jacqueline Shuman, University of St. Thomas Sandra Harris, Lamar University J. Kenneth Young, Lamar University Robert Nicks, Lamar University	
<i>Is Value Added a Socially Just Route to Increased Student Learning? An Analysis of Tennessee’s Value Added Assessment System</i>	185
Kimberly Hewitt, University of North Carolina at Greensboro	
<i>Data Use and the Work of Social Justice Leaders to Remedy Injustice at Their Location of Practice</i>	203
Charles McNulty, University of Northern Iowa	

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Betty J. Alford, *Stephen F. Austin State University*  
Julia W. Ballenger, *Texas Wesleyan University*  
Andy Borst, *Western Illinois University*  
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Sandra Harris, *Lamar University*  
Karen L. Hayes, *University of Nebraska at Omaha*  
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## **LIVING LEGEND AWARD**

In order to recognize outstanding contributions to the field of educational administration, NCPEA began the Living Legend Award in 1999. Recipients of this most prestigious award are recognized for the following:

**Living** a life that inspires others

**Exemplary** service to NCPEA

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**Dedication** to research, teaching and service to the professions

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As we enter the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we find that education in the United States continues to be contested ground. But since our schools deal with the aspirations of a burgeoning and increasingly diverse population, situated within a nation facing rapid change, and operate under a highly fractured political system, what else could be expected? In addition, recent economic turmoil has significantly reduced the funding available for public education at national, state, and local levels, and the lives of students and teachers from primary schools to doctoral studies have been significantly impacted, usually for the worse. So we return again and again to old questions: What knowledge is of the most worth? How do we educate everyone's children well in such tumultuous times? How do we prevent the erosion of core values and still create a more inclusive society? Can our schools become as Mann and Dewey hoped, the great engines of democracy, or are they doomed to replicate the status quo? When the nightly news is filled with doings of the privileged 1 percent and when the inherent inequities of capitalist societies are laid bare, everyday interactions become—justifiably so—inextricably intertwined with cries for justice, and thus the concept of *social justice* becomes, fittingly, the theme of the current NCPEA yearbook.

Gathered here is the work of several authors who address this concept in a variety of ways, often in seeming agreement about what it means. Yet within Part 1, we note that two of the invited chapters present social justice as an elusive term indeed. Autumn Cyprès, for example, unpacks an “ordinary” conversation to reveal the structures of Discourse and discourse which lie within, and then shows how problematic our simplest interactions can be, how laden with political freight. To further that thought, Theodore Kowalski outlines how, as a profession, educational administration has shied away from the critical conversations we need to have about social justice if it is to become a valuable pillar of our profession.

The remaining two sections contain chapters chosen through a blind review process, with a variety of pieces addressing issues related to the preparation of school leaders and the inescapable challenges they will encounter in practice. There are authors who address the value of university training in educational leadership, a practice under considerable criticism in the current climate. There is research on the problems faced by principals who have the duties of both formative and evaluative supervision, and research on the culture of schools which are making a positive difference in children's lives. Another chapter looks at the role of data in working to address inequities in the learned curriculum, while a different author presents cautionary evidence about the meaning of the data we so assiduously collect.

In short, even working within the context of “social justice” we have here a reflection of that diversity which is both a strength and a dilemma for our profession and for our country as a whole. We are reminded that this ongoing conversation, this sometime fractious dialogue, is the fundamental characteristic of democracy, and that the common good is inevitably more an aspiration than a description because it is that good which we must seek in common. We thank and commend our authors for their contributions to that search.

The process of producing this yearbook was, as always, a group effort. In addition to the authors, we would like to thank the reviewers who contributed their time and insight in helping choose and strengthen these chapters. Thanks are also due to our associate editor, Julia Ballenger, and our assistant editors, Sandra Harris and Bill Thornton. We are also grateful for the assistance of the NCPEA Executive Director, James Berry, and, especially, of the Publications Editor, Theodore Creighton, without whom this project could not have been completed.

*The Hour Glass Economy: The Social Justice Challenge  
for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

Fenwick W. English, NCPEA President  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The increasing gap between the *haves* and the *have nots* in America today threatens the very existence of the nation. It's been called "the hour glass economy" and it is worse than in 1929 when the top 1 percent of the population received nearly 22% of the nation's total income (Irvin, 2008, p. 17). The difference which comprises the *income gap* has been aptly summarized in the book *Super Rich*:

In 2003, the top fifth of earners in the USA received over half of the national income while the bottom fifth received only 5 per cent. In fact, the top 1 percent took in more of the pie than the bottom 40 per cent. (Irvin, 2008, pp. 16-17)

The hour glass economy is very visible in the schools. Schools which are embedded in suburban tracts of America's cities generally continue to produce students who do well on tests and gain entrance to college. But inner city schools and many rural schools represent the bottom half of the hour glass. Here the fraying fiber of America is visible in run down facilities, high turnover in the teaching corps, and large pupil drop out rates.

The tragedy is that the neo-liberal perspective of education ignores the social class disparities and puts the blame entirely on "failing schools." The reality is that there is an intimate connection between social privilege and schools which serve those privileged students well. Pierre Bourdieu (1998) put it this way:

Families are *corporate bodies* animated by a kind of *conatus*... a tendency to perpetuate their social being, with all its powers and privileges, which is at the basis of *reproduction strategies*: fertility strategies, matrimonial strategies, successional strategies, economic strategies, and last but not least, educational strategies.... The reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital is achieved in the relation between familial strategies and the specific logic of the school institution. (p. 19)

The 2012 NCPEA Yearbook takes on the issues of social justice, competition, and quality as a major challenge to educational leadership in the twenty-first century. There are chapters which examine the demographic factors influencing the culture of student achievement and the impact of the neo-liberal foundations connections to the federal department of education; strategies and tactics affiliated with narrowing the achievement gap; and suggestions for preparing leaders who are committed to social justice in this century.

To be concerned with social justice in the nation means examining not only what goes on within schools, but the relationships between schools and the larger social class and political structures which work to perpetuate themselves. Social justice leaders have to become *activist leaders* outside of schools because as Basil Bernstein (1996) observed:

There is likely to be an unequal distribution of images, knowledges, possibilities, and resources that will affect the rights of participation, inclusion, and individual enhancement of groups of students. It is highly likely that the students who do not receive these rights in school come from social groups who do not receive these rights in society. (p. 8)

I am pleased that so many of the authors of the chapters in this yearbook were willing to re-examine pedagogical practices within schools, but also more closely consider how larger society and political and economic interests use the schools to perpetuate and advance their own hegemony. If this effort is allowed to go unchallenged then we will continue to see the bonds of social solidarity widen and the common good perpetuated by the common schools marginalized, for as Brian Barry (2005) notes, “As the sense of social responsibility withers, so too do levels of trust in others decline” (p. 183).

Charter schools, vouchers, merit pay, and other neoliberal tactics for the schools create winners and losers and continue to widen the gap between the political *haves* and *have nots*. They are the ways that the state retreats from any promise to ensure that schooling is good for everyone, because when it isn’t good for those at the bottom of the hour glass, it’s just their fault because they made poor decisions. Once again the victims are blamed for being who they are and where they are, ensuring that they will continue to be poorly educated compared to their more favorably positioned and wealthier classmates in the suburbs.

It is my hope that the chapters collected in this yearbook will help in creating the awareness upon which we may correct the deleterious agenda of neo-liberalism which is wrecking havoc with the bonds of social trust which are established in the common schools to ostensibly serve all the children of all the people. That they have not always lived up to that promise is not a reason to abandon them at this point in our history. It harkens back to what Bankston and Caldas (2009) called America’s “civic creed” in its schools, a kind of civic faith which “was linked to the long-standing image of Americans as moving toward a special destiny, and the peculiarly American version of the faith in education was shaped by the nation’s history...” (p. 167). I believe that this is a shared value among most of the authors in this volume. That faith continues to animate calls for social justice in educational leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## *Maintaining the Human Touch in Educational Leadership*

Sandra Harris, Lamar University

NCPEA has been a valuable organization for me as the relationships fostered through it have enabled me to grow personally and professionally. It is partially because of NCPEA's strong outreach to individuals that I want to talk this evening briefly about three of the challenges before us to maintain the human touch in our profession:

- Identifying appropriate responses to technology dilemmas,
- Establishing covenant communities in our diverse classrooms and beyond, and
- Nurturing our professional relationships.

I believe these all have the potential to develop or diminish the human touch.

### **IDENTIFYING RESPONSES TO TECHNOLOGY DILEMMAS**

Matthew Militello (2011) argues that technology in schools today has the potential to be that of a “disruptive force” or to have a “transformational impact” (p. 15). The determining difference, he suggests, does not lie in the technology, but in the humans who control the technology. To illustrate his point, he cites Kurt Vonnegut's 1952 book, *Player Piano*, the story of a world created where technology begins to control every aspect of life. How exciting it must have seemed at the beginning; what an awesome piece of technology . . . but after the tunes in its repertoire had been played and played and the “new” had worn off, where was the ability to create a new tune, to sing a new song? That was invested only in human capacity.

Technology has opened up avenues for online learning throughout the world. I am not against the increasing use of technology. However, I'm reminded of the first time we tried to feed solid food to my little grandson, Austin. He closed his lips, shook his head and there was no way that spoon with its “delicious” rice cereal was getting into his mouth. The next day, we had a similar encounter, but he must have gotten a little taste, because over the next few days he grew to actually look forward to his cereal and is now a confirmed chocoholic!!

My reaction to online teaching/learning which currently assails all our universities is not unlike Austin's reaction to that first spoonful of solid food. At one time I was totally and completely opposed to online teaching/learning – all I could do was shake my head violently and say No, No! This made me think I was clearly not in the right place; but was instead in the wrong place at the wrong time. Now, I realize that being in the right place at the right time does not preclude living in the midst of inner chaos. Today, while I may not fully embrace online learning, I am actually becoming rational enough to consider the potential technology brings to education. After all, the enemy of education is not online programs. Instead, our enemy is **not building these programs on sound research-based principles**. Because it is so new, there is still much to be learned regarding online or virtual learning. Thus, some of the questions we should be asking include:

- How do we provide blended programs that balance online/virtual learning with some component of face-to-face?
- How do we accommodate the student who needs differentiation in a fully online environment?
- How do we build a climate in online programs where students network and form lasting relationships in the virtual venue?
- What is the appropriate class size when a course is fully online?

### *Invited Chapter*

Jackson (1968) wrote, “The greatest intellectual challenge of our time is not how to design machines that behave more like humans, but rather, how to protect humans from being treated more like machines” (p. 66). Thus, the challenge before us is to control technology, rather than let it control us or we diminish the human touch.

#### **ESTABLISHING COVENANT COMMUNITIES**

Whether teaching and learning are conducted in face-to-face, blended or fully online delivery models, and with the world’s complexities and changing demographics, today putting a human face to our challenges is especially important. One way to do this is to facilitate the development of covenant communities that encourage rich cultural conversations with educational leaders. Sergiovanni (1996) addressed the covenant idea as a way to create a community of learners that

- Respects and values diversity,
- Develops shared values and beliefs,
- Serves the common good, and
- Supports people helping one another achieve common purposes.

Having these cultural conversations is a critical component of preparing students for leading in our increasingly diverse schools of today (Okun, 2010). Ken Young, Carol Mullen, and I (2011) have been investigating this challenge of creating covenant communities where difficult cultural conversations can take place with diverse groups of doctoral students in a face-to-face program.

The doctoral students who participated in our study indicated the importance of having these conversations but they emphasized the need for a safe, trusting environment in order to participate – they needed to feel the presence of a covenant community. This happens best when professors are purposeful and intentional in building this trusting covenant climate.

It is difficult at best to establish covenant communities in a face-to-face environment where learning happens in a variety of serendipitous ways inside and outside the classroom, but I believe this potential is limited in a virtual environment. Yet, somehow we must navigate our way through this difficulty to strengthen peer-learning environments in all delivery models. Two questions we should be asking as we work to establish covenant communities in our classrooms are:

- How do we create covenant communities that nurture greater understandings of our diverse society?
- What intentional steps must be taken to be assured that our students feel the covenant presence?

The challenge before us is to establish covenant communities within our classrooms which have the potential to develop the human touch in our universities and beyond.

#### **NURTURING PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Technology which has spawned the growth of online/virtual delivery models is indirectly contributing to harming professors’ professional relationships. At a time when university budgets are strained, the competition for students is fierce. Distance Education programs are able to draw students from hundreds of miles away, when just a few years ago they were limited to drawing students only from their geographic areas. Consequently the environment in Higher Education is more competitive than ever before and this has had a clear impact on the professional and even personal relationships of professors. In my own experience, it has often been professors at other universities who mentored and encouraged me. These colleagues (most of whom were met through NCPEA) became my writing partners, presentation partners, and invited me to participate in their research and contribute to their book chapters. Their support was and continues to be invaluable.

### *Maintaining the Human Touch in Educational Leadership*

The professional relationships which bind us together as human beings with common interests in educational leadership are invaluable to our profession as we come together to share ideas and resources. This is less likely to happen when we are competing for the same students and the same dollars. Thus some of the questions we should be asking include:

- How do we contribute to the fiscal health of our universities and maintain quality of our programs?
- How do we develop relationships with sister universities in this competitive setting since geographical boundaries are diminishing?
- How do we mentor, support, publish and present with our colleagues in the Academy when competition gets in the way of our collaborative efforts?

Our challenge is to nurture our own covenant community where collaborative, professional relationships might flourish and thus expand our human currency.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

There is no doubt our world is increasingly complex and with today's technological advancements resulting in a diversity of learning modalities educators must focus on the challenge of maintaining the human touch. Our legacy as educators should culminate in an embrace of learning that encourages lifelong wonder and an appreciation of our humanity. Our goal as educators should not be to **leave** a legacy, but to **live a legacy**. . . . This means that while we **lead** in life-long learning we must **live** the process of continued interrogation to find ways

- to respond to technology with balance in order to build people connections that develop our human capacities,
- to establish covenant communities so that we create environments where students' stories put a human face to teaching and learning issues, and
- to nurture professional relationships where that we can embrace our shared responsibilities to one another.

When we do this, we nourish our human capacity at a time when the human touch is so needed.

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## *Activist Leadership*

Rosemary Papa, Northern Arizona University

Esteem friends and colleagues, Executive Board members and our Executive Director Jim Berry. I am humbled to deliver the 2011 Walter D. Cocking Lecture.



### **Who was Walter Dewey Cocking?**

He was 6'3 and by some accounts 240 or 300 lbs. Quite a commanding presence. He married but had no children. He was a teacher, superintendent (Iowa and Texas), worked with President Roosevelt in the 1930s on the Tennessee Valley Authority. He served as Editor to two premier educational journals: *The School Executive* and *The American School and University* (Herring & Klimes, 1976). He is the **founding father of NCPEA**.

Walter Dewey Cocking was the Dean of the College of Education at the University of Georgia, serving from 1937 to 1941. Along with Marvin Pittman, he was a major target of Governor Eugene Talmadge's 1941 attempt to remove "foreign" influences from higher education in Georgia. The following brief biography comes from "*This Day in Georgia History*," part of the Georgia Encyclopedia (2004-2012) project at the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government [On a side note, The USS Carl Vinson returned after a historic deployment that included the burial at sea of terrorist Osama bin Laden].

Graduating from Columbia, he was a pioneer in the idea of individualized instruction and specialized curricula, classrooms, and language laboratories. In 1937, as dean of the University of Georgia's College of Education where soon after arriving the University System of Georgia Board of Regents directed Cocking to embark on a study of state-supported higher education for African Americans in the state. His research led him to conclude that there was a vast discrepancy between African Americans and Whites in Georgia's postsecondary education. He and a colleague were FIRED for advocating public school integration. This became known as the "Cocking Affair" and led the state attorney general to successfully defeat Talmadge in the next election for governor. Cocking was subsequently invited to return to the University of Georgia, but he declined. Such political interference led the Southeastern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools to strip the accreditation of ten white state colleges in Georgia (Georgia Encyclopedia, 2004-2012; Georgia Southern University, no date).

His place in our history is obvious. And, to some his leadership abilities are even more notable. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* chronology of Major Landmarks in the progress of African Americans in Higher Education notes this 1941 action as a major landmark. As noted on their website, "The *Cocking Affair* in the University of Georgia system leaves two White professors, Dean Walter D. Cockling and Dr. Marvin S. Pittman, without jobs for promoting equality" (*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2006, p. 2).

**Note:** Excerpts from this speech are taken from the Rowman & Littlefield book, *Turnaround Principals for Underperforming Schools*, Papa & English (2011).

### Invited Chapter

In 1947, under the guidance of Walter Cocking, editor of *The School Executive* and The E. B. Norton, professor of educational administration at Teachers College Columbia, **NCPEA was founded August, 1947** (Papa, 2005). Walter Cocking along with 55 others chartered the first two-week meeting which was billed as the Work Conference of Professors of Educational Administration with 72 professors attending. The objectives were to:

1. Achieve among conference members a better understanding of the problems of developing leaders in education, and
2. [To develop] a common approach regarding the methods and techniques for the more effective preparation of educational administrators. (Papa, 2005, p. 6)

These principles still guide us today! Walter Cocking became the first Executive Secretary-Treasurer of NCPEA. In 1990, this position became the Executive Director.

Ah, to be a Walter Cocking Intern--there were 13 of them, from 1949 to 1960. He was a task master, tough by all accounts I read. When I first came to NCPEA 24 years ago (1987) I was asked by some if I knew any of his interns. Luckily, I had been mentored by one (Stalcup). And, several of his interns were still attending NCPEA when I began. The Walter Cocking lecture given in 1987 at Chadron Nebraska, was by Dan Griffith, a giant in our field (Alford, Papa, & Coleman, 2007).

Walter Cocking even spoke about other disciplines in describing leadership. This excerpt is taken from the *Terre Mariae*, University of Maryland, 1939 book from the School of Pharmacy. He wrote, “The pharmacist in modern American life has become a guide, a leader, an advisor and a counselor to all the people of his neighborhood” (*Internet Archive American Libraries*, no date, p. 1).



By now, you may be wondering about the Yin and Yang symbol. The opposite colors with dots in the center of opposite color, symbolize that while there are opposites, they stand together as part of a dynamic whole. Both opposites are necessary for the whole to prosper and to work. For example, Yin may symbolize advancement while Yang stands for retreat. This is also the cover of my latest book, *Turnaround Principals for Underperforming Schools* (2011) with Fenwick English. Excerpts from this book are woven through the remainder of this lecture, as I believe there is strong relevance to both the man Walter D. Cocking was and how today we must in education administration focus on both the Yin and Yang in understanding the challenges we face.

In our search for answers, we listen to many charlatans; strong critics of public schools now make money off of public education by disclaiming their 20+ years of critical political rhetoric. These critics today make the rounds selling what their companies will do to help raise test scores. The privatization from when I began teaching, 39 years ago, is stunning: in the 1970s classrooms were not allowed to display any consumerism (i.e., McDonald’s drink containers could not bear the name or logo at athletic events). Today, Apple and Dell enter classrooms and use classrooms as technology laboratories. Starving public schools since 1983 under President Reagan began the semi-private elements—Philanthro-capitalism, today known as Heritage, Wallace, Bill and Melinda Gates foundations, etc., opened the school gates with their private capitalistic ventures.

**What would Walter say about this?** When the Soviets launched Sputnik October 4, 1957 these efforts spawned Gene Roddenbury to write *Star Trek* in the late 1960s, which led Ed Roberts to build the Altair 8800 the first personal computer for which Bill Gates and Paul Allen wrote the code (Film Junk

### *Activist Leadership*

Reed, 2009). In Walter's time Sputnik did not drive our politicians to make public school comparisons with U.S.S.R. schools.

Yet, today we compare our schools to Chinese schools because corporate America has discovered their truth--the world is flat using the globalization lens. Fewer jobs are available to U.S. workers. International comparisons are now the norm. So, corporate America today defines its consumers as schools, districts, multi-districts, state, multi-state, national, and global. Wow!

Evidence of this corporatization of public education:

- 1993 the first virtual (online) school began – today 31 states have adopted online education as a viable approach to teaching students.
- Online education makes possible what is in 2011-2012 termed the backpack student...student choice at the course level (Utah, Florida approaches) from any providers = multiple providers and public school districts cannot refuse. The backpack follows the student...the public funding will follow the student.
- This business model has a motto: Adopt, Adapt and Scale.

The essential ingredients to build activist leaders are identified in [this] book. The key rests in the mind and heart of the leader who has a fundamental understanding of the dynamics of schooling, human motivation, and possesses the resiliency and energy to engage in altering the internal landscape of an unsuccessful school. The reasons for the lack of success are complex and interactive. Schools are not inert structures but living organisms. Putting them back together again is a collaborative venture because lone rangers don't make it.

The challenge is not only to turn low performing or failing schools around, but to enable them to become more socially just places for all students. The book examined the following questions:

- How do school leaders turn around underperforming schools?
- How does a school leader treat the school's most vulnerable students?
- What are the characteristics of successful school leaders that are social justice centered? What problems do these principals face?
- What are the consequences these principals face? Our research centers on confronting these questions.

**Heuristics we define as the observed beliefs and values of leaders in turnaround schools: the leaders interior sensibilities defined as accoutrements.** The observed beliefs and values of leaders in turnaround schools is the interiority later to be defined as the accoutrements.

Heuristics is the involving or serving as an aid to learning, discovery, or problem solving by experimental means and especially by trial and error (Merriam Dictionary, 2010) and is the chunking of patterns of information into *rules of thumb* (Davis, 2004).

Focused on turnaround schools, data from the WWC (I.E.S. What Works Clearinghouse, 2008) revealed the first four heuristics. The WWC used a semi-structured hierarchy classification to determine the strength of evidence based grounding: 3 levels, strong level of evidence = randomized controls; moderate level = quasi-experimental; and, low level = focused on expert opinion derived from strong findings or theories in related areas.

What WWC Research says about turning around underperforming schools is noted in the first four heuristics.

**Heuristic 1: A dramatic change should be signaled** (low evidence). Their data indicated that there has to be a signal of some sort that things are not going to be same as before. This signal is one that is an important sign to those inside and outside the school that a significant break or interruption is going to occur. What this means is that awareness has to be created that it's not going to be 'business as usual' any longer. There is no one 'best way' to signal such a change.

**Heuristic 2: A consistent focus on instruction** (low evidence) and **Heuristic 3: Select improvements that are visible and easiest to secure** (low evidence). The key to turning around a low-performing school is to focus on instruction. The reason is not hard to discern. Student performance is normally determined by test scores because they are the cheapest means to define performance. One must know how 'low performance' is defined before attempting to organize the energies of the people inside and outside of a school site. Differentiating instruction and making sure it is aligned to the means of measurement is usually a key element in engaging in 'improvement' (English, 2010).

Simplistic business models are usually ignorant of the core of the educational enterprise. Business models are about management and not about instruction, except perhaps to search for ways to reduce costs and improve scale-up efficiencies.

It is possible to have a well managed school and low student achievement. One does not usually imply the other. However, if a school is poorly managed overall, that usually includes the instructional program and hence the appearance is that if managerial techniques are installed to create order, this will somehow improve instructional performance as well.

**Heuristic 4: Build a committed staff** (low evidence). The key to leadership in turning low-performing schools around is that there has to be a 'critical mass' of like minded professionals and support staff that are committed to improvement. While we think that the word 'culture' is often over-used as is 'climate' for schools, there has to be a concerted effort to creating a sense of palpable expectations for change which requires concerted work towards change and towards advancement.

The ability of the principal to connect, excite teachers and staff, convince mostly by example, is pivotal in school improvement. The principal has to be 'out front' but can't be the only one 'in front.' Finding ways for many people to shine is a key. There is an old saying that, 'It's amazing how much can be accomplished if one is not worried about who gets the credit' that epitomizes the posture of the activist leader.

The remaining heuristics are from the research of Papa and English.

**Heuristic 5: Educational reform is complex, multifaceted, and interactive.** There have been many attempts at educational reform in the U.S. over a 200 year period. While some were initially successful, none have been able to be sustained except the graded school which is one of the few exceptions to sustainability. However, the graded school carries enormous educational baggage and continues to be a major barrier to break what Sarason (1990) has called "the encapsulated classroom" (p.111) tradition. Educational reform cannot be considered an approach involving a simple check list which is enacted upon stable organizational entities. Schools are dynamic and fluid despite how they may appear to outsiders. Any reform which attempts to change internal dynamics must be considered interactional and not static.

**Heuristic 6: The motivations and goals of educational reformers are not the same.** Any study of the history of the reformers of education in the U.S. will show that some were prompted by altruistic goals of educating the masses while others were looking for cheap and quick educational fixes. Many reformers are still looking for quick fixes and too many believe that the corporate model of 'one size fits all' and top down change will reform the schools so that they work for everyone and not simply the well-to-do. In this, they are mistaken.

Reformers do not all agree on what constitutes a reform. Many reforms are profoundly anti-democratic. While the rhetoric about changing schools is usually about students and learning, many reforms have little with anything to do with learning at all. Rather they are about imposing a 'for-profit' mindset on the schools where the major beneficiaries are not students at all, but the owners and stockholders.

**Heuristic 7: Many reforms have little to do with social justice.** Many educational reforms propose changes that have little to do with altering the socio-economic-political status quo. Schools continue to act as conservative social agents that reproduce the culture and status of those in control of the country and its economic agents. Some reforms benefit those who are now in control of the schools and enhance their position. Not everyone benefits from reforming schools. It all depends on who is defining the reform and what is the content of it.

**Heuristic 8: The public school pupil mix will continue to be even more diverse than it is today, calling into question the existing dominance of the Euro-American majoritarian cultural perspective on many fronts, from ‘core curriculums’ to ‘standardized tests.’** All of the demographic trends concerning the racial and ethnic composition of the U.S. indicate it is becoming more and more diverse. It is estimated that by the year 2050 Whites will no longer be the majority. The largest gain will be from Hispanics and minority children will become the majority by 2031 (Yen, 2009). For years minority children have been at a disadvantage when they are immersed in a school culture that is alien and often incommensurable with their lived life experiences. Increasingly, the tension between the cultural perspectives of the once dominant majority Euro-American view will be called into question as to its propriety and relevance. For example, Popham (2001, as cited in Au, 2009, p. 138), a noted educational statistician, has indicated that standardized tests institutionalize inequality because it is a statistical impossibility for all students to reach 100% proficiency because standardized tests “require that a certain percentage of students fail in order to be considered valid and reliable.” Gibson (2001) has called high stakes testing “a form of regulated elitism.”

An activist leader works to create awareness on the part of the faculty and support staff of this fundamental problem and works to ease the tensions involved. An activist leader also works to create understanding that not only is curriculum biased if it does not question the cultural arbitrary embedded within it, but so are tests and other educational materials and accompanying pedagogies if they are not interrogated as well.

**Heuristic 9: The profound quandary of African American and Native American students in schools dominated by Euro-American cultural perspectives places them at extreme risk of alienation and failure.**

**Heuristic 10: Poverty is not a random variable among children and the inequality gap is growing in the U.S.** The large repository of research and statistics continues to demonstrate that poverty does not embrace American school children as a random (or chance) variable. Rather, poverty impacts Americans disproportionately, concentrating on African American, Native American and Hispanic student populations in very great numbers. Research shows that it is far more difficult for AA families to remove themselves from poverty than Whites (Hertz, 2005). African American families are much more likely to remain poor over several generations than Whites. The income gap in the United States between rich and poor is expanding. It is the second highest of all countries in the world, only behind China (*The Economist*, 2011). This trend is profoundly troubling for the future of a democracy.

**Heuristic 11: School leadership success is intimately connected to school district leadership success.**

**Heuristic 12: District leaders must face down pressures to treat all the schools the same in spite of their performance.** While it may be convenient and even romantic to think about turning schools around in isolation, an individual principal and his/her faculty can only do so much in isolation. S/he will require increased resource support, perhaps some waivers from larger school system policies, regulations and practices, and strong political support when the times get rough as they inevitably will. Likewise, the commitment of the central office to their low-performing schools has to be manifest in “a commitment by the board and the superintendent to work together collaboratively, to candidly assess the strengths and weaknesses of the district, to put aside issues which do not impact achievement and to build community support for their plans” (Papa & English, 2011, p. 86).

### *Invited Chapter*

There is an increasing awareness that superintendent stability is one of the cornerstones of success in turning schools around. There are enormous pressures on school district leaders to treat all the schools the same. Making exceptions without the buffer of a federal or state law for various exceptionalities is politically dangerous. When more funds flow to schools serving children from the lower classes, the politically powerful elites who normally exercise control may exert resistance and a backlash occurs.

There can be an expressed fear that somehow if ‘those children’ succeed ‘our children’ will not enjoy the cultural and educational advantages to which they are *entitled*. Despite the rhetoric to the contrary, not everyone wants all children to do well in the schools, especially if it means that limited resources are re-directed to those perceived not to be the same or *deserving*. It takes great courage for district leaders to confront these forces and pressures and often boards are representative of those class-centered interests.

**Heuristic 13: The creation of an effectively aligned curriculum within a centralized testing program is a school district responsibility, while differentiated instruction is a school site responsibility.** The key to improving scores on standardized tests of accountability rests on curriculum alignment and differentiated instruction. While curriculum alignment is a central responsibility, differentiated instruction is a school unit responsibility. Schools and school district personnel must share in the blame and/or the success of their efforts. If the curriculum to be tested is not taught, it doesn’t matter if instruction is differentiated.

**Heuristic 14: While school leadership involves learning, it is actually acquired (i.e., an act of accoutering) through development and practice.** The ‘accoutrements’ of leadership are not simply discrete skills, though some skills are part of being accoutered. The word *accoutrement* was borrowed from Middle French in 1596 (Merriam-Webster, 2012) which meant to arrange or to sew something. In contemporary terms it means an article of equipment or dress which is acquired. Used in my current research, it refers to perspectives and outlooks concerning leadership developed through application and practice and which are descriptively *sewn into one’s persona* as s/he develops into a fully fledged activist leader.

**Heuristic 15: Activist educational leaders understand that social justice involves the whole of society and not just the schools.** I fully believe leaders are made and not born. They develop and learn, make mistakes, and continue developing. I don’t believe in traits because that would connote some sort of genetic origination. Leaders come to leadership and develop themselves. In the words of Warren Bennis (1989), “Leaders have nothing but themselves to work with” (p.47). While activist school leaders have primary responsibilities for their schools’ operations, they understand that schools are the recipients of students from all classes of society and that some come with many more advantages and with experiences that put them ahead of their classmates (or behind) as the case may be. School as an institution is not a socially neutral place. It is representative of the interests, perspective, outlook, culture and mores of the dominant elites who control them. Bourdieu and Passeron (2000) call this “the cultural arbitrary” (p. 16).

There are many inequalities in the larger society and schools in most nations reproduce those inequalities. The activist school leader fully understands this essentially conservative fact and works to create an educational environment which does not reproduce such inequalities.

**Heuristic 16: The dominant reform model pushed on schools by the federal and state agencies and many foundations in education are exemplars of machine bureaucracy.** There is the relentless pressure to standardize everything, creating an educational Procrustean bed for teachers and students and dealing with resistance to that model with punishment via merit systems linked to pay for performance by student test scores on standardized tests. Standardized tests eliminate student individual differences as a calculus in evaluating learning. If such did not erase such differences they could not be called ‘objective.’

**Heuristic 17: The activist leader understands the importance of cultural capital in turning around schools and has no place for deficit metaphors for students.** Schools represent a specific form of cultural capital of various social classes in the larger society. Educational institutions are those agencies which bestow forms of cultural capital on students in the form of diplomas and degrees. Students from various social classes come to schools with different forms of cultural capital. Those students from social classes which are most congruent with those of the school do much better in them than those who have less or little experience with the approved modes of cultural capital. The activist educational leader looks at students who have not had access to dominant forms of cultural capital as neither stupid nor deficient, but simply as different. Deficit mental models of students who are different are not compatible with turning around low-performing schools. All students are capable, but they are different.

**Heuristic 18: The activist leader is intentional in developing their leadership by embracing both the *heart and mind*.** The socially just activist leader must be thoughtful not only with others but with oneself. Skills and management techniques can be learned. How we respect others and provide *fairness* in opportunities for all asks the school leader to delve deeper into one's heart: to be curious, and imaginative when dealing with the current wisdom.

**The Accoutrements of Leadership are those *special characteristics and skills that through application and practice are sewn into one's persona*.** It is essential to differentiate programs and practices at school sites (e.g., a specific reading program, test practice sessions, participation in city poster projects, etc.) and the leadership skills and characteristics that allow the repertoire of programs and practices to be implemented.

I refer to these leader skills and characteristics as Accoutrements: a leader's perspectives and outlooks developed through application and practice and which are descriptively *sewn into one's persona* as s/he develops into a fully fledged leader.

**Who the school leader is matters.** The six accoutrements are where our focus should be as we prepare the next wave of school leaders.

**Accoutrement One, Leading the Adult Learner.** Leaders should know adult learners learn on a need-to-know basis (Papa & Papa, 2011). Adults learn differently and want what they want when they need it. Fairness for the adult learner takes the learner at his/her particular learning point. Thus, the superintendent at the district level and the Principal at the building level must know how to work with the principals/teachers for program implementation and they must know the program and know how to work with teachers to achieve the program goals.

For example, teacher professional development must be anchored on adult learning principles. If we know how a learner approaches the acquisition of knowledge then we can arrange strategies that will enhance their learning. The days of the after school workshop and the ubiquitous power point presentation for all teachers are gone. When the decision is made for professional development, the leader must know the teachers/learners and adjust the teaching and learning appropriately.

**Accoutrement Two, Human Agency.** Walter Cocking in 1939 understood what his research was telling him about inequality. We must ensure today's school leader has a varied repertoire of fair and just behaviors. The leader knows how to approach individuals and knows what they need to excel.

For example, if principal A is comfortable with travel, enjoys bringing back ideas, but is not comfortable teaching others. Principal B has family commitments that limit travel but loves to be in a coaching capacity with teachers. Understanding such allows a team approach to implementing potentially exciting new programs or practices.

**Accoutrement Three, Intended but Ignored Skills.** How do we measure a good listener? Yet we know listening is critical for school leaders, as is observing. We know it is vital for the socially just *activist* leader to be caring, compassionate and above all, fair in treating students and teachers.

### *Invited Chapter*

For example, vision building requires strong people skills. Strong personnel relations demand it and have the understanding that it is ok and normal to wrestle with complex issues. Listening to all sides of an issue and using the compass of fairness are skills to develop.

**Accountment Four, Intellectual Curiosity.** A leader is curious. We can prepare school leaders to be curious of their school setting. Curiosity in learning and how it is fostered in the school environment is critical for school staff to develop, understand and apply. Curiosity is fairness in action as it asks ‘why’ with no assigning of blame.

For example, where does technology fit into our vision? Do the latest social media ideas match our stated goals? How do the latest versions of software meet the needs of specific students (e.g., NYsoftware for remediation vs. enhancement). *Is the leader willing to suspend his/her own perceptions/biases to examine new ideas?*

**Accountment Five, Futurity.** What future do my lovely grandchildren face? Most toys today are electronic and the schools they attend are testing dominate. Technology gives us a false sense that it should be easier to solve the problems we face within our schools than it really is while providing supposed efficiencies. More importantly, where are we going? What might the future landscape look like? How will social networking effect curriculum and provide learning opportunities?

For example, leaders must be exposed to learning frames that go against the grain of current wisdom. Going against the current fad may be a very good way to anticipate the future.

**Accountment Six, Imaginativeness.** Creativity, inspiration, originality, resourcefulness, visionary, artistic, inventive, ingenious are the synonyms to imaginative leadership. Professional and personal experiences with good heart and an almost spiritual need to be of service for others; to be the hope for others; to help others be all they can be; to see the good in others – these are limited only by one’s lack of imagination.

For example, visibility of the principal is noted as important in many settings. It is the imaginative superintendent who arranges for principals to have time with no interruptions and establishes budget practices that ensure the essential services are covered. Imagine a superintendent that goes into the classroom and models learner focused teaching.

### **Thirteen Explicit Leader Beliefs and Actions**

We identify in our book 13 explicit leader beliefs and actions (Papa & English, 2011). These are critical to teach within our educational leadership programs.

1. A refusal to accept the status quo as inevitable;
2. A refusal to accept low performing or failing schools as permanent features of public education;
3. A commitment to social justice and schools as levers of social change;
4. A commitment to a participatory process;
5. A commitment to understanding who is doing the speaking;
6. A commitment to social justice;
7. Respect to understand family, home and the cultures of your students;
8. Knowing that some forms of student resistance to the school are a healthy sign of their protest not to be erased or have their cultural identities compromised;
9. Knowing that your persona matters;
10. Knowing that you need to remain intellectually curious and imaginative;
11. Asking the hard questions that guide our craft;
12. Encouraging teachers to remain learners; and,
13. Sponsoring professional development that fosters culturally responsive pedagogy. (pp. 127-131)

### So what does it all mean?

Unraveling the workings of the school and putting them back together again is a collaborative venture, and is not for the faint of heart. Make no mistake about it. This is hard work. It takes a special kind of educator to do it.

One couldn't do it unless something was known about what was going on inside of the school buildings. It is the *what's going on inside of them that is important*. But the major lesson of this effort is that as human constructions we can change schools by changing what goes on inside of the school buildings. The key to doing that is *changing what is going on inside the heads of the human beings in them*.

*This is the challenge of leadership. Leadership is about creating a new mindscape in old landscapes* (Papa-Lewis, 1999). Dr. Walter Dewey Cocking died at age 72 in 1964. The editorial staff, Dale Hayes, of the *American School and University* journal wrote:

School children, school teachers, school administrators, school architects, school boards, school buildings, and school systems---the whole of our educational complex - are better for his having passed our way. He saw hope and progress everywhere, and he made others look ahead with him. (Herring & Klimes, 1976, pp. 5-6)

The Walter Cocking lectures began in 1967, 44 years ago. Activist leaders are shaped by us.

Thank you.

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## ***Lack of Shared Vision and the Unintended Consequences: A Case Study of Educational Leaders' Perceptions of Change***

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Building shared vision is an essential leadership skill integral to orchestrating change in any system. Educational leaders can draw upon numerous theories to guide change, many of which include strategies for building shared vision (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Starvos, 2005; Deming, 2000; Senge, 2006.). Indeed, shared vision and effective change efforts are deeply interconnected. Senge (2006) identifies shared vision as one of the cornerstones of learning organizations, a framework for promoting organizational change. Shared vision, according to Senge, is the collective caring behind an organization. When all members of an organization convey the same vision, this acts as a positive force for change.

The concept of shared vision is well accepted; yet, building and maintaining shared vision are difficult undertakings, requiring complex skills that remain elusive for many educational leaders. As a result, it is not uncommon for practicing leaders to implement a reform with an assumption of a shared or common vision, only to find the effort less than effective. Furthermore, many change efforts lead to unintended consequences particularly when leaders do not take an active role in developing a shared vision throughout the organization (Evans, Thornton, & Usinger, 2010; Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; Thornton, Beattie, & Brackett, 2010). When change efforts do not produce intended results, leaders often introduce yet another reform thus repeating the cycle of ever-new initiatives that can create confusion, lead to exhaustion within both teacher and leadership corps, and produce few systemic improvements (Fullan, 2008).

This study, which was designed to explore the mental models held by educational leaders with regard to one change effort, provided evidence that leadership cannot assume the existence of a shared vision. Moreover, the findings suggest that lack of shared vision can lead to unintended consequences that have impact throughout a system. The study explored various aspects of *walkthroughs*, a single change effort implemented district-wide eight years prior to data collection. Walkthroughs within the educational setting are parallel to the business approach of "Management by Wandering Around" (Peters & Waterman, 1982, p. 122). Developed at Hewlett-Packard, the practice, whereby supervisors build relationships by physically walking throughout the plant and engaging with workers, is a strategy that many leaders in highly successful companies employ. Subsequently, Frase and Hetzel (1990) introduced the practice into the field of education as a tool for principals to positively impact schools. Because walkthroughs had been implemented for almost a decade, the study explored educational leaders' understanding of this established change effort. This article summarizes the dissertation, *The Congruence of Mental Models Amongst District and Site Level Administrators of Walkthroughs as a Vehicle for System-Wide School Improvement*, (Evans, 2010).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Theories of Organizational Change**

Four organizational change theories were selected as a theoretical background for change within schools and school districts. The theories were selected because of their prevalence within the educational system as well as the explicit or implicit presence of mental models present in the theory. First, the *Continuous Improvement Model* by Deming (2000) illustrates the importance of developing a common vision through continual engagement in a cycle of change. This "Plan, Do, Study, Act Cycle" serves as the primary vehicle in the development of shared vision (Keleman, 2003).

In the second theory highlighted, Argyris and Schön (1996) contend that organizational learning and individual learning are closely linked. However, in order for organizational learning to occur, system leaders must employ strategies to intentionally integrate individual and collective learning into skills and knowledge that will deeply impact the organization. These opportunities for shared learning provide

## *Invited Chapter*

structures by which members of an organization can inquire deeply into current reality and perceptions and co-construct a vision for the organization's future.

Senge (2006) further adds to this theoretical base by describing a framework by which those within an organization can collectively learn and adapt to challenges. Within a *learning organization*, leaders create structures in which individual mental models are revealed and explored, personal mastery is encouraged, shared vision is developed, and team-building is supported within the context of systems-thinking.

In the final highlighted theory, *Appreciative Inquiry*, building a shared vision for the future is essential in making deep organizational changes. As people dream about the possibilities for their organization, they set the stage for implementation (Cooperrider et al., 2005). Rather than focusing on challenges facing the organization as in the previous theories, stakeholders build upon the organization's past successes to develop a shared vision. This creative process provides the framework for finding the organization's purpose and its highest potential.

### **The Role of Mental Models in Organizational Change**

Two primary themes within the literature on mental models and organizational change were evidenced. The first theme underscored the importance of identifying mental models of leaders to better understand the manner in which leaders approached their positions (Fauske & Johnson, 2003; Linn, Sherman, & Gill, 2007; Ruff & Shoho, 2005). In these studies, the exploration of mental models revealed valuable insights into behaviors that leaders expressed in response to various circumstances.

The second theme emergent within the research on mental models was the importance of shared mental models in change efforts. In these studies, researchers suggest that the success of change efforts vitally depends upon the development of shared understandings of the change initiative throughout the entire organization (Barr, Stimpert, & Huff, 1992; Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson, & Daly, 2008; Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Spillane, 2000; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). This research on mental models is compelling because it indicates that beliefs, knowledge, assumptions, and attitudes of change agents critically influence change efforts. Yet, little empirical research exists on the significance of mental models on change efforts within school districts.

### **District Role in Change Efforts**

In a review of the recent literature, several themes emerged on districts' impact upon change efforts. These themes are (a) policy setting and implementation, (b) district leaders' involvement with change efforts, (c) shared leadership, (d) resource allocation, and (e) professional development. Policy setting and guiding its implementation represent two responsibilities district leaders face in managing change efforts (Cuban, 1983; Spillane, 1996). District leaders often mitigate which change efforts will be pursued, what supports will be provided throughout the system, and how mandates from entities such as state and federal governments are interpreted (Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, & Yoon, 2002; Gallucci, 2008; Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008; Spillane, 1996, 2000). Within this role of policy setting, district leaders also set the vision and focus for change efforts (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Rorrer et al., 2008; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). This critical role of policy setting directly impacts the success of change efforts throughout the school district.

In addition to setting policy, district administrators are also instrumental in establishing a culture of change by district leaders' knowledge of and involvement in the change efforts (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Rorrer et al., 2008; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). These studies suggest that a positive climate for change is created when district leaders actively engage in change efforts. Furthermore, district leaders play an essential role in creating trust throughout the system (Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly, & Chrispeels, 2008; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). As trust in district leadership increases, willingness to implement reforms expands.

The literature revealed establishing forums for shared leadership as an essential district function in advancing change efforts. Involving teachers, principals, and district leaders with change efforts was instrumental in district administrators' ability to implement and sustain systemic change (Agullard, Huebner, Goughnour, & Calisi-Corbett, 2005; Chrispeels et al., 2008; Gallucci, 2008; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Stein & Coburn, 2008; Stein & D'Amico, 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003.) Since teachers are expected to

### *Lack of Shared Vision and the Unintended Consequences*

implement the change directed by district administrators, district leaders' ability to structure opportunities for teachers to interact with and impact change efforts is critical to the success of any change initiative.

Resource allocation was another critical function of district leadership. School districts successful at implementing change had leaders who strategically allocated resources to support change efforts (Cuban, 1983; Rorrer et al., 2008; Spillane, 1996; Togneri & Anderson 2003). Because competition for resources remains a challenge in the current educational landscape, districts whose leaders direct resources to key change efforts will likely experience systemic improvement.

Finally, according to the literature, district-level leaders play a pivotal role in providing professional development opportunities for their teachers to support change efforts. A key aspect of professional development identified in the literature is the need to provide quality, on-going professional development focused on the outcomes of the change initiatives that district administrators support (Agullard et al., 2005; Chrispeels et al., 2008; Desimone et al., 2002; Stein & D'Amico, 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Researchers determined that when professional development opportunities align directly with district goals, the outcomes for success with any change initiative are enhanced.

### **CONTEXT OF STUDY**

The district chosen for this study was a large urban district in the western United States that serves approximately 63,000 students over a large geographic area. The district spans approximately 6,500 square miles and encompasses rural, suburban, and urban neighborhoods. Although the district covers a vast geographical range, over 90% of the schools are located in an approximately 100 square mile metropolitan area. In 2009, the district operated 92 schools including 63 elementary schools with a student population consisting of 54.41% white, non-Hispanic and 45.59% minority. In addition, at the time of the study, the district employed approximately 7,200 people thus making it one of the largest employers in the area.

### **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative methodology was utilized to explore two research questions:

1. What mental models (beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and knowledge) do educational leaders responsible for school improvement hold about the role of walkthroughs as a vehicle for system-wide change; and
2. How do different contexts influence the mental models that educational leaders hold?

The university Institutional Review Board (IRB) provided oversight for the design and implementation of the study. The participants in this study were 17 practicing elementary principals and six district level administrators responsible for supervising principals. The principals were selected from a group of 63 potential participants – the total number of elementary principals in the district. The criteria used to select potential participants were social economic status (SES) of the school and the number of years since the participant received his or her first administrative credential. This purposeful sampling strategy was utilized to gain a broad level of both experience and context with practicing principals as it related to the research questions. All elementary level principals were categorized using publicly available information, (i.e., SES of school and years of experience). Socio-economic status (SES) of each school was based upon classifications utilized by the district in the study. In this case, schools classified as high SES were those in which less than 40% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch under federal guidelines. Mid-SES schools were those in which 40% to 59.99% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Finally, Title 1 schools were those schools in which 60% or more students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Nineteen principals, representing the various categories, were initially contacted by phone. Of the 19 potential participants, 17 agreed to participate in the study. Table 1 summarizes the socio-economic status (SES) of each school, number of years since certification, and number of years as principal for each of the 17 principals in the study.

*Invited Chapter*

At the time of the study, six district level administrators provided oversight of the elementary principals, either in a direct supervisory role or one level above, supervising all schools. All district administrators agreed to participate in the study, thus providing a full population of district level administrators directly responsible for supporting walkthroughs. Table 2 illustrates the characteristics of district administrators based upon administrative experience.

Table 1  
*Characteristics of 17 Elementary Principal Participants*

School Type	High SES (7)	Mid SES (4)	Title I(6)
Years Certified	0-5 (2)	6-10 (9)	11+ (6)
Years as Principal	0-5 (9)	6-10 (4)	11+ (4)

Table 2  
*Characteristics of District Administrators*

Years in Current Position	1-2 (4)	3-5 (0)	6+ (2)
Years at District Level	1-2 (2)	3-5 (1)	6+ (3)
Years as Principal	0-5 (1)	6-10 (3)	11+ (2)

Two data collection procedures were used: (1) semi-structured interviews and (2) survey results. A standardized, but flexible, open-ended interview guide allowed participants to share their ideas in their own voice as well as provide a basis for comparison among participants. All principals were asked the same questions with probes reflective of their responses. The questions were slightly altered for district administrators to account for their positions within the organization. Again, appropriate probing was employed to capture their complete thoughts. The interview guides are found in Figure 1.

The second data source was a survey that participants completed after the interview session. Survey responses provided supplementary data and afforded participants with an opportunity to consider questions in a different manner (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997).

Because many principals had incorporated forms into the walkthrough process, a third data source, walkthrough forms, was collected from this group. Fourteen principals were using a walkthrough form with 13 principals providing a sample for inclusion in the study. The participants who did not utilize walkthrough forms were not excluded from the study. Indeed, the interview process was designed to expose the reasoning that prompted principals to either use or reject walkthrough forms, further revealing their mental models.

Data analysis occurred in several phases. First, data from the principal interviews were analyzed so responses could be explored independently from district administrators. However, the identical analytic process was used for both sets of data; NVivo8™ software was used for data management. Initially, transcripts were coded line-by-line by the principal investigator, highlighting specific details such as purpose of and feelings about walkthroughs. Sections were coded as *free nodes*, i.e., codes that stand independently. Once each transcript was coded in this fashion, the free nodes were clustered into *tree nodes*, i.e., codes that form hierarchy based upon commonalities. Memos were created for data points that either seemed to represent emerging themes or appeared to be counter to prevailing patterns.

Following initial coding, peer debriefing was conducted with the other investigators as a means of establishing validity of the three themes revealed in the data (Creswell, 2003). At this point, adjustments were made to the descriptions of the themes, sub-themes were identified, and interview sections were coded to the appropriate theme or subtheme. A constant comparative method between participants was also employed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

*Lack of Shared Vision and the Unintended Consequences*

Questions for Principals
1. Tell me about your understanding of walkthroughs. Where did you come by this knowledge?
2. Talk me through a typical walkthrough at your site.
3. Tell me about the reactions you have had about what you've seen during your walkthroughs.
4. What do you believe are the benefits of walkthroughs?
5. What impact have you seen at your school site of walkthroughs?
6. Tell me about your walkthrough form.
7. What are the expectations your supervisor(s) hold for you with regard to walkthroughs?
8. How do you see walkthroughs impacting the district as a whole?
9. Why do you think the district has put time and energy into walkthroughs?
10. What is your reaction to the district's mandate on walkthroughs?
11. Metaphors are often used as a way to understand how someone perceives something. Please fill in this sentence frame: "When I do a walkthrough I think of myself as a(n) _____ because..."
12. Here is a piece of paper. Please make a sketch showing the value you place on the walkthrough process at your site.
13. What else can you add to our discussion that was not covered?

Questions for District Administrators
1. Tell me about your understanding of walkthroughs. Where did you come by this knowledge?
2. When the district first introduced walkthroughs, what was your reaction?
3. What types of walkthroughs have you seen as a district supervisor?
4. What do you believe are the benefits of walkthroughs?
5. What impact have you seen at your level of walkthroughs?
6. What expectations do you hold for your principals (or area superintendents) with regard to walkthroughs?
7. Tell me about your expectations for walkthrough forms at your schools.
8. How do you see walkthroughs impacting the district as a whole?
9. Why do you think the district has put time and energy into walkthroughs?
10. What is your reaction to the district's mandate on walkthroughs?
11. Metaphors are often used as a way to understand how someone perceives something. Please fill in this sentence frame: "When I do a walkthrough I think of myself as a(n) _____ because..."
12. Here is a piece of paper. Please make a sketch showing the value you place on the walkthrough process at your site.
13. What else can you add to our discussion that was not covered?

*Figure 1:* Interview guides for principals and district administrators.

## **FINDINGS**

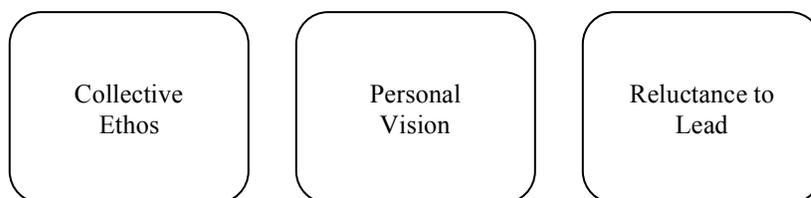
### **District Administrators**

Although administrators' data were analyzed first, results were best understood after an examination of the findings from the district administrator's interviews was conducted. Three interrelated themes were identified from the district administrators:

1. Collective Ethos,
2. Personal Vision, and
3. Reluctance to Lead (see Figure 2).

*Invited Chapter*

*Collective ethos.* Both the interview data and survey results illustrated that all district administrators perceived walkthroughs as an important component of leadership within the district. This collective ethos, or belief, was represented in several ways. First, all administrators articulated that they possessed clear expectations that principals conduct walkthroughs. The comment by one administrator summarized the general expectations of the group, “I expect them to do walkthroughs on a regular basis and use the walkthroughs to provide feedback to their teachers.” This expectation was consistently expressed by each of the administrators who supervised the principals.



*Figure 2:* Depiction of major themes in district administrator data.

Many district administrators assumed some type of walkthrough strategy had been regularly employed at school sites. Indeed, when the practice was introduced, the majority of administrators recollected feeling amazed that principals did not already engage in the practice. These leaders expressed a strong inclination to engage regularly with their staffs and indicated that they walked through their sites consistently before the practice was formally introduced in the district.

Finally, all the administrators contended that walkthroughs were integral to other change efforts that the district leaders had implemented over the past several years, including, but not limited to, professional learning communities (PLCs) and Response to Intervention (RtI). One administrator described walkthroughs as a major support system for the evaluation process, the district curriculum, and the implementation of best practices in the classroom. This administrator’s comment best summarizes the sense of collective ethos: “...it’s just a way of doing business that helps everything...”

*Personal vision.* Although all district administrators held common expectations about the utilization of walkthroughs, their understanding of the purpose of the walkthrough process reflected their personal vision, the second major theme found in the data. Each administrator’s perception of walkthroughs was filtered through an individual, rather than systemic or organizational, lens. These beliefs appear to have been developed in isolation, based upon their previous, personal experiences as principals. Three of the six district administrators considered shaping culture as the primary purpose of walkthroughs. For them, walkthroughs provided principals with a vehicle for building culture through visibility, accessibility, and awareness. In contrast, the other three district administrators argued that the main purpose of walkthroughs was to monitor instruction in classrooms, thus linking walkthroughs with other change efforts and student achievement.

One way in which this theme was revealed was the expected time commitment and use of specific walkthrough forms. Supervisors who believed walkthroughs provided the opportunity to enhance relationships and build culture expected principals in classrooms daily. Conversely, supervisors who believed walkthroughs were a monitoring tool required less frequency and more documentation, i.e., the walkthrough form. Similarly, district level administrators who perceived walkthroughs as a strategy to build culture felt strongly about not requiring documentation. Rather, walkthroughs were used as a way for principals gain greater awareness of their schools. Other district level administrators, more focused on monitoring teacher and school behavior, expected their principals to document walkthroughs using either established protocols such as Teach for Success® (WestEd, 2009) or a form generated at the school.

*Reluctance to lead.* All the district administrators cited the evolutionary nature of walkthroughs within the district. Several administrators recalled that the initial intent was for principals to be in classrooms. The practice since evolved, for some, into a more prescribed system involving specific “look-fors” that are linked to other change efforts. One administrator reasoned that the term walkthrough had lost much of its meaning. She observed, “...the label walkthrough, like so many constructs in education, has come to mean a lot of different things. It doesn’t have a specific definition. It’s a vehicle.” This evolution

### *Lack of Shared Vision and the Unintended Consequences*

of the practice, however, was based upon the initiative of individual principals and not through intentional efforts of district leaders.

Furthermore, the district administrators did not hold a collective vision for walkthroughs and felt uncomfortable identifying the next stages of the change effort. All administrators indicated that a next step was necessary to meet the needs of the principals with advanced skills and to refresh the practice; however, none could identify the next step. This reflection by one administrator best illustrated the sentiment by the majority: “We need an advanced level and I don’t, I don’t have a picture in my head of what...that might be. I’m sorry to say, I should. I should have some sort of mental picture.” The district administrators uniformly expressed uncertainty with the prospect of moving the practice forward.

Powerlessness within their roles as district leaders further manifested itself in this theme. One administrator keenly expressed this sense of powerlessness with regard to walkthroughs: “I wish there was somebody out there who was doing amazing conferences and that’d really help us take our walkthroughs to the next level.” Another administrator had a clear vision of what she would like to see with regard to a district-wide vision for walkthroughs, but could not imagine her role in that transformation. When asked if district leaders as a group were moving towards her vision she realized, “You know, I don’t know. You would think I could answer that question. I guess what I would say is that I’m kind of hoping it’s going to be the next step.” Another administrator was concerned that if district leadership did not offer something meaningful, principals would begin thinking negatively towards walkthroughs. Whether waiting for expertise to arise within the district or to herald from the outside, the administrators expressed a reluctance to personally exhibit leadership with regard to this change effort.

Finally, Reluctance to Lead was evidenced by a hesitancy to address perceived deficiencies within the principal corps. All the administrators noted disparity in skill level among the principals with regard to walkthroughs, but had little to offer in terms of remedy. One administrator observed that some principals did not see the connection between their walkthrough practice and the professional development they provide their staffs. Another administrator claimed that some principals had difficulty providing effective, targeted feedback about instruction because they lacked the skills necessary to engage teachers in those conversations. Three administrators recalled that they had been to schools where they perceived walkthroughs rarely occurred. This perception was based upon the surprised reactions of teachers and students when the administrators came into the classrooms. One administrator estimated that twenty percent of the principals did not conduct walkthroughs on a regular basis. This administrator believed that some principals did not see the benefits of walkthroughs while others did not have the skills to effectively provide teachers with feedback or link walkthroughs to school goals. While all administrators cited deficiencies, only one administrator mentioned how to build the skills of the existing principals. This administrator related that she worked individually with principals to increase their skills. No district administrator indicated a district-wide approach to improving the skill level of all principals.

### **Principals**

The principal interview data suggest how building leaders respond to the type of leadership practiced by the district administrators. Three major themes were identified:

1. Surrogate for Leadership,
2. Sense of Isolation, and
3. Uncertainty with Change Effort.

Through a line-by-line analysis of these three overarching themes, distinct nuances were identified. Within the theme of Surrogate for Leadership, three subthemes emerged: a) Shaping Culture, b) Monitoring, and c) Supervision. Two subthemes evolved within the theme of Sense of Isolation: a) Independent Islands and b) Assumed Expectations. Finally, within the theme of Uncertainty with Change Effort, two subthemes were identified: a) Role Conflict and b) District Vision. Figure 3 provides a conceptual model for these themes.

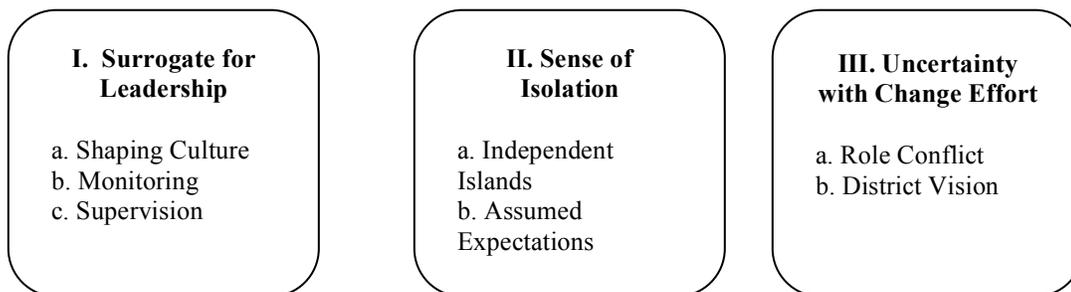


Figure 3: Depiction of major themes and subthemes in the principal data.

**Surrogate for leadership.** This theme was common for all participants in the study and is best described as how the participants perceived walkthroughs as a vehicle or tool for performing the many leadership tasks inherent in the principalship. For all participants, the walkthrough practice held great value because it helped accomplish important school goals. All participants indicated that walkthroughs facilitated accomplishment of role expectations, the most important being shaping culture, monitoring, and supervision.

**Sense of isolation.** The data revealed that all principals experienced a sense of isolation in relationship to implementation of walkthroughs; however, these perceptions varied in degrees and in two distinct ways. The Sense of Isolation stemmed from two major sources:

1. Independent islands and
2. Assumed expectations.

All but two principals indicated that their walkthrough practices developed independently of any influence by district-level personnel beyond initial trainings. Five principals perceived that walkthrough practices developed solely upon the initiative and enthusiasm of the individual principal. One participant stated, "...unless you are self-motivated...and have a vision as to where you want to go..." walkthroughs were not going to occur at a school. In addition, the majority of principals had little or no awareness of the walkthrough practice of other principals within the district. Indeed, based on comments of peers at district meetings, some participants suggested that walkthroughs were not occurring at many sites. Interestingly, each participant expressed enthusiasm for the practice; however, they could not confirm that others within the principal corps held the same value.

The second area of isolation stemmed from uncertainty among the principals about the expectations for walkthroughs beyond "just doing them." Fourteen principals indicated that they had had either no conversation or very little discussion with their supervisors with regard to walkthrough practices. Because the principals had not directly conversed about walkthroughs with their supervisors, they made general assumptions about supervisors' expectations. Only three participants revealed that they had spoken directly to their supervisors about their walkthrough practice. The Sense of Isolation expressed by the participants with regard to walkthroughs by means of the development of Independent Islands and Assumed Expectations links directly to the third major theme: Uncertainty with Change Effort.

**Uncertainty with change effort.** Uncertainty with Change Effort, the third major theme emergent from the data, was evinced in two ways:

1. Role of Principal and
2. District Vision.

Regardless of the specific circumstance, the responses to the uncertainty surrounding this change effort included both confusion and frustration.

Uncertainty about how walkthroughs fit into the role of the principal was evidenced in three ways. First, the majority of participants expressed that time was a limiting factor in their ability to implement

### *Lack of Shared Vision and the Unintended Consequences*

walkthroughs effectively. Many mentioned that their walkthrough practice stopped during certain times of the year, especially when statewide and district-wide testing occurred and when teacher evaluations were due. Participants also cited student discipline and paperwork associated with the principalship as factors barring the regular application of walkthroughs.

Another area of uncertainty was a pull to be either a teacher or a coach within the context of the walkthrough. Seven principals reflected that they enjoyed a teaching role either directly with teachers or with students during their walkthroughs. One principal averred that effective instructional leadership required a principal to be an exceptional teacher. Others revealed that their own teaching skills were inferior to some of their teachers; thus, they perceived that providing feedback to these teachers was problematic.

Finally, six principals indicated a tension between their roles as support for teachers and as evaluator. Three principals specifically identified this tension, asserting that teachers would always perceive the principal as an evaluator and someone with authority regardless of collaborative or supportive efforts. The tension was also evident by the conflicting language found in the interviews. Principals stressed that they did not want walkthroughs to be threatening in any way; they wanted walkthroughs to provide teachers with support and feedback. However, they used the data for evaluative purposes. Of note, these principals did not consciously recognize the inherent tension created by these two conflicting purposes.

The data revealed that frustration existed between the principals and district administrators due to the lack of certainty about the top leaders' vision for walkthroughs. All but one principal expressed some degree of frustration related to this perception. Three main areas of concern were identified. First, the majority of principals indicated that although the district administrators clearly expected principals to conduct walkthroughs, they were not believed to be a mandate. The principals believed that mandates came with higher expectations and more consistency among site administrators. Nine principals specifically indicated that they would welcome more accountability for walkthrough practices. Some believed that greater accountability at the principal level would have a more pronounced impact upon the district as a whole. Additionally, three principals communicated that such accountability would help them become stronger principals.

Second, nine principals specifically stated that they believed a wide disparity of skills and implementation level existed among the principals. One principal reflected,

...whoever's doing the walkthrough, their level of instruction has to be very competent....I don't know that there's sort of a universal level of administrators in our district that recognize and can reinforce and can facilitate discussions about what good instruction is.

Again, principals surmised that walkthroughs would have more pronounced impacts upon the district if criteria for effective practice were established and training provided as needed.

Finally, eight principals expressed a desire for district-level personnel to develop common criteria for walkthroughs. They believed that district leaders should provide minimal guidelines for effective instructional practices that would serve as a foundation for walkthroughs. The principals desired both a common language between schools and the flexibility to adapt walkthrough practices to meet specific needs of their schools.

### **Metaphor Clusters**

Although the ideas about the walkthrough process itself converged into the three themes found above, principals tended to cluster into five distinct roles that they assumed in implementing walkthroughs (see Table 3). The framework used to group principals was based upon responses to the following interview question: "When I do a walkthrough, I think of myself as a *what* because..." This question created an opportunity for participants to describe their leadership stance with regard to walkthroughs.

These differences are analogous to how perfume reacts with individuals. Though a single scent contains the same chemical compounds, it reacts differently on individuals based upon environmental factors and composition of the skin (Behan, MacMaster, Perring, & Tuck, 1996). In much the same way, individuals constructed mental models of the term *walkthroughs* differently. The basic components are

similar throughout; however, walkthroughs take on subtle undertones making them truly unique for each participant.

Table 3  
*Metaphor Clusters for Principals*

Cluster Name	Number of Principals	Key Ideas
The Coach	5	supporting, encouraging, teaching
The Team Member	4	equality, shared purpose, collaboration
The Student	2	student-centered, monitoring
The Reporter	4	observing, monitoring, analyzing
The Parent	2	monitoring, protecting, guarding

## CONCLUSIONS

The original study was designed to explore the mental models that building and district educational leaders hold regarding one change effort, walkthroughs. The data actually revealed the unintended consequences of a particular change effort when shared vision is absent. The only shared vision held by all respondents in this study was that walkthroughs benefit the school and the principal; therefore, walkthroughs should be conducted.

That the shared mental model or vision did not develop within the context of an openly shared understanding suggests a lack of organizational learning. Senge (2006) notes that people construct mental models about everything. From an organizational perspective, however, individual mental models that remain private do not represent an organizational mental model. In fact, hidden mental models can be major barriers to organizational growth (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Karp, 2005; Kim, 2001; Senge, 2006.) Senge states,

Though highly personal in nature at one level, effective work with mental models is also pragmatic, that is, it is tied to bringing key assumptions about important business issues to the surface. This is vital because the most crucial mental models in any organization are those shared by key decision makers. (p. 176)

The data from this study suggest that although participants held a collective mental model of the value of walkthroughs, the mental model did not represent one that was consciously shared. Rather, the mental model was born of individual experience and practice. Participants possessed little awareness of the mental models that other leaders held with regard to walkthroughs. This mental model, though collective, was based upon individual assumptions, perceptions, and comprehensions versus an intentional dialog among leaders. Individuals were provided a general expectation by district leadership to conduct walkthroughs; however, the purpose of the practice was left to individuals to determine. In terms of district-wide impact, participants had difficulty envisioning impacts on the entire system because mental models were constructed individually. Many provided educated guesses about potential impacts at the district level; however, such posits were generally based upon impacts experienced at each participant’s school site.

Though all the participants adopted the practice of walkthroughs and constructed individual mental models about purpose, a collective sense of why the practice was important to the organization was missing. Kim (2001) maintains that it is critical for organizational leaders to not only provide training on how to implement initiatives but also to create a conceptual understanding of the purpose. He contends, “...conceptual learning emphasizes the *why* of doing things – that is, it has to do with the *thinking* behind why things are done in the first place” (p. 23). Unfortunately, the absence of an organizationally-shared vision of the purpose of the walkthrough process appears to have resulted in a reluctance to lead on the part of the district administrators and a sense of isolation, frustration, and confusion on the part of the building principals.

### *Lack of Shared Vision and the Unintended Consequences*

The second major finding suggests that the mental models surrounding the construct *walkthroughs* were highly individualized. Both principals and district leaders viewed the practice through individual lenses. The mental models constructed by participants were based upon individual experiences and how each practitioner utilized walkthroughs. Participants also held individual perceptions with regard to the district leaders' purpose for ushering in walkthroughs as a leadership practice. No collective sense was evident with regard to the overall intent of walkthroughs from a system-wide perspective. Therefore, context had little impact upon the development of mental models. The experiences of participants were highly individualized. No apparent pattern emerged based upon school type, years of experience, or years since administrative certification.

Because mental models were highly individualized, many participants expressed a sense of isolation with regard to the initiative. Karp (2005) notes mental models and the "underlying assumptions" from which they are created are rarely discussed openly within organizations (p. 89). Little forward movement of an organization can be accomplished if the deeply held assumptions are not addressed openly (Chrispeels, et al., 2008; Fullan, 2008; Kim, 2001; Senge, 2006). Kim further suggests that if organizational learning is to occur, then the knowledge of individuals must be integrated into the broader context of the whole organization. He articulates, "If we are interested in innovation and in the vitality of large institutions, then we are interested in creating learning communities that *integrate* knowledge instead of fragment it" (p. 16). The findings of this study clearly illustrate that the innovation of walkthroughs remained at the site level.

The awareness of isolation carried over to other educational issues including the definitions of effective instruction, instructional leadership, and change efforts. For example, opinions varied about how different change efforts such as professional learning communities and Response to Intervention interacted with one another. Of note, this individuality was both celebrated and disdained. Several participants indicated that they were proud of their individual stance on walkthroughs and their abilities to move their schools forward. District leaders similarly expressed amazement at some of the innovation within the principal corps. However, the data suggested that many participants felt uncomfortable with the perceived lack of district-wide vision for walkthroughs. A desire existed to bring order and a collective meaning to the practice. This was illustrated by a desire to have common standards with regard to effective instruction and additional accountability for principals.

The third major finding highlights the effect these collective, unshared mental models had on district-wide leadership. Because leaders held the collective, but unshared mental model that walkthroughs were an individual endeavor, district administrators were reluctant to lead the effort. Leadership did not arise from the principal corps, either. With the absence of system-wide leadership, individuals experienced isolation and uncertainty with regard to the change effort. Perceived lack of system-wide leadership reinforced the mental model that development of walkthrough practices resided with individual principals.

Holistically, the three major findings appear interrelated, associated, and somewhat reinforcing. The Individual Endeavors are associated with Reluctance to Lead, which is associated with Isolation and Uncertainty. In turn, Isolation and Uncertainty seems to reinforce Individual Endeavors.

The interaction of mental models illustrates that though walkthroughs are highly valued, they are perceived to be an individual endeavor that inhibits district administrators or principals from taking a system-wide leadership role, thus creating a sense of isolation and uncertainty among principals that reinforces the mental model that the effort resides with individuals. This process can be predicted to continue because a shared vision is lacking. Figure 4 illustrates this interaction of these mental models. The unvoiced, collective mental model that walkthroughs reside in the realm of the individual principal actually inhibited the rise of system-wide leadership with regard to this effort.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

Building shared vision requires willingness by those in leadership positions to openly discuss mental models held by all within an organization. Complex skills such as team building, discussion and discourse strategies, and establishing effective feedback loops are essential to creating a culture in which the vision of leaders is articulated throughout an organization. As this study illustrates, when leaders are left to construct their own visions in isolation, results are varied and impact to the system is weakened. In this case, when principals were left to construct their own meaning of the change effort, isolation and a sense of independence

emerged, and an uncertainty with the change efforts resulted. These unintended consequences had a direct impact upon the success of this change effort and have the potential to undermine future change efforts.

As Senge (2006) notes, the antidote to isolation and independent islands is creating structures by which leaders can communicate and co-construct the vision. This particular change initiative is compelling in that principals and district leaders universally accepted *walkthroughs* as a leadership practice. However, the manner in which this practice evolved, the resulting sense of isolation and the reluctance to lead expressed by these leaders suggests that co-constructing a shared vision cannot remain solely the initial stage of implementation. Indeed, systems leaders must actively and regularly engage in conversations that reveal and explore assumptions to mitigate unforeseen impact.

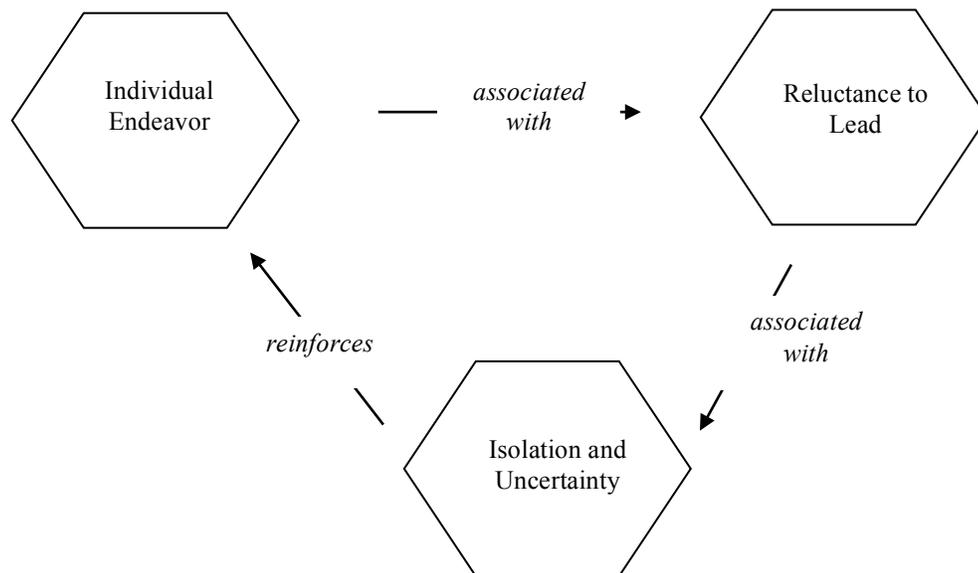


Figure 4. Illustration of the interaction of mental models.

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*Lack of Shared Vision and the Unintended Consequences*

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## *Whose Social Justice Counts? A Discourse and the Everydayness of Language*

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During my second year of a principalship I was fortunate enough to see the seeds of school change I had planted take root. I had my share of first year battles in order to demonstrate that I was not a paper tiger, and I had seen the administrative team I joined become stronger. By the spring semester of my second year, things were becoming interesting and inspiring. Our leadership team had gelled, and our school had made positive strides forward in terms of students' test scores. Along the way I got married; a particular pleasure for a workaholic dedicated to organizational reform.

In the Spring semester of my second year my Superintendent, Mr. Roberts, (not his real name) asked for an update on the state of our school. Unlike the previous year when updates were rife with issues centered on the budget, staff incompetency, and community politics, I was able to relay that things were going well. Here is a snippet of how the conclusion of our conversation went:

ME: I am happy to tell you that this year is much better than last. Things are smoother. We have a great sense of team, there are infrastructures in place that are making a difference, the test scores are going up. It's really going well.

MR. ROBERTS: That's good Autumn, I'm happy to hear that.

ME: I really appreciate your availability and your mentorship since I have been here. I have to say I am enjoying my job this year.

MR. ROBERTS: Well, you got married. Things always look better when you are happy and married.

I made a cheerful smile at this remark, thanked him for his time and cheerfully left the building. I then invoked several curse words and spent a great deal of time trying to figure out why I was so furious with the parting comment from my boss. He had no idea I was so angry.

The above vignette has a great deal to do with power, frameworks of identity, and discourse. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the interactions of these notions as they relate to the discussions in and around "social justice issues" (for purposes of this discussion I mean issues around equity, identity, and power) from a linguistic and discourse analysis lens. It is important to note that there is a rich line of inquiry that explores in detail the different points of reality from a critical perspective, the existence of racism, and other acts of marginalization that occur subconsciously and through ignorance, (Jacobs, 1999; Lawrence, 1987; Okun, 2010). However, this discussion considers sociolinguistic mechanisms that help to form the chasm between persons engaged negotiating what is the truth. For purposes of this discussion I also use the words "truth" and "reality" interchangeably. We begin our discussion with a brief primer on discourse analysis, followed by a discussion of the social construction of identity and power. This chapter concludes with a look at the implications of how such dynamics play into the ways in which we perceive "the truth" while discussing "social justice issues".

### **A Primer on Discourse Analysis**

Scholarly considerations of discourse and its impact on reality typically fall within the umbrella of post-structuralism, a philosophical and intellectual stance that originated in France in the 1960s. One of the goals of post structuralism is to deconstruct traditional views about reality and truth (Cherryholmes, 1988). Post-structuralists Michele Foucault (1975, 1980) and Jacques Derrida (1982) both examined discursive practices and their relationship to reality or truth. At the heart of Post-structuralism is a concern with the deconstruction of the power relationships that permeate the texts and discourse practices of society.

*Discourse* refers to the different ways in which we individually or collectively integrate language with other communicative elements when creating and interpreting a message. But what is the difference between *talk* and *discourse*?

We define *talk* as a social action in which those participating in a discussion co-construct a meaning in interaction in everyday activity (Duranti, 1997). Discourse however, is "...a set of norms, preferences, and expectations relating linguistic structures to contexts which speakers and listeners draw on to modify, produce, and interpret language" (Ochs, 1988, p. 8). The concept of discourse can be further deconstructed into more specific terms and understandings. James Paul Gee (1996) drew on Foucault (1975, 1980) to specify understandings of discourse into something he called "Big D discourse" ("D/discourse") and "Little d discourse" ("d/discourse").

D/discourse refers to the many ways of acting and being in the world: D/Discourse is a set of communicative constellations and talk patterns. These constellations consist of language working in concert with one, many, or all the following: Feelings, bodies, non-linguistic symbols, objects, clothes, interaction, action, technologies, geography, time, tools, symbols, art, verbal and non verbal expressions, and people (Gee, 1996). D/discourse contours social practices by creating particular kinds of subjectivity in which human beings are managed and given certain forms which are viewed as self-evident, rational, normal, or irrational and abnormal (Derrida, 1982; Foucault, 1980; Gramsci, 1971). The concept of d/discourse is centered on the pragmatics of language in use. It refers to the language bits and grammatical resources that make up interactions. Discourse, however, is not talk, because talk depends on a message being created between the speaker and the receiver in discourse.

### **Performative Speech Acts and Constantive Speech Acts**

When we use language we are doing something more than speaking; we are acting (Austin, 1962; Butler, 1997, 1999; Lakoff, 2004; Yoshino, 2005, 2006). These acts of speech can be described as *constantive speech acts* while others are known as *performative speech acts* (Butler, 1997). Constantive speech acts are those that state something concrete that can be proven true or false. For example, if a man having lunch al fresco with his wife were to say, "The car is on rolling up the curb", the wife might turn her head to look at what was being described. If the man were to say, "THE CAR IS ROLLING UP THE CURB!" the wife would inevitably get out of her chair quickly and move. The second announcement is a performative speech act as it informs the listener (in this case the wife) that there is imminent danger. While the words are the same, the intent, the impact, and thus the meaning are different.

The problem that often arises in communication is that the creator of a message and the listener are both responsible for engaging in a discursive dance in which both parties are synchronistically tuned to the discursive tapestry being woven by the threads of performative and constantive speech acts. And as with all partners who are dancing, sometimes a toe is stepped on. When a sentence is heard, we are responsible for deciding if the sentence is performative, constantive, or both. Problems arise in communication because of the messiness encountered in the interpretation of constantive and performative speech. Thus, these discursive missteps happen because the two parties involved do not always understand if they are receiving a performative statement (in which there is a new reality insinuated) or if the statement is misinterpreted as a constantive statement (a statement that simply describes what is). Furthermore, constantive and performative statements are not always exclusionary, a dynamic which only adds to the turbulence surrounding discursive attempts to negotiate reality.

Take for example the exchange at the beginning of this chapter between the superintendent and me. We know a toe has been stepped on because I relayed that the reaction I had to something my boss said was anger. We also know that what my boss witnessed while we were dancing discursively was a cheerful smile as a reaction to his insights and a statement thanking him for his time. Without question my smile and "thank you" was a performative speech act. The performance was intended to convey gratitude and mask my anger. But what about this statement:

"Well, you got married. Things always look better when you are happy and married."

Is this a Performative speech act, a Constantive speech act, or both? I do not know. I believe my immediate reaction was that it was a performative one in which he chose to sum up the blossoming fruits of

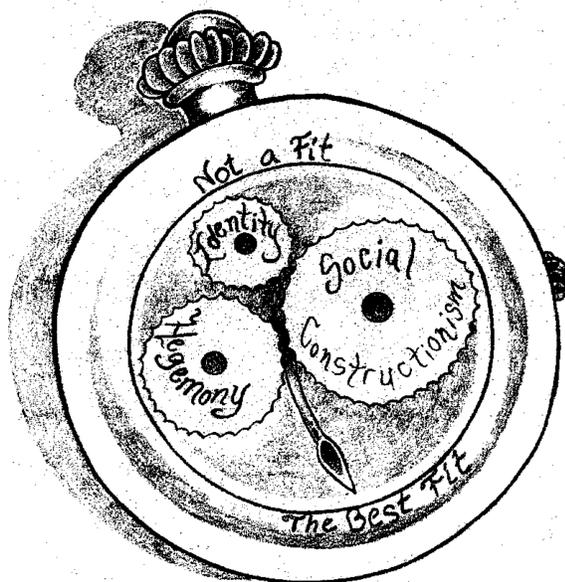
### *Whose Social Justice Counts?*

15 difficult months of hard work dedicated to building infrastructure and leading as something other than the results of a complex leadership effort. His statement performed as message to me that stated, “Everything is better this year because you have a man in your life.” In sum, his speech act erased the credibility of my efforts as a leader, a politician, and as an organizational reformer by focusing on a personal event that arguably had nothing to do with my efforts at work. His acknowledgement of my marriage as the reason for a smoother second year as a leader (rather than the totality of my efforts) left me blind with anger because it erased my efforts as leader. Furthermore one could argue (and several feminist researchers have; see Butler, 1999) his implication that happiness is only possible within the status of marriage to a man.

Did my boss intend for this to be his message? I don’t know. I certainly did not ask him or relay my blinding fury *because he was my boss*. Therein lies the foundations of the discussion about power, hegemony, and frameworks of identity in the next section.

### **Power, Hegemony, and Fit**

Fit is a sociopolitical construct that looks at the intersections of power, hegemony, and identity frameworks (Tooms, Lugg, & Bogotch, 2010). A way to consider this idea is through the visual metaphor of an old fashioned pocket watch operated by three synchronized gears.



Although dated as a contemporary timepiece, the watch itself is a common object. We take for granted that it will serve as a reference point for our day-to-day interactions. Now, try to imagine the same watch with only one hand; an hour hand. It still keeps time in terms of hours, but we have to now use other ways of knowing to approximate the minutes and seconds based on something other than the slow movement of the hour hand. For example, we might rely on our environment as well as what we call our internal clock. Over time, we will get used to this watch and it will become normal to tell time with just this one hand. Our single hand watch remains our everyday reference for telling time. We stop thinking in terms of minutes or seconds and just accept the hours as our commonsense of reality. When the single hand points up, it is midday or midnight. There is no half past, quarter past, five minutes till. We become confident in our ability to tell time, and why not? The hour hand becomes good enough (Tooms, Lugg, & Bogotch, p. 98).

Three interrelated theories are needed to understand the inner workings of the fit watch: Social Constructionism, Identity Theory, and Hegemony. That is, Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann,

1966; Gergen, 1999) explains how we create understandings of one another and of the world around us. Identity Theory considers how human beings are understood by each other within multiple contexts. Hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) is a socio-political concept which explains how certain groups of people in society are constrained, oppressed, and subjugated by other groups of people without the use of violence and through the creation of cultural meta-messages.

The intersections of hegemony, identity theory, and social construction are so embedded in our everyday practices that they become ordinary, taken for granted, and invisible, like the inside gears in a watch. As such the term *fit* becomes a commonsense shorthand used everyday to make sense of and justify personnel decisions by institutions and individuals themselves.

**The primary gear: Social Constructionism.** Often scholars in education will confuse this primary gear with another term used regularly in education, Social Constructivism. The latter, Social Constructivism, places the site of world construction within the mind of an individual. Social Constructionism is a theory primarily concerned with relationships as the central site of the construction of reality (Gergen, 1999; p. 8). The term *Social Constructionism* was first coined by the sociologists Berger and Luckman in their seminal work *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). In essence, they posited that reality is co-created by humans.

Constructionists believe that the generation of what is “good” comes from *within a tradition*, one that already has accepted constructions of what is real and good (Gergen, 1999, p. 50). Social constructionism invites us to re-consider the nature of school leadership in a way that relentlessly considers the blinding potential of “common sense” knowledge and the mundane routines of school. The tension between the socially constructed rules of leadership and a leader’s decision to observe, subvert, or transcend these rules determines how we assess a leader’s fit. Thus the social construction of what a leader *is* can be based on skill sets as well as *visceral perceptions of what a leader looks and acts like* (Tooms, Lugg, & Bogotch, 2010 2003). This argument, in turn, introduces the second dynamic: Identity Theory.

**The second gear: Identity Theory.** Within the context of Identity Theory, sociologist and psychologists recognize three distinct usages of the term “identity” (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The first is the use of identity in reference to a culture shared by people. Discussions written within this broad line of inquiry fall along the lines of Critical Race Theory (hooks, 1991), Latino Critical Theory (Hernandez, 2007), Feminist Theory (Lakoff, 2004; Lather, 1991) and Queer Theory (Capper, 1999). A second way to use the term is in reference to a common culture that connects participants (Snow & Oliver, 1995). For example, one can be identified as a “Red Sox fan” or an “educator in Knox County Schools.” Identity can be also be used as a reference to parts of a self which are composed of meanings attached to the roles people play in society (hooks, 1991; Stryker & Burke, 2000). These roles are fluid and exist on a continuum that is our life. For example, we can consider that a French female principal is also a mother, wife, member of the local gym, doctoral student, socialist, and volunteer at the local soup kitchen. Her children primarily identify her as “mother” rather than “volunteer” or “student.” The same can be said for her teachers who identify her as “principal”. Why? Because we generally ignore the other contexts that create one’s identity outside of the one we interact with.

In terms of sociolinguistics, researchers note that how we explain, model, and understand who we are differs with different circumstances (Butler, 1997; Gee, 1996; Goffman, 1967; Lather, 1991; Lakoff, 2004; Stryker & Burke, 2000). For example, two men shooting pool together might use a different set of words to describe their frustration than they would in front of their children or wives. Or, two principals having dinner together might not be as eager to order martinis if they were eating in a restaurant that was located in their school district.

When considering discourse and how it intersects with societal structures, there are words, phrases, or maxims that stir vivid impressions and a listener’s most basic values. These bits of language are called *condensation symbols* by socio-linguists (Gee, 1999). We argue that within the realm of school leadership, the word *fit* is a condensation symbol that recognizes our unconscious and conscious blurring of one’s identity with one’s role and responsibility. It is this blurring that affects how leadership is defined and evaluated in ways beyond formal assessment. We don’t think about the context in which we understand another’s identity with much depth. For example, we may assume that the principal who fulfills our

### *Whose Social Justice Counts?*

expectations of leadership will also ‘fit’ with our expectation of other aspects and contexts of identity. We are confident of this assumption because we like our principal, and have decided he fits. Because he fits one set of our expectations regarding identity and role, we assume he meets others. Thus, our principal must be a “good” conservative Christian because that is what we are *because his presentation of self within the context of school is just like us*. Thus we are shocked when we discover he had a drink at a seedy bar on a Saturday night, without his wife. We may then decide he is not the leader we thought and we may not feel compelled to support him. We make judgments of his abilities as a leader through our constructs of what is acceptable. This is because we associate role so closely with context, we run the risk of assuming the performance a person exudes in one arena is the same in all others. In most cases, it is not. If this example is still muddy, consider the implosion of the career of former United States Congressman Anthony Weiner.

**The third gear: Hegemony.** Hegemony explains that some groups or individuals maintain dominance over other groups of individuals in society through socially constructed persuasions and coercions (Gramsci, 1971). This dominance is achieved through convincing members of subordinated groups to accept, adopt, and internalize the dominant group’s definition of what is *normal* (Kumanshiro, 2004). This type of veiled oppression is achieved by using mechanisms such as the mass-media and mass schooling, which inculcate and reinforce the viewpoint and power of the dominant class (Apple, 2001; Derrida, 1982; Foucault, 1975). Those subjugated by hegemony are rarely aware of its presence because the messages of what is normal permeate the every-day consciousness of society through symbols, language, and other structures influenced by the dominant group.

There are also modern illustrations of how hegemony affects identity and fit. For example, Lawrence Mungin, an African American Harvard educated lawyer, stated that he understood the price of success as an attorney, despite his education, was a negation of his race. He said “I wanted to show I was like white people; ‘Don’t be afraid. I am one of the good blacks’” (Barrett, 1999, p. 43). In terms of school leadership, hegemonic constructions serve to blur the role of leader with understandings of what a leader looks and acts like. Blackmore and Sachs (2007) explain that women in positions of school leadership choose to operate at work from one of several gender scripts of leadership. These include a “being strong” script, “superwoman” script, and the “social male” script (pp. 56-62). Curry (2000) explained that hegemonic structures in the United States mandate that women deal with leadership norms within education by constructing a “leader persona” which requires the compartmentalization of certain features of themselves.

### **Language Games and Searching for the Truth**

All schools (both public and private) not only inculcate members of society in terms of *how to be*; more importantly, they constrain members of society by teaching and reinforcing *how not to be* (Foucault, 1975). This is accomplished through language games. The characterization is based literally on Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s theory of *Language Games* (1965, p. 71). He explained how reality is formed and reformed through the use of the language games, which are a series or cycle of interactions that contain covert and overt rules. People use language games to understand these rules, as well as honor, break, or change them. In school administration, words that play a part in power structures and language games include “professional,” “collaborative,” and “appropriate.” In sum, language games are embedded in nearly every discursive interaction we have; that includes those interactions that center on the unpacking of social justice issues.

So let us begin again with me, my boss, and “Things always look better when you are happy and married”. This is a type of language game. Like all language games, its existence is up for debate as are the rules and the reality created. One of Michel Foucault’s (1982) many considerations of how reality (or “truth”) is created within discourse was in a book called *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*, which was based on Renee Magritte’s painting of the same name which appears below.”



Foucault argued several points related to how truth (or reality) is constructed and understood around language, language symbols, and societal rules of acceptance. Consider the painting by Magritte. It says “Ceci n’est pas un pipe” which literally translates to “this is not a pipe”. Of course it is not; this is a picture of a painting a pipe. But *how do we know* this is a picture of a painting of a painting of a pipe? Because the image on this page reminds us of a pipe more than it reminds us of an actor such as Daniel Craig, or a refrigerator, or an automobile (Porter, 1986). In its totality, the painting reminds us of a pipe because of *how our brain interprets* its shape and its colors on the canvas. It is our brain that creates the truth of what we see... or hear. Foucault argued (1986) that periods of history possessed certain underlying conditions of truth that constitute what is acceptable. These conditions are ever present and change over time from one epistome to another just as periods of history change over time. This argument extends to the context of educational administration, economics, or any other arena. When objects (be they ideas, paintings, or statements) are involved in discourses we must realize that they are arranged in a kind of uncharted dimension in which surrounding constellations of meanings glitter separately and at different frequencies of brightness in a lawless fashion (Foucault, 1986, p. 5).

We individually put priority, order, and meaning into these arrangements. It is probable that in such a dimension objects are placed in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a common place beneath them all (Foucault, 1982, p. 4). In other words, we can somewhat agree on what is truth, but not mostly and certainly not totally. Such is the work of the language games that play out regularly in the discourses of topics relevant to our profession, including social justice.

While it is currently chic to engage in conversations about some topics under the umbrella of equity and social justice, other topics remain woolly terrain because of their fit. For example, sexual identity is an area that many are willing to address, but only in so far as to examine sexual identify free of transgender issues. It also appears that our field is also grappling with the notion of whose opinion of reality counts or is allowed to count in terms of social justice. Does one’s own identity have a role in the message he or she is sending or the research he or she is generating? Of course it does. That is why research is always in some way biased and entwined in hegemonic structures. T. B. Greenfield’s experience in this domain is legend. He spent a lifetime arguing that postmodern considerations of educational leadership must include considerations identity, among other things. At the time of his initial contributions, he was mocked by the establishment as an outsider. His personhood and the frameworks of his identity were called into question and conflated with his ability to understand the intricacies of leadership (Greenfield & Ribbons, 1993). He has been dead for almost two decades and is now lauded as a great mind and contributor, but that does not take away from the sting of the initial discourses he encountered when trying to reframe what is the truth.

Another consideration we find centers on persons who study issues outside of their own identity frameworks. For example, when one considers issues related to gender, politics, or the marginalization of people according to their gender, we often consider the voice of authority to belong solely to that of women. However, there are scholars of women in leadership who are not women (Biddix, 2010), and scholars of critical race theory who are members of a privileged ethnicity (i.e., Anglo), (Okun, 2010); and

### *Whose Social Justice Counts?*

there are scholars who write about transgender issues who identify as heterosexual and not transgendered (Thomas & Reidthaler, 2006). Is their scholarship less valued or less relevant because they lack membership in the group they are discussing? I agree with Foucault (1975, 1980), and Greenfield (1993) would note that a researcher's identity indeed plays a part in how they are understood, negated, or embraced.

That leaves me back in my boss's office with our conversation about marriage as a closure to my report of the state of our school. Was he being sexist? *How do I know?* If I asked him this question and he insisted his intent had nothing to do with sexism should that negate my sense of anger or marginalization? *How do I know that he was telling me the truth* relative to his participation in this language game? Is his statement an example of someone exerting male privilege? *How do I know?* What if he insists that his statements were constative rather than performative? If my superintendent says this is not a picture of a pipe and I am sure that this is a picture of a pipe: How do I know what is the truth? And who decides what is the truth? There are litanies of research efforts geared to the description of who decides what is the truth starting with Gramsci's work and most notably including Michael Apple (2001) and Joel Spring (2004). The fact remains that where the d/discourse of my boss and me were concerned, I do not know what the truth is relative to his intent. Furthermore, I will never be able to know the truth of his intent. I argue that the space of *not knowing* is the most uncomfortable of all relative to discourse centered on marginalization, equity, and a myriad of other topics under the vast umbrella of social justice.

This space is dangerous territory because in the heat of a discursive moment, we can jump to conclusions, act out to protect a bruised ego, or engage in behaviors meant to ensure our fit/ job security. Ultimately, when it comes to the politics of discourse and the wooly conversations of social justice, sometimes we simply do not know what the truth is, despite our suspicions or convictions. No matter how much we want our version of the truth to be understood by another person, it simply cannot be because of the difference in arrangement of the constellations (i.e., our own histories, baggage, frameworks, etc.) around the object or idea that we are looking at. We cannot shy away from critical conversations about social justice issues. But we can, in the heat of discourse, take a breath, and consider deeply the constellations surrounding the discursive acts we are witnessing. And that is why discussions about social justice will always be wooly. These volatile dynamics permeate discursive interaction often blind us to understanding why social justice issues are so difficult to understand and think about together. Like other scholars (Jacobs, 2009) concerned with topics related to how we engage in discourses in and around social justice issues, I hold the hope these issues will eventually, agonizingly, solve themselves. Until then we must be vigilant as to the nuances of how we understand each other through discourse as well as the politics of power, hegemony, and identity.

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## ***Technical Knowledge and Values in Professions: Issues Related to Social Justice in Educational Administration***

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Over the last two decades, myriad books, articles, and position papers have proposed the application of social justice in school administration. Most but not all of them have supported the concept. Yet, the profession appears no closer to determining if this concept should be more normative than it was before these publications. Reluctance to accept social justice as a professional standard, however, is not atypical; most professions have been and remain divided over the function of values in professional preparation, licensing, and practice (Olson, 2007). Although the depth of discord in educational administration is unknown, it is clear that rhetoric has not produced systematic reforms in colleges and schools of education (Zeichner, 2006).

My purpose here is neither to advocate nor to oppose social justice. Rather, it is to discuss why disparate views about values in professions produce tensions between technical knowledge and philosophy and to examine three factors that have restricted the pursuit of social justice in educational administration. The argument is made that all professions, but especially those in the human services category, should have an active moral role. Therefore, the challenge is not determining if a profession should be guided by values, it is deciding which values should be normalized and specifying how these values will complement technical knowledge to improve practice.

With respect to social justice in educational administration, three conditions arguably have restricted normalization: concept ambiguity (imprecise and inconsistent definitions), the profession's culture (the preference to tolerate dissonance in lieu of reaching consensus), and ideological conflict (fundamental disagreements within the profession and between the profession and society). Admittedly, my analysis here was influenced by three convictions:

1. Technical knowledge is essential to a profession and, therefore, shared values should complement rather than replace theoretical and tacit knowledge.
2. Unresolved disputes, such as the one concerning social justice, are symptomatic of a professional culture that allows various and even dissimilar epistemological and philosophical convictions.
3. Not resolving issues related to social justice is disadvantageous professionally and politically because it prevents widely shared values, such as equality, fairness, and ethics, from receiving adequate attention.

### **PROFESSIONS AND VALUES**

Fundamentally, professions are occupations that possess distinctive power and prestige. These rewards are granted to them by society because their members have special competence and knowledge thought to be essential (Larson, 1977). An occupation becomes a profession when its practitioners possess and can apply "relevant components of systematically developed and organized uncommon knowledge to address issues and problems deemed of importance to civil society" (Heffernan, n.d., p. 1).

The sole generic resource of professions is, like all labor, their capacity to perform particular kinds of work. They distinguish themselves from other occupations by the particular tasks they claim and by the special character of the knowledge and skill required to perform them. The authority of knowledge is central to professionalism and is expressed and conveyed by a variety of agents and institutions; it is not contingent on practitioner-client relationships or on the official activities of associations. (Friedson, 1993, p. 58)

### *Invited Address*

Clearly then, a profession's standing depends on the extent to which its members acquire a special body of knowledge and apply that expertise in practical and ethical ways.

In human services (or helping) professions, social utility has been judged with respect to the benefits produced for individuals, institutions, and communities. The thesis of civic professionalism posits that a profession should have a moral relationship with the rest of society (Wilmot, 2012). Thus, moral purpose is achieved when values such as ethical practice, equality, and fairness complement the application of technical knowledge by practitioners, especially when the applications occur in unfavorable social, economic, and political conditions.

According to Starr (1982), professions have three classical pillars: the cognitive, the collegial, and the moral. The moral pillar encompasses ethics and other values, but it is entwined with the other two values. Specifically, moral pillars should complement technical knowledge and they should be widely shared to reflect collegiality. Although all professions adhere to some philosophical principles, the nature of the values and the level of attention given to them have not been uniform. Across professions, however, some concern has been voiced regarding the pursuit of political and controversial values that may threaten a profession's credibility. If a profession's epistemological footing is relinquished, its claim to be speaking any manner of objective truth is diminished (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002).

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION**

Applying social justice in all forms of public administration has been and remains controversial. Much of the discourse on this topic has occurred in books, chapters, and journal articles authored by professors and rarely read by practitioners. In many respects, the status of social justice in educational administration is no clearer now than it was 10 years ago. I believe that several values commonly promoted under the label of social justice are already shared values not only in our profession but in society; equality and fairness are two examples. Reaching consensus about shared values requires clarity, a culture of shared beliefs, and a willingness to resolve ideological differences. Currently, the presence of all three criteria in educational administration are questionable.

### **Conceptual Ambiguity**

Conceptual ambiguity occurs when a value or set of values is not defined, defined imprecisely, or defined inconsistently. Social justice is a quintessential example of this problem. This concept not only is being interpreted differently by professors, some of the interpretations arguably are discordant philosophically. Several common themes cut across most definitions, such as equality and empowerment; however, specificity regarding process (e.g., how equality is to be achieved) and outcomes (e.g., what criteria determine if equality is achieved) is either missing or stated vaguely. Equally important, definitions differ with respect to including critical theory perspectives, especially those that are highly political and controversial, such as overthrowing capitalism through political activism (Pearl & Knight, 2010).

Authors who have reviewed social justice publications in educational administration (e.g., Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Shoho, Merchant, & Lugg, 2005) concur that a uniform and widely accepted definition of the concept does not exist. In testimony before the U. S. Department of Education's National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality (NACIQ, 2006), Arthur Wise, president of the National Council for Accrediting Teacher Education (NCATE), said, "I have come to learn, painfully over the last year, the term [social justice] is susceptible to a variety of definitions....more recently the phrase has acquired some new meanings, evidently connected to a radical social agenda" (p. 255). The problem of concept ambiguity also has been documented in other professions, for example, social work (Olson, 2007), community psychology (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002), counseling psychology (Ali, Liu, Mahmood, & Arguello, 2008; Fouad et al., 2004), and nursing (Kirkham & Browne, 2006; Lipscomb, 2011).

Criticisms of social justice have often focused on the vagueness and inconsistency of definitions; Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Lahann, Shakman, and Terrell (2009) refer to these concerns as the ambiguity critique. They note that the "anything and everything" version of this critique presents social justice as "an ambiguous and vague slogan with multiple instantiations, no clear and consistent professional definition, and inadequate theoretical grounding" (p. 626). They added:

### *Technical Knowledge and Values*

Although we are advocates of teacher education for social justice, we must admit we agree with the “anything and everything” version of the ambiguity critique; it is rightly intended to push the field forward by demanding clarity, consistency, and incisiveness. (p. 627)

I liken the situation in educational administration to the condition in community psychology described by Fondacaro and Weinberg (2002). They noted that social justice was commonly discussed, even in professional literature, in a manner suggesting that its meaning is self-evident. This inaccurate assumption presents a major barrier to determining if social justice is or should be a shared value.

### **Professional Culture**

Educational administration’s culture has not been particularly conducive to reconciling conflict, particularly disagreements stemming from foundational disputes that affect a profession’s standing. Efforts to professionalize educational administration became evident shortly after 1900 as universities began offering courses in administration, and superintendents attempted to cloak themselves in professionalism (Callahan, 1962, 1966). For much of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the knowledge base consisted almost entirely of tacit knowledge. Textbooks published during the period made little or no mention of espoused theories, and much of what was known and taught about school administration came from anecdotal evidence of “successful” practice. According to Goldhammer (1983), this knowledge base hardly justified educational administration being treated as a profession.

Circa 1950, a select group of educational administration professors initiated a theory movement that was congruent with broader efforts to elevate the stature of social sciences in academe. Specifically, they tried to conduct the types of research that had produced scientific knowledge in the physical and natural sciences. These types of studies attempted to adhere to two principles: research had to be value-free and researchers had to control cultural, political, economic, and social variables (Nagel, 1986). Across the social sciences, studies based on these two principles were conducted even though it was extremely difficult if not impossible to provide necessary controls (Carney & Williams, 1997). As the theory movement gained momentum, substantial changes were made in textbooks, courses, and degree requirements (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2005; Getzels, 1977).

Approximately a decade later, however, the theory movement was attacked by diverse and powerful influences, such as new theories of science, critiques of logical positivism, pressures for policy research, and altered relations between social sciences and educational administration (Culbertson, 1988). Critics contended that treating educational administration as a science actually thwarted the development of the profession’s knowledge base (Willower, 2001). Not all prominent professors agreed, and as a result, two epistemological axes—one based primarily on espoused theories and one was based primarily on tacit knowledge—were maintained (Murphy, 2002). Rather than resolving epistemological differences, professors accepted a “big tent” philosophy permitting two opposing views of knowledge to coexist (Donmoyer, 1999). This decision, more than any other, reshaped the profession’s culture; educational administration departments were now “largely unencumbered by mutually forged benchmarks and standards” (Murphy, 2002, p. 183). In the aftermath of the big tent being erected, retrospectives on the role of politics and values emerged as a third force shaping professional preparation (Donmoyer, 1999), and educational administration was balkanized into three factions.

In other professions, essential technical knowledge, application skills, and philosophical dispositions are articulated as uniform requirements and standards. For example, most other professions have a national curriculum for preparing practitioners and nearly identical state licensing criteria (Kowalski, 2004, 2009). Although several sets of standards have been developed in our profession and applied to both program accreditation and practitioner licensing, they make no mention of social justice per se, and references to values are often vague and open to interpretation.

In education generally and educational administration specifically, the current culture allows dissonance to trump consensus. Epistemological and philosophical arguments often occur at a distance, impersonally (i.e., through publications), and practitioners are rarely included in the discourse. In part, this is because no one organizational voice speaks for the profession; even the two primary groups, professors

and practitioners, have multiple voices. After studying educational administration departments and programs, Levine (2005) not unexpectedly found that faculty within and across them had conveniently decided to agree to disagree, even about the most fundamental issues related to professional pillars.

### **Ideological Conflict**

Ideological conflict, both within the profession and between the profession and society, has been evident in relation to social justice. Conceptual ambiguity is not entirely responsible. The depth of internal and external conflict was evident in NCATE's decisions regarding social justice. In 2006, the accrediting agency's standards included social justice as one illustrative example of a professional disposition. In his testimony before NACIQ (2006), Wise, appearing on behalf of NCATE, categorically denied that NCATE had a standard or requirement on social justice (p. 243). Technically that was correct since an example of a disposition is neither a standard nor a requirement. Nevertheless, criticisms did not subside and when the 2008 standards were drafted, the example of social justice as a disposition was removed. Thus academic units independently determine if, how, and to what extent social justice is addressed.

Although there are various interpretations of NCATE's treatment of social justice, it is clear that decisions made by professions are subject to public disapproval. Using several historical accounts, Abbott (2005) explained that professional and political ecologies (sets of social relations that are neither fully constrained nor fully independent) are connected; a nexus is especially evident in federal and state policy decisions that affect a profession's autonomy and privilege (e.g., state licensing).

Logically, a profession-wide decision on any value depends on justification—for example, argument as to why social justice should be a normative concept. Without such validation, normalizing values is simply a political decision. In the nursing profession, for example, Lipscomb (2011) contends that injunctions for social justice typically have been presented without explanation or justification; thus, the concept usually has been asserted rather than argued. He adds that when it has been argued, weak forms of justification have frequently been advanced—arguments that failed to provide an intellectual rationale demonstrating why social values are essential to nursing competency. Although advocates in education have usually described social justice foci (e.g., eliminating the effects of inequities and power differences), they too have been less specific in providing information about applications and outcome criteria.

Criticism related to motives and evidence has been directed most often at brands of social justice that advocate radical change through political activism. Pearl and Knight (2010), proponents of democratic pedagogy (to address issues such as equality and empowerment), claim that the conceptualization of social justice espoused by critical pedagogues is fundamentally undemocratic.

Critical pedagogues claim a truth; after having defined it, they then impose it on others. In a democracy, truth is determined through open and thorough debate of opposing views. We argue that truth is the result of such deliberation. Critical pedagogues have a vanguard approach, ours is an effort to create an informed citizenry through deliberation, action, and discovery. The gulf between the two is huge. (p. 246)

Whereas democratic pedagogy entails teaching students how to think, indoctrination entails teaching students what to think.

Members of our profession also are divided with respect to the level of emphasis that should be given to social justice in academic preparation. Concerns here relate to the possibilities that technical knowledge will be deemphasized and that the profession's research agenda will become even more irrelevant to problems of practice. With respect to the former, Cochran-Smith and associates (2009) refute the notion that the application of normative concepts, such as social justice, forces a choice between knowledge and values.

Knowledge and justice are not dichotomous, but complementary, goals. In fact, many would suggest that attention to social critique and to improving society motivates students and stimulates knowledge acquisition. This means that it is not only the case that both social critique and subject matter knowledge can be taught, but also that pursuing the former can often further the goals of the latter. (p. 636)

## *Technical Knowledge and Values*

Knowledge and social critique, however, are not naturally complementary. Thus, deciding how the subject matter is to be organized is pivotal. The primary curricular question is: Should values be taught in separate courses? Generally, integrating values (e.g., ethics) and skills (e.g., critical thinking) into knowledge-based courses has been the norm; pedagogically this option presumably heightens relevance and pragmatically it prevents the required curriculum from expanding. Many medical schools and law schools, for example, have given substantially more attention to communication in recent decades by integrating communicative skills into required knowledge-based courses (Kowalski, 2005).

With respect to ideological differences and research agendas, an objective review of doctoral dissertations and journals reveals the extent to which philosophy is being addressed apart from practice-based problems. Authors who have examined scholarly productivity in our profession (e.g., Foskett, Lumby, & Fidler, 2005; Heck & Hallinger, 2005) have reported that articles published in educational administration journals were often the products of ambiguous or irrelevant research agendas. Other authors, such as Levin (2006), contend that our profession has made little progress establishing a coherent knowledge base that addresses the most critical questions posed by the field. Accordingly, making research on social critique and research on practice complementary is another unanswered challenge.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Although social justice has been promoted in educational administration for several decades, the concept remains politically charged and controversial. If it is to contribute to our profession's active moral purpose, ambiguity and disagreements must be resolved. As discussed here, this goal seems unlikely as long as the social justice is not defined precisely and consistently and in a manner that gains broad acceptance from professors and practitioners.

In professions, social justice should be treated as a normative concept as defined by Fondacaro and Weinberg (2002). They wrote: "Values like social justice are best understood as normative concepts—no less than any other scientific concepts, they are theoretical constructs that acquire meaning and significance only as they arise in particular empirical contexts" (p. 488). They and other authors (e.g., Jayyusi, 1991) contend that by viewing social justice as an empirically descriptive term, scholars are able to determine utility by investigating applications and outcomes in specific empirical contexts. To date, this line of research has not been sufficiently developed.

Finally, we need to carefully examine how our profession is being perceived socially and politically. Over the past decade, several educational administration departments have been closed, a number of states have discontinued issuing licenses for school administrators or they have made licensing optional, and the number of alternative preparation programs operating outside of academe has increased (Kowalski, 2004, 2009). In order to ensure its future, educational administration must restructure its professional culture so that its three essential pillars are made stronger. To bolster our cognitive pillar, we need to resolve our epistemological differences; to bolster our collegial pillar, we need to work closely with practitioners to address critical problems that plague our schools; to bolster our moral pillar, we need to define and embrace shared values that enhance the application of technical knowledge to ameliorate social, economic, and political problems that limit school effectiveness. If we fail to move forward in this manner, our big tent could become an empty tent.

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*An Examination of Individual and Collective Learning within a Cohort Model in Management Development*

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This phenomenological study examines management education within a cohort delivery model in higher education over a period of two years. The study explores how the group context influences individual cognition and group learning. Results of the study highlight specific tensions, or struggles, that characterize members' experiences of cohort life. These tensions revolve around group purpose, membership, identity, and bonding. The study examines how the learning of individual members is related to the context of the group and has implications for understanding the group as a vehicle for cognitive change. By identifying key elements that facilitate individual and group progress and by highlighting critical tasks for cohort directors, this research offers valuable insight to university faculty, in a variety of disciplines, who want to design and implement cohort learning experiences in higher education.

Professional learning experiences in higher education are formative events for managerial development, and finding better ways to develop contexts that support executive learning is an on-going challenge for universities. Traditional attempts to improve management education programs have targeted three major areas: teaching methodologies, curriculum revision (Andre, 1985; Sullivan & Buttner, 1992), and student recruitment and selection practices (Devries, 1993; Hollenback, 1994). However, relying exclusively on these traditional approaches has failed to significantly alter managerial programs, increase the learning of participants (Barnett & Muse, 1993) or reduce the increased fragmentation experienced by students in large bureaucratic institutions. In response to the growing criticism of traditional management programs, universities are beginning to rethink their approaches to instruction.

One increasing approach to university preparation programs is the cohort model. Although the definition of cohort differs practically and theoretically among researchers, the most common understanding of a cohort is a "group of students who begin and complete a program of studies together, engaging in a common set of course activities and/or learning experiences" (Barnett & Muse, 1993, p. 140).

Many universities are attracted to a cohort model because it can be used both as a delivery format and a successful mode for learning. In addition, monitoring the academic progress of a cohort of students is an easier task for university faculty than following the records of students who self-select various courses and enrollment schedules. Many potential students are attracted to a cohort program because of the inferred promise of peer support and social connections (Chairs, McDonald, Shroyer, Urbanski, & Vertin, 2002; Zukas & Malcolm, 2000), its design to accommodate the schedules of working adults, and its predetermined sequence of course offerings. Regardless of why a cohort model is selected, the structure alone does not ensure that a cohort will succeed (Norris & Barnett, 1994). To the contrary, cohorts must be formed and maintained in a purposeful way if they are to foster student learning and development (Imel, 2002).

The formation and maintenance of successful cohorts requires student participants and faculty members alike to significantly alter familiar way of teaching, learning and knowing. The traditional views of accepting the university instructor as the ultimate authority and of using independent learning styles to dominate the group environment are factors that can limit cohort effectiveness (Imel, 2002). In contrast, contemporary cohort programs are designed to create collaborative environments in which students are expected to shift from being dependent, passive receptacles of knowledge to being independent, autonomous, and self-directed learners who participate in interdependent activities (Griffith, 1987).

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## *Preparation and Professional Development of School Leaders*

University faculty members who instruct cohort students also are expected to adjust, from being the familiar “sage-on-the-stage-lecturer” and ultimate knowledge authority to being learners themselves who facilitate the education process and serve as catalysts to help groups become cohesive learning communities.

The use of a cohort format in higher education has emerged slowly over a number of years, but cohort learning is relatively new as a focus of inquiry. Although there is increasing literature on cohorts and their potential as an alternative to traditional educational programs in universities, little is known about the cohort experience from the perspectives of student participants.

This paper reports the results of a phenomenological study that examines management education within a cohort delivery model over a period of two years. The research was conducted with members of a weekend, master’s cohort program in human resource development. Informed by the fields of adult education, organizational learning and leadership development, this study uniquely describes a cohort from the perspective of its members and explores how participants manage both individual cognition and collective group learning. Specific tensions faced by cohort members during the two-year time frame are identified, and collective changes that occurred are high-lighted and discussed. Suggestions offered to university faculty members who direct cohorts in higher education settings are inferred from the interview comments made by cohort participants.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study has direct implications for understanding the group as a vehicle for cognitive change. By examining the perspectives of cohort participants, this research contributes to the limited knowledge on cohort programs as a mechanism for instructional delivery and examines how the learning of individual members is related to the context of the group. By suggesting critical tasks for cohort directors, valuable insight is offered to university faculty members, in any discipline, who plan and implement cohort learning experiences in higher education.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study is designed to have student members of a management cohort reflect on and describe their cohort experience. The method of reflection that occurs throughout this study provides a logical, systematic and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experiences.

The qualitative research paradigm provides an excellent match to the phenomenon being studied. According to Van Mannen (1998), qualitative research emphasizes people’s lived experiences and is well suited for locating the meaning people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives. Within the qualitative research paradigm, a phenomenological approach was used because it seeks to describe what an experience really means for the persons who have had the experience.

### **Sampling Method**

Unlike quantitative designs, phenomenological research is not conducted for the purpose of making generalizations, but rather to “detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201). Sampling in qualitative research is characterized as purposive or theoretical (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Seidman, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The choice of participants is driven by the conceptual question, rather than by the concern for representation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). When studying the master’s management cohort, we looked for data to provide the richest and broadest range of information about the learning perspectives of the cohort members, not to statistically represent the specific population.

## **Site and Participants**

A two-year longitudinal study was conducted on members of a weekend cohort master's program in human resource development. The cohort consisted of fifteen students, all of whom voluntarily agreed to have researchers observe their class sessions. Nine students agreed to be interviewed three times during the length of the two-year program. Because two cohort members left the program during the first semester, the total number of students interviewed was seven. Our research goals were to secure a sample that had experienced the cohort phenomenon and produce trustworthy data on their experiences. Therefore, an adequate sample for qualitative research of this nature is small and appropriate for the context.

The seven participants, consisting of six females and one male, ranged in age from 29 to 45 years of age. Their average years in the workforce were ten. Six of the study participants were currently employed. Collectively, participants' work experiences were in both the private and public sectors and in diverse settings. None of the seven cohort members had participated previously in cohort experiences.

The program's curriculum was structured to present students with a clear understanding of the fundamental principles and theories of human resource development that underlie effective education and training in organizations. Principles were taught in the context of traditional lecture and discussion, along with relevant learn-by-doing tasks. Some of the course assignments were designed as team projects, as encountered in a typical job site. A course on group dynamics was taught during the first semester of study, in addition to the introductory course.

## **Data Collection**

The primary means of data collection were in-depth interviews. Seidman's (1991) in-depth interview method was utilized because it brought the interviewer into the world of the person being interviewed (Patton, 1990). Seidman's method entails three interviews in which the interviewer examines an individual's (a) Past – the historical/biographical antecedents and context; (b) Present – the current experience; and (c) Future – the connections, reflections and meanings of experiences. Seidman suggests that interviews be conducted so that each of the three time periods is explored separately and all interviews are concluded within two weeks. We chose to modify the process so that we could capture and examine each participant's evolving experience of the cohort. Therefore, in each interview we explored the past, present, and future and also extended the period of time to complete the interviews from two weeks to two years.

Each of the participants was interviewed three times; once during the first semester of study, at the conclusion of the first year and at the conclusion of the second year. Primarily, open-ended questions were used in which participants were asked to reconstruct and reflect on their experiences with the cohort and express their views and feelings about their individual and collective learning within the cohort structure. To verify cohort members' recollection of their cohort experiences and to check their interview statements, we conducted class observations and spoke with faculty who taught the courses.

## **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed by using four primary steps suggested by Creswell (1994):

(a) *Bracketing*. A reflective process where researchers bracket their own preconceived ideas about the phenomenon;

(b) *Horizontalizing*. A process of reviewing interview transcripts where all statements initially are given equal value. Later, repetitive statements and those irrelevant to the topic are eliminated, leaving only the horizons of the experiences;

(c) *Clustering*. A process where the horizons of experiences are clustered into themes; and

(d) *Organizing*. A process of arranging the horizons and themes into a coherent, textural description of what was experienced and a structural description of how it was experienced.

When analyzing the transcribed interview data, we first got a sense of the whole by carefully reading through all of the transcriptions and jotting down ideas as they emerged we looked at the substance

of the information and at its underlying meaning. Next, topics were identified and listed. Then, similar topics were grouped together, and relationships among the topics were sought and coded. In qualitative research, coding is grounded in data. The goal of coding is to “rearrange the data into categories that facilitate a comparison of data within and between these categories” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 78).

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, issues of validity and reliability are recast into the broader concept of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness gives consideration to credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Confidence in the truth of the findings and the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other respondents is considered credibility. The extent to which the findings of an inquiry can be replicated with the same or similar subjects and under the same conditions is considered dependability. Confirmability is the degree to which findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects and conditions of the inquiry and not by the bias of the researcher.

### **RESULTS**

In this section we review the results of the qualitative analysis. To set the context, we examined what the cohort meant to its participants and then reviewed the experiences of cohort life for its members.

#### **Meaning and Experience of Cohort Life**

*Participants considered the cohort a psychological and cognitive support group.* In the early stages of group formation, the psychological aspects were dominant. The following comments illustrate these sentiments:

“On the very first day I was blown away. I’d never been in a school situation where someone took me and my classmates to the library, to get (I.D.) cards, where to get lunch. So an expectation, indeed, was set and built.... Not only would we be a support to each other, which indeed happened, but the university would also continue with a lot of attention.”

“It was really great to have someone comment on things that I had done in class and push me to keep doing those things. And, it wasn’t a teacher. It was another student. I like being able to go through something with a lot of people. It’s really nice not to feel like you’re alone in a situation.... there’s nothing worse than that, because you get extremely stressed out.”

As the second year of the program began, the emotional and psychological concerns of individuals that permeated the first-year adjustment period began giving way to a collective academic focus. One participant described the cohort’s transition:

“When we first got together it was getting together with a new group. Seeing that everybody succeeded, developed over time, and I think it became much more important as we went along. After the first year before the start of the second year, we started pushing for the equality of the work. Mainly in the second year of the program, everybody really was getting into the academic part of it and wanted the group to produce better results, better papers, better presentations, and so forth.”

Comments by another cohort member accentuated the move to an academic focus. “The single most important thing that happened to me in this cohort was opening my mind to the HRD field in general, gaining new perspectives on individual learning and organizational learning, and team learning, and stuff that I never thought about before.”

While the cohort was evolving into a strong cognitive support group, it continued to provide emotional support to cohort members. An example of how cohort members provided cognitive and

### *An Examination of Individual and Collective Learning*

psychological support was evidenced in the following participant reflection. “One of the cohort members wanted to drop out, and the group got together and literally prevented her and tried to help her along both in encouragement and also helping academically. In the second year, we had a couple of cohort members who had problems with completing course work and all of the cohort members wanted to get together and did get together to help those individuals.”

*Participants viewed some of their cohort experiences as stressful and filled with anxiety.* The stress and anxiety experienced by individual cohort members ranged on a continuum, from minor, temporary stress to stress caused by emotional situations and got in the way of learning. One participant explained stress as “... minor tensions that go on ... anytime you’re in a group of people.” Others commented on the level of stress associated with performance anxiety. “I would get nervous that I hadn’t said anything. You don’t want to let your colleagues down.” Others wrote, “... the first paper due in a graduate program. That’s intensive by any stretch of the imagination, and you know stress was right off the scale.” Another wrote, “In the afternoon, as group dynamics started to approach, my back would tense up. For me it would be like, oh, no. It’s coming, it’s coming.” Still another cohort member described the effect of stress on learning. “You get uptight and you get stressed out, so you think more about what people are thinking than about what you are learning.”

A particularly impactful tension-causing incident, witnessed by all cohort members, occurred early in the first semester of study, as the group was forming and learning how to communicate and work together. The experience involved a heated exchange among a few cohort members. Emotions were freely expressed, and assumptions about the beliefs of those involved in the exchange were angrily stated by one of the participants. The explosive communication was emotionally painful and stressful to some of the students who were involved in the incident and to others who witnessed the event. The opportunity at work through the hostility with a neutral party was not presented, and the incident was not discussed openly in the group again. In our later interviews with individual cohort members, some said this incident was a significant emotional force that determined the extent of group cohesiveness and defined the boundaries of openness when discussing controversial issues or ideas in future group conversations. Most individuals were reluctant to revisit the confrontation. A typical response was given by one of the cohort members. “In general, the class is very supportive, but there have been some individual instances where there’s tension, and we need to be able to air that better.” As time passed, the event itself and the internal emotions around the event became “undiscussible” in the cohort’s culture (Argyris, 1990). A popular organizational consultant states that “individual differences and behaviors can either support or take away from team effectiveness” (Hartzler & Henry, 1994, p. 129). This incident, left unconfrosted, is an illustration of how the group context can negatively influence individual cognition and group learning.

*Some participants felt constrained by the cohort decision-making process and structure.* Typically, the cohort used a consensus process to make decisions. When questioned about the process, several members claimed it encouraged “group think.” The following statements are illustrative of their opinion.

“I learned to be careful of ‘group think’ and group mentality. There’s power in groups that I am very weary of – the power to make fun of someone, to set somebody up as ... the one to be ridiculed for the two years.”

“People got swept along in a group. There’s a lack of thinking sometimes. Don’t make waves. Or, we all want to dress the same way because there’s comfort [in sameness].”

Other cohort participants voiced their opinions on how the consensus decision-making process could conflict with personal wishes. A hypothetical situation was posed by one of the participant. “I might reach a point that I might want to take a specific elective that my cohort might not want and ... I have to compromise.” This sentiment was confirmed in another comment. “The biggest problem in the cohort is that you’re not on your own. Being on your own is very important because then you can go at your own pace. Then, you can take the courses you want to take, take electives you want to take. Here, you are in constraint of 14 other individuals who might have 14 different ideas on where they want to go.”

*Preparation and Professional Development of School Leaders*

In retrospect, the cohort participants spoke about the limitations associated with interacting with and hearing the perspectives of only 14 peers throughout the two-year program. They viewed the inclusion of outside participants in some of the courses as a positive cognitive experience for cohort members because it brought new perspectives on organizational theory and practice into the group. One cohort member expressed the positive influence of having "... non-cohort students attend classes. The [group] barriers were totally dropped." Several cohort members wanted to have the option of enrolling in electives outside the cohort structure, without first getting the cohort's consensus on the choice of courses. "I'd most like to [have taken] elective courses ... it would have been much easier for me ... or for anybody ... so, definitely, [that was] the negative part of the cohort." Another cohort participant gave a compelling reason for favoring personal selections of elective courses over the consensus model: "I need freedom to choose electives that would truly benefit me from an educational standpoint."

*In general, comments by participants about the meaning and experiences of cohort life were complimentary.* However, when asked if participants would recommend the cohort experience to others, their answers were mixed ranging from no benefit to high praise. The following responses exemplify the range of answers. "Would I do it again? No, I wouldn't go into a cohort. I haven't seen any benefit." Other comments gave credit to the support received from cohort colleagues. "The support, the whole atmosphere, the whole deal has been so good that I would have done it again. If I had to choose between the cohort and non-cohort (I had that choice when I started), I'm glad I chose this." Another participant claimed, "I never would have gone back to school if it weren't for the cohort."

**CHANGES IN THE COLLECTIVE COHORT**

Change is an unavoidable aspect of cohort learning, and group contexts influence individual and group learning. As the cohort experiences progressed over the two-year period, the system became more defined and both individual and collective changes became more evident. As expected, individual changes were more striking than the incremental movements that characterized the collective whole. The major areas of collective change are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1  
*Changes in the Collective Cohort*

FROM	TO
Concerned about fitting into the group	Concerned about academic outcomes and program completion
Emphasized psychological support	Provided psychological support but emphasized academic support
Focused on personal success	Became concerned about group success
Showed little trust	Developed trust in selected areas
Showed strong reluctance to freely express ideas and feeling	Expressed ideas more freely but in limited contexts
Used defensive behavior and lacked internal harmony	Used less defensive behavior and was more internally harmonious
Took events at face value without much processing	Was actively engaged in understanding the meaning of events
Wanted knowledge about management theory, content, problem solving	Became knowledgeable about management, theory, content, problem solving
Showed dependency – wanted to be taken care of	Became independent

**TENSIONS EXPERIENCED BY COHORT MEMBERS**

Four tensions and/or struggles characterized members' experiences in the cohort life. These tensions are comparable to the paradoxes of group life described by Smith and Berg (1987) in that the cohort members experienced contradictory and opposing emotions, thoughts, and actions that coexisted

*An Examination of Individual and Collective Learning*

within the group. These contradiction were related to (a) purpose, (b) membership, (c) identity, and (d) bonding. Table 2 illustrates these cohort tensions.

**Purpose**

The group members continually struggled with what they considered to be the purpose of the cohort. Some individuals saw the group as a support mechanism for personal learning. As an example, “[The cohort means] getting through graduate school with support. Especially when you’re working.” Another participant described the cohort’s purpose as a mechanism for professional development. “One of the purposes why I came into the program was to learn more of the conceptual background, theories, and what’s going on in research. I need more of a basis for that ... at work, for my own professional growth.” One member viewed the cohort purpose as a combination of both professional and personal growth. “In the beginning of the program I started to learn about the workplace. I ended up learning about the learning itself. And, that was a great learning experience.” Another participant stated “The [purpose] of the group was to stay together, nurture each other, learn, certainly to learn from each other.”

The tension between personal and professional purposes for the cohort also was reflected in the symbolism that some participants used to describe the group. Several individuals overlapped their cohort experiences with earlier childhood memories and family members. Examples of these comments are: “I can close my eyes and see my mother asking me a question.” “... [In the cohort] everybody stays in their family role: this is mother, this is father, this is you know ... Aunt Lily ... I was like the child that wanted to run away.”

Table 2  
*Tensions Experienced by Cohort Members*

<i>Tensions</i>	<i>Opposing Emotion</i>	<i>Opposing Emotion</i>
Purpose	Personal	Professional
Membership	Inclusion	Exclusion
Identity	Individual	Collective
Bonding	Obligated	Cohesion

**Membership**

Some participants struggled with their own sense of belonging in the group. One cohort member stated, “When I first come to class I was extremely intimidated by everybody.” Another said, “One of the biggest things I was accused of was that I was interrupting when other people were talking. So, I became real conscious of this ...and later saw those who accused me were participating in the same behavior.”

As individual members struggled with who should be physically and psychologically in the cohort, they looked at the connection of diversity and the tension of group membership. On one hand, participants agreed that diversity was welcomed in the program. Examples of comments that supported this claim are, “I wanted to do this program because of the stated attempt by the university to get a diverse combination of participants” and “... being around diverse people who think is ... the best part [of the cohort experience].” Also, cohort members welcomed non-cohort students who attended cohort classes because they brought diverse academic ideas to the group. On the other hand, there were complaints about the diverse personalities and behaviors of cohort members. One example is, “It’s a very diverse group of people, ages, experiences. Sometimes I don’t see us really coming together.” In addition, the early incident in which a heated, verbal exchange occurred between cohort members in another example of rejecting personalities and behaviors that proved divisive for the group. During the final interview at the end of the program, one participant came to terms with the diversity issue regarding group membership: “I developed an understanding of how and why people think the way they do. I developed more of an acceptance of people.”

## **Identity**

As with most groups, cohort participants vacillated between wanting to be treated and seen both as an individual and as a group member. One participant described this tension as “the battle between individuality and the group experience.” Another participant identified the cohort as a team and stated, “The culture of the cohort is team work. More than anything else, you see yourself part of a larger team and not just you for your own sake. We wanted to succeed ourselves, personally, but also we really did want everybody else to succeed in the program and to finish the program. That was a very strong part of the culture.”

Some participants, however, wanted to maintain an individual identity, without a sense of collectivism. One cohort member explained, “While the group affiliation is important to me ... I believe strongly that it is important to look beyond the identity of group boundaries. I would describe myself as an independent thinker.” Another participant was asked how maintaining separateness affected the identity of the group. The response was, “Frankly, I don’t care. I want to do this program, but I want to survive it intact.”

## **Bonding**

A feeling of group cohesion did not come easily for these cohort members. Throughout the program participants struggled with their sense of obligation to themselves and to the group as a whole. Several cohort members said they “felt obligated and didn’t want to let others down.” At the same time, others didn’t want to sacrifice their own learning for the sake of group cohesiveness. Because group members were wary of losing their individual identities, participants occasionally mistook group harmony as “group think” and thwarted a chance to collectively bond.

At the beginning of the second year of study, the participants in the cohort searched for and found a common goal among all of the members that would unite the group with a common focus. The goal was to complete the program and graduate. Once this collective focus was verbalized and targeted, it served as a bonding force that began the development of some trust and cohesion within the group.

Ultimately, the level of bonding was different for everyone. One individual, who thought it was important to maintain some distance from the group, was pleased to comment, “... even out of the cohort experience, I came up with a concept of myself.” For another participant, however, the sense of bonding was particularly strong. “I care about these people now. I care about what’s going on in their daily lives, what they’re worried about. What their concerns are, not just with school, but with other things. They’ve become my friends ... like my family ... I have to admit it is hard being separated for two weeks at a time.”

The themes a group purpose, membership, identity, and bonding have a direct impact on the planning and administration of a diverse learning cohort. Next, we will explore the leadership responsibilities for university faculty who are interested in designing, refining, or maintaining educational learning experiences in a cohort format.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR DIRECTING A COHORT**

Learning within a cohort model in higher education is complex. Because of the complexity, we believe a cohort director is key to providing successful learning experiences for students who participate in the cohort model. Most directors learn their responsibilities through trial and error, so the critical tasks that facilitate individual and group progress are important to identify. The director’s tasks that we suggest in this section are inferred from our interviews of the cohort members and class observations. These critical tasks, or leadership responsibilities, are highlighted below.

### **Focus on the Selection Process**

One critical task of a cohort director is the selection of applicants into the program. To the best of their judgment, directors need to select participants for a cohort model who do not have a background of family and/or personal experiences that will place the cohort member at high risk when under the pressures

## *An Examination of Individual and Collective Learning*

that naturally occur as groups are forming. In other words, do not select members for the cohort delivery model who require “extreme maintenance” to the extent that their emotional needs continually dominate the learning goals of the group. The behavior of individuals within groups “can have a positive or negative influence on teamwork and can impact overall team results” (Hartzler & Henry, 1994, p. 142). Although a stringent selection process does not guarantee a good fit for group learning, vigilance in the selection process of participants in cohort learning is important, particularly if applicants do not have substantial support from others outside the group.

### **Build a New History**

Because cohort participants usually have little or no shared experiences prior to joining the group, a second key task of the director is to create a new history among the cohort members. To accomplish this task, the director needs to create and maintain a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environment that includes specific structures and processes to help establish psychological and academic boundaries, group purpose and goal attainment, and professional and personal development. At the same time, expect and encourage the involvement by all cohort members in planning activities to meet their individual and collective needs.

### **Establish Group Purpose and Learning Goals**

Explain the purpose of the cohort and what it is *not*. Have students set initial learning goals for themselves and for the collective, even though some of these goals will be revised once the program is underway. Throughout the program, relate the learning activities to the purpose and goals of the cohort so participants understand the relevance of their experiences.

### **Establish Psychological and Academic Boundaries**

At the initial meeting of the cohort, discuss the structures and processes available to support students and their learning environment. Discuss individual and group expectations for academic achievement, group participation, and university obligations. State and display the ground rules for communication within the group. Revisit these rules throughout the duration of the cohort, if needed. Cohort members can add to or revise the initial rules once a safe learning environment is established. Prior to beginning the cohort, give careful thought to the sequence of learning activities, especially during the group’s formation period, and include both social and team building activities throughout.

### **Conduct On-going Assessments of Individual and Group Needs**

Throughout the program, another critical task of cohort directors is to conduct assessments of the content taught and of the learning process. Then, adjustments can be made as needed. Soliciting a critical analysis from cohort participants is a vital piece of this assessment. Therefore, a regularly scheduled time for reflection can contribute to personal and organizational learning.

### **Avoid “Group Think”**

Avoid “group think” by creating elasticity in the cohort’s boundary. Creating elasticity can be accomplished by purposefully planning activities that intellectually permeate and extend the group’s routine responses and thinking patterns. Examples are to allow cohort members to take an elective outside of the cohort schedule, invite other students to enroll in selected courses with the cohort members, and approach class discussions and problem solving from a variety of viewpoints.

### **Be Flexible to a Point**

Be prepared to deal with whatever incident comes along by remembering to remain flexible, keep a sense of humor, and make decisions with participants that are based on the cohort's purpose and learning goals.

### **Establish and Integrate Dual Learning Tracks for Professional and Personal Development**

Finally, to accelerate learning, the cohort director needs to establish two integrated learning tracks within the cohort. Design one track to include the professional content of the courses being taught. Design the other track to help cohort members learn about group behavior, conflict management, communication skills, and the process of change. The latter track can assist cohort participants to better understand cohort undercurrents and professional experiences rather than interpreting these events solely from the limitations of personal perceptions.

### **CONCLUSION**

Closely planned and managed university cohorts are critical to optimizing individual and group learning. As university cohort directors strive to create effective learning communities, it is important to be mindful of the structures that provide appropriate psychological and cognitive supportive for diverse participants. Additionally, to deal with the complexities of cohort-based learning, directors need to develop competencies that go beyond the skills used to lecture, teach a single course, or monitor administrative tasks. These expanded competencies include skills in asking challenging questions, being open to change, facilitating in-depth discussions and student reflection, strengthening cohort relationships and completing tasks, communicating clearly, dealing with conflict and defensiveness, and building teams. Also useful to cohort directors is a strong knowledge base in the theory and practice of adult education, organizational studies, group dynamics, leadership development, and change.

The cohort model for learning is not a one-size-fits-all phenomenon. Even with sensitive planning some students may become frustrated with a cohort's lack of flexibility in certain contexts, while other individuals may thrive in the familiarity of a cohort environment. As one cohort participant summed up the two-year cohort experience, "The cohort is more than a collection of individuals. It has a life of its own."

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*An Examination of Individual and Collective Learning*

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*Preparation and Professional Development of School Leaders*

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***Not Yet Bought: Bill Gates' and Secretary Arne Duncan's Vision of the Education Master's Degree***

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We were disappointed to hear Secretary of Education Arne Duncan say that state and local governments should rethink their policies of giving pay raises to teachers who earn master's degrees because evidence suggests that the degree alone does not improve student achievement (Duncan, 2010). Likewise, Bill Gates has suggested that school districts should end teacher pay increases based on seniority and master's degrees (Duffrin, 2011).

Perhaps we should not have been surprised to hear that the master's degree was not valued in the speech by Secretary Duncan at the American Enterprise Institute on November 17, 2010. Nevertheless, we were still taken aback by one more Secretary of Education speaking against and dismantling public education.

**OUR EXPERIENCE WITH ENTERING MASTER'S DEGREE STUDENTS**

The typical entering student is a beginning teacher with a few years of teaching experience, but usually without graduate-level knowledge of educational statistics or research design. They have very little knowledge of the foundational values of public education, school finance, pedagogy, curriculum, or evaluation. On the other hand, by the time they complete their programs, we regularly witness that they write better; speak more knowledgeably; make more mature professional educational judgments; use systematic, explicit and direct instruction; and are motivated by historic educational ideals. Most embrace the importance of life-long learning and seek effective ways to incorporate effective literacy learning strategies into their content area curriculum.

**THE LONG HISTORY OF THE MASTER'S DEGREE**

The origin of the master's degree is somewhat obscure. In Europe during the middle ages, the master's degree was a license to teach (Fehl, 1962). Here in America in 1831, Harvard President Josiah Quincy established an advanced seminar for the preparation of teachers of the classics, requiring at least a year of study beyond the bachelor's degree (Rudolph, 1962). The University of Michigan started Master of Arts and Master of Science degree programs in 1858; Columbia started offering the Master of Arts degree in 1857. The master's degree has represented increased specialization, professionalism, and career development. Over 600,000 master's degrees are awarded each year. In some careers, such as school administration, social work, library sciences, and academic counseling, an M.A. is needed in order to qualify for an entry-level job. However, the continued viability of the master's degree depends upon producing empirical evidence that it is worth student time and expense.

**THE LACK OF EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE MASTER'S DEGREE**

Unfortunately, there is not a lot of evidence available. For us, this is not surprising because we regularly witness the progressive development of students in our classes. It is very unlikely that our entering students could produce the theses, projects, or examinations that they produce in their culminating activities. Further, students remark how they have changed, as well. Could it be that we are delusional? Could it be that the students, having put much effort into their programs, convince themselves of the worth of the master's degree, in order to reduce cognitive dissonance?

Dan Goldhaber and Dominic Brewer (1997) reviewed the relevant literature and found that "teachers with an MA degree are no more (or less) effective than those without advanced degrees, clearly a counterintuitive finding." However, in their own study of NELS:88 data, they found that "a teacher with a

## *Preparation and Professional Development of School Leaders*

MA in mathematics has a statistically significant *positive* impact on [10<sup>th</sup> grade] students' achievement relative to teachers with no advanced degrees or degrees in non-mathematics subjects." They also found similar results for science, but not for English or history, "where the subject-specific variables were statistically insignificant." Nonetheless, it is probably not an accident that these researchers were able to empirically demonstrate that master's degrees in mathematics have a positive outcome, because the curriculum is much better defined across graduate mathematics programs than in other fields.

Since 1986 about 300 colleges have created extended teacher education programs that enable students to obtain both a bachelor's degree in an academic field and a master's degree in education (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Ferguson (1990) found that the students of teachers with master's degrees had higher test scores in grades 1-7.

Recently, Richard Buddin (2010) analyzed student test data in the Los Angeles Unified School District from 2003 to 2009. He concluded that traditional teacher qualifications have no association with student outcomes. However, Derek Briggs and Ben Domingue (2011) re-analyzed the data and "found significant and meaningful associations between ... value-added estimates of teachers' effectiveness and their experience and educational background."

### **MASTER'S DEGREES VARY IN QUALITY AND IN PURPOSE**

We recognize that the content and quality of master's degree programs vary widely. Some programs are a first step toward a doctoral degree; other programs are heavily vocational; while still others are experiential. Generally, master's degrees require about a year of full-time or equivalent part-time graduate education of approximately 36 semester units, and include introductory courses (such as educational foundations, statistics, and research methods), specialization courses, some "broadening" courses, internship opportunities to apply the specialization in the field, and a culminating thesis, project, or comprehensive examination (Glazer, 1986). When graduates with the master's degree are employed, the quality of their work is generally inseparable from the context of the school district. Hence it is difficult to identify the effect of the degree, but undifferentiated devaluation of all master's degree programs is wrong. It does nothing to improve the effectiveness of teacher preparation or development, nor is it a panacea for improving student learning outcomes. Its main goal appears to be the establishment of "merit pay" based upon student achievement.

### **REVISITING BILL GATES' "EVIDENCE"**

Bill Gates based his opinion on a study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (released in December 2010) which claimed to provide strong evidence supporting "value-added" analysis of teacher performance. Gates—not a degree holder himself—believes that if teachers can be evaluated using the value-added approach, there is no need to pay teachers based upon seniority or a master's degree. Teachers can simply be paid on the basis of how well they increase student test scores. However, Jesse Rothstein, an economist at the University of California at Berkeley, re-analyzed the Gates Foundation report and found that over forty percent of those teachers whose state exam scores placed them in the bottom quarter of effectiveness were in the top half on an alternative test designed to measure higher-order, conceptual understanding. Rothstein explained that "teacher evaluations based on observed state test outcomes are only slightly better than coin tosses at identifying teachers whose students perform unusually well or badly on assessments of conceptual understanding." This means that "a teacher's value-added [score] for state tests does a poor job of identifying teachers who are effective in a broader sense." Rothstein goes on to say that "A teacher who focuses on important, demanding skills and knowledge that are not tested may be misidentified as ineffective, while a fairly weak teacher who narrows her focus to the state test may be erroneously praised as effective" (National Education Policy Center, 2011).

### **OUR EVIDENCE, BASED UPON AN ANALYSIS OF A NATIONAL DATABASE**

We decided to perform our own analysis, and looked for a large scale, nationally representative, longitudinal data base that would include information on the education level of teachers. We chose to analyze a longitudinal project initiated by the National Center for Education Statistics, the *Early Childhood*

*Not Yet Bought*

*Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten* (ECLS-K). The base year sample of the ECLS-K data included 3,305 teachers in 1,277 kindergarten classes during the 1998-1999 school year. The sampling process involved a multi-stage design to ensure the national representation of classrooms and students (Rose, 2009). As a result, the classrooms drawn in the sample included both full-day and part-day programs in both public and private schools. According to Charlton (2010), “Benefits of using the ECLS-K data include its large and diverse sample and access to multiple measures that address a large number of variables.”

While we did not find as many relationships supporting the master’s degree as we would have liked, this national data analysis has indicated some interesting characteristics of master’s degree holders. Even given the fuzzy and broad definition of the master’s degree, we noticed that:

Teachers with the master’s degree are more likely to utilize “manipulatives” in teaching mathematics than those with less education. Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 below display related data.

Table 1  
*Use of Manipulatives*

Teach math with manipulatives	BA or less	BA plus one year	Master’s Degree
Yes	92.47%	94.66%	96.01%
No	7.29%	5.02%	3.12%

Teachers with more education than a bachelor’s degree are more likely to envision a stronger leadership role for teachers, as opposed to the idea that it is the school administrator who singularly sets priorities, makes plans, and sees that they are carried out.

Table 2  
*Teachers Impacting Policy*

Belief in how much teachers impact policy	BA or less	BA plus one year	Master’s Degree
No Influence	6.52%	4.72%	5.29%
Slight Influence	15.71%	16.79%	18.67%
Some Influence	31.52%	30.46%	25.73%
Moderate	23.43%	23.63%	25.76%
Great Deal	21.61%	23.54%	24.03%

Teachers with more education than a bachelor’s degree place somewhat more emphasis upon teaching students to make predictions based upon a text. This emphasis upon higher level understanding of text is of critical importance in learning to read for meaning.

Table 3  
*Text Prediction*

Make predictions based on text	BA or less	BA plus one year	Master’s Degree
Taught at a higher grade level	4.30%	2.47%	2.37%
Once a month or less	4.11%	4.00%	2.35%
2-3 times a month	5.83%	4.06%	6.30%
1-2 times a week	24.91%	24.32%	20.40%
3-4 times a week	23.77%	25.24%	29.23%
Daily	34.47%	38.04%	37.80%

*Preparation and Professional Development of School Leaders*

Teachers with more education than a bachelor’s degree utilize work books and work sheets slightly less frequently.

Table 4  
*Use of Workbook/Sheets*

Work book/sheets frequency	BA or less	BA plus one year	Master’s Degree
Never	18.12%	20.52%	20.54%
Once a month or less	3.43%	4.60%	3.88%
2 or 3 times a month	4.08%	6.89%	5.38%
Once or twice a week	20.60%	22.36%	21.64%
3 or 4 times a week	19.72%	18.72%	18.94%
Daily	33.21%	26.05%	29.12%

We believe these characteristics show some important evidence. While further research is warranted, particularly of high quality NCATE accredited master’s degree programs, we believe it would be truly tragic if teachers were advised to not pursue master’s degrees. Teachers should set an example by continuing their education beyond the bachelor’s degree. As Orr and Orphanos (2011) have shown, the quality of a preparation program positively influences a leader’s work and their school’s efforts to improve student achievement.

**ANALOGOUS RESEARCH ON NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION**

While holders of the master’s degree have not been sufficiently studied, National Board Certification promotes professional development comparable to attaining a high quality master’s degree. Large-scale studies in Florida and North Carolina found that, controlling for a host of student and teacher characteristics, students made significantly greater gains if their teachers were National Board Certified (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006). Researchers in the Los Angeles Unified School District found that the positive effects of board-certified teachers were even larger when examined using a randomized assignment-of-classrooms-to-teachers design.

Cantrell, Fullerton, Kane, and Staiger (2008) found that students of National Board Certified teachers outperformed those of teachers who had unsuccessfully attempted the certification process by 0.2 standard deviations, about twice the differential that they found between National Board Certified teachers and unsuccessful applicants from a broader Los Angeles Unified School District sample not part of the randomized experiment, but analyzed with statistical controls. The point is that since the value of National Board Certification has been demonstrated, it is reasonable to likewise value teachers with quality master’s degrees.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE MASTER’S DEGREE**

We are proud of our own master’s degrees as a stage in our graduate preparation that taught us the value of public education in a democracy, advanced knowledge in our fields, and a repertoire of approaches to teaching. Rather than devalue the master’s degree, we suggest that accrediting bodies, professional associations, and universities improve the credibility of the master’s degree by:

1. Requiring a stronger prerequisite foundation in the liberal arts.
2. Hiring a preponderance of full-time faculty.
3. Strengthening student preparation in research.
4. Requiring a thesis after students pass a comprehensive examination.
5. Requiring marginal students to complete appropriate additional coursework, before granting them the master’s degree.
6. Requiring collaboration and consultation between the master’s degree candidate and potential employers.

7. Providing developmental experience in universal access for all learners. [And]
8. Discontinuing weak programs.

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## ***Perceptions of Practice: Challenges of Enhancing Teacher Supervision and Evaluation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

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*We need to make sure our students have the teacher they need to be successful. That means states and school districts taking steps to move bad teachers out of the classroom. Let me be clear: if a teacher is given a chance but still does not improve, there is no excuse for that person to continue teaching.* (“Obama, takes on unions,” Minnesota Public Radio NewsQ [MPR], 2009)

Teacher effectiveness and accountability are topics receiving increased attention and remain the centerpiece of Race to the Top (U. S. Department of Education, 2009) competition, the \$4.35 billion grant program of the federal stimulus package for public schools. In a summer 2009 speech to the National Education Association (NEA) Secretary of Education Arne Duncan encouraged the union membership to think boldly about teacher supervision and evaluation. Duncan stressed the use of data to help identify and support quality teaching and to evaluate teacher performance.

It’s time we all admit that just as our testing system is deeply flawed—so is our teacher evaluation system—and the losers are not just the children. When great teachers are unrecognized and unrewarded—when struggling teachers are unsupported—and when failing teachers are unaddressed—the teaching profession is damaged. (“Arne Duncan's Speech to RA Delegates,” 2009)

Research has indicated that an important element for improving teacher effectiveness is supervision and evaluation (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Peterson, 2004; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007; Sullivan & Glanz, 2009; Xu & Sinclair, 2002; Zepeda, 2007) but valid supervision and evaluation practices are underutilized resources in identifying the quality of teaching and its effectiveness (Mathers & Oliva, 2008). Research also suggested that supervision and evaluation are often viewed by administrators and teachers as ritualistic exercises that are difficult, subject to contextual complications, unfulfilling, expensive, superficial, and time consuming (Cousins, 1995; Goe, 2007). Consequently, a teacher’s effectiveness—clearly the most important factor in student achievement and accountability—is not consistently measured, recorded, discussed, or used to inform decisions (Westberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). When supervision and evaluation become a casualty of impaired implementation, they have imperceptible value and do little to improve the quality of performance and instruction (Peterson, 2000; Stiggins & Duke, 1986). Although teacher supervision and evaluation have the potential to help teachers improve and meet the responsibilities of accountability and increased student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1986; Donaldson, 2009), to continue use of a conventional system confounded by challenges and ineffectiveness is a travesty and an injustice that challenges the 21<sup>st</sup> century school leaders with dire consequences for our schools and our students.

This study examined the literature relative to the demands of teacher supervision and evaluation and explored the perceptions of building principals regarding structural and procedural challenges facing them in this critical but daunting responsibility.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE CHALLENGES**

#### **Dual Purposes**

Challenges building administrators encounter with supervision and evaluation are many and varied including: insufficient amount of time, resistant teachers, inadequate data resources including test scores; and conflicting purposes of teacher supervision and evaluation (Andrews & Knight, 1987; Baratz-Snowden, 2009; Brandt, Mathers, Oliva, Brown-Sims, & Hess, 2007; Duffie, 1991; Krajewski, 1978; Peterson, 2000; Portin, Shen, & Williams, 1998). Most supervision and evaluation systems portend to serve

both accountability and professional growth purposes (Haefele, 1993; Holland, 2005). Supervision is tied to professional growth and improving teaching and learning, while evaluation purports to emphasize the accountability function - assuring teachers meet standards in alignment with policies or removing incompetent teachers. To be of ultimate benefit to the teachers and to the process, both supervision and evaluation must be integrated components of the same comprehensive system. Yet one of the controversies that has jaundiced teacher supervision and evaluation has been educators' limited understanding of the purposes of supervision and evaluation and their inevitable and intricate connection.. The purposes of both supervision and evaluation and their definitions vary within and across districts, and the term "observation" further complicates an understanding of the supervision and evaluation process (Brandt, Mathers, Oliva, Brown-Sims, & Hess, 2007). In addition to district personnel unsure of the purposes of evaluation, most state departments and courts contribute to the confusion of terms and administrative roles by rarely distinguishing between the two (Hazi, 1994). As a result, the intent of both supervision and evaluation are ambiguous, contributing to faulty implementation. Many principals view the process merely as a legal, compliance issue avoiding difficult employment decisions and simultaneously leaving teachers with little or nothing to improve their craft and enrich their individual teaching techniques and skills.

In a study supported by The New Teacher Project entitled the "Widget Effect," Westberg et al., (2009) described the pervasive failures of teacher supervision/evaluation. While working with 12 districts, four states, approximately 15,000 teachers and 1,300 school administrators, the researchers found teachers were rated similarly with little differentiation. Teachers were given ratings of either good or great; excellent teaching garnered little recognition, reinforcement, or reward. In addition, few teachers received constructive feedback relative to professional growth, and beginning teachers were left isolated and provided scant assistance. According to the researchers, even more disturbing, poor performance was virtually circumvented. Clearly, the dual purposes of the process were misconstrued or disregarded, and the implementation for both professional development and accountability were dishonored; teachers and students suffered from a deficient system.

### **Lack of Time**

A chronic threat to the process is lack of sufficient time. Principals report they rarely have enough time or resources to implement quality supervision practices and conduct evaluations helpful to teachers (Krajewski, 1978; Peterson, 2000). Although Colby, Bradshaw, and Joyner (2002) found that teacher growth was a consequence of more time allocated to supervision and evaluation, little time is afforded to teachers and available to principals for supervisory activities such as sharing of data, coaching, collaborating on goal setting, classroom visits, and reflection.

Because of time restrictions, experienced teachers are usually observed and evaluated once every two or three years; this single visit may also be considered the summative evaluation—a one-shot performance. The typical "drive-by" evaluation is comprised of an observation (Odden, 2004) conducted once a year for approximately 20-30 minutes (Brandt et al., 2007; Sweeney & Manatt, 1986) with a brief post observation conference and the signing of requisite forms (Ponticell & Zepeda, 2004). Typically, this is the only supervisory activity between the teacher and the principal and the total extent to which principals and teachers collaborate on professional development issues. Generally, non-tenured and beginning teachers are observed more frequently, at least twice a year (Brandt et al., 2007), which is still a paltry and desultory amount of time to render worthy feedback and assistance to those teachers who may be struggling in their first years of teaching.

### **Resistant Teachers**

Another issue thwarting the effectiveness of the supervision and evaluation program is teacher resistance. Teacher resistance may originate from individual teachers' concerns with the quality of the process or issues emerging from the collective concerns of the teacher unions. Teachers may object to the execution of supervision and evaluation for several reasons including defending the "sanctity of the classroom" where teaching is seen as an isolated activity and deemed an individual right. Furthermore, allegations of supervisor subjectivity and bias causes much concern for teachers who are distrustful of the evaluator (Andrews & Knight, 1987). Supervisors also may not possess a depth of content knowledge and

### *Perceptions of Practice*

understanding relative to the art of teaching and are judged incompetent by the classroom instructors. Teachers argue that teaching is viewed as complex and contextual, and cannot be measured within a 30 minute time period, once a year, represented numerically or with a checklist (Kersten & Israel, 2005), rather it necessitates the use of multiple performance measures.

On the other hand, Painter (2001) explored the complex process from the perception of principals regarding barriers relative to teacher evaluation and collective bargaining in two states, one requiring collective bargaining and the other state without such statute. Principals' perceptions of major barriers varied depending on their state's involvement with collective bargaining. Principals with collective bargaining felt the process was frequently hampered by dealing with statutes for tenured teachers and the influence of teachers' unions, resulting in an inability to remove ineffective teachers. Ostensibly, the implementation of the supervision and evaluation process in most districts depends on collaboration of the teacher unions, but historically, teacher unions have been viewed as not always collaborative with administration, (Painter, 2001; Toch & Rorhman, 2008). Recently, the two national teacher unions have proposed changes regarding teacher evaluation to their membership. In their new working paper entitled, *A Continuous Improvement Model for Teacher Development and Evaluation*, The American Federation of Teachers (2010) supported multiple sources of data, standards for systems of support, and accountability. The National Education Association (2011) also reconsidered its stance on multiple indicators and accountability in its newly developed *Proposed Policy Statement on Teacher Evaluation and Accountability*. It remains to be seen whether the teacher unions and the administrators will be able to work harmoniously regarding the sensitive and often volatile topic of teacher evaluation, but it is imperative for the quality and integrity of the process.

### **Multiple Data Sources**

Using multiple and varied data sources as part of the teacher supervision and evaluation process is critically important to its value for teachers and administrators. Adopting multiple data sources, however, is time-consuming and may be viewed as unfair and inconsistent since the same data are generally not available for every teacher. On the other hand, some would argue that it is inappropriate to have the same set of data for each instructor; "no single data source is valid for every teacher in a school, and no individual data source is available for each teacher" (Peterson, 2004, p. 63). Regardless of the complications with multiple data sources, the utilization of multiple data sources is a requirement in the current federal initiative Race to the Top. As cited in the federal application:

- (ii) Design and implement rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers and principals that (a) differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories that take into account data on student growth (as defined in this notice) as a significant factor; and (b) are designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 6)

**Student achievement test data.** Although student achievement data are considered by some as compelling indicators of teacher effectiveness, the use of standardized data alone engenders much debate. Reliable and valid data are not available for every teacher, making data inappropriate as a single standard evaluation criterion (Peterson, 2000). In fact, testing data are available for less than 20% of the current teaching staff; most teachers do not teach subjects that are tested on state-mandated assessments (Baratz-Snowden, 2009). Other concerns with the tests include their incapability to actually measure what the students know beyond basic skills or what they have learned in out-of-school environments, and their insensitivity relative to students' backgrounds or other external risk factors (Gratz, 2009). They are intended to measure student achievement not teacher quality, and the test scores are not easily linked to an individual teacher (Goe, 2007). In addition, students are misreported by class and grade level; students' scores jump from top to bottom or vice versa from year to year; and in several cases, data processing errors have affected thousands of students (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009). Baratz-Snowden (2009) cautions, "It is easy for inappropriate measures such as standardized test scores to hijack the process and narrow the concept of effective teaching" (p. 11). Standardized test data, nevertheless, may be useful in diagnosing instructional deficiencies and providing information to teachers to improve their effectiveness, but they do

not single-handedly provide judgment of a teacher's skill and ability. "It should never be the only measure," argues Arne Duncan (Richardson, 2009, p. 28).

**Standards for effective instruction.** Standards, designed to specify the requisite knowledge and skills, are used as performance-based teaching standards and can provide both administrators and teachers guidance in supervision and evaluation. It is difficult to create and maintain a valid system of supervision and evaluation without standards of practice; yet, studies (Loup, Garland, Ellett, & Rugutt, 1996) indicated that many of the largest districts in the nation were deficient in establishing performance standards. More recently, it has been estimated that fewer than half the states have adopted standards developed by the Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) or adapted their own state standards for beginning and veteran teachers (Goldrick, 2002). Use of standards typically requires more intensive collection of evidence including frequent observations and work samples.

**Classroom observations.** According to the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) study (as cited in Baratz-Snowden, 2009), classroom observations are the most customary form of data collection in teacher evaluations with approximately 29 states requiring districts to include classroom observations as part of the teacher supervision/evaluation process.

Characterized by both advantages and disadvantages, observations are a way to examine teacher performance, student reactions, and student behaviors. They provide the observer with opportunities to see varied instructional techniques, to monitor professional development practices, and to note student achievement.

Notwithstanding the benefits, observations may be cause for concern. A single observation is a mere snapshot of teacher performance, easily misconstrued, and becomes one of the most serious and common flaws. Even a series of classroom visits do not adequately portray the complexity of teaching, and only a large number of observations of a particular teacher will provide generalizable information (Muijs, 2006). In addition, formal observations may be performed by several evaluators with varying perspectives and different training, and may be structured around an observation instrument that measures teachers' performances on a rating scale or checklist (Donaldson, 2009; Goe & Croft, 2009). The problem with rating scales or checklists is that they are not based on rigorous standards of practice reflecting the complexity of teaching (Baratz-Snowden, 2009). When observations are done infrequently, when they are treated synonymously as evaluations, and when rating scales are the single instrument used to capture the art of teaching, the situation has serious ethical implications.

**Portfolios.** Although the development of portfolios has been viewed as a promising practice to gain greater understanding of the teacher's overall performance, ongoing investigation regarding the validity and reliability of portfolios is frequently disputed. According to Goe, Bell, and Little (2008) there remains a dearth of research linking portfolios to student achievement; yet, some researchers (Donaldson, 2009) maintain that portfolios can be valid and reliable, providing a broader perspective of the art of teaching. Used to document a large range of teaching behaviors, portfolios may include: lesson plans, instructional materials, student work, action research projects, teaching videos, parent and community communication, and teacher written reflections. One advantage of the portfolio is that they can be used with most teachers in nearly every discipline (Toch & Rothman, 2008).

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of K-12 building principals regarding the structure and processes challenging the fairness and equity of teacher supervision and evaluation. Results of this study will provide insights and practical application into supervision and evaluation for school districts and state organizations at a time when states are focusing on The Race to the Top (U. S. Department of Education, 2009) initiative and the link between quality leadership and student learning.

The following questions guided this study: What is the purpose of teacher supervision/evaluation? What resources are principals using to supervise and evaluate teachers? What are the most rewarding and the most challenging aspects of the process? How satisfied are the principals with the current process?

## **Methodology**

To investigate the perceptions of the K-12 principals in Iowa regarding supervision and evaluation, a survey was sent to 1226 practicing school administrators across Iowa. A total of 493 administrators responded to the survey for a response rate of 40% which is lower than anticipated and a potential limitation of the study, but it is better than the average of 36.8% reported by Sheehan (2001) for response rates to online and e-mail surveys. Principal names and e-mail addresses were secured from the Iowa Department of Education (2009) online district directory.

A pre-notification letter briefly describing the project was sent electronically to all the PK-12 school leaders approximately one week prior to disseminating the survey. A follow up letter was electronically sent approximately 10 days after the survey was e-mailed. According to researchers (Mehta & Sivadas, 1995; Shinn, Baker, & Briers, 2007) use of a complement of best practices, including advanced notice and follow-up reminders increase participation of potential non respondents.

## **Instrumentation**

The 10-item electronic survey was approved by the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) in the spring of 2009 and sent to the building principals during the first semester of 2009-2010 academic year. Demographic information was requested regarding gender, educational level for which the principal was responsible, the number of years the principal had been an administrator, and the number of faculty currently supervised. Using a review of literature, the remaining survey items were focused on the purpose of supervision and evaluation, use of multiple measures of performance, principal perceptions of meaningful and challenging aspects of supervision/evaluation, activities to increase the effectiveness of the process, and overall principal satisfaction with the process. A final open-ended question was provided for additional comments.

## **Analysis**

Descriptive survey data were automatically analyzed using the Qualtrics Survey program; frequency, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated and employed to describe the results.

Approximately 276 (46%) of the participants were administrators at the elementary level while 321 (54%) were at the middle school and/or high school levels, 60% were female and 40% were male. The majority of principals had many years of administrative experience supervising and evaluating teachers. Forty-seven percent of the respondents indicated they had been in school administration for 11 or more years, while 30% had been administrators for 6-10 years, and only 1% of the respondents had been in the principal role for less than two years.

## **RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

### **Purpose of Supervision and Evaluation**

Most researchers agree on the purposes of and connections to supervision and evaluation, yet view the two as distinct with differentiated procedures based on school goals and teacher needs (Baratz-Snowden, 2009; Bernstein, 2004). Supervision provides constructive feedback, identifies ways to improve performance, and focuses on teacher growth (Mathers & Oliva, 2008; Ovando & McCleary, 1991), while summative evaluation serves to meet state statutes, district practices, and contractual policies (Zepeda, 2007). Sullivan and Glanz (2000, 2009) felt that supervision got supplanted by evaluation and described supervision as a “dynamic process that facilitates dialogue to promote instructional improvement” (p. xv). Yet, overwhelmingly, the Iowa school principals (72%) felt the most important purpose of supervising and evaluating teachers was to enhance student learning, another 23% of the administrators indicated that the purpose was to improve curriculum and provide teachers with feedback. Principals overwhelmingly supported the focus on student learning and teacher growth:

*Preparation and Professional Development for School Leaders*

My #1 goal in evaluating teachers is to help teachers use better instructional strategies and to help them be more engaging in the classroom, both in turn will help improve student achievement.

Few reflected on the dual role of the principal as supervisor and evaluator, however, one principal remarked:

Supervising and evaluating teachers is a two dimensional concept: (a) help our top achieving teachers gain the resources and the training they need to become even better in their content area; (b) hold accountable those teachers who are moderate and mediocre and be able to make the tough decisions.

Another administrator alluded to the change in roles:

As an instructional leader it is my job to provide teachers with meaningful feedback about how they are doing as educators. I have worked hard to shift the focus of my observations to student learning, as it refers to instruction and the tasks the students are given.

Only about 27 (5%) of the Iowa principals deemed evaluation and accountability as the key component of the process by endorsing the following evaluative responses: ensuring accountability, meeting district requirements, and making personnel decisions. In a related study by Westberg et al., (2009) administrators (91%) agreed that dismissing poor performers is important to maintaining high-quality instructional teams, yet 41% of the administrators admitted they have never non-renewed a teacher in his or her final probationary years because they found the teacher unworthy of tenure.

Neither accountability nor professional development has been well-defined or well-served by the current practice of supervision and evaluation. Principals must deem both instructional enhancement and accountability important and incorporate both processes for system validity. Viewing the system only through the instructional improvement lens without acknowledging the need to address rewards, remediation, and personnel decisions is a disservice to the organization.

Table 1  
*Number and Percentage of Principals Indicating the Most Important Purpose of Supervising/Evaluating Teachers*

Purposes of supervision/evaluation	N	Percent
Enhance student learning	354	72
Improve curriculum/instruction	77	16
Provide teacher feedback	35	7
Ensure accountability	16	3
Meet district requirements	8	2
Make personnel decisions	3	1

**Principal's Time**

When considering their most serious imbroglio in the supervision and evaluation process, more than 90 % of the principals rated lack of time (see Table 2) as their first or second greatest challenge. The results of this study paralleled the results of the study by Kersten and Israel (2005) who found time limitations were cited by 47% of their respondents. Principals' lack of time for supervision is due to their increasing expanding roles and layering of responsibilities (Duffie, 1991; Portin, Shen, & Williams, 1998) resulting in 60-80 hour work weeks which include supervision of weekend and evening activities (Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Ferrandino & Tirozzi, 2000; Pierce, 2000; Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). Portin et al., (1998) conducted a statewide survey of principals in Washington to determine the changes in the educational environment and the influence these had on the

*Perceptions of Practice*

work life of principals. Over 90% of the principals reported an increase in the scope of their responsibilities with 81% indicating there had been a substantial increase in managerial responsibilities. Because principals continue to assume their increasing roles in management and accountability, they spend less than one-third of their increasing work week on curriculum and instructional activities including supervision (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Eisner, 2002; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Schiff, 2002).

Ancillary to the other responsibilities, the typical principal may have 25-30 teacher evaluations annually (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006) and with a growing number of Baby Boomers retiring, teacher evaluations for non-tenured and tenured teachers will constitute an increasing amount of time (Donaldson, 2009). About 57% of the Iowa respondents were currently supervising between 21-39 teachers, while over a quarter of the principals (27%) were supervising between 40-100 teachers. Undoubtedly, the number of faculty to be supervised and evaluated plays a tremendous role in the limitation of time for quality supervision and evaluation (Frase & Streshly, 1995; Xu & Sinclair, 2002). One principal's comments underscored the concern:

I am the only administrator in this district with over 60 teachers and half a dozen new teachers that must be evaluated two times per year for two years. My biggest barrier is time.

**Resistant Teachers**

Dealing with resistant teachers was viewed by only 15% of the principals as their most challenging aspect of the process; yet, 41% placed this concern within the top two challenges. Principals reasoned:

Time can be challenging, but ranking it second leads one to believe it is a big problem. Resistive teachers are the challenge.

The most difficult aspect of teacher supervision is evaluating teachers who should not be teaching, or are not competent.

Table 2  
*The Most Challenging Part of Supervising/Evaluating Teachers in Rank Order as Determined by the Percentage of Building Principals with 1=most challenging and 5=least challenging*

Challenges to supervision/evaluation	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of time	72.82	17.83	5.31	2.76	1.27
Resistant teachers	15.50	25.69	16.77	24.63	17.41
Inadequate tools or instruments	7.22	29.94	28.45	21.23	13.16
Lack of subject area expertise	3.40	19.96	37.15	23.57	15.92
Lack of district support for professional development	1.06	6.58	12.31	27.81	52.23

**Use of Multiple Sources of Data**

Although the use of multiple data sources necessitates a great deal of time, when well-designed and carefully implemented, the variety of data deepens professional learning for both teacher and the principal. Common sources of data include: classroom visits with walk throughs and observations, student work, standards of practice and performance goals, parent communication, student test data, and teacher work samples or portfolios. The Race to the Top competition advocates the implementation of multiple sources of data as part of the supervision and evaluation system, and the Iowa State Board of Education recently approved an amendment to the Iowa Code requiring the use of multiple forms of evidence of student learning and growth using teacher created tests, authentic measures, and district-designed and standardized tests.

**Standardized tests.** Iowa principals did not identify achievement test scores as the most beneficial resource in the supervision and evaluation process, but over half of the principals (58%) believed that test scores were quite helpful to very helpful in the process. In the 2008 NCTQ study (cited by Baratz-Snowden, 2009) only 15 states required districts to include objective measures of student learning and only two states made student learning the key factor in tenure decisions. As a result of recent federal monies available for innovating school reform and teacher/leader effectiveness, administrators need to carefully consider the use of test data and their impact as they address the issue of teacher evaluation. Although research has its caveats regarding using student test data for teacher evaluation, a school district that does not focus on student achievement, accountability, and teacher quality reduces teacher supervision and evaluation to the whim of the principal, and both evaluator and process lose credibility. Duncan asserts that without a connection between student achievement and teacher evaluation, the profession is devalued. Richardson (2009) noted, “It basically says that teaching doesn’t matter, that anybody can do this” (p. 29).

**Standards of practice.** Teaching standards (64%) were also designated as quite helpful to very helpful in the supervision and evaluation process. A number of national efforts have been in place to define what constitutes effective teaching and to construct ways to measure it using standards of practice. Since its inception in 2001, the Iowa Teacher Quality legislation has required Iowa principals to evaluate all teachers using eight Iowa Standards for effective teaching. Possessing agreed-upon standards for effective teaching is a requisite for the process of supervision and evaluation. Baratz-Snowden (2009) noted, “Without a shared set of standards of professional practice, teacher quality is in the eye of the beholder and floats about at the whim of the observer” (p. 11).

**Observations.** Iowa principals supported the use of multiple data sources for supervising and evaluating teachers with nearly 97% finding classroom observations as quite helpful to very helpful. Although a single classroom visit or even a series of visits cannot begin to represent the complexities and art of teaching, observations are “windows” into the classroom; they are a detailed recording of actual behaviors during delivery of instruction. Observations can be an objective picture from an outsider’s perspective and can be used to judge a teacher’s performance relative to that of other teachers.

**Student work.** The majority of principals felt using student work (73%) was quite helpful to very helpful. Analysis of student work was viewed as a means to examine student learning over time and a way to review teacher practice. However, scrutinizing and appraising student work is not only time-consuming, but it generates concerns regarding the validity and reliability as an equitable method for teacher effectiveness (Mathers & Oliva, 2008).

**Portfolios.** More than half of the participants noted that the least helpful in supervising/evaluating teachers were teacher portfolios (57%) while teacher action research projects (47%) were also seen as not helpful in informing the process. There is controversy regarding the influence of portfolios on student achievement (Donaldson, 2009; Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008), yet they are one way to assist teachers in documenting the complexity and art of teaching and learning and can generally be submitted as a valid artifact by most teachers (Toch & Rochman, 2008).

### **Level of Satisfaction and Most Rewarding Aspect of Supervision and Evaluation**

When asked about their level of satisfaction with the supervision and evaluation process, 74% of the principals responded that they were satisfied with the process; another 10% responded at the very satisfied level. The most rewarding and meaningful aspects of the supervision/evaluation process were those focusing on student and teacher learning. Assisting student learning (M=8.69, SD=1.69), coaching to improve instruction (M=8.67, SD=1.54), reinforcing good instruction (M=8.66, SD=1.50), and collaborating on professional development (M=8.09, SD=1.79) were all highly ranked while complying with district standards had the lowest ranking (M=4.64, SD=2.70).

### **Effectiveness of Supervision and Evaluation**

Regardless of the fact that their biggest challenge was lack of time, Iowa principals felt more classroom visits would make supervision and evaluation more effective with about 27% of principals citing this as their first choice to improve the process.

## *Perceptions of Practice*

Though research has recognized the impact of effective principal leadership on individual student learning and achievement (Cotton, 2003; Nettles & Herrington, 2007), direct, causal effects of leadership on student learning remains unclear. The assumption is that principals who spend their time interacting with teachers and students regarding instructional responsibilities are effective educational leaders with an influence on student achievement. Some researchers believe that both direct and indirect effects account for up to one fourth of the total school-level effects (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Overall, the view is that principals have largely an indirect affect on achievement mediated through supervisory activities such as interactions with staff and students, professional conversations, and classroom visits (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Nontenured teachers are generally recipients of more frequent visits by their principals as compared to tenured teachers, but infrequent classroom visits for either nontenured or tenured teachers become missed opportunities to inform, reinforce, reward, collaborate, or remediate. Research supports the correlation that effective principals spend a major portion of their day in classrooms while unsuccessful ones do not (Sagor, 1992; Teddlie, Kirby & Stringfield, 1989).

## **DISCUSSION**

This study explored the perceptions of building principals regarding the supervision and evaluation process. Specifically, the study investigated the purpose of supervision and evaluation, the use of multi measures, the availability of principal time, and other challenges embedded within the structure and procedures. Although the focus of teacher supervision and evaluation has changed over the decades, it remains a topic of great concern for quality leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with dramatic impact on educational stakeholders as they seek to improve the effectiveness of teacher evaluation and assimilate the changes into an equitable systemic reform for increased student learning.

Data from more than 500 Iowa principals demonstrated that principals primarily view the supervision and evaluation process for the purpose of enhancing student learning. Furthermore, principals felt improving curriculum and instruction strategies was another important feature of the process, while accountability and personnel purposes were seen as less important.

The use of multiple data sources was affirmed by the principals who endorsed classroom observations and review of student work as the two key sources for information. Principals also embraced using teaching standards as a viable source of information. Teacher portfolios and student test data were not seen as helpful to the administrators with portfolios ranking as the least helpful.

When asked about the challenges of the process, principals overwhelmingly cited lack of time; this would concur with current research (Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; DiPaola, & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Ferrandino & Tirozzi, 2000; Kersten & Israel, 2005). Principals were adamant in their need for additional time to supervise teachers and felt that management issues increasingly usurp instructional time. Resistant teachers were not seen as a barrier to the evaluation process for the majority of principals, though a number of administrators were concerned with teachers who refused to improve their craft or who were incompetent.

In alignment with their perspective on the purpose of supervision and evaluation, principals rated assisting student learning, coaching to improve instruction, reinforcing good instruction and collaborating on professional development as the most rewarding features of the supervision and evaluation system. They reported that additional classroom visits would be of greatest benefit to strengthen the supervision and evaluation process.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Comprehensive and Valid System of Supervision and Evaluation**

Districts must design their supervision and evaluation procedures to reflect a comprehensive system with explicit purposes, appropriate standards of practice, specific procedures, and valid and reliable multiple measures. It is imperative that its purposes, including those regarding commitment to professional growth and to accountability for student learning, are executed. To negate the dual purposes and disregard

appropriate implementation defrauds the system and imperils the learning organization for teachers and students.

Standards of practice for teachers and administrators must appropriately reflect the intricacy of the classroom with multiple sources of data supporting the practice. As schools become more familiar with standards-based evaluation systems, they need to be attuned to the reliability and validity of the procedures and instruments used especially when these are connected to decisions for tenure, pay for performance, and termination (Milanowski, Kimball, & White, 2004). Reliability of the measures can be achieved if the instruments have clearly defined, objective criteria (Mujis, 2006), while validity lies in the ability to accurately measure the intended complexity of the standards of practice deemed important for that grade level, subject area, and teaching context (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). Without these steps in the process, the evaluation system merely collects meaningless data and fails to demonstrate discrimination of performance.

### **Communication and Collaboration**

Teachers need to understand that the main objective of supervision and evaluation is to assist them in the improvement of their craft and enhance student learning (Henson, 2010); however, accountability is and must be viewed as integral for the sake of the integrity of the system. To ensure an understanding of and a commitment to the process administrators and teachers should collaborate to (a) examine the multiple purposes of the supervisory/evaluation system; (b) analyze multiple sources of data relative to specific classroom instruction, student authentic measures, and tests; (c) design and employ valid teaching/learning standards; (d) produce reliable and valid instruments capable of serving the purposes of supervision and evaluation; and (e) formulate meaningful methods to enhance and solicit reflective feedback.

Communicating and involving the teachers in the process, foster collaboration, build trust, and strengthen credibility in the supervision/evaluation system for teachers and administrators.

### **Time for Implementation**

The availability of time to supervise and evaluate teachers clearly undergirds the process that has become labor-intensive and nearly unmanageable. Despite the beliefs that teacher supervision and evaluation lead to increased student learning, more is added to the principal's managerial agenda and little is taken away, rendering the principal with less time for supervision and evaluation activities. Principals need time to visit classrooms, conduct coaching conversations, provide quality feedback on improvement, and participate in professional development activities. Teachers can be motivated by principals who have sufficient time to be instructional leaders, but with the increasing number of new faculty, time for supervision and evaluation continues to disintegrate, implementation procedures continue to be aborted, and benefits to teachers and students remain improbable. Some districts have experimented with various leadership structures to reorganize the principal's work day with the intent of resolving the time issue to include the use of released time and assignments designated to other faculty and staff (Cushing et al., 2003; Grubb & Flessa, 2006). Leadership models may include: teacher-leaders, principal-teachers, assistant or associate principals, co-principals, or management or services coordinators (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). The message from research and echoed by critics is clear: Principals cannot execute the job single-handedly (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Spillane, 2005); they must rely on the assistance and contributions of others (Marks & Printy, 2003). If districts and state organizations want to assign supervision and evaluation as a priority, they must help principals reallocate their responsibilities in order to reduce the managerial work load and spend more time on supervision and evaluation.

### **CONCLUSION**

Designing quality evaluation programs for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is as difficult as it is important (Toch & Rothman, 2008). Effective and meaningful teacher supervision and evaluation practices promote collaboration among educators to identify and reward teacher excellence; link the purposes of supervision to those of evaluation; and align these with the processes for implementation to enhance teacher quality, remediate deficiencies, support accountability, and determine tenure decisions.

## *Preparation and Professional Development for School Leaders*

The educational system must be accountable for student achievement and responsible for placing the highest priority on committing to quality teaching through a collaborative process. Supervision and evaluation of our teachers can no longer be ineffectual, jeopardized by a lack of time, poor measurements, and ambiguous outcomes. Supervision and evaluation cannot continue its unethical charade cheating our students and teachers. Educational systems including state departments and local school districts must confront the system that is broken and obsolete and commit to a quality process. To ignore the reality of our current system is a social injustice impeding the quality of our future.

In the words of Arne Duncan, "Great teachers and great principals make a tremendous difference in students' lives. Talent matters tremendously in education. Achieving a quality education for all children is the civil rights issue of our generation" (Richardson, 2009, p. 28).

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## ***Teacher Motivation in Alabama's Public Schools: Some Empirical Findings and Their Potential Implications for School Leaders***

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The purpose of this study was to examine the empirical data gathered through the administration of the *Alabama Take20* survey (New Teacher Center, 2009) to determine which factors motivate Alabama's teachers. More specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Which factors did teachers identify as most influential and as least influential in determining their future professional plans?
2. Do these factors vary in relation to the school's academic performance?

### **THEORIES OF MOTIVATION**

Lunenburg and Ornstein (2000) analyzed a variety of definitions of motivation, concluding that it is comprised of three basic elements: *effort*, *persistence*, and *direction* (p. 89). They defined effort as "the magnitude, or intensity, of the employee's work-related behavior" (p. 89). Persistence was defined as "the sustained effort employees manifest in their work-related activities" (p. 89), and direction was defined as "the investment of sustained effort in a direction that benefits the employee" (p. 89). These definitions are consonant with the concepts underlying this study.

The wide variety of motivation theories are often divided into two basic types: *content* theories and *process* theories. Content theories focus on the question, "What energizes human behavior?" (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000, p. 90). Process theories focus on how this occurs (p. 100). Because of the nature of the questions on the *Alabama Take20* survey (New Teacher Center, 2009), this study was confined to survey items associated with content theory models.

Perhaps the best known content theory is Maslow's (1943, 1970) hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow's theory recognized both extrinsic motivators and intrinsic motivators. He contended that individuals' needs are hierarchical, following a sequential pattern from survival to self-actualization. Maslow posited that some needs are felt as more pressing than others at a given time. Until the most pressing needs are satisfied, the other needs have little effect on the individual's behavior, a concept Maslow termed *prepotency*. Maslow placed the basic physiological needs, e.g., food, shelter, and air at the bottom of the hierarchy. When these have been met, the individual becomes motivated by security and safety needs, e.g., physical and financial safety. The next level of Maslow's hierarchy is social affiliation needs, e.g., acceptance, belonging, or love. Once these needs are satisfied, they are followed by esteem needs, including both peer recognition and self-esteem. The apex of the hierarchy is self-actualization, including success, autonomy, and self-direction.

Owens and Valesky (2007) noted that the research on Maslow's hierarchy of needs is somewhat situation-bound, e.g., when "times are good and jobs plentiful, such research tends to pick up little concern for the lower-order needs" (p. 387). Sergiovanni (1967) linked this situational concept to the teacher's age, finding that teachers ages 20 to 24 were most concerned with esteem, whereas those ages 25 to 34 showed a wider variety of unmet needs. Those ages 45 or over showed the lowest levels of unmet needs.

Herzberg (1966; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1993) viewed needs not as a hierarchy but as falling into two basic factors: hygiene and motivation. The hygiene factors are maintenance issues, which must be sufficiently satisfied before the motivational factors become relevant. Failure to meet the hygiene needs can result in job dissatisfaction; however, meeting them does not result in satisfaction. Only the successful addressing of motivation factors can lead to that result. Further discussion of the differences and similarities between satisfaction and motivation, as applied to teachers, in general, and Alabama teachers in particular, are found in the work of Webb (2007). Among the hygiene issues are the work environment, type of supervision, salary and benefits, and attitudes of superiors. Among the motivation factors are achievement, growth, responsibility, and recognition.

### *Preparation and Professional Development*

As Owens and Valesky (2007) noted, Maslow's (1943, 1970) and Herzberg's (1966; Herzberg et al., 1993) models are "basically highly compatible and, in fact, support one another" (p. 393). They related Maslow's physiological, security, and affiliation needs to Herzberg's hygiene factors and Maslow's esteem and self-actualization needs to Herzberg's motivation factors.

Another similar, well-known content theory of motivation was developed by Alderfer (1972). Alderfer identified three basic categories of needs: *existence*, *relatedness*, and *growth*. The lowest level of the hierarchy is the existence needs, including salary, benefits, security, and job conditions. The next higher level is the relatedness needs, including relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates. Finally, the highest level is the growth needs, whereby the employee is challenged to use his or her full set of skills and knowledge and to develop new knowledge and skills. Unlike Maslow's (1943, 1970) theory of prepotency, Alderfer's theory allowed that people may experience all three levels of needs simultaneously and that the continued failure to satisfy higher order needs may lead the individual to focus on attainable, lower order needs.

Yet another well-known content theory of motivation examined in this study was McClelland's (1961) achievement motivation theory. McClelland postulated that some individuals have a high need to achieve success (n Ach) and a low level of need to avoid failure (low avoidance). Others have a lower level of n Ach and a higher level of avoidance. Those high in n Ach seek and enjoy competition and success. Those with low avoidance are more defensive and seek to avoid failure rather than strenuously pursuing success. However, these failure avoiders often strive hard and often achieve success (Owens & Valesky, 2007, p. 379).

### **INSTRUMENTATION**

The data for this study were obtained from the results of the *Alabama Take20* survey (New Teacher Center, 2009) that was administered electronically to all K-12 public educators during the 2008-2009 school year. Only those schools with at least a 40% return rate were included in this study. Only those survey items deemed to be directly related to teacher motivation were examined. The survey was completed by 47.14% of the eligible participants, yielding data on nearly 30,000 educators (Hirsch, Freitas, & Villar, 2008), all of whom were included in this research.

To address the research questions regarding the factors which most and least influenced teacher motivation and the extent to which Alabama's data support or fail to support the three motivation theories, the full statewide data from the eligible schools were examined. To address the research questions pertaining to the extent to which these results vary between academically high and low-performing schools, two smaller populations, which included no high schools, were examined. These populations consisted of academically high and low performing schools serving low income student populations.

The high performing elementary, middle, and junior high schools were those schools which had been awarded the *Alabama Torchbearer School* designation since the 2004-2005 school year. To qualify as a Torchbearer School, the school must meet the following criteria:

- At least 70% of the student population receives free or reduced-price meals.
- At least 70% of the students score at Level III or Level IV (*Proficient*) on all sections of the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test.
- The average percentile stands above 50 in reading and in mathematics on the Stanford 10 assessment. (Schargel, Thacker, & Bell, 2007)

Additionally, only Torchbearer Schools in which a minimum of 40% of the eligible educators completed the *Take20* survey were included. Nineteen elementary, middle, and junior high schools met these criteria.

A comparison set of lower-performing elementary, middle, and junior high schools serving similar populations was selected using data from the Alabama Department of Education's (ALSDE) web site (<http://www.alasde.edu>). First, the ALSDE's list of schools that did not make *Adequate Yearly Progress* for school year 2007-2008 was used to determine which schools met this criterion. Then the ALSDE data base on those schools was consulted to identify which of those schools served populations in which 70% or more of the students qualified for free or reduce-priced lunch. Statewide, a total of 27 schools met these criteria.

*Teacher Motivation*

**FINDINGS**

In examining the state-wide composite results, 87% of the teachers responded *Strongly Agree* or *Somewhat Agree* to the prompt, “Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.” In regard to their future professional plans, 67% planned to remain in their current schools, an additional 22% planned to remain there until a better opportunity surfaced, 4% planned to leave their district but remain in education, and only 5% planned to leave education. This last figure included those who planned to retire. In short, the responding Alabama teachers generally experienced high levels of motivation and satisfaction in their work.

Because this was a study of populations, rather than of samples, descriptive statistics were used instead of inferential statistics. Table 1 presents the statewide percentages of response in each Likert-scale response category for each of the survey items related to teacher motivation, in no particular order of item presentation.

Table 1  
*Statewide Teacher Responses to Survey Items Related to Their Motivation*

Survey Item	Distribution (%) of Responses				
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Adequate Support from School Leadership	62	27	6	3	1
Collegial Atmosphere among the Staff	48	36	11	3	2
Adequate Facilities and/or Resources	42	42	10	4	2
Teaching Assignment	35	36	11	3	2
Time during the Day for Collegial Planning	32	37	19	9	4
Salary	35	36	17	7	6
Cost of Living in the Community	23	30	30	8	8
Student Behavior	41	37	13	5	3
Testing and Accountability	30	39	20	7	4
Community Environment where I Live	32	36	22	5	5
Benefits	44	35	14	4	3
Effectiveness with My Students	59	33	6	1	1
Testing and Accountability	30	39	20	7	4
Prestige	13	23	37	12	15
Advancement Opportunities	19	29	32	10	9
Influence	20	33	32	7	7
Cost of Living in the Community	23	30	30	8	8
Recognition and Support	23	36	26	8	7
Parental Support	25	39	24	7	5

The first research question addressed was: Which factors did teachers identify as the most and least influential in determining their future professional plans? Table 2 presents the most influential factors and the statewide distribution of responses, reported in percentages.

These motivational factors seem to be a rather eclectic mix, including internal motivators (e.g., *effectiveness with my students*) and external motivators (the remaining five factors). *Adequate support from school leadership* and *effectiveness with my students* were perceived by teachers to be relatively more motivating than the remaining four factors.

The next step was to determine which factors were least motivational to teachers. Table 3 presents the results of the statewide survey. Not surprisingly in this era of accountability and criticism of schools, teachers perceived that *prestige*, *advancement opportunities*, and *influence* were not primary factors

*Preparation and Professional Development*

influencing their motivation. Neither were the *cost of living in their community, recognition and support, nor the support they received from parents.*

The next step was to determine to what extent these teacher motivation factors vary between academically high and low performing schools. Table 4 presents the results from this analysis. For this analysis, cumulative percentages were calculated in two response categories. The first consisted of those individuals who responded either *Strongly Agree* or *Somewhat Agree*. The second category contained the responses of those individuals who responded *Strongly Disagree*, *Somewhat Disagree*, or *Neither Agree nor Disagree*. Because of rounding estimates in each of the original response categories, the total percentages of these two new categories do not always equal 100%. Contingency coefficients (Cramer's V, which for these two-by-two tables equals the absolute value of phi) were then calculated through the Chi-square procedure using these two new response categories, comparing the responses of the teachers in the Torchbearer Schools with those of the teachers in the Comparison Schools. As is evidenced by the low Cramer's V calculations for all survey items, there is relatively little difference in the responses of the teachers between the two school performance categories.

Table 2  
*Factors Most Influencing Teachers' Future Professional Plans*

Survey Item	Distribution (%) of Responses				
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Adequate Support from School Leadership	62	27	6	3	1
Effectiveness with My Students	59	33	6	1	1
Collegial Atmosphere among the Staff	48	36	11	3	2
Benefits	44	35	14	4	3
Adequate Facilities and/or Resources	42	42	10	4	2
Student Behavior	41	37	13	5	3

Table 3  
*Least Influential Factors in Determining Teachers' Future Professional Plans*

Survey Item	Distribution (%) of Responses				
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Prestige	13	23	37	12	15
Advancement Opportunities	19	29	32	10	9
Influence	20	33	32	7	7
Cost of Living in the Community	23	30	30	8	8
Recognition and Support	23	36	26	8	7
Parental Support	25	39	24	7	5

*Teacher Motivation*

Table 4  
*Teacher Responses to Survey Items Related to Their Motivation in Torchbearer and Comparison Schools*

Survey Item	Torchbearer Schools		Comparison Schools		Contingency Coefficient (Cramer's V)
	Strongly Agree or Somewhat Agree %	Neither Agree nor Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, or Strongly Disagree %	Strongly Agree or Somewhat Agree %	Neither Agree nor Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, or Strongly Disagree %	
Adequate Support from School Leadership	91	9	85	14	.08
Collegial Atmosphere among the Staff	94	6	79	18	.19
Adequate Facilities and/or Resources	90	15	78	21	.09
Teaching Assignment	90	9	84	16	.10
Time during the Day for Collegial Planning	74	26	65	34	.09
Salary	71	29	69	31	.02
Student Behavior	77	22	74	25	.04
Testing and Accountability	71	28	69	31	.03
Community Environment where I Live	66	35	58	42	.08
Benefits	81	21	74	26	.06
Effectiveness with My Students	94	6	89	11	.09
Prestige	35	65	38	67	.01
Advancement Opportunities	44	54	55	46	.10
Influence	52	48	54	47	.01
Cost of Living in the Community	50	52	50	46	.03

Recognition and Support	58	42	63	38	.04
Parental Support	60	40	64	36	.04

Table 5 presents the most influential motivational factors for the teachers in each of the two school performance categories. Responses to the original five response categories are included for each survey item. Although there is considerable overlap between the two groups concerning which factors were motivational to teachers, the percentage of teachers in academically high performing schools who responded *strongly agree* is considerably higher than the percentage of teachers indicating this response in the lower performing schools. This is interpreted as teachers perceiving the importance of this motivational factor being somewhat greater in the higher performing schools. It is interesting to note that *responsibility for decisions* and *student behavior* were perceived as more influential factors in the lower performing schools, whereas *benefits* rose to a higher level of importance in the higher performing schools.

The next step was to determine which factors were perceived by teachers in each of the two school performance categories to be least influential in determining their future professional plans. Table 6 presents the results of that analysis. Again, the table displays the percentages of responses to the original five-point Likert scale. For the least influential motivation factors, little difference was found in the response patterns between the two school performance categories. *Prestige* and *influence* were perceived as low influence factors by both school performance populations, followed by the *cost of living in the community* and *parental support*. *Advancement opportunities* were viewed as less influential in high performing schools than in their lower performing counterparts.

*Adequate support from school leadership* and *effectiveness with my students* are by far the most influential motivators for Alabama teachers. Both of these factors were slightly more motivational to teachers in high performing schools. The lowest motivators were *prestige*, *advancement opportunities*, and *influence*, with little difference found between teachers in the two school academic performance categories.

Table 5  
*Most Influential Motivation Factors in Academically High and Low Performing Schools*

Survey Item	Distribution (%) of Responses				
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Academically High Performing Schools</b>					
Adequate Support of School Leadership	71	20	6	2	1
Effectiveness with My Students	66	28	5	1	0
Collegial Atmosphere among the Staff	63	27	6	3	1
Teaching Assignment	55	35	7	2	0
Adequate Facilities and/or Resources	50	36	9	5	1
Benefits	48	33	14	3	4
<b>Academically Low Performing Schools</b>					
Adequate Support from School Leadership	54	31	7	4	3
Effectiveness with My Students	51	38	8	2	1
Teaching Assignment	43	41	12	3	2
Student Behavior	44	39	11	9	5
Collegial Atmosphere among the Staff	42	37	12	5	3
Responsibility for Decisions	36	44	13	4	2

*Teacher Motivation*

Table 6  
*Least Influential Factors in Academically High and Low Performing Schools*

Survey Item	Distribution (%) of Responses				
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Academically High Performing Schools</b>					
Prestige	16	19	36	10	19
Advancement Opportunities	18	26	33	9	12
Influence	25	27	31	8	9
Recognition and Support	25	33	24	9	9
Cost of Living in the Community	26	24	37	5	10
Parental Support	28	32	22	12	6
<b>Academically Low Performing Schools</b>					
Prestige	15	23	38	10	19
Cost of Living in the Community	20	30	30	8	8
Influence	23	31	32	7	8
Community Environment Where I Live	25	33	27	6	9
Parental Support	25	39	24	7	5
Advancement Opportunities	28	27	29	10	7

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The data from this study provided stark contrast to Wiley’s (1995) findings in a study of 460 participants in a wide variety of work settings, including retail, sales, manufacturing, insurance, health care, and government. In Wiley’s study, the five most influential motivators were (1) wages, (2) appreciation, (3) job security, (4) promotion and growth, and (5) interesting work. The comparison of the results of these two studies reinforces the contextuality of motivation.

This study’s findings also contradicted Cashwell’s (2008) findings on factors contributing to teacher attrition in Hampton Roads, Virginia. For the 179 teachers participating in that study, monetary factors were found to be the only significant reported influence on attrition.

However, this study’s findings much more closely parallel Webb’s (2007) findings on teacher motivation and satisfaction in eight elementary schools in Alabama’s Black Belt region. That study found moderate, positive correlations between teachers’ perceptions of their principal’s leadership and their own motivation and job satisfaction. Webb’s study also concluded that teacher motivation and job satisfaction are not related to teachers’ years of experience in the role.

Herzberg’s (1966; Herzberg et al., 1993) two-factor theory of motivation supports the findings in this study. Teachers generally perceived their hygiene needs to be satisfied, but only effectiveness with students and responsibility for decisions were viewed as highly influential motivators. They were perceived as being even more influential by teachers in the academically high achieving schools.

Alderfer’s (1972) theory also supports the findings, as teachers perceived influential needs in all three areas: existence, relatedness, and growth. Also, it appeared that several needs had been frustrated, e.g., prestige, influence, and advancement opportunities. This may have been a factor in teachers assigning such influence to other needs, e.g., effectiveness with students, responsibility for decisions, and collegial atmosphere among the staff. As with Herzberg’s theory, although the general pattern of influence among needs was shared by teachers in both academically high and low performing schools, the most positively influential motivators were stronger among the teachers in the higher performing schools.

### *Preparation and Professional Development*

Some support was given by McClelland's (1961) theory of achievement motivation. All teachers, and particularly those in academically high achieving schools, listed their self-perceptions of effectiveness with their students and responsibility for decision making as two highly motivating factors, consistent with McClelland's achievement model. However, when achievement was measured through the assessment of others, e.g., prestige, influence, and recognition and support, teachers' perceptions of the motivational influence of these factors were considerably lower.

The data suggest that strict interpretation of Maslow's (1943, 1970) tenet of prepotency of needs might not be appropriate for this population. Some higher order needs were viewed as highly motivating, e.g., success with students and responsibility for decisions, even though some lower order needs, e.g., prestige, recognition, and influence had clearly not been met. Similarly, Owens and Valesky's (2007) analysis of the research done on Maslow's theory identified the possibility that the theory is situationally bound, i.e., it applies more convincingly in some work environments than in others. It may be that the current culture surrounding teachers in American public schools may deny them access to prestige, recognition, and influence. Once teachers accept that they do not have ready access to these motivators, they may block the effects of non-satisfaction to some extent and transfer their needs to other, achievable influences, as Alderfer (1972) suggested. Finally, Sergiovanni's (1967) research using Maslow's model suggested that different age ranges of teachers experience different needs. The current study was not able to disaggregate the teacher perception data based on the teacher's age.

Clearly, there is a need for considerable further research, even to properly interpret and understand the current findings. In large measure, this arises from the ambiguity of the questions on the *Alabama Take20* survey instrument. For example, when teachers responded that *adequate support from school leaders* and *student behavior* were influential motivators, did they view these as positive or negative motivators? Because teachers in academically higher performing schools viewed administrative support as a more influential motivator, and because teachers in these schools generally viewed their administrators more positively than did their counterparts in lower performing schools, there is cause to infer that they were interpreting this item positively. However, teachers in lower performing schools viewed student behavior as a stronger motivator than did their peers in higher performing schools. Should this be interpreted as a negative motivator? Similarly, how were teachers interpreting recognition and support? Recognition and support by whom? In what forms? Additionally, which benefits were seen as motivators? Health insurance? Retirement benefits? Vacation time? Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, the data from the *Alabama Take20* survey have provided useful initial insight into what motivates teachers in that state.

### **POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS**

What implications might the findings of this study have for school leaders? Fortunately, statewide, four of the top six motivating factors for teachers – *adequate support from school leadership*, *effectiveness with my students*, *collegial atmosphere among the staff*, and *student behavior* – all lie within the realm of responsibility for instructional leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). Interestingly, for the Torchbearer and Comparison schools, *teaching assignment* rose to one of the most influential factors affecting motivation. This, too, falls within the purview of the school leader. Two of the top motivational factors identified by the statewide sample, *adequate facilities and/or resources* and *benefits*, fall more within the responsibility of the local board of education or of the state.

*Adequate support from school leadership* was viewed as the strongest motivational factor by the statewide sample and in both the Torchbearer and Comparison schools. School leaders must work with their faculties and individual teachers to determine just which types of support are most desired. *Effectiveness with my students* was the second most influential motivational factor. With the increasing emphasis of school leaders assuming instructional leadership as their primary role (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008) one main focus must be on assisting faculty members to become as fully effective with their students as possible. Research clearly shows that building and maintaining a healthy school climate and culture is critical to student success (Bliss, Firestone, & Richards, 1991; Carter, 2000;

### Teacher Motivation

Cruickshank, 1990, DuFour, 2000; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Edmonds, 1979 a & b; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Hoy & Feldman, 1987; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Klinger, 2000; Lezotte, 1991, 1992, 2001; Lindahl, 2006). Research conducted on these same Torchbearer and Comparison schools (Lindahl, 2009) found that the teachers in the Torchbearer schools viewed their school climate substantially more positively than did their counterparts in the lower performing schools. School leaders *can* help to shape their school's culture and climate, which should translate into improved student performance.

*Collegial atmosphere among the staff* was the third most influential motivational factor. Although this may be viewed as a sub-set of the school climate factor, it occupies a key role in both Maslow's (1943, 1970) hierarchy of needs (affiliation needs) and Herzberg's (1966; Herzberg et al., 1993) maintenance factors. It also occupies a central position in the development of professional learning communities, which are currently viewed as essential to the ongoing success of schools over time (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord & Sommers, 2007). Again, as supported by the data from this study, school leaders can, and must, develop a collegial atmosphere among their staff.

The factor *teaching assignment* was viewed as an influential motivational factor in both the Torchbearer and Comparison schools, albeit less influential in the statewide sample. To an extent, principals have some discretion in assigning teachers to certain grade levels, courses, or schedules. However, with the requirements governing *Highly Qualified* teachers, the vast complexities of schedules, seniority, and other personnel matters, which principals cannot discuss openly, teachers often perceive principals having greater latitude than they actually have in making teaching assignments, particularly in smaller schools. Finally, *student behavior* was viewed as a motivating factor in the overall sample. Although teachers have the primary responsibility for shaping student behavior, principals can contribute by mentoring teachers regarding effective and ineffective behavior management approaches, by establishing fair school discipline policies and enforcing them consistently, and by supporting teachers, when appropriate, as students or parents challenge teachers' disciplinary decisions and actions.

Although principals do not have any control over *benefits*, a motivating factor seen as influential, they do have some control over the *adequacy of facilities and/or resources*. Merely ensuring that the building is clean, well maintained, and safe enhances teachers' perceptions of the facilities. Although time is always a limiting factor for school leaders, grant writing and partnerships with businesses, community organizations, and even with individuals can help to increase the resources available to the school.

Teachers rated the following factors as the least influential motivators: *prestige, advancement opportunities, influence, cost of living in the community, recognition and support, and parental support*. One perspective might be that this is fortunate, for school leaders have little to no control over these factors, and therefore cannot be responsible for them. Another interpretation of these results, however, could be that teachers recognize that these factors are outside the school leader's control and that such benefits may not be forthcoming. Consequently, rather than remain frustrated by their absence, teachers have discounted their influence as motivators.

In conclusion, school leaders can influence many of the factors that motivate teachers. A positive relationship between the motivation of teachers and their performance in the classroom can be assumed, just as a positive relationship between teachers' performance and the performance of their students can be assumed. By better understanding which motivational factors teachers view as most influential, school leaders can obtain maximum benefit from their directed efforts.

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## *Quality Communication: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership Challenge*

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In the 21<sup>st</sup> century global village, strong communication skills are vital for school leaders around the world. In their meta-analysis of 70 studies over a 30-year period, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified 21 responsibilities of school leaders—one of which is communication. The majority of the remaining 20 responsibilities require communication skills. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004) specifically identified communication as the requisite skill of today's administrator. "Tasks cannot be accomplished, objectives cannot be met, and decisions cannot be implemented without adequate communication" (p. 210). The importance of the communication about which Lunenburg and Ornstein wrote and its various forms in today's PK-12 school environment cannot be over-emphasized.

This interdisciplinary study developed out of the fields of communication and educational leadership. Regardless of the emphasis placed on communication, it has received consistently low ratings on culture and climate surveys from teachers and community members. With schools and districts focused on collaboration and team building, communication has taken on more and more importance as the skill of necessity for administrators' day-to-day routine tasks, strategic planning, and everything in-between. This study focused on: (a) possible communication apprehension among PK-12 building principals, and (b) the school organizational structure, including building size, enrollment, number of staff, and frequency of four types of communication: public speaking, interpersonal communication, group discussion, and meetings.

Two questions framed this study:

1. How does self-reported communication apprehension impact building principal frequency and selection of contexts for communicating within a school community?
2. How is principal communication apprehension impacted by school organization and design?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review revealed four categories of research related to communication and educational leadership: (a) self-perception of communication competence; (b) communication apprehension; (c) communication and educational leadership; and (d) leadership qualities and characteristics.

#### **Self-Perception of Communication Competence**

The first category of research examined was that of principals' self-perceptions of communication competence. McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) defined communication competence as "the adequate ability to pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing" (p. 109). Further, McCroskey and McCroskey argued that "self-report measures used properly can help us to build our understanding of communication behavior. Self-report measures used as indicants of communication performance can only retard such efforts" (p. 112).

In the spirit of people wanting to form an understanding of their own communication behaviors and competencies, researchers examined the available self-report measures during the 1980s, and concluded that no appropriate measures were available at the time (McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). Consequently, the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC) was developed (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). The SPCC asked participants to rate their competence levels on a scale of 0 (completely incompetent) to 100 (completely competent) on

### *Preparation and Professional Development*

12 items, ranging from “present a talk to a group of strangers” to “talk with a friend” to “present a talk to a group of acquaintances” (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988).

This is just one example of several instruments that are available to measure people’s self-perceptions in communication. Petrie, Lindauer, and Touniasakis (2000) posited that self-analysis was a tool to enhance leadership effectiveness. They used various self-analysis tools to help pre-service educational leaders enrolled in university classes become more self-aware, productive, and effective. The use of self-reflection results from exercises on values clarification; the “JoHari Window” (Luft & Ingham, 1984); the “Motivational Feedback Questionnaire” developed by Maslow (1962); Schutz’s (1958) “Fundamental Interpersonal Relationships Orientation-B” (FIRO-B); and other comparable tools helped to develop successful leaders by helping them understand their assumptions about people; how they can give and receive to satisfy basic needs; how they are motivated and what motivates other people; and the processes of feedback and disclosure in interpersonal relationships, to name but a few. These tools reveal interpersonal relationship preferences and behaviors, most of which are grounded in communication. Once building administrators are able to examine their own perceptions of their competencies in communication, they are better equipped to identify areas that may be more subtle, such as communication apprehension.

### **Communication Apprehension**

The second over-arching area of the literature review was communication apprehension. McCroskey (1977) defined communication apprehension as “the perceived ‘fear or anxiety’ associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p. 78). Given this definition, it seems appropriate to note that the study of communication apprehension has grown in recent years, as there have been numerous studies about communication apprehension since McCroskey first introduced the term in 1968.

An awareness of communication apprehension as an area of study includes an examination of what scholars have learned over the past five decades of work dedicated to understanding those individuals who are reticent about speaking in public, attending meetings, participating in group discussions, and engaging in interpersonal communication. One of the instruments most often cited in the field of communication is the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). Richmond and McCroskey (1995) estimated that 20% of the general population suffered from chronic CA. In addition, almost 70% of college students reported a CA experience (Bowers, 1986; Krider & Schneider, 2003).

The awareness of communication apprehension at the building level is of two-fold importance: (a) when a principal is aware that he or she is communication apprehensive, it may indicate that the principal needs further communication training to assist in the day-to-day functions and demands of the building leadership position; and (b) when a principal is aware that staff members at any level are communication apprehensive, it may indicate that staff training in communication could be helpful. In order to investigate specific ways in which communication research intersects with educational leadership research, the authors turned to the third over-arching area of the literature review—Communication and Educational Leadership.

### **Communication and Educational Leadership**

A challenge for 21<sup>st</sup> century leaders is quality communication. This necessitates the merging of the fields of communication and educational leadership. These connections were examined in three areas: communication styles, communication skills, and communication modes.

**Communication Styles.** De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, and Oostenveld (2010) conducted a study “to investigate the relations between leaders’ communication styles and charismatic leadership, human-oriented leadership (leader’s consideration), task-oriented leadership (leader’s initiating structure), and leadership outcomes” (p. 367). De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, and Oostenveld found that charismatic and human-oriented leadership are mainly communicative, whereas task-oriented leadership is significantly less communicative. Communication styles were “strongly and differentially related to knowledge sharing behaviors, perceived leader performance, satisfaction with the leader, and subordinate’s team commitment” (pp. 376-377).

## *Quality Communication*

Communicator image, in addition to leadership, can be tied to personality type indicators, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as shown in the study by Opt and Loffredo (2003). Their study examined the dimensions of extraversion and introversion (from the Myers-Briggs personality type indicators) as related to communicator image. Opt and Loffredo found that individuals who prefer extraversion tend to have a more positive communicator image than those who prefer introversion. The results of their study supported other research showing that personality preferences differ in communication behaviors and traits, which could have implications for the individual's comfort and success in society. Communicator image is important in PK-12 education at the building principal level, reflecting open leadership and collaboration.

The communication style and communicator image of a PK-12 building principal also has much to do with school building climate. Research suggests that a more open communication style is preferred among educators. Buffie (1989) studied and examined key skills for instructional leaders; open communication was one. Other skills identified in the study and linked to communication were: instructional leadership, staff development, creating a positive school climate, positive school-community involvement, visioning, developing trust, and motivating others. Halawah (2005) and Rafferty (2003) found positively correlated relationships between school climate, open communication, and being effective as a building principal.

**Communication Skills.** Interpersonal relationships, communication styles, and listening are generally important to educational leadership. Halawah (2005) and Dukess (2001) assert that principals must have strong interpersonal skills; they should be good listeners and effective communicators. Valentine (1981) and Miltz (1977) also found that communication is a vital tool for the educational administrator: "Research indicates that supervisors spend at least 70% of their time involved directly in the process of communication" (Valentine, p. 1). Recognizing the importance of communication as evidenced by time spent, Valentine developed an audit of administrator communication as an answer to the lack of scholarship that appears in the literature about administrator communication. The Audit of Administrator Communication was designed a) to provide the practicing principal with teachers' perceptions of the principal's communication skills, and b) to collect research data in principal communication.

Halawah (2005) administered two instruments that informed his work. One of the surveys, the High School Principal's Communication Survey, was administered to teachers. The survey asked teachers to respond to 16 items using a Likert scale. Halawah cross-tabulated the results of the teacher survey with the Evaluation of School Climate (The Evaluation Center, 2005) which was administered to secondary students. His findings indicated that school climate is positively associated with principal's communication effectiveness.

**Communication Modes.** Meetings are an integral part of a building principal's day-to-day work, and one in which his or her communication skills are most likely to be observed. The principal is called upon to lead, participate in, and sometimes simply attend meetings. The act of meeting is an act of communication. How one conducts or participates in a meeting is one key to effective or not-so-effective communication with staff, students, and various publics that intersect with the enterprise known as school. Lee (2008) and Francisco (2007) discussed how team meetings should flow, and how to create and facilitate meetings that matter. A large percentage of a principal's workday includes meetings: organizing them, participating in them, or leading them; so skills in leading meetings are critical.

Spillane, Camburn, and Pareja (2007) divided up daily principal tasks into administration, instruction and curriculum, fostering relationships, and professional growth (any of which could involve meetings) and asked principals to record what they were doing at specified intervals. Their findings revealed that principals spent 77.8% of their time on administrative tasks; 55.2% of their time leading instruction and curriculum; 65.9% of their time on fostering relationships; and 23.3% of their time leading professional growth activities. The majority of these responsibilities would utilize a meeting structure of one type or another, require communication skills, and consume much of the principal's time.

Recent studies (Hornig, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010; Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2007; Rayfield & Diamantes, 2004) explored the ways in which school principals spent their day, whether it was time on task or interruptions. Hornig, Klasik, and Loeb examined the relationship between the time principals spent on different types of activities and school outcomes, including student achievement, teacher and parent assessments of the schools, and teacher satisfaction. Spillane, Camburn, and Pareja explored the prevalence of co-performance of management and leadership activities in the school principal's workday.

## **Leadership Qualities and Characteristics**

The fourth over-arching area of the literature review suggests another question. What are the preferred qualities and characteristics inherent and learned that a good school principal should possess? Two sub-areas emerged from the literature: a) effective school leadership; and b) distributed or balanced leadership.

***Effective School Leadership.*** Various studies in K-12 school contexts examined leadership effectiveness (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Murphy, 1983; Rafferty, 2003; Walker, 1990). Blasé and Blasé found two themes and 11 strategies that contributed to effective instructional leadership. Murphy created a profile of effective principals and the factors that contributed to said effectiveness.

Rafferty (2003) studied the relationship between school climate and communication in 26 high schools using two survey instruments: The Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Secondary Schools (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990) and The Communication Climate Inventory (Dennis, 1975). He specifically wanted to find out if teachers were willing to share concerns about issues related to school climate with the building principal—upward communication. Results indicated that “teachers in open climate schools were found to be more willing to communicate with their principal about student evaluation or assessment policy, suspicion of child abuse, and their teacher performance evaluation, than were teachers in closed climate schools” (Rafferty, p. 63). Rafferty’s findings revealed “the positive relationship between school climate and upward communication patterns, and suggest that school climate can be improved by increasing upward communication opportunities to influence the day-to-day aspects of school life” (p. 68). This communication pipeline is crucial if building administrators are to be aware of and proactively seek solutions for social justice issues such as prejudice, oppression of subgroups, and harassment.

***Distributed or Balanced Leadership.*** The assistant principal role in a PK-12 building is one that does not appear in the literature as often as the role of principal, but the assistant principal plays an important role in the communication chain. Communication is at the heart and center of assistant principals’ interactions. The American Council of Teacher Education (2008) cited Mitchell Weiss of Howard High School of Technology as the 2008 Delaware Assistant Principal of the Year. Weiss noted five broad categories that serve to support the climate of the school and the well-being of its students: guidance, discipline, testing, student supervision and community interactions. (p. 9) Weiss elaborated on the importance of face-to-face (interpersonal) communication in his day-to-day interactions, noting that person-to-person communication while out in the building reduced the amount of time needed for email, dealing with classroom and student problems, and drop-in meetings. The important message being delivered is that consistent and clear communication prevents future complications and problems.

Researchers concur that the assistant principal role is changing from the traditional notions of disciplinarian and manager to instructional leader paralleling that of the principal (Domenech, 2002; Kennedy, 2002; Matthews, 2002; Murphy, 2002; Quinn, 2002). Domenech (2002) called for communication skills that lead to success in these administrators’ roles: “An effective instructional leader must lead by persuading teachers, parents, and the public to buy into the principal’s vision. Communication and interpersonal skills, which have always been important, have now become paramount” (p. 35). Domenech (2002) further discussed the power of persuasion, communicating with the community, and working with the media as being three critical areas of skill development for building administrators.

Another area of the literature with implications for administrative teams or balanced leadership is the use of electronic communication within the context of daily tasks. Glendinning (2006) pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of using email for the school principal; yet, Glendinning warns: “...Administrators must remain wary of the effect that extensive e-mail communication can have on the school community, and they need to work to promote a healthy, balanced e-mail culture in the school” (p. 86). As school leadership continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there will be more electronic modes of communication discovered and developed—already Facebook, Twitter, and Tweeting are part of school cultures. As technology continues to emerge, school administrators must establish Glendinning’s “healthy balance”.

The literature review of self-perception of communication competence, communication apprehension, communication and educational leadership, and leadership qualities and characteristics revealed a natural intersection between quality communication and successful leadership. Just as effective

## *Quality Communication*

communication is essential for healthy organizations, it is critically so in the field of education. Reviewing the research formed the basis for this study.

### **METHOD**

This study investigated building principal communication apprehension, communication frequency, and communication contexts. To explore the two research questions, surveys were sent to 203 Midwest PK-12 school principals within a one-hour driving radius around an urban area of approximately 400,000 people. It is important to note that selecting all principals in the study population may have led to non-response bias, which was not adjusted for in the analysis. Respondents were asked to provide demographic information and complete the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24).

### **Data Collection**

Letters describing the research study were sent to K-12 district superintendents prior to sending out the surveys. Surveys were then emailed a week later to PK-12 building principals. The study was survey-based and entirely voluntary, depending on an individual's choice to participate. Some of the identifying information (i.e., email address) was required to inform response analysis and deliver electronic correspondence. The survey management system utilized did not connect email addresses to survey responses. The responses were anonymous and could not be connected in any way to the participant once the survey was submitted. Of the 203 surveys dispersed during February and March of 2011, 99 were filled out completely. The survey was distributed five times, each succeeding time only to non-responders. The response rate was 48.8%.

The demographic section included the following data: frequency of formal presentations; group meetings (times in which the building principals were non-speaking participants and times when principals were active participants); the number of face-to-face interactions; and the respondents' preferred communication mode. In addition, demographic information was collected on principal preparation programs, types of schools, adequate yearly progress, and preferred modes of communication. Demographics provided data in order to tabulate results.

### **Reliability**

The instrument used in this study is the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension also known as the PRCA-24 model (McCroskey, 1982). McCroskey's model has yielded reliable results from college and university level students in basic public speaking courses across the United States, in addition to being used in some cross disciplinary work in later studies (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). The PRCA-24 has been nationally normed and is supported to be statistically valid and reliable. The instrument is based on four communication contexts: public speaking, speaking in small groups, speaking in meetings, and speaking in dyads. Each of these contexts has six items on the most recent version of McCroskey's instrument. Combined with McCroskey's communication apprehension model, the researchers collaboratively developed comparisons of principals' self-perceptions of their communication apprehension to selected demographic data.

The PRCA-24 model consists of 12 pairs of dichotomous statements about communicating with others in various situational contexts. For example, one of the statements is "I dislike participating in group discussions". The participants can then identify which of the five answers best describes their feelings of communicating with others. The possible responses include the following Likert scale items: Strongly Disagree=1; Disagree=2; Neutral=3; Agree=4; Strongly Agree=5. The corresponding statement is "I like getting involved in group discussions".

The published reliability of the PRCA-24 for the national sample has an internal reliability Cronbach alpha of .90. The Cronbach alpha reliability for the total score in the sample was .83. The Cronbach alpha reliabilities of the subscores in the sample range between .75 and .91. Osborne, Christensen, and Gunter (2001) found that the average internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) in top educational and psychology journals was .83. The sample specific Cronbach alphas suggest that the PRCA-24 gives a reliable estimate of communication apprehension of the principals in the sample.

**RESULTS**

The average communication apprehension score of the principal respondents was 16.3 points lower than the national sample, indicating that respondents have less communication apprehension than the national average. The lower PRCA-24 scores were expected, because the national scores are based largely on traditional aged college students from diverse backgrounds and academic disciplines, whereas the respondents were principals hired to act in leadership positions within community school districts.

To explore the relationship between staffing structures that include assistant principals and communication apprehension, this study used an independent sample t-test analysis. Table 1 illustrates the PRCA-24 mean comparisons between principals with staffing structures that include assistant principals and principals who do not have assistant principals.

Table 1  
*Mean Comparison of PRCA-24*

<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Deviation</u>
Communication Apprehension Total	1	44.75	14.26
	0	51.43	12.58
Group Subscale	1	10.63	3.33
	0	11.85	3.86
Meeting Subscale	1	10.00	3.65
	0	12.11	4.01
Interpersonal Subscale	1	10.63	3.78
	0	11.86	3.20
Public Speaking Subscale	1	13.50	5.19
	0	15.60	4.35

*Note:* Group 1 = One or more assistant principals, Group 0 = No assistant principals

Table 2 illustrates the independent sample *t*-test comparing differences between the two groups on the total PRCA-24 total score and all four subscores. The two groups of assistant principals and no assistant principals had equal variances for the total PRCA-24 score and all four sub-scores.

Table 2  
*Independent Sample t-test*

<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Mean Difference</u>	<u>Sig.</u>	<u>Effect Size</u>
Communication Apprehension Total	-6.68	*	Small
Group Subscale	-1.23	NS	
Meeting Subscale	-2.12	*	Small
Interpersonal Subscale	-1.22	NS	
Public Speaking Subscale	-2.11	*	Small

\*\*\* <.001; \*\* <.01; \* <.05

The independent sample *t*-test analysis indicated statistically significant differences between principals with assistant principals and principals without assistant principals on the total communication apprehension score, meeting subscale, and public speaking subscale. Principals with staffing structures that included assistant principals were overall less apprehensive about communication and less apprehensive about running a meeting and public speaking. The effect sizes for all three significant scales were small but still statistically significant. Generally, no statistical differences were found between principals with and without assistant principals with regard to working in groups and interpersonal communication. These findings suggest that principals who work without the aid of assistant principals are more apprehensive about communicating during meetings and when speaking to large public groups. It is important to note

that significant findings are correlational and do not suggest a causal relationship. It is possible that principals who may be more inclined to exhibit communication apprehension may choose or be chosen to fulfill leadership roles without the support of assistant principals. This perspective is in contrast to the perspective that principals exhibit communication apprehension because of a lack of support from assistant principals. Both perspectives may be equally correct, but the evidence suggests that the presence of support from assistant principals plays some role in the communication apprehension of principals.

## **DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Discussion**

This interdisciplinary study combined the interests of educational leadership with the principles of communication in a collaborative investigation of the communication apprehension of school principals. The first research question focused on the relationship between communication apprehension and the frequency of and selection of contexts for communicating within a school community by the principal. The second research question was designed to determine how principal communication apprehension is impacted by school organization and design. To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics were applied to the demographic survey results. There were three findings from that review that concur with previous studies on principal leadership styles and communication.

***Finding One.*** Principals spend the majority of their day communicating. Principals, like managers in other fields, spend seventy to 80 percent of their time in interpersonal communication (Richard, Tschannen-Moran, & Stronge, 2008; Lunenburg & Irby, 2006; Mintzberg, 1997). The demographic survey asked respondents their frequency of engagement in the four PRCA-24 communication contexts: interpersonal (defined as lasting for seven or more minutes), group discussions, small group meetings (in which the principal was the facilitator), and formal presentations. The highest percentages of respondents for each category included the following: a) 37 percent of the respondents indicated they averaged 21-30 face-to-face interpersonal interactions of seven minutes or longer each week; b) 30 percent averaged ten or more meetings per month in which they actively participated in discussions; c) 39 percent indicated they averaged facilitating four to six small group meetings a month; and d) 54 percent averaged two to three formal presentations each month. In addition, 56 percent indicated they attended one to three meetings per month in which they were not active participants.

The respondents represented building principals in four student enrollment categories: <300, 300-599, 600-999, and 1000-2499. These categories are the first four enrollment divisions established by the two states involved in the study. The majority of the respondents, 83 percent, served as principals in schools with fewer than 600 students. The sample was comprised of 14 female and 16 male principals in schools in which there were less than 300 students. Thirty-two male and 21 female principals served buildings with enrollments of 300-599 students. Two female and six male principals served buildings with enrollments of 600-999 students, and also buildings with 1000-2499 students. Of these data from principals of buildings with fewer than 600 students, 83 percent of the respondents revealed fewer meetings were held than were held by principals in buildings with more than 600 students. Results indicated that 81 percent of the respondents facilitated four or more small group meetings each month. Of that 81 percent, 21 percent facilitated ten or more meetings per month. This finding is similar to earlier studies (Doud & Keller, 1998), in which scheduled meetings accounted for 17 percent of a principal's time. This finding is noteworthy due to the statistical significance of the role of communication apprehension in principals with or without an assistant principal.

***Finding Two.*** Female principals tend to communicate more frequently across the four communication contexts than their male counterparts. Previous research on gender differences in leadership reported females with higher scores in the areas of instructional leadership and human relations while males were reported to have higher scores in the area of traditional management (Estler, 1987). More recent studies affirmed the more collaborative, participatory, and interpersonal relationship skills that female principals tend to embody (Cleveland, Stockdale, & Murphy, 2000; Rosenbach & Taylor, 1998; Rosener, 1990; Stelter, 2002). In a study by Battle (1982), female principals scored higher than male principals on all dimensions of communication as measured by the Audit of Administrator Communication.

### *Preparation and Professional Development*

Using the two highest percentages of face-to-face interpersonal interactions lasting for seven or more minutes per week for male and female principals revealed that seventy-two percent of the females engaged in 21-40 interpersonal interactions per week. In contrast, sixty-eight percent of the males averaged 11-30 interpersonal interactions per week. While these data are self-reported, they would appear to reflect the research in gender and communication styles.

Likewise, in the area of facilitating meetings, female principals again spent more time than their male colleagues (Leithwood, 2003; Scribner, Madrone, & Hager, 1999). This finding was reflected in this study as well, in which the percentages of female and male principals engaging in less than seven meetings a month were almost identical (50 percent of the respondents). However, females facilitated more meetings each month than their male counterparts. Twenty-two percent of the male principals facilitated seven to nine meetings a month compared to ten percent of the female principals, while 33 percent of the female principals facilitated ten or more meetings per month compared to 20 percent of the male principals who facilitated more than ten meetings.

Fifty-five percent of the respondents gave formal presentations two to three times per month and 25 percent of the principals indicated they averaged four to six public speaking engagements per month. Thirty-one percent of the female principals gave formal presentations four to six times per month compared to 22 percent of the male respondents. Sixty percent of the male principals gave formal presentations two to three times per month compared to 46 percent of the female principals.

***Finding Three.*** Respondents with unduplicated responses indicated a preference for oral communication (54%), followed by electronic communication (44%). Five percent of the respondents chose all three: oral, written, and electronic; and one individual indicated the preference for oral, but added the necessity for “putting things in writing”. Only two respondents indicated written communication as their preference. Regardless of preference, all respondents’ scores indicated an average level of communication apprehension.

The second research question focused on the impact of organizational structure - including building size, enrollment, and staff - on the communication apprehension of the principal. The study found that principals in buildings in which there is an assistant principal were, in general, less apprehensive overall about communication when running a meeting and when speaking to the public. The presence of a second administrator in the building appeared to lessen the apprehension of the building principal in small and large group communication contexts.

One reason for the findings may be that respondents, overall, have less communication apprehension than the national average. Two factors may account for this. One is that principal licensure and certification in the two states in which the surveys were administered require a master’s degree and a minimum of three years of teaching experience. A second factor is that most teachers who are attracted to the position of building administrator are likely to have had a number of building leadership experiences prior to applying to the principal preparation program. This combination of experience and a graduate degree may give them higher levels of confidence in communicating with diverse populations and in a variety of situations, at least in small groups and in face-to-face interpersonal interactions.

### **Research Limitations**

When examining the results of this study, it is important to keep the following limitations in mind. The first is that the instrument for measuring communication apprehension, the PRCA-24, uses a self-reporting model that was normed using undergraduate college student responses. In contrast, the participants in this survey have had work experience, leadership opportunities, and a more mature career outlook as a result. In summary, the participant populations have different experiential and demographic characteristics that may have influenced the results.

A second limitation is that the research sample was not normally distributed with almost all respondents identifying as Caucasian. Sixty percent of the respondents were male, more than the national average, but with a 48.8% return rate of the surveys, this was representative of the geographic area in which the survey was distributed. The sample was also taken within a 60-mile radius in a Midwestern section of the United States. This, coupled with the lack of diversity identified in the demographics, may have resulted in more homogeneous results. Another sample issue that may have influenced the results is that 83% of the respondents served schools with enrollments of fewer than 600 students, again representative

## *Quality Communication*

of the area, but perhaps not able to produce the variation in results that a larger or more random sample might have.

A third limitation to the study is that researchers were unable to find studies linking the presence of an assistant principal to the support of the individual principal as related to communication or communication apprehension. Intuitively, one could draw the conclusion that more administrators would provide more opportunities for school community members to interact with a figure in authority and would therefore lessen the communication apprehension of either the principal or the assistant principal through a sharing of the responsibilities of communicating with diverse audiences.

### **Recommendations**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, principals find themselves needing communication skills in diverse contexts. There is a critical need to keep up with growing numbers of communication technologies and the demand for on-time information. National and state standards for school leaders suggest that effective communication is essential for successful leaders in public education. This need for effective communication skills is the foundation for the consideration of the following four recommendations.

***Principal Preparation.*** Leading productive meetings; articulating a vision for the school to internal and external audiences; initiating discussions on student achievement, curriculum, instruction, and assessment with faculty members, parents, and the community; having difficult conversations; being able to facilitate conflict resolution; and demonstrating language sensitivity for diverse cultures are but a few of the communication contexts in which competence is required to be a successful principal. Weaving oral and written communication performances throughout coursework may not be adequate for developing candidates with the communication proficiencies requisite for today's communication-rich environments. Supporting this recommendation are the standards set by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2008).

***Further Research.*** Further research should include more objective measures for documenting the frequencies of meetings, the size of meetings, the size and types of public speaking engagements, and which communication behaviors in various contexts are most effective. To validate the findings, the research should include the triangulation of data with other stakeholders' perspectives. One way to accomplish this is to replicate studies such as Richard, Tschannen-Moran, and Stronge (2008) did on the elementary principal's workday. Renorming the PCRA-24 for working adults by administering the instrument to graduate students in all fields of study might also help in establishing a more reliable standard on which to base communication apprehension in the PK-12 school setting.

***Assessment.*** A diagnostic instrument could provide valuable information to professors and enable differentiated instruction. Additionally, it could provide information for advising students who need training or professional development on the availability of workshops or seminars. If the need were great enough, the instrument could provide links to seminars or workshops as part of the required program to help candidates meet school leadership standards.

***Multiple Modes.*** As if the scope of communication skills discussed previously were not daunting enough, technology, social networking, and the demand for real time information and communication adds another layer of complexity to demands on a principal's communication performance. Principals are now podcasting, tweeting, blogging, and using other social networks to keep faculty members, parents, and the community informed about what's happening at school. Good communication, regardless of the mode, is now more important than ever before.

### **CONCLUSION**

The era of accountability in public education compels university educational leadership preparation programs to evaluate the knowledge and skills in which candidates need to demonstrate proficiency to "Prepare Effective Leaders for Tomorrow's Schools" (Western Illinois University). Accountability necessitates exceptional, if not extraordinary, communication skills. Principals and other educational leaders must be able to facilitate and participate in group discussions around instruction, achievement data, curriculum, budgets, teacher effectiveness, and a host of other educational issues in which the communication style and delivery must match the subject matter and the audience. Good news or bad news

### *Preparation and Professional Development*

must often be communicated to large audiences. Consider declining enrollments, consolidation, teacher reduction in force, and program elimination as some of the bad news administrators must deliver, while opening new buildings, adding programs, winning the state basketball championship, and dramatically improving student achievement reflect good news events. Facilitating strategic planning sessions with the community and delivering professional development are other large group activities calling for formalized communication skills. In addition, face-to-face interactions with parents, faculty, staff, city and state officials, and community leaders require sagacious expertise in interpersonal communication skills.

The time is now for serious examination of principal preparation programs to evaluate the level of communication training within the program and the competency development of the candidates. In today's climate of on-time information, school leaders' communication skills in oral, written, and electronic modes are tantamount to successful leadership. Whether giving a formal public presentation, leading a meeting, speaking one-on-one with a colleague, or participating in a group discussion, PK-12 building principals are involved in hundreds of communication exchanges each week. The challenge lies ahead for principal preparation programs in our nation's colleges and universities to reflect practice.

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## ***Outperforming Demographics: Factors Influencing Nine Rural and Urban Schools' Culture of Student Achievement***

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An important opportunity facing educators and educational researchers is the effective use of school performance data to improve student achievement. Despite a wealth of literature and materials available for school improvement, schools continue to struggle to systematically and effectively use school performance data in order to improve student achievement for all students. Assumptions are often made about students from diverse backgrounds without taking time to examine test scores to understand *why* some students are more successful than others. Another false assumption is that schools with certain demographic profiles such as students of lower socioeconomic levels or higher levels of ethnicity will be unable to perform at a high level academically. However, research has observed that schools that have high percentages of these demographic factors associated with lower student achievement have also outperformed or overcome these potential risk factors. These studies, often titled 90/90/90 studies (Carter, 2000; Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, & Hibpshman, 2005; Loeb, 2003; McGee, 2004; Reeves, 2000, 2003; Rothman, 2002), have isolated schools as outliers with 90% ethnicity and 90% poverty and which perform at 90% achievement. Within the 90/90/90 literature, many school cultural themes emerged as factors influencing high achievement.

An overarching theme identified in the 90/90/90 studies is positive school culture. Positive school culture is a particularly powerful factor in creating positive student learning outcomes, specifically a culture that creates an atmosphere of high student achievement and academic success (Kannapel et al., 2005; Loeb, 2003; McGee, 2004). Research (Carter, 2000; Eilers & Camacho, 2007; McGee, 2004; Reeves, 2000, 2003) suggests that schools which succeed despite demographic risk factors share certain traits and beliefs; most notably, such schools are led by strong principals who hold students and teachers to the highest standards. Each principal in these succeeding schools believed that children of all races and income levels can meet high academic standards (Carter, 2000; McGee, 2004). Within the context of social justice, educators in these succeeding schools ensure all students despite economic background or ethnicity or language are able to develop their full capacities regardless of the demographic profile of the school. In addition to creating a culture of high standards, the successful principals created a “can do/will do” culture built on a mission, communication, and collaboration (McGee, 2004). Schools that have been successful in educating at-risk students have also been found to have a special focus on meaningful assessment and extended learning time for students beyond the typical school day (*Hope for Urban Education*, 1999; Kannapel et al., 2005; McGee, 2004).

Studies focusing on schools that succeed against all odds typically are isolated and are often outliers among schools, but they do help to celebrate these schools as “model schools” that are outperforming their demographics. Schools may be identified based on uniqueness of programming or funding support, for example, magnet or charter schools. These schools may also be high profile schools or considered “turnaround schools”. Due to their often-extraordinary contexts or unique programmatic focus, observers from the mainstream educational context commonly struggle with identifying transferrable features or strategies. Missing from the literature are schools that are average in their demographic makeup and may not have any distinct indicators on the surface such as the schools in the 90/90/90 studies, yet are successfully helping students despite the level of demographics that can negatively affect student performance. What are these schools doing to create learning spaces that allow students to outperform their predicted achievement based on demographics? Are the practices of schools that are scoring significantly higher than their predicted demographics would suggest consistent with existing research and literature? What role does leadership and teacher education play in creating schools with a philosophy of social justice education, where all students of any economic or background can and are expected to learn at high levels? Based on the mixed methodology design of our study, we aimed to shed light on the factors present in nine public schools - elementary, middle, and high schools, both urban and rural - that outperformed their predicted performance based on demographics in statewide-standardized tests.

## *Preparation and Professional Development*

Our review of the literature focused on the 90/90/90 studies with the purpose of analyzing and identifying consistent factors within the literature. Through our review we identified a hypothesis identifying seven factors consistent with the 90/90/90 studies of schools outperforming demographics. The seven factors identified were (a) mission and vision, (b) leadership, (c) curriculum and instruction, (d) professional development, (e) data based decision making, (f) culture, and (g) accountability. We used these factors, found in the 90/90/90 literature, as our lens in studying the nine selected schools. In our review of the literature we also included literature focusing on the effects of demographic factors on student performance.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Demographic Factors and Their Influence on Student Achievement**

Barton and Coley (2010) presented disturbing evidence that the achievement gap between white and black students has stalled and is no longer closing. Their report highlighted a number of potential factors that may have contributed to the failure to narrow the achievement gap. It also discussed many of the known and accepted factors among research that are often associated with lower student achievement.

Our study does not attempt to understand why the gap is not closing but instead on how to better understand how schools are overcoming known factors that negatively influence student achievement. We identified from the literature multiple factors that may play a role in influencing student achievement. Although factors influencing student achievement remain to be fully understood, we selected those that are most often associated with student achievement. The five demographic factors we identified from the literature were socioeconomic status, mobility, ethnicity, special education, and English as a Second Language (ESL) status.

**Socioeconomic status.** By defining socioeconomic status (SES) based on the percentage of free and reduced lunch recipients, researchers (Biddle, 1997; Chall, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2001, 2008) found a negative relationship with a decrease in student achievement in schools that have lower SES. The studies, which occurred at school, district, or state levels, showed that the students from settings with lower incomes suffered lower test scores.

**Mobility.** Mobility was another factor closely associated with a negative impact on student achievement. Nelson, Simoni, and Adelman (1996) found that high mobility heavily influenced the earlier grades as students transitioned in and out of schools. A negative influence occurred in urban schools as well as in suburban schools (Ingersoll, Scamman, & Eckerling, 1998; Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). Although many students associated with occurrences of high mobility are also associated to lower SES, there is evidence of students with higher SES and high mobility suffering lower achievement on end-of-level exams.

**Race/ethnicity.** Although not as directly linked in the research as SES, race and ethnicity have also been found to be influential on student achievement. More specifically, ethnicity and race are typically operationalized as minority status, which is the factor negatively associated with lower student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2007). Bankston and Caldas (1998) found that minority status had a greater negative impact on student achievement than socioeconomic status.

**Special education.** Special education is another factor that may influence levels of academic student success. The U.S. Department of Education (2007) found that students placed in special education consistently achieved below basic levels of achievement. Other studies have shown that students with disabilities suffered gaps in reading when compared with nondisabled peers (Reynolds & Wolfe, 1999).

**English as second language.** The final student demographic factor we wanted to consider in this study was English as a Second Language (ESL). Although ESL can also be associated with migrant status, we isolated ESL as those student receiving support services to learn English.

Currently, the United States is experiencing an influx of immigrants unlike any other previously experienced (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). This increase is illustrated by Freeman, Freeman, and Mercuri as they stated (2001) “...while the general school population in the United States has increased by only 24%, the English Language Learner (ELL) population has increased by 105%” (p.5).

An additional complication faced by ESL students is that this subgroup is very heterogeneous in nature, which gives rise to unique challenges to address the divergent needs of the students that comprise

this group (Manna, 2011). Linda Darling-Hammond (1999) found that, as minority status and poverty were negatively associated with student performance, so too were performance issues noted with students of English as a Second Language status.

### **Seven Successful School Practices: Findings from the 90/90/90 Literature**

In situating our work, we drew from research and literature found in both 90/90/90 studies and current texts that identified attributes in schools that serve students from disadvantaged backgrounds, consisting of such factors as described above. Our lens within this study focused on factors that contributed to the schools' successful educational outcomes. We were intent on clarifying the complexity of factors identified by the existing literature and further identifying observable behaviors and practices that influence a culture of high student achievement. Specific to our study is the influence that principals and teachers have in establishing a school culture of high student achievement. In order to understand this influence, we turned to the literature to identify factors that inform culture and student achievement.

A significant body of research is associated with culture and its influence on student achievement. Although we found many potential categories as to why culture has been connected to student achievement, we felt it imperative to isolate, narrow, and refine the most influential elements of culture. Categories associated with culture that have emerged from our review of the existing literature include mission and vision, leadership, curriculum and instruction, professional development, data-based decision making, culture, and accountability. Table 1 summarizes the themes in these seven categories. The literature reviewed the seven identified categories, which provide insight on effective practices generating high levels of student achievement. These categories informed our study design and data collection.

**Mission and vision.** Scholars (e.g., Carter, 2000; Kannapel et al., 2005; McGee, 2004) identified key factors around mission and vision, which impact closing the achievement gap. They reported on cultivating a caring and nurturing culture where leadership and staff believe that children of all races and income levels can meet high academic standards. In this culture, the staff is also capable of making this happen and the leadership holds teachers to the highest standard. Thus, collectively, they can and do close the achievement gap.

**Leadership.** Research suggests that schools succeeding against all odds share certain traits and beliefs, most notably the schools are led by strong principals who hold students and teachers to the highest standards. These principals believe children of all ethnicities and income levels can meet high academic standards (Carter, 2000; McGee, 2004; Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). These principals employ a philosophy of social justice in terms of students' access to learning (Lindsey, Lindsey and Terrell, 2011). Eilers and Camacho (2007) found that if a principal is proactive in developing a culture of change and is focused on student learning, the organization's learning increases. Heck (1992) reaffirmed the importance of the instructional leadership role of the principal in determining student achievement. From observing the characteristics of principals who improved student reading scores, Mackey and associates (2006) found that those who understood their role as instructional leaders had a greater impact on student achievement in reading. Robinson (2008) found the importance of linking leader actions to teacher reactions in increasing leadership's link to student outcomes. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) stated that "the research of the last 35 years provides strong guidance on specific leadership behaviors for school administrators and that those behaviors have well-documented effects on student achievement" (p. 7).

**Curriculum and instruction.** The literature around curriculum and instruction indicates that schools identified as high-performing, high-poverty schools have a strong focus on academics, instruction, and student learning while they also make excellent use of the school day (Kannapel et al., 2005; McGee, 2004). Schools successful in educating at-risk students have also been found to have a special focus on meaningful assessment and on extending the learning time for students beyond the typical school day (e.g., *Hope for Urban Education*, 1999; Kannapel et al., 2005; McGee, 2004).

**Professional development.** McGee (2004) found that team-based professional development plays an important role in increasing student achievement in high-poverty, high-performing schools. Additionally, when teachers learn together instead of pursuing individual professional development goals, the staff learns as a team and provides a common approach to impacting student learning (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Loeb, 2003; McGee, 2004).

*Preparation and Professional Development*

Table 1  
*Successful School Practices: Relevant Themes in 90/90/90 Literature*

<b>Mission and Vision</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Curriculum and Instruction</b>	<b>Professional Development</b>	<b>Data-Based Decision Making</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Accountability</b>
Mission, vision, and goals	Principal leadership	Systems of prevention and intervention	Professional development	Data-based decision making	Community and parental involvement	Accountability systems
Emphasis on student results and achievement	Participative leadership	Standards-Based instruction procedures	Targeted staff development	Evaluation of students and teachers	Shared systems of beliefs	Responsibility for success
High standards for all	Central office has shared belief about learning and high expectations	Extended learning time	Impassioned adult learners  Collaborative teaming	Use of a variety of assessments	Teachers and staff working 'beyond the scope' of their duties  Buy-in by all on resource allocation decisions	Consequences for failure

**Data-based decision making.** Research indicates that when data is used by teachers to inform their instructional practice, student learning improves (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2005; Stiggins, 2004; Wall & Rinehart, 1998). Equally important, Reeves (2003) reported that student learning increases when schools consistently elevate the importance of classroom-based tests and use the data to provide immediate feedback to students and teachers.

**Culture.** McGee (2004) and Reeves (2003) found a school culture where teachers: (1) believe that every child can and will learn; (2) are willing to spend long hours preparing; (3) strive to meet the individual needs of students; and (4) work as a team were critical in ensuring high academic success for all students. Elmore (2006) noted that the development of culture begins from the inside, with a commitment by educators to develop the knowledge, structures, and practices at the heart of the instructional core. Research has reported that in high-performance schools, educators fostered a sense of responsibility in students, created a collective sense of responsibility for school improvement, made efforts to win the confidence and respect of parents, and persisted through difficulties, setbacks, and failure (Illinois State School Board, 2001).

**Accountability.** The final category that emerged in our review of research was accountability. Carter (2000) stated that master teachers were crucial to improved teacher quality. It is the description of a master teacher that is significant to accountability. Carter (2000) defined a master teacher as someone who heads peer evaluation, leads team teaching, devises internal assessment measures, and keeps the mission of the school focused on academic achievement—it is quality of teaching, not seniority, which defines a master teacher. The Hope for Urban Education Study (1999) analyzed nine high-performing, high-poverty schools. Teachers in the study meticulously ensured that children were being taught the knowledge, concepts, and

skills articulated in state and district standards and that the children were held accountable to meeting these standards.

Our research utilized the themes that emerged from our review of the literature on successful school practices and student achievement. The purpose of our research was (a) to better understand, through careful analysis of a wide collection of school data, which demographic variables have a predictable impact on students' academic performance and (b) to explore the characteristics of the schools with high levels of those demographic variables predicting lower performance that significantly outperformed the predictions.

Our study was guided by the following three research questions:

- Which demographics are significantly related to school performance?
- Which schools in the state are performing significantly higher than their demographics would predict?
- Are the practices of schools that are scoring significantly higher than their predicted demographics consistent with existing research and literature?

## **METHODS**

Through the review of the existing research on school improvement and 90/90/90 literature, we hypothesized that there are seven areas of school practices that are associated with high-poverty, high-performing schools. Using these seven elements as a lens through which we evaluated data collected from nine schools in our study, a revised hypothesis emerged. A mixed methodology design was used to test a current hypothesis through an iterative process of refinement.

### **Procedure**

Our study employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative data from school demographics, state end-of-level test data, and perception based survey data with qualitative data from interviews and focus groups. We selected a mixed method approach to provide the “most complete analysis of problems” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p.21). Literature supports the current trend that qualitative and quantitative methodologies of research are complementary and pragmatic in understanding complex problems (Arnon & Reichel, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The explanatory design provided a method for using quantitative data to select and identify a sample where qualitative data could later be collected. Additional quantitative data was collected after identifying the sample of schools as a means of triangulating and substantiating the data.

After the nine schools were identified, a survey instrument was distributed asking the principals and teachers about their perceptions as to the culture of their school based on how they functioned as a learning community. As the ranking of schools were based solely on grades 3, 7, 10, and 11, the survey was used as a means of triangulating and substantiating that the overall school was engaged in a successful culture of learning.

Data from focus groups and interviews, which provided the qualitative perspective of the explanatory design, was then collected. Transcriptions from the interviews and focus groups were coded against the hypothesis we had identified from the review of literature.

### **Participants**

Participants were 131 teachers and 11 principals within nine public education schools located in a Midwestern state. The schools were located in both urban (44.4%) and rural (55.5%) districts, with a majority of the teachers being female (74.8%) and white (93.1%) and having taught more than 10 years (63.3%). The age range for these teachers was 21 to 61. The majority of principals were white (90%) and male (63.6%), having worked as a principal more than 10 years (63.6%). The 142 participants did not contribute to both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study, as based on a participant selection model within a mixed method explanatory design (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The quantitative phases preceded the qualitative phase. The 142 participants were included within the survey data used as an

element of triangulation, after identifying the nine schools. However, only 53 teachers and 9 principals contributed to the qualitative data of the study.

### **Ranking of Schools**

In answering the first two research questions, which demographics are significantly related to school performance and which schools are performing significantly higher than their demographics would predict, we were able to identify our participants for the study. Based on state end of level exam data and school demographic profiles we created a ranking of over 2000 public schools within the state. The following presents the analysis we conducted in order to identify the nine schools.

**Identifying and ranking schools for the study.** The nine schools were selected from a calculated ranking of all schools by their projected levels of performance beyond their demographic makeup. We generated the ranking based on statistical analysis of the demographic profiles and state end-of-level exams for grades 3, 7, 10, and 11 for math and reading of each school in the state.

In order to create the rank order of schools that significantly outperformed their demographics, we analyzed grades 3, 7, 10, and 11 exam data from the state Department of Education website. Data was reported by school as well as by seven demographic factors: racial identity (American Indian/ Asian/Pacific Islander/Hispanic/Black/White), gender, receiving special education services (Y/N), eligible for ESL services (Y/N), eligible for free/reduced school lunch (Y/N), enrolled in the same school as of October 1st (Y/N), and eligible for migrant services (Y/N). The counts for each of the demographic variables were available for each school. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the average math and reading score and the five demographic variables (the number of schools that had students eligible for migrant services was very small, so it was removed as a factor; gender was also not to be a factor, given similar overall scores as well as similar distributions among the schools).

Test scores and all demographic information were standardized (z-scores) to determine the relative impact of each demographic variable on the overall test score of the school. In order to assure that a large portion of the variance that racial identity would have on the outcome would not also be covered by the percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch, we created a variable called “percentage of non-white students” as a comprehensive variable. In determining variables for the analysis, school average for the test (either math or reading) was the dependent variable, and the five independent variables regressed against it were the percentages of students who were:

- Non-white;
- Receiving special education services;
- Eligible for ESL services;
- Eligible for free/reduced lunch; and
- Not enrolled in the school as of Oct 1

In all cases, the variables correlated negatively and significantly ( $\alpha = .05$ ) with average school score; the higher the percentage of the variables, the lower the resulting school average. The regression results from the math test showed free/reduced lunch was the predictor with the greatest impact on the average score ( $r = .700$ ) and percentage of non-white students followed closely as the second ( $r = .570$ ). Similar to the math correlation results, reading results showed that free/reduced lunch ( $r = .774$ ) had the greatest impact on the average reading score, with percentage of non-white students ( $r = .707$ ) as second.

The only variable that was not significant for math was ESL services. Including ESL services in the math analysis, the results showed a loss of very little predictive power; however, in reading, not using it would have made the model significantly weaker. ESL services was a strong second variable ( $r = .597$ ) and accounted for a significant amount of variance in the average score that free/reduced lunch did not. Percentage of students receiving special education services ( $r = .207$ ) and percentage of students not enrolled in the school as of Oct 1 ( $r = .507$ ) accounted for smaller but still significant amounts of variance, while percentage eligible for ESL services did not.

### *Urban Schools' Culture*

Thus, we derived at four demographic variables in our model based on the percentages of students who were:

- Eligible for free/reduced lunch;
- Non-white;
- Receiving special education services; and
- Not enrolled in the school as of Oct 1

Projected scores were made based on the beta weights for these four variables and subtracted from the average score. A positive score meant that the school obtained a score higher than might have been expected given the demographic make-up of the school, while a negative score meant that they underperformed from what they might have been expected to score. We were able to identify the top schools with respect to this mode of analysis.

Regression analysis revealed that four demographic variables had statistically significant negative relationships on math and reading portions of the state end-of-level exam. The projected score is a hypothesized value of where the school would have scored based on the influence from the regression analysis of demographic factors. The difference between projected math and reading scores was then compared with the actual math or reading score by the school, resulting in a ranking of schools with the level of performance above what the demographic profile might have predicted. The result provided an ordered ranking for math and for reading of all schools in the state, with the highest ranked schools as those with the greatest performance above what their demographic makeup would have suggested.

The nine schools were selected based on their combined ranking of math and reading performance above their demographics and percentage of students utilizing free/reduced lunch services or percentage of minority students. We identified schools from the ranking that had at least 25% of students on free/reduced lunch or that had at least 25% of students who were not Caucasian. Of the nine schools, five were selected based on free/reduced lunch and four were identified by their level of ethnicity.

### **Data Collection**

**Interviews.** To answer our research question 3 (Are the practices of schools that are scoring significantly higher than their predicted demographics consistent with existing research and literature?), two types of interviews were conducted: open-ended semi-structured principal interviews and open-ended semi-structured teacher focus groups. Questions for focus group and principal interviews were formulated around the seven key constructs identified from the review of literature. Also included in the interview protocol were introductory and closing questions.

We selected the open-ended semi-structured interview format because it was a formal interview process that allowed us to develop and use an interview protocol. This was important since various members of the research team conducted the interviews. Also, the semi-structured interview protocol helped provide reliable, comparable qualitative data. The semi-structured format followed an interview protocol, but members were able to follow topical trajectories in the conversations when necessary. We first conducted interviews with school principals for the purpose of identifying each school's structure and culture. After the principal interviews, nine additional teacher focus groups were conducted to gain greater insight into the teachers' views of the schools' cultures and climates. Focus groups ranged in size from 2 to 12 teachers.

**Culture survey.** All participants were administered the Learning Community Culture Indicator (LCCI) (Stewart, 2009), a validated perception based culture survey that measures school function across eight elements of a learning community (Williams, Matthews, & Stewart, 2007). The participants were asked to respond to measures focusing on common mission vision, values, and goals; interdependent culture; collaborative teaming; data based decision making; systems of prevention and intervention; professional development; principal leadership; participative and leadership. Together these measures helped in assuring that as identified in the rankings as outperforming their demographics, they were organizationally united in a common culture focused on assuring student success.

### **Coding and Analysis of Focus Group and Interview Data**

The analysis of interview data occurred after the data had been collected and followed a process of structured analysis described by Gibbs (2010) as Analytic Induction. This iterative process allowed us to code transcriptions based on a predetermined hypothesis generated from the literature of isolated schools that had outperformed their demographics. The online coding program of Ethnonotes was used in the data analysis process. Inter coder reliability was attained with a 90% agreement rate. Independent codings of the same passages were used to ensure validity of the results. Negative cases were observed that challenged the original hypothesis until a saturation point was reached and the hypothesis had been substantiated by the analysis.

Our approach to coding focus group and interview data was an iterative process in which we refined our hypothesis through the results of coding. Using our hypothesis of the seven original categories provided seven nodes or themes. Within each node, three to five specific codes were identified. All members of the research team coded for frequency among the interview transcripts. Final results of the first coding process revealed two prominent nodes, culture and leadership. Within the node of culture, the codes of school atmosphere and shared beliefs had the highest frequency of coding. In the theme of leadership, the code of principal leadership had the highest frequency of occurrence.

Based on our two emergent themes, we revised our working hypothesis to incorporate our results. Following a similar process to the first round, we coded for frequency of the seven new codes within the themes of culture and leadership. The results of the second round of coding revealed three substantial constructs—principal influence, teacher influence, and a culture of high student achievement. It was these three constructs that provided our final refined hypothesis. Through this iterative process, we were able to clearly identify the relevance of principal influence in relationship to influencing teachers on shared beliefs and school atmosphere within a culture of high student achievement.

## **RESULTS**

### **Learning Community Culture Indicator (LCCI) Results**

The results of this study came from nine schools identified in a ranking of all state schools that had significantly outperformed their demographics. Although the ranking was based on single grades within the school, such as grade three, we wanted to study the entire school to observe what the school may be doing within the organization to help students learn at high levels. Prior to entering the schools to conduct interviews, we determined the need to assess the culture of the entire school. This additional measure helped to assure that as identified in the rankings as outperforming their demographics, they were operating within a common culture focused on assuring student success as an entire school. These results provided a needed triangulation in ensuring that the schools were indeed a beneficial location to study.

The LCCI scores are based on an 11 point Likert scale as to the level of agreement by the teacher or principal on statements regarding school culture (10 – Strongly Agree, 8 – Agree, 6 – Somewhat Agree, 4 – Somewhat Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 0 – Strongly Disagree). Statements such as, “I am aligning my efforts with a primary purpose of the school, which is to help all children learn at high levels” or “Rather than just being invited, students who experience academic difficulty are required to participate in activities that provide them with additional time and support for learning” were asked of teachers and principals to gauge their perceptions as to the culture of the school in working as a learning community. Our results indicated that all schools had high levels of agreement in identifying themselves as strong learning communities. The results in Table 2 show that eight of the nine schools’ average response was seven or higher, indicating a level of “Agree” with most statements.

### **Influence on High Student Achievement**

Our analysis of interviews provided a refined hypothesis that principal influence, in relationship to influencing teachers on shared beliefs and school atmosphere, was vital to a culture of high student achievement. We also observed that this influence was directional, in that influence permeated from

*Urban Schools' Culture*

principal to teacher and then to the shared beliefs and school atmosphere (see Figure 1). Principals and teachers identified critical practices in their schools that contributed to a culture of high student achievement. We categorized these practices as to whether they contributed to a shared belief or to the school atmosphere.

Table 2  
*Learning Community Culture Indicator Responses*

School	Location	Grade Level Identified	Respondents	LCCI M / SD
1	U	7	25/37 (68%)	8.3 / 1.7
2	R	3	9/14 (60%)	7.4 / 1.8
3	R	10 & 11	9/15 (82%)	7.1 / 2.4
4	U	7	21/29 (72%)	7.6 / 2.5
5	R	10 & 11	15/17 (88%)	7.3 / 2.2
6	R	7	13/21 (62%)	6.3 / 2.6
7	R	3	16/17 (94%)	8.5 / 2.0
8	U	3	8/8 (100%)	8.7 / 1.9
9	U	10 & 11	15/17 (88%)	8.0 / 2.2

Note. R= Rural/ U = Urban; Parenthesis indicate response rate of school

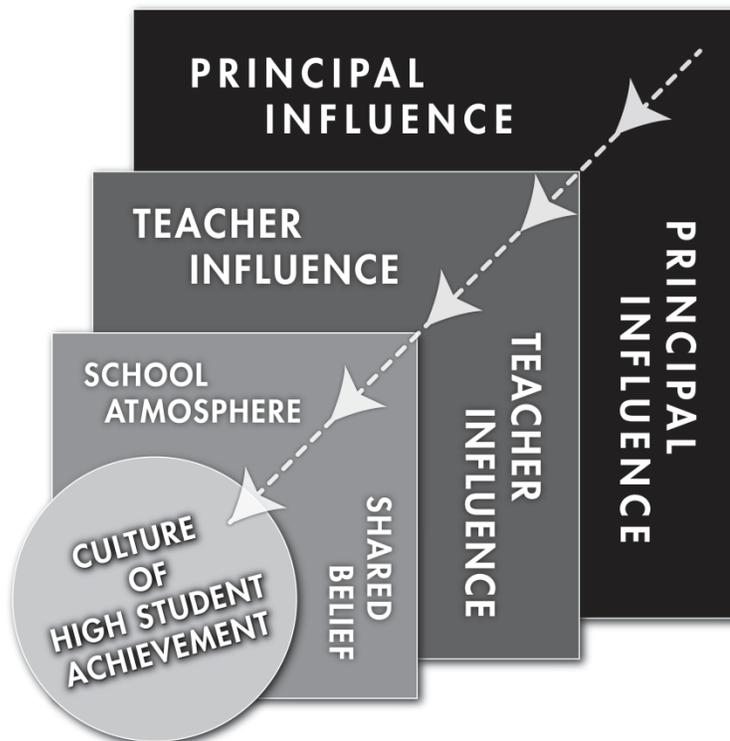


Figure 1. Creating a Culture of High Student Achievement

### **Principal Influence on Shared Beliefs and School Atmosphere**

Based on our initial hypothesis and through the process of our analysis we confirmed that the principal's influence was critical in establishing a culture of high student achievement. Within this larger theme of principal influence we identified two sub themes. We observed the first sub theme as the principal's influence on issues of teaching and learning as a direct contributor to a successful school atmosphere and beliefs that support culture of high student achievement. The second sub theme observed was how the principal influenced and established conditions for organizational change. Again, conditions directly enabled the creation of a successful school atmosphere and beliefs that support culture of high student achievement. As we reviewed interviews with principals and teachers, we identified practices that principals consistently displayed within their schools (see Table 3).

### **Principals Influence on Teaching and Learning**

Teachers and principals repeatedly identified three practices that established how principals influence teaching and learning. The interviews revealed that principals (a) ensured that teachers are focused on teaching, (b) created systems for teachers to support their teaching and learning, and (c) empowered teachers to make instructional decisions in the classroom.

*Urban Schools' Culture*

Table 3  
*Principal Influence*

<b>Areas of Influence</b>	<b>Reported Practice</b>	<b>Shared Belief/School Atmosphere</b>
Teaching and learning	a. Ensured teachers are focused on teaching	School Atmosphere
	b. Created systems for teachers to support their teaching and learning	School Atmosphere
	c. Empowered teachers to make instructional decisions in the classroom	Shared Belief/School Atmosphere
Establishing conditions for organizational change	a. Developed high levels of trust among staff	Shared Belief
	b. Displayed high expectations for everyone	Shared Belief
	c. Focused on continuous improvement	Shared Belief/School Atmosphere

**Teacher focus on teaching.** In understanding how principals ensured that teachers focused on teaching and learning, we observed multiple examples of how the principals accomplished this. They filtered the superfluous to ensure teachers stayed focused, reminded them of their purpose, and expected teachers to use every minute of instructional time for teaching. One urban middle school principal described how he kept the focus on teaching:

Remember why you are here. What were you hired for? You are here to teach...so teach. Don't worry about the policy, don't worry about what your administrators are doing, do what you're hired to do. That's teaching. And I'll make it so you can do that. So you tell me what you need. So I'm kind of servile to them in a way. You know, there isn't a real big step between my faculty and me.

A rural middle school principal spoke to the importance of teachers utilizing every minute of instructional time:

I want my teachers working, and I think that's, um, a real key thing here. We're on 51-minute periods, and our teachers teach 51 minutes, and I think that's a real key thing to us. I've seen school districts where the last 10 or 15 minutes is study hall or free time like, so talk to your friends. And we really don't do that. My teachers are teaching and I think that's good.

**Systems for teacher support.** In addition to establishing the importance of teaching, principals in our study worked to provide systems and structures that enabled instruction. Principals spoke to the need of supplying emotional support in addition to physical supplies so teachers don't focus on what they don't have and can remain focused on what they need to do to be successful. Teachers were also aware that their principals were willing to do whatever was necessary to support them. An elementary teacher noted, "You know, we don't get everything we want, because there's not enough money, but if there is a real need, he goes to bat for us."

### *Preparation and Professional Development*

**Empowered teachers.** Striving to meet the needs of teachers so they are empowered to make instructional decisions in their classrooms was the final practice identified on a principal's influence on teaching and learning. Teachers spoke of how principals created a culture of risk taking which allowed them to implement innovative instructional strategies without fear of retribution. Principals also discussed the importance of trust in defaulting to the teachers on key instructional decisions for students.

#### **Principals that Establish Conditions for Organizational Change**

The second sub theme was how the principal influenced and established conditions for organizational change. Within this sub theme, teachers and principals identified three specific practices. The identified practices of the principals were that they (a) developed high levels of trust among staff, (b) displayed high expectations for everyone, and (c) focused on continuous improvement.

**High levels of trust.** The overarching idea of trust was repeated throughout the interviews and focus groups. Building trust was important in shaping the culture to accept change. A rural high school teacher described how trust was important in uniting her school, "He treats us like professionals, and I really appreciate that...I just feel like ... we're trusted to do what we do, and so consequently, I think that's another reason we're all on board and going in the same direction."

**High expectations.** As well as trusting and supporting staff, principals in our study also displayed high expectations for themselves, students, teachers, and support staff. An urban middle school teacher explained how high expectations from his principal impacted his approach to his job, "I think just like we hold our kids to very high expectations, she holds us to really high expectation, and our job is hard, but she doesn't accept any less, and it makes you a better teacher for it." We observed that there was accountability of teachers and support staff in the schools we studied. However, this accountability was not limited to members of the faculty; it also included the principals holding students individually accountable for their academic performance. A rural elementary teacher captured this phenomenon of student accountability:

She had high standards for us as a staff. She also has incredibly high standards for the students, as well, and she will get personally involved with a student if she sees that they're not meeting her, you know, her expectations, which I think is really neat, because a lot of principals have a hands-off role with students, and so, you know, all the kids know that, too.

**Continuous improvement.** Creating conditions for continuous improvement was also a practice of principals in our study. One teacher commented how her principal encouraged her to return to graduate school to continue her education and build her professional goals. Another teacher talked about how her principal expects continuous use of data to reevaluate the master schedule to better accommodate student progress. Teachers also spoke of how principals expect teachers to not allow any student to fall behind; student progress was continuously monitored.

#### **Teacher Influence on Shared Beliefs and School Atmosphere**

Based on our initial hypotheses and through the process of our analysis, we confirmed that the teacher's influence was also critical in establishing a culture of high student achievement. Within this larger theme of teacher influence, similar to principal influence, we identified two sub themes.

Not only was principal influence important to a school culture of high student achievement, teacher influence on teaching and learning for all students and influencing conditions for organizational change were vital. In order to identify the practices the teachers reported in these schools, we returned to the interview data for both focus groups and individual interviews. As we reviewed interviews with principals and teachers, we identified practices that teachers consistently displayed within their schools (see Table 4).

*Urban Schools' Culture*

Table 4  
*Teacher Influence*

<b>Areas of Influence</b>	<b>Reported Practice</b>	<b>Shared Belief/School Atmosphere</b>
Teaching and Learning for all Students	a. Went beyond formal expectations	School Atmosphere
	b. Relied on other teachers for skill development and emotional support	Shared Belief
	c. Used data to continuously assess student progress	School Atmosphere
Influencing Conditions for Organizational Change	a. Displayed a belief that all students can be successful	Shared Belief
	b. Engaged in shared accountability	School Atmosphere
	c. Created an atmosphere of interdependence	School Atmosphere
	d. Aligned effort for a common purpose	Shared Belief/ School Atmosphere

**Beyond formal expectations.** We observed in the data multiple examples of how the teachers influenced teaching and learning for all students by going beyond formal expectations. Teachers spoke of their investment in their students and school. They reported their dedication to what needed to be done versus an hourly commitment. An example of this dedication came from a middle school teacher:

And we're invested in this, in our school being successful and our students being successful. We care what happens to them when they leave here...we're using our downtime to talk about these things, but the bottom line is that we're here because we care, so it doesn't really seem like a sacrifice during our lunch time to talk about how we could do a better job, because that's what we want to do. None of us are punching in and punching out at 8:00 and 4:00.

**Relying on other teachers.** As well as going beyond formal expectations, teachers reported a willingness to rely on other teachers for both gaining new skills and for emotional support. They shared how important it was to talk with other teachers about staying positive and identifying new strategies to meet the needs of individual students. They also described how relying on other teachers made coming to work enjoyable.

**Use of data.** Using data and continuous assessment to support student achievement was also a captured concept from our teacher focus group data. Meeting the individual needs of students, pushing students to achieve academically, and keeping students informed of their progress were all important

### *Preparation and Professional Development*

practices reported by teachers. A middle school teacher explained the value of setting goals and keeping students informed of their progress:

We have classroom charts posted in the room, so the kids know how they have done after taking a math chapter test. They want to know how we did as a class average. And then we post it and they can see. And we set goals before we take the test, okay, how did this go... How do you think we're going to do as a class average? And the kids will... want to definitely be 80 percent or higher.

Similar to our findings of the principals' influence in teaching and learning, teachers influenced the schools' cultures on practices of teaching and learning. However, it is important to note that teachers spoke specifically about ensuring that teaching and learning were about all students. Teachers spoke about an expectation that all students would be successful and the practices teachers engaged in directly reflected this belief in high expectations for all students.

#### **Teacher Influence on Conditions for Organizational Change**

The second sub theme was how the teachers, like principals, influenced conditions for organizational change. Within this sub theme, teachers identified four specific practices. The identified practices of the teachers were that they a) displayed a belief that all students can be successful, b) engaged in shared accountability, c) created an atmosphere of interdependence, and d) aligned efforts for a common purpose.

**Belief that all students can learn.** A genuine belief that all students are valued and can be successful was prevalent throughout the teacher focus group data. Teachers spoke of their joy and excitement around student learning. They expressed how they valued each student in their classroom and in their schools. An urban school teacher described the environment in her school where no student is permitted to fall behind, "Expectations are very high, and then you know, I think just the overall environment in the middle school is very dedicated and determined. You need to work. You know, we just don't allow anyone to fall behind."

**Shared accountability.** We identified that there was shared accountability among teachers in the schools we studied. Teachers talked about how they hold each other accountable and push each other to do their very best.

**Interdependence.** In our analysis, the data also revealed that the environment of accountability was closely linked to interdependence, the third teacher practice in influencing organization change. It was evident that the practice of interdependence was linked to a willingness to hold each other accountable. Teachers spoke in terms of relying on each other (interdependence) in practice to ensure that they were accountable to the needs of students. Teachers talked specifically about this interdependence in relation to gaining skills and knowledge on how to meet the needs of all students. An elementary teacher described interdependence in her school:

I kind of feel like it's, we're a team, and if you need support you can come to me and I will share and we'll work together because the goal is that all students are going to be successful, and this is how we're going to get them there, and this lesson may not work, but let's talk about it. Let's see what you can do differently.

**Alignment of efforts.** Teacher focus group data identified a final practice of aligned efforts for a common purpose. We saw evidence that teachers were aligned for the common purpose. Teachers also consistently identified that the common purpose they were aligned to was ensuring that all students are valued and meet with academic success. A rural elementary teacher captured this purpose, "All of the adults in the school spend a lot of time and energy, in thinking about how to be a supportive and caring place for children while pushing them to achieve academically."

## CONCLUSION

While our study was built on a substantial body of research that has explored demographic and cultural influences on student achievement (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Kannapel et al., 2005; McGee, 2004; Stewart, 2009), it also revealed three substantial constructs: principal influence, teacher influence, and a culture of high student achievement in association with schools that perform significantly higher than their demographics would suggest. Shared beliefs and a positive school atmosphere were instrumental in establishing a culture of high student achievement.

In our study, we tested the existing literature on how schools are overcoming the negative impact of demographic factors. Results from our study provide a promising refinement and further understanding of how schools can create a culture of high student achievement despite demographic influence. Although our study was testing a hypothesis based on the literature and did not allow for unique and emerging themes, we were able to refine the current literature and generate new conclusions. In addition, although our identified schools were not similar in percentages to the 90/90/90 schools, we focused on the proportional influence that each factor had on student achievement. A segment of our findings were similar to the existing literature; however, a segment of our findings extended beyond the existing literature by further explaining the influence principals and teachers have on creating cultures of high student achievement. This essential influence occurs within shared beliefs and school atmosphere. We further identified the influence as directional; the influence permeated from principal to teacher and then to a culture of high student achievement.

Our findings are consistent with earlier research, yet there is a need to further explain the intricacies of how shared belief and school atmosphere are impacted and created. For instance, although we framed our research within members of the instructional staff, further studies on the influence of outside factors such as parents, community, and government would help in explaining other potential sources of influence on creating a culture of high student achievement.

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## ***Leadership Dispositions and Skills for Ethnically Diverse Schools***

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Quality educational leadership is especially critical today in the era of school improvement, student achievement, and teacher accountability. Leaders help meet ever-changing contexts and opportunities. Senge (1990) observed, “The new view of leadership in learning organizations centers on subtler and more important tasks. In learning organizations, leaders are designers, stewards, and teachers” (p. 340).

In addition to these new leadership challenges, this is a time when school resources—human as well as financial—are limited not only in PK-12 schools but to universities as well (Price, 2008). While American educators today are serving an increasingly diverse community, educators are still predominately middle-class, European American, and English-only speakers (Banks et al., 2005; Jazsar & Algozzine, 2006; Swartz, 2003). Not only must school leaders understand students’ communities and experience, they also need the willingness, attitudes, and ethics or dispositions to work well with diversity and to teach these skills to others (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). Dispositions may be defined as, “values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities” (NCATE, 2002, p. 53). More specifically, diversity dispositions include the skills, beliefs and connections to be successful within the community (Schulte, Edwards, & Edick, 2008). For school administrators, the objective is to become a leader who “promotes the success of students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to the diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources” (CCSSO, 2007, p. 16) More than ever before, those who train educators need to assist candidates in cultivating their positive dispositions in order to help all students succeed (Keiser & Smith, 2009)

In order for school leaders to understand the role they play in a diverse community, it is not enough to participate in preparation programs that espouse multicultural education (Fiore, 2009). Educational leadership candidates must have opportunities to engage in dialog on social justice and to reflect about personal beliefs, as well as practice in culturally diverse settings (Barnes, 2006; Guerra & Nelson, 2008; Hafner, 2006, Howard & Del Rosiario, 2000).

The study of school administration and leadership has historically mirrored the prevailing perspectives of business and civic leadership (Fiore, 2009). Viewing leaders as components of a bureaucratic organizational structure, examining characteristics and traits of successful leaders, and identifying leadership in relation to systems and contingency theories are just a few of the perspectives (Lynch, 2012). Northouse (2013) suggested that leadership can be studied by observing traits, examining specific behaviors, focusing on specific situations, and even identifying the effect that charismatic leaders have on their followers. Sound theories associated with effective leadership and organizational structures are critical when examining schools and the leadership skills needed to guide them (Lynch, 2012; Robbins, 2004).

Many university programs that prepare school leaders include courses or program emphasis on diversity and equity, though the number of resources that address teaching social justice in leadership preparation programs is small (Hafner, 2006). At The University of Nebraska at Omaha, educational administration faculty address sociocultural consciousness, cultural proficiency, and community connections with candidates in an intentional developmental manner in order to promote measureable growth in knowledge, skills and dispositions of diversity. The Department of Educational Administration and Supervision at the University of Nebraska at Omaha has systematically and intentionally gathered information to assure us so that our students are prepared to lead for social justice. Our future leaders are assessed on how the perceptions of their skills align with stated dispositions that they must have in order to effectively lead in ethnically diverse schools. The department has systematically and intentionally gathered

information to improve the program, but the goal is to understand how candidates' perceptions of their skills align with stated dispositions in order to effectively lead in ethnically diverse schools.

### **DEVELOPING SOCIOCULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

An educational leader's knowledge of diversity dispositions is founded in self-awareness. Sociocultural consciousness is "the awareness that a person's worldview is not universal, but is profoundly influenced by life experiences" (Villegas & Lucas, 2007, p. 31). Educational leaders without this awareness overuse their own experience, and may misinterpret communication and behaviors of students and other adults. Educational leaders who see themselves as mono-cultural Americans are more likely to perpetuate misconception and stereotypes (Dantas, 2007). Hallinger and Heck (1996) noted that an awareness of positive dispositions and the savvy to utilize them for the improvement of school culture is not only important for administrators to work well with students – it is also critical for the school leaders themselves. Thus, administrators who have not developed this awareness have trouble being the leader of an effective school (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In fact, the leading cause of administrator dismissal is the lack of interpersonal skills (Davis, 1998; Keiser & Smith, 2009).

Based upon studies of teacher and administrator dispositions (Edick, Danielson, & Edwards, 2006; Edwards and Edick, 2006; Keiser, 2007; Schulte, Edick, & Mackiel, 2004; Schulte, Edwards & Edick, 2008; Schulte & Kowal, 2005) and upon analysis of candidate portfolios by the Educational Administration faculty at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, candidates in educational administration have positive beliefs about students; yet tend to undervalue the importance of sociocultural consciousness. This message also comes from reflections of course instructors, employers, and from the candidates themselves (Smith, 2008). Improvement in this facet of the program is imperative. As Parker and Shapiro (1992) state:

More attention needs to be given to future school and district leaders'... ability to support the education of all children. Opportunities' must be provided for leaders to examine and reflect on the meaning of their cultural background, their skin color, and their belief systems as well as the relationship between these attributes and their personal and professional practice. (pp. 387-388)

### **Developing Cultural Proficiency**

Cultural beliefs and models are built over years and are resistant to change (Dantas, 2007). Cultural proficiency, as proposed in *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders* by Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2003), was selected by our educational administration faculty as an instructional model because it is proactive, usable in any setting, and behavioral rather than emotional. Being culturally proficient enables administrative candidates to address issues of diverse school culture. Those who are culturally proficient "welcome and create opportunities to better understand who they are as individuals, while learning how to interact positively with people who differ from themselves" (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2006, pp. 4-5). The core values of cultural proficiency are:

1. Culture is a predominant force; one cannot NOT be influenced by culture.
2. People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.
3. People have group identities that they want have acknowledged.
4. Cultures are not homogeneous; there is diversity within groups.
5. The unique needs of every culture must be respected; (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey & Terrell, 2006)

### **Developing Community Connections**

The social fabric of community is formed from an expanding shared sense of belonging. Educational leaders must interact with a diverse array of constituents including many from different cultural backgrounds, experiences and traditions and speak languages other than English (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). They must have a keen awareness of school-community relations, group dynamics, intercultural tolerance, politics and power, team building and community engagement and how to

### *Leadership Dispositions and Skills*

effectively bridge these borders in order to work toward success. Communities are shaped by the notion that, only when members are connected and care for the well-being of the whole, will a civil and democratic society be created (Block, 2009)

At the core of educational leadership skills is an ability to model and help citizens contribute to creating a democratic and just future within the community (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). Citizens become powerful when they choose to shift the context within which they act in the world (Block, 2009).

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM**

The community of Omaha, Nebraska, is remarkably diverse. In the 1960's when desegregation became law, White flight was widespread essentially leaving a large portion of the urban center *hollowed out* with property wealth flowing to the suburban areas. Despite the prolonged struggles over desegregation, racial segregation continues to persist in our schools. Currently the Omaha Public Schools' race composition is 34 % White, 30% Hispanic, and 26% African American. The statistics from the Nebraska State of the Schools Report (2011) indicates the demographic challenges faced by the district including a poverty rate of 69.27%. English Language Learners comprise 14.89 % of children, and includes mobility rate of 18.14%. Sadly, the Omaha World Herald reports that the African American population in Omaha has the highest child poverty in the nation (2011). Seventy-seven percent of African American children are now living in poverty, and of the 1,131 entering kindergarten each year, only 99 of those expect graduate from college. The drop is even sharper among African-American males. Among Latino children, about 1,045 students will enter kindergarten and about 76 of those expect to graduate from college. Male students are projected to experience greater academic failure in this group as well (Building Bright Futures, 2008).

Within this context, the Department of Education Administration and Supervision (EDAD) at The University of Nebraska at Omaha offers aspiring school leaders advanced programs leading to the Master of Science Degree in Education (M.S.), as well as a Doctoral Degree in Education (Ed.D.). The department includes a non-degree administration endorsement program for candidates who have completed a previous master's degree, and meet all other criteria for admission. Perceptions of candidates are supplied in traditional methods—papers, discussions, tests—throughout the program. Faculty in this department, informally assess the attitudes and dispositions during each class session by carefully listening and examining attitudes with class and small group discussions, but the intentional survey of diversity dispositions, connections with the community, and community service have led to insights not only for candidates, but for the program and field as well.

#### **ISLLC Standards**

Just as students' schools are expected to meet established levels of achievement on specific grade level and subject level standards, expected levels of proficiency for school leaders have been identified. Standards are being used to build the systems necessary to measure the effectiveness and efficiencies of school leaders, and to ensure that they have acquired the necessary skills and abilities to create collaborative learning environments in which all students can be prepared to live and work in a social and political democracy (Anderson, 2002; Green, 2004).

To quantify and regulate the many facets of school leadership, the EDAD Department adopted the *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISSLC 2008*. These standards are aligned with the standards outlined by Nebraska Department of Education in Rule 24 and call for:

1. Setting a widely share vision for learning;
2. Develop a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
3. Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment;
4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;
5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and

6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal and cultural context. (CCSSO, 2008 p. 12)

Following the growth of individuals on these standards as they progress through their program, as well as tracking trends over time for the program takes multiple forms of assessment.

### **Educational Administration Assessment**

Graduate students in education have learned to be excellent students as reflected by high grade point averages, and so to assess leadership, a variety of other instruments have also been developed and validated by the department for alignment to standards and dispositions. When school leaders complete their formal preparation programs, they must be able display the skills and dispositions to increase student achievement, to raise awareness among students and staff, and to create heterogeneous learning communities for students and staff (McKenzie et al., 2008).

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Olivia and Marshall (2006) stress that the mission to strive for a more equitable and socially just society begins with educational leadership. It is a moral obligation to create leaders who possess the skills to take active roles that intervene on oppressive *power* differences that work to create schools that develop everyone's capacity to think, to critique, and to carry out civil discourse about complex debatable issues (Surface, Smith, Keiser, & Hayes, 2011). Moral transformative leaders must keep the process of teaching, leading and research aimed at keeping the social justice movement in the forefront. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand how candidates' perceptions of their skills align with stated dispositions in order to effectively lead in ethnically diverse schools.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study addressed the following research questions:

- To what extent were the EDAD candidates' self-perceptions of their development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions different at the end of the leadership program compared to their ability to apply the knowledge, skill, and dispositions when they first entered the program as measured on the ISLLC Standards survey?
- To what extent were the EDAD candidates' self-perceptions of their leadership dispositions different at the end of the leadership program compared to their leadership dispositions when they first entered the program as measured on Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI)?

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were the candidates in the Masters/Endorsement program in Educational Administration and Supervision at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (n = 135). The participants were in the EDAD program between the years 2006 and 2010 and include only those candidates who completed the program. The candidates were either seeking a Master's Degree in Educational Administration with the elementary or secondary principal endorsement or just the principal endorsement if they already held a Master's Degree.

### **Instruments and Data Collection**

The pretest and posttest data from the ISLLC Standards surveys and the Administrator Disposition Index (ADI) surveys were analyzed to determine the difference in the knowledge, skills and dispositions. The data were collected when the candidates first entered the program and again when they were enrolled in the practicum field experience. EDAD students complete a survey based on the ISLLC professional standards. The survey offers EDAD candidates a graphic representation of their growth from their own

### *Leadership Dispositions and Skills*

perspective. The survey contains 61 questions grouped into six general areas under consideration. Candidates are asked to respond to this survey at the beginning and again during their field-based practicum. Candidates are asked to indicate the rating of their proficiency for each standard by selecting the appropriate value on a 1 to 5 scale indicating whether the candidate strongly disagrees to the strongly agrees that he/she could do what it describes.

The Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI), created by the department, is aligned with the dispositions of effective leadership identified by the Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership (Schulte & Kowal, 2005). Smith and Kowal (2005) found the ADI to be “a reliable and valid instrument for measuring the dispositions of effective school leaders” (p. 85). Each candidate determines his or her commitment to each of the leadership dispositions on a 5-point scale ranging from “1” Strongly Disagree to “5,” Strongly Agree. This survey is also administered at the beginning and the end of the program. The Administrator Dispositions Index is also administered to practicing administrators in which they rate the candidates’ dispositions related to effective leadership.

Candidates create a Leadership Framework for their Educational Administration Digital Portfolio. This framework includes the standard and ADI that comprised the pretest and posttest for the study. All measures are stored in an electronic portfolio on the university server, which can be accessed by candidates for individual review and by faculty for aggregate evaluation.

At the end of the masters or endorsement program, candidates use the electronic portfolio to develop a capstone project, a synthesis of learning and experience in educational administration. This is completed concurrent with a candidate’s practicum semester. Practicum is a program of planned experiences in the field consisting of 250 hours of approved experiences. The capstone project consists of:

- 1) A summary of the coursework that the student has taken.
- 2) A professional resume.
- 3) A copy of their dispositions index and standards rating from the assessments.
- 4) Artifacts including papers, projects, and reflections that represent each ISLLC standard.
- 5) Personal and professional reflections focused upon each standard.

A comprehensive written examination is also required of all Master’s Degree candidates. It is usually taken either in the last term of the candidates’ class work or in the session immediately following completion of practicum.

### **Findings**

Repeated measure *t*-tests were used to compare the mean scores for candidates pretest and posttest scores. Total mean scores were calculated for the ISLLC Standards survey as well as the Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI) survey. The results of the repeated-measure *t*-tests, significance, and effect size using Cohen’s *d* for the candidates ISLLC Standards mean scores and ADI mean scores were used to determine the significance of the change in scores from the beginning of the administration training program to the end of the program.

**Research Question #1.** Repeated-measure *t*-tests reveal that for program participants who completed the ISLLC Standards survey the posttest mean scores ( $M = 4.70, SD = 0.38$ ) were significantly higher than pretest scores ( $M = 2.48, SD = 0.81$ ),  $t(134) = 29.86, p < .01$ (two-tailed),  $d = 2.57$ .

**Research Question #2** Similarly, *t*-test results reveal that for program participants who completed the Administrator Dispositions Index survey the posttest total mean scores ( $M = 4.94, SD = 0.11$ ) were significantly higher than pretest mean scores ( $M = 4.57, SD = 0.50$ ),  $t(132) = 8.56, p < .01$  (two-tailed),  $d = 0.74$ .

After comparing total scores on ISLLC Standards and Administrator Dispositions pretests and posttests, analyses were also conducted focusing on particular standards and dispositions. ISLLC Standard 2 and 5 which focus on positive school culture and acting fairly ethically were of special interest.

ISLLC Standard 2 states that candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by promoting a positive school

*Issues Related to Social Justice*

culture, providing an effective standards-based instructional program, applying best practice to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff based on identified needs. The knowledge and skills related to this standard are measured for each administrative candidate through a number of sub-standard items. The means and standard deviations for each sub-standard pretest and posttest score, repeated measure t-test calculation, significance, and effect size of the gains are contained in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Repeated-Measure t-test Results, Significance, and Effect Size for ISLLC Standard 2 Sub-Standards*

Sub-Standard	Posttest		Pretest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
2.1a. I have the skills to assess school culture using multiple methods and implement context-appropriate strategies that capitalize on the diversity (e.g., population, language, disability, gender, race, socio-economic) of the school community to improve school programs and culture.	4.7	0.5	2.4	1.0	24.5	<.01	2.10
2.2a. I have the skills to assess school culture using multiple methods and implement context-appropriate strategies that capitalize on the diversity (e.g., population, language, disability, gender, race, socio-economic) of the school community to improve school programs and culture.	4.7	0.5	2.5	1.0	25.3	<.01	2.18
2.2b. I could demonstrate the ability to make recommendations regarding the design, implementation, and evaluation of a curriculum that fully accommodates learners' diverse needs.	4.7	0.5	2.6	1.1	21.5	<.01	1.86
2.2c. I could demonstrate the ability to use and promote technology and information systems to analyze and interpret data, to enrich curriculum and instruction, to monitor instructional practices and provide staff the assistance needed for improvement.	4.7	0.5	2.5	1.1	22.0	<.01	1.90
2.3a. I can demonstrate the ability to assist school personnel in understanding and applying best practices for student learning.	4.8	0.4	2.9	1.0	21.2	<.01	1.83
2.3b. I can apply human development theory, proven learning and motivational theories, and concern for diversity to the learning process.	4.7	0.5	2.5	1.0	21.5	<.01	1.87
2.3c. I can demonstrate an understanding of how to use appropriate research strategies to promote an environment for improved student achievement.	4.7	0.5	2.4	1.1	23.6	<.01	2.04
2.4a. I could design and demonstrate an ability to implement well-planned, context-appropriate professional development programs based on reflective practice and research on student learning consistent with the school vision and goals.	4.7	0.5	2.3	1.0	25.5	<.01	2.19

2.4b. I could demonstrate the ability to use strategies such as observations, collaborative reflection, and adult learning strategies to form comprehensive professional growth plans with teachers and other school personnel.	4.7	0.5	2.4	1.1	23.4	<.01	2.01
2.4c. I demonstrate personal commitment to the development and implementation of continuous professional growth.	4.9	0.3	3.3	1.1	16.6	<.01	1.40

Leadership candidates' growth in this standard was also compared to growth in the Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI). Did leadership candidates lose, maintain, or improve their pretest ADI and ISLLC Standard 2 scores compared to posttest ADI and ISLLC Standard 2 scores?

A repeated-measure Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was calculated. There was a significant main effect for time (pretest/posttest),  $F(1,268) = 616.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = .70$ . There was a significant main effect for test (ADI/ISLLC Standard 2),  $F(1, 268) = 393.24, p < .001, \eta^2 = .60$ . There was also a significant interaction between time and test  $F(1,268) = 313.17, p < .001, \eta^2 = .54$ . Post hoc pairwise comparisons indicate that there was a significant difference on the pretest Dispositions ( $M = 4.54, SD = 0.63$ ) compared to pretest Standard 2 ( $M = 2.58, SD = 0.87$ ) and compared to posttest Dispositions ( $M = 4.90, SD = 0.44$ ). There was also significant difference between pretest Standard 2 and posttest Standard 2 ( $M = 4.74, SD = 0.35$ ). Also posttest Disposition scores were also significantly higher than posttest Standard 2 scores.

There was also interest in looking more closely at ISLLC Standard 5, which states that candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by acting fairly, with integrity, and in an ethical manner. As with the other standards, the knowledge and skills related to this standard are measured for each administrative candidate through a number of sub-standard items. The Standard 5 means and standard deviations for each sub-standard pretest and posttest score, repeated measure t-test calculation, significance, and effect size of the gains are contained in Table 2. This standard was also analyzed in relation to the Administrator Dispositions Index as with the other standards. However, only those dispositions which address ethics were included in the analyses. There were two dispositions identified as being critically related to Standard 5. Those dispositions' pretest and posttest scores, repeated measure t-test calculations, significance, and effect sizes of the gains are contained in Table 3.

Table 2  
*Repeated-Measure t-test Results, Significance, and Effect Size for ISLLC Standard 5 Sub-Standards*

Sub-Standard	Posttest		Pretest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
5.1a. I demonstrate a respect for the rights of others with regard to confidentiality and dignity and engage in honest interactions.	4.9	0.3	4.1	1.0	10.1	<.01	0.88
5.2a. I demonstrate the ability to combine impartiality, sensitivity to student diversity, and ethical considerations in their interactions with others.	4.9	0.3	3.9	1.0	11.7	<.01	1.00
5.3a. I make and explain decisions based upon ethical and legal principles.	5.0	0.2	3.5	1.2	14.2	<.01	0.64

Table 3  
 Repeated-Measure *t*-test Results, Significance, and Effect Size for Administrator Dispositions Index Survey Items 17 and 31

Disposition	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
17. I am committed to ethical principles in the decision-making process.	5.09	< .01	0.44
31. I believe one should accept the consequences for upholding one's principles and actions.	4.73	< .01	0.41
Total	5.57	<.01	0.49

Leadership candidates' growth in Standard 5 was also compared to growth in the Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI) item 17 and 31. Did leadership candidates lose, maintain, or improve their pretest ADI items 17 and 31 and ISLLC Standard 5 scores compared to posttest ADI items 17 and 31 and ISLLC Standard 5 scores?

A repeated-measure Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was calculated. There was a significant main effect for time (pretest/posttest),  $F(1,268) = 143.19, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35$ . There was a significant main effect for test (ADI#17&31/ISLLC Standard 5),  $F(1, 268) = 53.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$ . There was also a significant interaction between time and test  $F(1,268) = 55.58, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$ . Post hoc pairwise comparisons indicate that there was a significant difference on the pretest Dispositions ADI #17 and 31 ( $M = 4.66, SD = 0.72$ ) compared to pretest Standard 5 ( $M = 3.82, SD = 0.97$ ) and compared to posttest Dispositions ( $M = 4.92, SD = 0.49$ ). There was also significant difference between pretest Standard 5 and posttest Standard 5 ( $M = 4.94, SD = 0.25$ ). However, there was no significant difference between posttest ADI#17&31 and posttest Standard 5 Scores.

Also of interest was the growth in diversity dispositions. The educational administrative candidates espoused positive diversity dispositions, which were grouped into three domains. The first domain, *skills in helping students gain knowledge*, had positive results on the pretest ( $M = 4.37, SD = 0.34$ ) and the posttest ( $M = 4.48, SD = 0.38$ ). The second domain, *beliefs about students and teaching /learning* had the highest mean for pretest ( $M = 4.71, SD = 0.21$ ) and for the posttest ( $M = 4.77, SD = 0.26$ ). And domain three, *educators' connection with the community*, was not as positive, with most answering neutral to agree on the pretest ( $M = 3.94, SD = 0.53$ ) and neutral to strongly agree on the posttest ( $M = 4.22, SD = 0.45$ ).with most answering agree or strongly agree in all 3 factors. (Schulte, Edwards, & Edick, 2009). Educational administration candidates espoused more positive diversity dispositions after completing the program. While almost every item showed growth, *educators' beliefs and attitudes about students and teaching/learning* started the semester at such a high level that (4.71, with 5.00 maximum) that there was little room for improvement. *Educators' skills in helping students gain knowledge* indicated slightly significant growth, and the increase in *educators' connections to the community* was statistically significant.

**CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION**

This research was about educational administration candidates' readiness to lead in very diverse environments. Analyses were conducted to summarize our candidates' overall readiness to lead based upon their growth of knowledge and skills using the ISSLC standards. Another summary analysis measured the candidates' growth in dispositions. More in depth analyses were done to measure candidates' diversity dispositions; self-perceived growth of the ISSLC standards and self-perceived growth of their dispositions and an examination of the difference in the growth rate of the standards compared to dispositions in the area of ethics and ethical decision-making. A final analysis was conducted that measured students growth in the area of professional development.

### *Leadership Dispositions and Skills*

Educational administration candidates espoused more positive diversity dispositions after completing the program. While almost every item showed growth, *educators' beliefs and attitudes about students and teaching/learning* started the semester at such a high level that (4.71, with 5.00 maximum) that there was little room for improvement. *Educators' skills in helping students gain knowledge* indicated slightly significant growth, and the increase in *educators' connections to the community* was statistically significant. These findings lead to the questions: If candidates begin the program with very positive beliefs and skills in diversity dispositions, then why do they not feel as though they act in a way that connects them to the community? What then allows them to develop more positive connections?

The voices of our candidates provide us with one of the most powerful assessments of our program. Our students must be prepared for leadership within the communities that they serve and according to their voices, they appear to understand the importance of their leadership. For future school leaders it may be proactive to embrace an attitude of cultural proficiency. They ask if this a finding? Those who are culturally proficient “welcome and create opportunities to better understand who they are as individuals, while learning how to interact positively with people who differ from themselves” (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2006, p. 4-5). Using their framework as a guide, success can be found in the perceptions and insights of candidates’ comments in class discussions, reflection papers and other work by an increased depth of reflection, and in a climate of shared vision and commitment.

Each semester, candidates soon to graduate, participate in focus groups seeking candidates’ understanding of the core standards and dispositions foundational to successful school leadership. The perceptions of candidates, Masters’ through Doctorate, indicate that they are deeply passionate about social justice. Actuation of core values is one of the keys to the development of the dispositions that reflect social justice. Indeed, the core values of cultural proficiency often are seen most clearly in their own words when they were asked to tell us their view of social justice. As stated by our candidates:

*Culture is a predominate force; one cannot NOT be influenced by culture.* Joel, offered his insight of the centrality of social justice when he said, “Do we look at ourselves before we point the finger at others to make a difference? Do we really need more policies or permission to do the right thing?”

*People are served in varying degrees by the dominate culture.* Social justice is an issue that needs to be addressed at all levels in the educational process, from Pre-K to graduate as explained by Jonny

The earliest possible training of humanity with regard to the importance of developing a social conscience that is considerate of all human beings and other living creatures of nature will best prepare our society, locally and globally, for a life in which all live among each other in peace.

Fran, indicated that social justice involves being ethical, making sure that policies work for the wellbeing of everyone, leading by example

Social justice is a way of living. It cannot be easily defined as that would confine it as more simplistic than its existence. Acting in accordance with social justice means acting with integrity: doing what is right even when no one is looking. It refers to “righting” the “wrongs” you know and see through implementation of policies and setting positive examples. Social Justice is a moral responsibility of all educators.

Michelle offered a clear warning as well

Social justice can be impacted in a negative manner if policies are implemented that make all culture conform to the *American way*. This disallows people to practice their traditions and beliefs. Government laws/policies and education policies can impact social justice.

## *Issues Related to Social Justice*

Jay articulated the responsibility of school administrators

Every decision made by a leader that impacts students, faculty, or the school can be attributed to social justice. When administrators make a discipline decision, they will be looked at and judged by others if their decision is one that is fair. Unfortunately, people need to remember that an equitable treatment does not always come from an equal treatment.

*People have group identities that they want to have acknowledged.* Jason, also emphasized the role that school leader's play in impacting policy that affects social justice when he noted, "by developing an environment of awareness and tolerance of differences, school leaders provide positive culture that encourages social justice." *The unique needs of every culture must be respected.* Glenn, articulated the need to respect cultures and being an advocate.

Social justice is about assuming responsibility and accountability to advocate for others who cannot advocate for themselves. It's about advocacy and speaking out about inequality that exists in all social aspects of life. School leaders impact social justice by way of being the voice of the masses they teach, lead and work for in the community.

Karla expressed the need to speak out against injustices

School leaders can impact policy that affects social justice by making sure that they continuously make efforts to speak out against the injustices that occur to the members of their school community. They need to be the voice of those whose voices have been silenced by society.

Candidates offered a window to examine the quality of programs, and of their readiness to accept the responsibility inherent in leading.

The study indicates that students who successfully completed the leadership program believed in themselves and they were ready to assume the mantle of leadership. It could be argued that those preparing to become administrators would have a false sense of readiness for the realities of school leadership, and that perhaps these study participants rated themselves more prepared than they actually were. In response to this concern, additional research was conducted by the Educational Administration Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha that brought an outside view of the student. School district supervisors of our students were asked to rate the students dispositions. This rating was compared to the ratings that the students gave themselves. Using this same survey instrument, site supervisors actually rated the participants significantly higher than they rated themselves (Keiser & Smith, 2009).

The completion of standards and disposition inventories at the beginning of the leadership program help inform program participants about the program's focus and goals, individual progress, and serves as a gathering place for artifacts demonstrating growth. Candidates' portfolios, including their Administrator Dispositions Index and Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards survey scores can continue to serve the program participants after they leave the University.

The results of this study can also be very useful when planning and improving program and program delivery. This data and analyses have been used to report program success to accrediting bodies and to update and improve course syllabi (Smith, 2008). More importantly, professors in the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision can use this information to tailor their classroom activities and discussions to maximize student success.

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***Preparing Educational Leaders in the Pursuit of Social Justice: Practices and Processes for Culturally Proficient Leadership Development***

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**INTRODUCTION**

Curriculum in educational leadership programs should include an emphasis on social justice (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). As Shoho, Merchant, and Lugg (2005) acknowledged, “Since the 1990s, a growing movement within administrative preparatory programs has focused on issues of social justice” (p. 59). Educational leaders are challenged to become culturally proficient leaders who will examine and impact issues of educational equity, strengthen educational cultures of respect for all ethnic groups, and serve as advocates for high academic achievement for all students (Johnson & Bush, 2005). Theoharis (2004) urged that social justice leadership is needed which “places significant value on diversity and establishing culture and respect and understanding of that diversity” (p. 13). O’Neil, Fry, Hill and Bottoms (2003) pointed out that good instructional leaders, not only understand which instructional practices improve student achievement, they also know how to work with teachers to accomplish positive change and support teachers in carrying out instructional practices that help all students succeed. However, Theoharis (2004) noted that what is typically referred to as good leadership alone is not sufficient to ensure that all students will experience socially just and equitable situations and subsequently attain academic success. Explicit attention to issues of equity and advocacy for equity and excellence for all ethnic groups is needed (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004). As English and Papa (2011) stressed,

We proffer our definition of social justice as: schooling which recognizes and respects the fundamental differences in cultural identity and social experiences that place some children and their families at the margins of American culture and society, and which is aimed at removing such barriers which keep them there-not by assimilation (which is social silencing and erasure), but by working to remove the barriers, techniques, beliefs, and practices which put them there in the first place. (p. 101)

Determining what practices and processes in educational leadership doctoral programs impact students’ social justice practices and scholarship is limited. Osterman and Hafner (2009) pointed out, “. . . scholars have provided a plethora of recommendations regarding the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed so that school leaders will be able to ensure educational equity and work toward social justice” (p. 274). While studies of what is needed in educational leadership have been conducted, little is known about “specific ways in which preparation fosters the development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions with effective leadership” (Osterman & Hafner, 2009, p. 311). McCarthy and Forsyth (2009) expressed concern that although the curriculum in many educational leadership programs has changed in the last ten years away from a strong emphasis on the theory movement to curriculum that is designed to prepare leaders to meet current needs in schools, “Little has been done across educational leadership programs to assess what is taught in specific educational leadership courses and how courses are aligned in graduate programs” (p. 116). In discussing changing practices in educational leadership preparation programs, McCarthy and Forsyth (2009) reported, “. . . little is known about the optimum instructional delivery system” (p. 99). These authors (2009) further stated, “Despite significant attention being given to changing demographics in schools, there is little research on how leadership preparation is being altered as a result” (p. 105). Recognizing the importance of cultural proficient leadership in achieving social justice, the purpose of this research study was to identify practices and processes that influenced educational leadership doctoral students’ growth as culturally proficient leaders as well as to determine the impact of this doctoral program on its’ candidates culturally proficient practices and scholarship.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework that guided this study was grounded in an understanding of cultural proficiency as essential in achieving social justice through educational leadership in today's diverse world. Cultural proficiency is an effective and productive approach to address cultural diversity within schools that acknowledges and responds to both individual and group differences (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). Regarding cultural proficiency, Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2005) acknowledged, "It is an approach to addressing issues of diversity, inclusiveness, and entitlement; it provides tools and help for an increasingly diverse world with an increasing number of well-intentioned and fearful people" (p. 1). Rather than educators attempting to mold students of different cultures into the majority language and culture in a "melting pot" process based on an assimilationist premise that this process is necessary for national unity, they "welcome and create opportunities to better understand who they are as individuals while learning how to interact positively with students who differ from themselves" (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell 2003, p. 39).

### **Characteristics of Cultural Proficiency**

Cultural proficiency involves a process that acknowledges and validates students' personal values and feelings. Change is encouraged by leaders who are culturally proficient without threatening students' feelings of worth, placing blame on individuals, and creating feelings of guilt. In this process, educators and students are encouraged to reflect on their own individual understanding and values. According to Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2003), in culturally proficient schools, "The culture of the school promotes inclusiveness and institutionalizes processes for learning about differences and responding appropriately to differences" (p. 39).

In addressing the identification and understanding of diversity issues in *Teaching for Diversity*, Garcia (2005) presented two essential attitudes to assist teachers in identifying and understanding diversity issues that arise in teaching students from many backgrounds as well as in helping their students face similar issues as they enter the world. The first attitude involved acknowledging and working to understand the various manifestations of difference. This acknowledgement included reflection on "one's attitudes toward human differences" (Garcia, 2005, p. 21). A second attitude involved teacher recognition that human differences can also involve learning styles and preferences. These two attitudes are also essential for socially just leaders in identifying and understanding diversity issues that arise among all of their stakeholders. Just as it is important for teachers to empower their students, it is equally important for socially just leaders to empower all stakeholders "to think for themselves; to construct knowledge, or meaning; and to learn respect for themselves and others" (Garcia, 2005, p. 55).

Since values are central to culture, it is essential that educators examine basic values of cultures when they study them and become as culturally competent as possible. Roseberry-McKibbin (2002a) cautioned educators regarding the dangers of stereotyping and over generalizing when studying cultural groups and their values. In the study of any cultural group and its values, it is important that educators not use stereotypes as a means of categorizing others based upon incomplete perceptions (Penfield, 1990). Culturally competent educators must keep in mind that they must view each person in any cultural group first and most importantly as an individual instead of representative of a particular culture. Langdon and Cheng (2002) emphasized the importance of recognizing that great heterogeneity exists within cultural groups. Roseberry-McKibbin (2002a) exclaimed, "Although cultural norms tend to influence behavior, each individual and each family has unique experiences that influence beliefs, attitudes, and behavior" (p. 10). For this reason, becoming culturally proficient is a continual, on-going process that can never be completely actualized; however, it is the social and moral responsibility of all educators to become as culturally proficient as possible.

### *Preparing Educational Leaders in the Pursuit of Social Justice*

In *The Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency*, Lindsey, Robbins, and Terrell (2003) posited certain core values provide the foundation on which cultural proficiency is built. These values, or guiding principles, include the following:

- Culture is a predominate force; you cannot NOT be influenced by culture,
- People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture,
- It is important to acknowledge the group identity of individuals,
- Diversity within cultures is important; cultural groups are neither homogeneous nor monolithic, and
- It is important to respect the unique cultural needs that members of dominated groups may have. (pp. 6-7)

#### **Overcoming Barriers to Cultural Proficiency through Leadership**

According to Lindsey, Robbins, and Terrell (2003), two main barriers to the acquisition of cultural proficiency exist: the presumption of entitlement or systemic privilege, and an unawareness of the need to adapt. These authors supported that it is difficult for people to acquire cultural proficiency when they believe that they have gained all of their personal achievements and societal benefits based on their personal merit and the quality of their character. It is also difficult for people to acquire cultural proficiency when they are not aware that they need to make personal and organizational changes in response to diverse people with whom they interact. Because people believe that only others need to change and adapt to their cultures, they do not make needed changes. Adherence to a culturally relevant pedagogy is a way to break down these barriers.

Educational leaders can be influential in strengthening school cultures wherein students of all ethnic groups are equally valued and equity and excellence is fostered for all (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004). Leaders establish the conditions that encourage inquiry, study of practice, and positive actions to improve the educational opportunities of all students (Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, & Muth, 2007). Through the sustained focus that is maintained on achieving equity and excellence through advocacy leadership to communicate needs and a shared vision of excellence for all as well as through multiple positive actions, educational leaders can strengthen school cultures wherein socially just schools are possible that are “earmarked by enlightened school leadership and strong community action” (English & Papa, 2011, p. 62). Educational leaders can serve as powerful role models for appreciation of all cultures through their actions and words (Lindsey et al., 2003). However, it is crucial that educators acquire the cultural competencies needed to provide appropriate educational programming for linguistically and culturally diverse students and to facilitate the development of positive social relationships within schools and communities (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2002b). With increased diversity in schools, educational leaders are needed who will advocate for culturally responsive teaching (Riehl, 2000) and lead schools through “culturally responsive inquiry” (Johnson & Bush, 2005, p. 269). Fostering the development of culturally proficient leaders who will impact positively school improvement is needed in today’s diverse school settings (Lindsey et al., 2003).

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This research study was designed to illuminate the practices and processes in one educational leadership doctoral program that have contributed to students’ cultural proficient practice and scholarship. Specifically, the research questions that guided this study were:

1. What practices and processes of the educational leadership doctoral program contributed to cultural proficiency?
2. What are examples of the impact on students’ practice?
3. What are examples of the impact on students’ scholarship?

### **Data Sources**

Data collection included open-ended response questions and portfolio analysis of 15 students who were members of one doctoral cohort to identify the perspectives of these students concerning practices and processes of the educational leadership doctoral program that contributed to their cultural proficiency and to identify the impact of the program on students' cultural proficient practice and scholarship. The participants had completed the first eight core courses in the educational leadership doctoral program and included six females and nine males. Two of the students identified themselves as bi-racial, and the remaining students were White. Nine of the participants were school administrators, one was a graduate research assistant, two were teacher leaders, and three were higher education administrators. Data were attained through two, hour-long sessions occurring two weeks apart. The portfolio reflections and assignments that served as other data sources were attained over a twelve-month time period.

### **Data Analysis**

The researchers transcribed the open-ended responses and grouped these by topics. In addition, notes that were made during the review of artifacts and reflection papers in the portfolios served as data sources and were coded for themes. Inter-rater reliability was attained through individual scoring of the rubrics for the portfolios followed by discussion of scores provided by all doctoral faculty members to discern strengths and key areas for growth. The rubric for the portfolio assessment served as a foundation for assessment of the portfolio. Open and axial coding were used to identify the core themes that emerged from the data related to the research questions (Merriam, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Trustworthiness of the data was maintained through peer debriefing, member checks, and audit trail (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009). In peer debriefing, each researcher coded the data separately then discussed common themes that were identified by both as well as any inconsistencies. Member checks were attained through the interviewees' review of the data for accuracy. An audit trail was maintained by keeping all transcripts, notes, and artifacts in a secure file cabinet. That the study was a reflection of perspectives of one cohort's experiences is a limitation for generalization. However, the purpose of a qualitative study is to enhance understanding rather than to generalize findings (Merriam, 2009).

## **RESULTS**

The primary practices and processes that were identified that contributed to students' cultural proficiency included instructional features of the assigned course readings, instructional methods that fostered dialogue, and assignments that provided the opportunity for reflection and action. A program feature that contributed to students' growth as culturally proficient leaders was program coherence that was based on the implementation of program core values that emphasized cultural proficiency leadership, moral leadership, and reciprocal learning wherein the doctoral students and the professors shared in providing and giving information that impacted learning for all. The program design as a cohort model of delivery was an additional program feature that contributed to students' growth. The primary themes relative to examples of the impact on students' practice were a willingness to challenge the status quo and raise critical issues and a desire to implement change for school improvement. The primary theme emergent concerning the impact of the program on participants' scholarship was the selection of topics relevant to cultural proficient leadership for writing and for investigation.

### **Research Question 1: What practices and processes in the educational leadership doctoral program contributed to cultural proficiency?**

Practices and processes in the educational leadership doctoral program that contributed to candidates' growth in cultural proficiency included instructional features and programmatic features as discussed below.

### **Instructional Practices and Processes**

Instructional features of the doctoral program that emerged as themes from the data analysis were the readings that were selected; the instructional methods that fostered self-awareness, dialogue and Socratic questioning; and assignments that provided the opportunity for reflection on practice and actions.

**Readings that were selected.** A student emphasized, “The professors’ development of our activities and writing assignments is a huge catalyst for our growth and change.” Through professors’ assignments and instructional methods, students’ level of cultural proficiency increased. A representative comment by a student was, “Specifically, my heightened awareness of equity and excellence has stemmed from two main forms: reading and discussion.”

The most frequently cited book that influenced students’ criticality and cultural proficiency was Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. A representative student comment was, “In specific regards to classroom literature, Pablo Freire’s (1993) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has probably been one of the most influential books for me.” Another representative comment was, “*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire (1993) was an amazing text that showed that passionate people can make a great difference in the lives of marginalized populations.” Other frequently mentioned books were: Lindsey’s et al. (2003) *Culturally Proficient Leadership*, Tatum’s (2003) *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* Lindsey, Graham, Westphal, and Jew’s (2008) *Culturally Proficient Inquiry: A Lens for Identifying and Examining Educational Gaps*, Delpit’s (1995) *Other People’s Children*. Nieto’s (1999) *The Light in their Eyes*, Darling-Hammond’s (2010) *The Flat World of Education: How American Commitment to Equity Will Determine our Future*, Singleton and Linton’s (2006) *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*, Ladson-Billings’ (1994) *Dreamkeepers: Successful Leaders of African American Children*, and Dewey’s (1920) *Democracy and Education*. Articles that were frequently mentioned as instrumental in students’ growth in cultural proficient leadership were: Staunton’s (1986) “Maggie and Me” and McIntosh’s (1989) “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” Students described the influence of the readings on their practice. A representative comment included:

Many readings have exposed me to equity issues that are embedded within our cultural context and our education system. Specifically, Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Lindsey’s *Culturally Proficient Inquiry*, Gay’s *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, Delpit’s *Other People’s Children*, an auto-ethnography called “Maggie and Me” and various other articles.

Students explained ways that the readings worked in concert to build their understanding of culturally proficient leadership. As one student shared,

The books *Culturally Proficient Inquiry* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* were powerful readings. I had read Freire’s book on my own a few years ago in the principalship, but reading it in connection to the articles, such as Shield’s (2003) article and sections from *Courageous Conversations about Race* (Singleton & Linton, 2006) really helped to open my eyes and my soul to what Freire (1993) was saying, not only about the peasants of Brazil but marginalized people everywhere. In addition, the article and the video sections by Geneva Gay (2000) were hard “reads” because they caused me to view things from a different perspective.

### **Instructional Methods that Fostered Reflection and Dialogue**

That the students engaged in dialogue and critical reflective writing assignments in connection with the readings and cultural awareness activities were cited as powerful instructional methods in fostering their growth in culturally proficient leadership. Reflective activities included self-awareness activities, dialogue and Socratic questioning, and assignments that prompted reflection on practice and actions.

**Self-awareness activities.** Examples of some of the cultural self-awareness activities that students participated in during one course were: (a) What’s in a Name, (b) Cultural Perceptions, and (c) Exploration of Cultural Roots as described in Lindsey et al. (2003) *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School*

### *Issues Related to Social Justice*

*Leaders.*” In the “What’s in a Name activity”, the students shared with partners their first name and the histories of their names. They also shared their perceptions of (i.e., of what their name signifies to themselves). Lastly, the students shared the country origins of their last name. A second activity was “Cultural Perceptions”. Students selected someone in the room who they did not know to be their partners. They then took turns with their partners guessing how their partners would respond to country of family origin and heritage, languages spoken, interests or hobbies, favorite foods, and types of movies or television preferred. Afterward, they then shared their perceptions with their partners, and their partners provided what their actual responses would be. Students then reflected on what assumptions were accurate and which ones were not. Also, students determined which assumptions were based on stereotypes. One other activity was “Cultural Roots”. In this activity, students explored their cultural roots. They were challenged to think about their families of origin and the places where they grew up. Next, they were asked to go back in time as far as they could remember and describe aspects of their family’s heritage of education, religion, occupation, wealth/income, food, language, and politics. Students then shared their cultural stories within small groups, beginning with the present generation and going back in time as far as they could remember. Thereafter, the students made comparison between generations in their families and stories within their groups. The intent of these cultural self-awareness activities was to allow the students to engage in reflection and dialogue in order to increase their cultural knowledge as well as the cultural knowledge of others in their classroom.

**Dialogue and Socratic questioning.** Dialogue and Socratic questioning characterized each of the core classes in the educational leadership doctoral program. A student shared a representative comment by saying, “The dialogue that occurs in class is very beneficial to me.” Another student added, “I enjoy and learn from the class discussions.” Still another stated, “I have greatly enjoyed the environments which foster open-ended questions by the professor leading to dialogue from the group.” As a student elaborated, “Likewise, our discussions stem from readings and other classroom activities that most of us had not been exposed to prior, so since we are navigating new waters, the experience is even richer and more authentic.” A student summarized an idea frequently expressed, “The instructional practices in classes are conducive to the desired outcome of having the scholar-practitioner in each of us come alive.” Socratic questioning rather than lecture based instructional methods characterized the professors’ primary instructional styles. Socratic questioning is characterized by openness and probing questions that lead to further exploration of the topic. In the process of dialogue that ensues, students may pose questions as well as the professor in a process of shared, reciprocal learning. A student summarized, “The dialogue and Socratic discussion are eye opening.” Another student explained:

The class format led by our instructors guides us to develop our own thought processes and encourages us to dive deeply into equity issues. This type of reflective and reflexive thought drags us into our inner depths, forcing us to unveil the equity issues and prompting us to utilize dialogue to formulate possible solutions that we can, in turn, take back to our own educational settings and put into practice.

All classes were presented in a seminar format involving small group work as well as total group discussion of the readings. As a student shared, “The discussion prompted from the readings has been a pivotal aspect to my growth, both from my professors’ and cohort members’ voices.” Another student shared,

Dialogue has provided an opportunity to open up, express thoughts, ideas, and questions. It is a critical connector between the articles and books we read and the reflections that we write. By engaging in meaningful dialogue, we begin first and foremost to hear our own ideas and thoughts. This gives us the chance to reflect on what we ourselves are actually saying, what we really believe at the foundational level. Second, dialogue makes us realize that in a great many ways we still lack the language to fully express and develop our thoughts and ideas and gives us occasion to begin to employ the new vocabulary we are acquiring. Socratic questioning has forced us to think and reflect on issues that are sometimes hard to face.

**Assignments that encouraged reflection on practice and actions.** In addition to the readings for the classes, students particularly cited the cultural immersion plunge, the equity audit, the book study over the book, *Other People's Children* (1995), the cultural autobiography activity, and self-reflective/reflexive journals as pivotal assignments that furthered their growth as culturally proficient leaders.

The cultural immersion plunge was the students' exposure to persons or groups markedly different in culture (ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or physical exceptionality) from that of the "plunger". Important criteria for cultural plunges are: (a) the majority of people there are from the focal group; (b) students are on the turf of the focal group (not in a school or restaurant); (c) this must be a type of experience that students have never done before; and (d) the plunge should last for at least three hours.

After the plunge, students were asked to write a five-page reflection paper for the plunge. The reflection paper included a discussion of popular stereotypes about the focal group and any prior contact they have had with it. Next, students described their emotional response to the experience and any insights on why they reacted emotionally the way they did. Lastly, students included a discussion of whether the plunge experience reinforced or challenged the popular stereotypes of the focal group. The cultural plunge paper was concluded with exploration of "implications for my growth as a culturally proficient leader." This last section was particularly significant because students often overlook the implications of these experiential assignments on their growth as culturally proficient leaders.

The cultural autobiography was a reflective, self-analytic story of students' past and present. First, each student was asked to **narrate** life experiences that he or she considered of significance in shaping his or her worldview. They were told to include typical and/or exceptional events from childhood, school years, religious life, family life, and memorable encounters with individuals of various backgrounds, etc. Second, they were asked to **analyze** how these experiences have shaped their culture-standards for thinking, valuing, behaving and evaluating (Goodenough, 1981), and **interpret** the cultural meanings of these experiences. Lastly, they had to **reflect** on the process of writing the cultural autobiography, and explain how this process helped them discover their cultural identity.

The equity audit was another assignment that students participated in using Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, and Nolly's (2004) reconceptualization of equity audits. The students were asked to facilitate the implementation of an equity audit in their organization. The purpose of the equity audit is to uncover, understand, and change inequities that are internal to their organizations in three areas: teacher quality, educational programs, and student achievement.

Students recognized that the instructional methods of dialogue, reading, small group cultural awareness activities, and reflection papers were not isolated tasks. A representative comment was, "Dialogue has provided an opportunity to open up, express thoughts, ideas, questions about our culture and the culture of others. It is a critical connector between the articles and books we read and the reflections we write." This interconnected was further described by another student, "Again, the best thing about the reflective papers, the cultural awareness activities, and the research papers are the class discussions that spark which leads to differing perspectives from cohort members but allows me to see a different approach." Another student summarized, "I feel that each assignment we have completed added to my overall understanding of the need for cultural proficiency and equity and excellence in the academic success of all students in P-12 schools." As a student related, "The written assignments have been extremely important in my growth and understanding because they have been the springboard for self-reflection, internal dialogue, and class discussion that have influenced actions as an educational leader." Another student provided the following summation of the benefits of assignments that heightened self-understanding by saying:

The doctoral program has provided a direct outlet for me to discuss my struggles with the current education system in terms of both cultural proficiency and issues of equity. Through assignments such as the cultural autobiography, we have had the opportunity to explore our personal selves much deeper than I have ever done before. We were told that we must fully understand who we are as moral, ethical beings before we can begin to look outside to others.

## *Issues Related to Social Justice*

Another student shared a representative comment:

We performed equity audits and case studies on specific topics associated with cultural proficiency. In regards to the equity audit/case study for the group I was in, we focused on my high school campuses' academic equity, more specifically focusing on the achievement gap between the African American and White student populations and the discrepancy in performance in math and science on state accountability tests.

Another student shared an often expressed viewpoint, "The equity audit brought attention to a need to address many of the policies that we work under today and provide a foundation supporting the need for advocacy and change."

The cultural plunge activities included a visit to the Zen Buddhist monastery for one student. A representative comment was, "The cultural plunge was an exciting and engaging way to obtain a better understanding." Another student's comment served to reinforce the interconnectedness of features of the doctoral program, "The written reflection on the cultural plunge really allowed me to synthesize new understandings of the needs that exist in our schools."

### **Program Features**

Program features included coherence through an emphasis on core values that supported an emphasis on social justice and a cohort design of sequenced courses with sustained face-to-face sessions where time for dialogue was provided.

**Program coherence through emphasis of shared values.** The theme of this doctoral program in educational leadership is scholar-practitioner leadership, and it was a theme that was referenced in all courses. Tenets of the program include beliefs in the value of reciprocal learning; the importance of cultural proficient leadership and social justice; the importance of critical reflection and dialogue to improved practice; the importance of authentic, moral leadership; the importance of democratic leadership; and the importance of advocacy and positive actions for school improvement. The tenets were discussed by professors throughout the various classes and influenced the way that the classes were conducted and the assignments that were designed. Students voiced strong recognition that the core values were promoted throughout the program with continuity and overlap in the courses in addressing the core values. As a student stated, "During my course of study in the doctoral program, I have had numerous opportunities to read about and discuss cultural proficiency." A student commented that the courses "overlap in their focus on social justice, moral leadership, courageous conversations, and principles of ethics." Another student added,

Each class brings attention to how policies and procedures are implemented in manners that assist in the maintenance of the status quo. Readings, discussions, and assignments mesh well to create a comprehensive program that highlights the various entities of the education system and considers previously unquestioned mechanisms of power and privilege.

Still another expressed, "The design of each class brings issues of social justice and inequity present in our education system to the forefront. I am more aware of ways to create a more just system."

**A cohort design.** Students also cited the cohort design as instrumental in their growth in cultural proficient leadership. A student explained, "The instructional practices in class have helped me grow in the same fashion as the cohort model. Hearing all students' perspectives on an issue is a great way to learn and say things like, 'Well, I never thought about it like that.'"

All of the core classes were taken as a cohort, and a level of trust was established in the classes that influenced the depth of discussion that was achieved. A student shared, "Being able to discuss challenging topics in the trusting environment of the doctoral cohort has helped me gain the courage to speak against injustices in my workplace." A student explained, "The cohort has allowed me to see cultural

### *Preparing Educational Leaders in the Pursuit of Social Justice*

proficiency from other perspectives of people I trust.” A student emphasized, “First, the cohort model that focuses on the scholar-practitioner fosters discourse that prompts us to not only voice our opinions but also grow from the opinions of others.” The student further shared,

The cohort experience has been one of the largest contributing factors in my understanding of cultural proficiency. The format serves as a platform and springboard for us to bounce ideas off one another and further understand the complexities of the issues surrounding us in education today. Further, we all have been able to develop a trusting relationship that allows us authenticity in our discussions, providing a more rich and fruitful experience.

As another student added, “The doctoral program has definitely heightened my understanding of cultural proficiency. Discussing the materials with our cohort members brings the material to life.” Another student added, “In listening to others talk of their experiences and voice their own understanding of books and articles, it has helped me gain deeper meaning and understanding in my own life.” The following statement resounded as a frequently expressed view,

The cohort system is proving to be a vital component to my success and learning. The communication built among the class has created opportunities to learn that I don’t think would be possible apart from this system. In addition to a support system, the cohort members have become comfortable enough to discuss a variety of issues that relate to cultural proficiency, social justice, and equity and how each is present or absent from our practice.

Another student added, “The cohort overall is the best experience of my educational experiences. I am thinking about things in a whole new way using lens that I never knew existed.” Still another participant shared,

Prior to these experiences of reading and writing assignments, I was floating along thinking that I was fairly culturally proficient in both my practice and scholarship. Boy, was I ever wrong! I have much room for improvement, yet, I do now have a beginning path to get there.

Sustained face-to-face sessions where time for dialogue was provided characterized the cohort experience in the doctoral program. The classes were all offered in a face-to-face format in four-hour segments. In this time-frame, there was time for in-depth discussions of the readings as well as student presentations of independent projects. Although the every-other weekend format was intensive, students expressed appreciation of the value of the time that was provided for reflection and dialogue.

#### **Research Question 2: What are examples of the impact on students’ practice?**

Ultimately, the professors’ hoped to impact students’ practice and scholarship as a result of the doctoral courses. Voices of students supported that the goal of developing culturally proficient leaders was being achieved. Students were at different places in their level of conscientiousness concerning social justice issues. For some students, the readings and dialogue served to validate their beliefs. A student commented, “I am happy to say that the readings and discussions we have had in class have validated my thinking about culture and how it deserves to be embraced.” For others, the readings and reflective discussions and writing assignments caused them to consider issues that they had not considered before. A student explained, “I was very dogmatic and thought that my belief system should apply to everyone prior to the experiences this year in the doctoral program. I now feel that I was just ignorant.” Another student added,

My experiences so far in the doctoral program have helped me to recognize the injustices and oppression that still exist in society today. I had never really thought about this until I began this program. Now, I look for injustices in my professional life and am conscious of it when someone says something or does something that is a form of injustice or unfair treatment. I am more aware of culture and how important it is to recognize and appreciate the different cultures in society.

Another student further elaborated, “The doctoral program has really opened my eyes to the concept of cultural proficiency. Actually, I think the emphasis on cultural proficiency is a strength of the program.” The impact on practice included a willingness to challenge the status quo and raise critical issues and a desire to implement change.

### **Challenge of the Status Quo**

A willingness to challenge the status quo and raise critical issues served as evidence of the impact on practice. Students frequently discussed a willingness to ask pertinent questions and critically analyze practices instead of blindly continuing the status quo. As a student shared,

The largest impact from my course readings has come from the culturally responsive pedagogy since I work so much with ELL students. As an educator, I see culturally responsive teaching not as an option, but as a necessity. The readings prompted me to look at education through a critical lens (at myself and others) and open up more to foster that same criticality among others. . . . This university’s model of the scholar-practitioner is reinforcing the need for transformative leadership by preparing us as critical thinkers who put theory into practice.

Participants expressed that they had gained confidence to engage in the “courageous conversations” about issues of social justice. They were more willing to serve as an advocate for those who may have been ignored previously. This resulted to changes in campus procedures for some schools.

Their recognition of inequalities was heightened. A participant explained, “Overall, the doctoral program has heightened my awareness of equity and excellence by revealing the inequalities embedded within our system and opening my eyes to true democratic education.” Another student added, “My eyes have been opened to the multitude of ways that inequity and equity can be identified and addressed.” Another student added, “The book *Culturally Proficient Inquiry* (Lindsey et al., 2008) gave me actions and approaches that I can use in my workplace. Instead of simply identifying inequity and inequality among students and their opportunities, I was provided with some tools for use in my workplace.” Still another student expressed,

My awareness of cultural proficiency has been heightened not necessarily from an understanding of its importance but more from the aspects of how to incorporate cultural proficiency into practice. Knowing about inequities and issues of social justice represents only the beginning of being culturally proficient; learning how to take that knowledge and put it into practice is key.

Another student shared, “I have been challenged to speak up for those whose voices are ignored. One of our guest speakers stated, ‘Always do what is right for the students.’ This statement has resonated with me.”

Specific examples of ways that participants are impacting practice included:

- In my college English courses, during literary discussions, there are many opportunities to discuss issues related to cultural proficiency, and equity and excellence, based on events and characters in the readings.
- My students engage in cooperative learning groups and the class as a whole participates in Socratic discussion. My students benefit from the diversity of viewpoints they are exposed to and often say so.
- As a principal, I made sure that all 8<sup>th</sup> graders had a field trip to a university each year. Many of them had never been so far away from home, and very few of them had seen a university. This was part of our efforts to build a college-bound culture.
- On two occasions, I have had an intervention with a teacher dealing with racial insensitivity leading to a student being wrongfully cited for special education services. Since that intervention with the teacher, the student has flourished, and the two have begun to build an effective teacher/student relationship.

*Preparing Educational Leaders in the Pursuit of Social Justice*

- In creating a Professional Learning Community for our leadership team where we commit to adult learning, we use articles from class and other sources at times to gain knowledge about social justice, equity, and cultural awareness.
- As the leader of the site-based decision making team on my campus, I have taken steps to diversify the parental representation on the committee. Finally, I have taken every opportunity to engage in dialogue related to equity, racism, stereotyping, and other issues related to cultural proficiency.
- I do my best to speak up for the voices who may be silenced. In general, I have a better understanding of cultural differences and equity and use this lens to make sure that my actions and decisions will not affect others in a negative way.
- Being able to discuss challenging topics in the trusting environment of the doctoral cohort has helped me gain the courage to speak against injustices in my workplace.

**A Desire to Implement Change**

The students expressed that the doctoral program had increased their commitment to serve as a leader of change. As a student emphasized,

The program fosters building a network and community of educational leaders who are prepared to go out and share the same experiences and awareness in their own learning communities, prompting the outreach of equity and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Another student expressed another frequently stated concept:

I believe that I already had a heightened awareness of the need to address issues of equity and excellence. However, understanding the need to address issues of equity and excellence is very different from acting upon that understanding. I feel that the greatest change I have experienced in this program is my willingness and ability to act upon my awareness of issues of equity and excellence. I am also now in a professional position that allows me greater positional power to make necessary changes in practice and to help guide conversations toward a greater understanding among my staff.

Changes that were cited included:

I have worked on my campus to promote culturally responsive pedagogy with teachers for English language learners with recruitment of all students for Pre-AP and AP programs and co-curricular programs. This has prompted dialogue within the English Language Arts Department in regards to instruction and curriculum development that promotes equity and excellence.

**Research Question 3: What are examples of the impact on students' scholarship?**

The impact on scholarship that students expressed was that they sought to read more about what it means to be a culturally proficient leader and had a strong desire to write more about issues of inequality including investigating ways to meet the challenges in school leadership. For example, students' choice of topics for writing supported a heightened urgency to address academic issues of equity and excellence, the courage to do what's best for all children, and the understanding that the schools are instruments for creating a socially just democracy. Students also expressed that they sought to read more about what it means to be a culturally proficient leader. A representative comment was,

### *Issues Related to Social Justice*

Specific actions in my scholarship that I have demonstrated is my commitment to an appreciation of cultural proficiency and to equity and excellence, seeking out additional published research, seeking and reading works by authors such as Gay, Singleton and Linton, Dantley, and West, and journaling on issues that I recognize in work and in the world.

The doctoral students expressed a desire to write more about issues of inequality investigating ways to meet the challenges in school leadership and voiced the selection of dissertation topics indicative of this desire.

### **DISCUSSION**

Students in this study cited that deconstruction of readings through critical analysis, and reflective dialogue and writing were primary instructional methods used in the doctoral classes at this university. In turn, they cited strong benefits to these instructional methods to their personal growth. The university doctoral program setting is unique to the public school setting in that a curriculum is not prescribed through curriculum guides or policy. In the last decade, new course titles have emerged in educational leadership departing from the strong consistency in course titles in educational administration programs in the past decades (McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009). Professors of educational leadership are now guided instead by the current needs present in schools as well as by recognition of standards that are important in leadership development (McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009). The educational leadership doctoral program at the regional university wherein this study was situated was designed to develop scholar-practitioners who would be characterized as having a commitment to social justice, to authentic leadership, to critical analysis and inquiry, and to reflective practice and would be highly skilled in critical analysis, research methodologies, and impactful leadership. The program was designed to develop students' growth as scholar-practitioner leaders who would make a positive difference through educational leadership. Therefore, the course readings were selected explicitly to assist in the development of scholar-practitioner leaders. A critical component of this leadership in today's diverse and multi-faceted educational settings is the leader's commitment to social justice and culturally relevant pedagogy (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2005). Educational leaders in schools that are improving share common features of focused commitment to the attainment of goals, a passion for equity and excellence, a strong belief in the importance of democratic, collaborative leadership and demonstrate skills in criticality, in listening, in reflection, and in achieving results (Taylor, Cordeiro, & Chrispeels, 2009).

A program feature of this educational leadership doctoral program was the cohort model. The students took all core classes of the doctoral program as a cohort with face-to-face meetings every other weekend. The cohort model was cited by students as influential in their growth as scholar-practitioner leaders. Cohort benefits and challenges in educational leadership programs have been cited in the research literature as a cohort mentality that can develop both positively or negatively, group cohesiveness can be attained, a level of trust can be developed that fosters personal growth, and a support system can be provided through the cohort experience (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000). The students in this study cited the cohort feature of this doctoral program as instrumental in providing a community of learners wherein trust and support were present. They frequently discussed the impact of comments from other students during the class discussions as extremely beneficial in fostering their growth and development.

Students' comments as well as portfolio reflections reinforced the impact of the doctoral program on their scholarship and in their growth toward culturally proficient leadership. Repeatedly, students cited that they now analyze practices in their schools through the lens of criticality to discern where issues of equity are present that may be inhibiting students' opportunities to learn. They shared that they engage in dialogue with faculty and foster the courageous conversations that challenge the status quo as an advocate for equity and excellence. They acknowledged that they are engaged in an ongoing process of growth referred to it as "unfinishedness" (Friere, 1993, p. 84). In short, students recognized that the work of school improvement is ongoing to promote student learning (Murphy, 2006), and leadership is needed (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). The participants in this study cited that they have grown in confidence and knowledge of ways to assist in bringing about needed changes in organizational practices and processes and that both their scholarship and practice have been impacted.

### *Preparing Educational Leaders in the Pursuit of Social Justice*

Students' reflective comments and assignments served as important methods of program evaluation for strengthening program design and coherence for this regional university. One student shared a representative comment,

The doctoral program has allowed me to grow in ways that I never knew was possible. The cohort model prompts critical self-reflection that is crucial in cultural proficiency and in promoting equity and excellence for our students in the public school system. This program has empowered me to be a more democratic, culturally responsive educator.

This study has implications in the continuing dialogue of the impact of educational leadership programs. Young, Crow, Murphy, and Ogawa (2009) chronicled that “. . .the need for a knowledge base on educational leadership preparation has been made clear; energy to act has been mustered; and as we shall see throughout this handbook, some important initial steps at strengthening the research base are underway.” (p. 18). This study serves as a further example of factors to consider in program design and evaluation.

The work of strengthening culturally proficient leaders who will impact positively school improvement is needed in today's diverse school settings (Lindsey et al. 2003). This study supports that the actions and practices of professors in educational leadership doctoral programs can be influential in fostering students' growth. The challenge is to foster that ongoing growth not only for students but also as professors as we create learning communities committed to attaining both equity and excellence.

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***Realizing Higher Education's Humanizing Potential:  
Assessment as a Dialogical Act***

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**INTRODUCTION**

More than a decade ago, Mary Huba and Jann Freed (2000) advised higher education assessment practitioners to reframe their practice from one focused on teaching to one focused on learning. Despite numerous discourses, political panels, and professional conferences, higher education assessment stands at a similar cross-road as it did when Huba and Freed penned their work, though the discourses of accountability, quality, and institutional effectiveness have complicated the practice of assessment for learning considerably. Yet, to argue these forces should simply go away would be the scholarly equivalent of an ostrich sticking its head in the sand. Instead, the community of higher education scholars must consider a means by which higher education assessment serves a full gambit of technical, political, societal, and, most importantly, individual (i.e. students and faculty) needs. In short, we are in need of another paradigm shift.

In this paper, I discuss a means of considering assessment practice in higher education anew. At its core, higher education assessment is a dialogical act; *a human endeavor in which people encounter each other to name the world and what they value in education*. This notion of assessment is rooted in the Freirian concept of dialogue, though it may also be influenced by the works of Bhaktin (1982), Guba and Lincoln (1989), or other scholars of discourse and humanizing evaluation. Dialogue into the dominant paradigm of higher education assessment is of paramount importance if assessment is to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and maintain a focus on equity, ethics, and humanization. Without a clear undergirding philosophy of the true meaning and value of assessment, higher education will likely have—if it has not already—fundamental tenets forced upon its practice of assessment. These forced tenets will likely not comport with the core values of knowledge creation, dissemination, and service valued in academe.

First, I briefly review the literature of higher education assessment to highlight a variety of discourses traditionally guiding assessment practice yet providing, at best, minimal meaning and value. I then explain how the Freirian concepts of dialogue and praxis could serve as a frame through which higher education assessment can be theorized and practiced from a constructivist rather than a positivist paradigm. Finally, I address potential implications of this paradigm shift and focus on the deeper meaning of assessment linked to constructivist paradigms. This conceptual analysis is meant to be the initiation of an evolving and interactive dialogue about the meaning and value of assessment and the potential it holds for higher education and society. My intention is to express the potential of assessment as a dialogical act and urge the scholarly community of professors of educational administration to engage in dialogue about this paradigm shift. Doing so reorients the theorization of higher education assessment from being a discourse of technique toward participatory, critical pedagogies that focus on humanization and growth as an end rather than a process. There can be no more meaningful venue in which to initiate such dialogue than in a scholarly journal themed around social justice and quality and read widely by the nation's professors of educational administration.

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND ASSESSMENT**

Few clear connections between educational philosophy and assessment exist in the literature, most likely because few efforts to articulate epistemological, ontological, or axiological positions for assessment have been considered. Instead, the form assessment takes “stands in” as the guiding ethos for why assessment is done, for a “philosophy” of assessment. Higher education assessment, if it can be thought of as an organic, living profession, has settled into a routine wherein techniques or proclamations related to

assessment have become the reason assessment is done, thereby negating the noble intentions of supporting student learning and instructor development. Gunzenhauser (2003) offered the idea of a *default philosophy*, a system of thought entrenching itself in important philosophical spaces for assessment simply because no true, enlightening philosophy exists. A default philosophy often takes the form of a routine or widely-accepted action masquerading as a philosophy (i.e., not a full philosophy) simply because no philosophy exists. In its fullest form, a philosophy offers meaning and value to phenomena whereas default philosophies remain tacit and unexplored because of their seemingly intractable, soothing, familiar, or safe nature. Default philosophies of assessment, for example, are seldom examined because they do, after all, help assessment practitioners *get through* various assessment situations. While a default philosophy provides clarity on the manner in which an act should be carried out, it seldom provides an understanding of deeper meaning and value. This unfortunate situation arises because some other system of thought or action presents itself as the most amenable, least troubling way through assessment. All too often, the busy pace of professional life crowds out one's ability to reflect upon a philosophy of assessment or on how assessment generates knowledge and results in new truths. Philosophical reflections are difficult work, though work that must be undertaken and made transparent if assessment is to have meaning or value to learning and society.

In response, Gunzenhauser (2003) offered the most useful, meaningful definition of a philosophy: "Philosophy of education addresses why we educate so that we make better choices about whom, what, where, when, and how we educate. A philosophy of education provides answers to fundamental questions about the role of education in a society" (p. 52). In a system operating under a full philosophy, techniques or methods do not completely encapsulate epistemological or ontological questions. Instead, method supports inquiry into the meaning and value of a phenomenon. As Postman (1995) posited a full philosophy of education

has nothing whatsoever to do with computers, with testing, with teacher accountability, with class size, and with the other details of managing schools. The right answer depends on two things, and two things alone: the existence of shared narratives and the capacity of such narratives to provide an inspired reason for schooling. (p. 18)

Issues of accountability, metrics, or reporting often become the reason assessment is done and are vital factors to assessment success, commanding extensive study in the scholarship on assessment. As Astin (1991) wrote:

An institution's assessment practices are a reflection of its values. In other words, the values of an institution are revealed in the information about itself that it gathers and pays attention to.... Assessment practices should further the basic aims and purposes of our higher education institutions. We might consider these two premises, respectively, as the "is" and the "ought" of assessment in higher education. (p. 3)

Likewise, Courts and McInerney (1993) reminded practitioners: "the approaches to assessment we choose to adopt, adapt, or create will reflect our assumptions about the nature of learning and the roles of the participants" (p. 16). Astin (1991) and Courts and McInerney (1993) describe an axiological state of assessment that is little more than a *reflection* of institutional values and not the values themselves.

With the notable exceptions of their work, few scholars of higher education have explored a philosophy of assessment. Astin's work offered unique insights on the entrenchment of default philosophies for assessment. In no instances in his seminal text, *Assessment for Excellence*, did Astin, (1991) reference epistemology, ontology, or axiology of assessment, offering instead a methodological framework for assessment (e.g., Astin's well-known I-E-O Model). Although Astin never proclaimed a philosophy of higher education assessment, his work remains the most widely-cited text (See Budd & Magnuson, 2010), consistently held up by assessment scholars and practitioners as offering *the* philosophy of educational assessment.

## TRADITIONAL PARADIGMS AND THEIR PERSUASIONS

If one probes the philosophical foundations of assessment, one sees a variety of default philosophies at play. Almost unanimously, higher education assessment scholars define the core value of assessment as improved student learning (Angelo, 1996; Astin, Banta, Cross, El-Khawas, Ewell, & Hutchings, et al., 1994; Banta & Associates, 2002; Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Maki, 2010; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Suskie, 2009). However, the literature on higher education is equally-dominated by a focus on form, technique, and, most importantly, process. Perhaps inordinately so, the form assessment takes or standards in the application of forms (i.e. statistical cut-offs, criteria levels, power analyses, or tradition) dominate the literature on assessment and preclude scholars' abilities or desires to address unexplored philosophical issues. Similar to Postman's argument that philosophy of education has nothing to do with testing or accountability, *the form assessment takes does not—rather, should not—define the full meaning and value of assessment*. Instead, form of assessment serves as a suggestive artifact of what an institutional culture values and finds meaningful in the education of its students.

There is indeed worth in the scholarship of form - that is, the scholarship guiding the effective practice of assessment. Any philosophy which undermines the validity and reliability with which assessment data are made meaningful and valuable is as equally disastrous as any unexplored, default philosophy. However, the scholarship of form commands a great deal of attention in the literature and has come to stand in for the real reason assessment is done. In contrast, the scholarship of assessment's philosophy and logic is undeveloped (Astin, 1991). Assessment practitioners face daily challenges to both produce functional, effective assessment results and ponder the deeper meaning and purpose of their craft.

Given this reliance on tacit assumptions, process and technique stand in as the default philosophy for assessment. The literature defining assessment is decidedly process- and production-oriented. Angelo (1996), for example, defined assessment as “an ongoing *process* aimed at understanding and improving student learning” (p. 7, emphasis added). Palomba and Banta (1999) contextualized assessment as “the *systematic* collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development” (p. 4, emphasis added). Huba and Freed (2000) called assessment “the *process* of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences” (p. 8, emphasis added). Suskie (2009) described assessment as “an ongoing *process* of establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning and systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches our expectations” (p. 3, emphasis added), while Maki (2010) contended assessment is:

A systemic and systematic *process* of examining student work against our standards of judgment, it enables us to determine the fit between what we expect our students to be able to demonstrate or represent and what they actually do demonstrate or represent at points along their educational careers.... Assessment is also a *process* of decisions and actions. (pp. 3–4, emphasis added)

The efforts of these respected assessment scholars and practitioners are decidedly focused on assessment as a process, a set of technical manipulations aimed at production of data. Common to all definitions is the understanding that assessment is a process focusing on student learning.

While Astin (1991) defined the fundamental purpose of assessment as enhancing students' educational development, he also pointed out “most assessment practices today are not well suited to higher education's basic purposes, and some practices would appear even to undermine those purposes” (p. 4). Ratcliff, Lubinescu, and Gaffney (2001) echoed Astin's sentiment stating:

There are many purposes of assessment. For example, assessment can be used in maintenance of standards, admissions, motivation of students, and feedback purposes for both teachers and students. The purposes of assessment may overlap and be reciprocal or can conflict.... (p. 15)

Additional reasons assessment's name is evoked include more pragmatic goals such as new student recruitment efforts, demonstrating external accountability, fundraising, and improving instruction (Ewell, 2002). However, the literature and discourse on assessment also suggest that assessment is driven by

alternative goals, such as accountability (e.g. Burke & Associates, 2005; Ligenfelter, 2003; Sirotnik, 2004), accreditation (e.g. Ewell, 2005; Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001; Wolff, 2005), methodology or technique (e.g. Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Cross & Steadman, 1996; Gonyea & Kuh, 2009; Popham, 1999; Suskie, 2009; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996), power or politics (e.g. Anderson, 2006; Foucault, 1991; Hacking, 1991; Morley, 2003; Skolnik, 1989, 2009), or other goals. These alternate forms stand in for what is valued in assessment practice and seemingly provide, by *default*, some basic level of meaning for assessment. While these forms direct much of the daily actions of assessment practitioners, they provide little more than basic meaning and value to their practice.

The scholarly literature documents a challenge for the emergence of a full philosophy of assessment. Assessment—or, at least, the scholarship on assessment—is beset by an inordinate focus on technique, accountability, accreditation, or power, each serving as a default philosophy for assessment and providing an undertheorized reason assessment is done. This is problematic for a function of the modern institution espoused to focus on improvement, quality, and clarification of values since assessment's ability to improve, demonstrate quality in its own practice, and its values are unclear.

Business, technological, or accreditation aims for assessment are important, yet, they are neither the reason assessment is done nor the facets of its foundation that provide assessment with meaning and value. To argue that assessment should simply be *less-business-like* or *less-technical* ignores very real and useful facets of contemporary assessment practice that could offer pragmatic uses and, thus, value. A higher education system that does not stay attuned with business or market values is one detached from reality, though such reality is only partially-explanatory of higher education's overall mission to society. Likewise, an institutional culture completely devoid of technical expertise lacks legitimacy. Scholarly literature has revealed the dominance of these default philosophies in assessment practice and attempts to reorient assessment away from these undergirding efforts will likely result in little significant effect. Higher education assessment has long been criticized for an inability to demonstrate student success and for being detached from core values of education (Fendrich, 2007; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Veblen, 1918). This lack of effect stems from disconnects between assessment's practice and its philosophy. Whereas practical guidelines and methodological best practices are clearly delineated and constitute the majority of the literature on assessment, philosophical treatments of assessment's foundations have yet to emerge.

A full philosophy of assessment—one that explains how assessment results in new knowledge and truths about the world in which education occurs—is needed. This philosophy cannot neglect the default philosophies and pragmatic pressures on assessment practitioners. Technique, business, accountability, and accreditation—with all of their complexities—must be addressed in any exploration of the epistemological, ontological, and axiological foundations of assessment. This full philosophy requires a new paradigm to be fully realized. This call is not unlike many that have come before it (Banta & Associates, 2002; Huba & Freed, 2001), though the paradigm shift envisioned for assessment, is, I believe, quite nuanced and holds promise. Assessment reenvisioned as a *dialogical act* derives its meaning and value from a variety of constructivist theories related primarily to Freire's notions of *dialogue* and *praxis*. In the following section I offer an initial framework of dialogical for consideration by the scholarly community. Further dialogue into the nature and philosophy of assessment as a dialogical act is warranted and necessary to bring this initial framework into great clarity and reorient future educational leaders to a new meaningful philosophy of assessment.

## **ASSESSMENT AS A DIALOGICAL ACT**

Assessment practitioners have an immense opportunity and responsibility in reinforcing and redefining the values of education (Astin, 1991; Gunzenhauser, 2003). Further, they possess an innate, though often unrecognized and underutilized, creative capacity. They often serve as a bridge and buffer between internal and external constituencies and balance the conserving and transforming functions of educational reform (Postman, 1995). Every question they pose, every technique they implement, every project they engage in results in a litany of new thoughts and are often scrutinized by a multitude of colleagues, committees, and units. Daily, assessment practitioners find ways to champion assessment results through to fruition (i.e. change or celebration of results) and in bringing disparate parties together to discuss findings. Given their creative capacity and influence, they are naturally situated to serve as leaders of campus dialogue on student learning.

### *Higher Education's Humanizing Potential*

There is a certain amount of confusion about *dialogue*. The term is often used in political, and by extension, educational, circles as somewhat of a buzzword. In this sense, dialogue often represents speech or discussions—for whatever ambitions—given by a leader to individuals. Freire (1970) offered a more meaningful, scholarly view on dialogue, not as a one-sided pronouncement but as an interactive encounter between individuals, a philosophy represented by his concepts of *dialogue* and *praxis*. For Freire (1970) dialogue was “the encounter between man, mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (p. 88). Naming the world is a uniquely complex concept. It is far more meaningful than simply saying “this is that,” though dialogue can take such oversimplified form. Ultimately, Freire’s concept of dialogue has an extension of larger discursive exploration and is related to the works of Bakhtin, Hegel, Habermas, and Buber, for example.

However, Freire’s theory is particularly germane to educational philosophy as his work focused on pedagogical philosophy and liberating instruction. Like similar discursive theories, Freirean dialogue upheld language and knowledge as more than mere manifestations of power; they *are* power. Thus, utterances, no matter how seemingly trivial, occur in a power laden context. To say, “this is that,” for example, carries the implied notion—especially in academe—that one possesses the power, expertise, knowledge, or legitimacy to make such pronouncements. It also connotes an understanding of one’s positioning within the world and within the power complex, particularly in relation to others. For this reason, Freire’s concept of dialogue is contingent upon interaction and *encounter* between individuals. One cannot engage in dialogue alone as dialogue occurs in a discursive, human sphere of context, laden with power and encounters of humans in communion with each other and the world.

While a dialogically-named world is critical to Freire’s (1970) philosophy, naming the world must result in *praxis*, “action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (p. 79). Through *praxis*, the world is changed, improved, even recreated. *Praxis* cannot be imposed upon a group of people; true transformation is obtained by collaborators working in communion or concert with individuals. However, without an encounter between man to name the world (*dialogue*), the transformation of the world (*praxis*) is futile and often favors specific, limited values or power systems. Thus, to fully achieve a more liberating, meaningful state, *dialogue* and *praxis* must be inextricably connected. Having delineated an understanding of these critical terms in Freire’s philosophy, I now turn to addressing the manner in which assessment practice can be reenvisioned as a dialogical act.

#### **How is Assessment Dialogical?**

Ultimately, I offer opportunities for higher education assessment practitioners, faculty, and leaders to consider how assessment is naturally dialogical and for constructing a framework for theorizing about assessment as a dialogical act. If one peels back the layers of terminology and unpacks the jargon of assessment one finds, at its core, that assessment is essentially a series of encounters between the people of higher education to name the world, to arrive at truths and make meaning about the world in which higher education occurs. When viewed as a dialogical act, assessment empowers the people of higher education—by which I mean faculty, administrators, staff, students, parents, and a wider range of constituents—to engage in naming and changing the world, a vaunted value that is more than mere lip service.

The naming of the world in assessment contexts may take a variety of forms. In assessment practitioner parlance, this transformation of the world is synonymous with *advocacy* or *closing the loop*. Action upon the word is the ultimate focus of Freirian philosophy just as improvement and change are the goals of assessment. Educators coming together, either formally or informally, to articulate what they value in a curriculum given the current contexts is an over simplified example of the dialogical foundations of assessment. Naming the world may be represented by faculty and students collaboratively naming the learning goals they hope to obtain, taking into account students’ prior learning and the realities of academic life. Regardless of form—as surely a multitude of forms abound—the fundamental goal of dialogue is to “create a process of learning and knowing that invariably involves theorizing about the experiences shared in the dialogue process” (Macedo, 1970, p. 17). Given the multiform nature of dialogical assessment, it is less critical that the variety of forms is accounted for or described and more important that an understanding of dialogue as a way of knowing is realized. For Freire (1995), “dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task” (p. 379). Dialogical assessment is an articulation of a new way of knowing that supports higher education peoples’

capacity to understand and transform student learning. This connection to critical and participatory pedagogy alone warrants further exploration of dialogical assessment. However, such a reconceptualization is likely also supportive of many of the aims of accreditation and accountability efforts.

Nonetheless, an example of form offers perhaps the clearest understanding of assessment reenvisioned in this manner. Therefore, I briefly outline how a widely-acknowledged model of assessment is naturally dialogical. In doing so I rely on Huba and Freed’s (2000) *Assessment Process* (Figure 1) and, occasionally, additional models of assessment to demonstrate the dialogical nature of the phenomena.

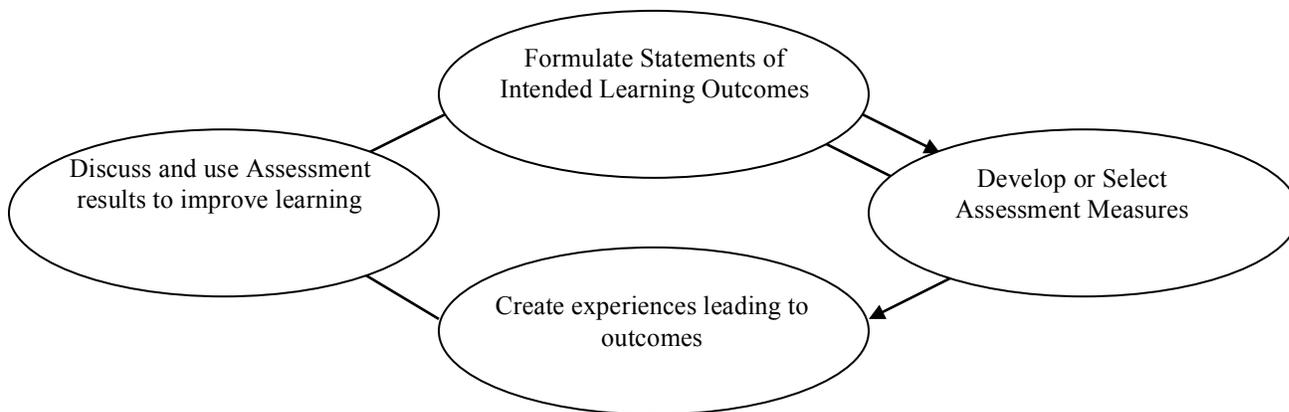


Figure 1. Huba and Freed’s Assessment Process (2000, p. 10)

**Articulating student outcomes.** Most assessment models, including Huba and Freed’s (2000), suggests assessment should begin by clearly articulating student learning outcomes (Banta & Associates, 2002; Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Maki, 2010). These important statements outline what students are *supposed* to be able to do with knowledge as a result of their educational experiences (Huba & Freed, 2000). The articulation of student learning outcomes lends itself to a dialogical frame in as much as this effort should be collegial, interactive, iterative, and reflective (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Maki, 2010). Articulating what an educator intends students to learn inherently implies consideration of what students have yet to learn and is thus a naming of current contexts. When crafted through dialogue, student learning outcomes are a representation of what educators—and occasionally students—value in education. They are perhaps the most tangible representation of the values undergirding educational practice. Outcome statements are not objective and are highly-value laden, suggesting an interpretivist or constructivist approach to assessment’s philosophy, discussed later.

**Developing or selecting methods.** The development or selection of sound assessment techniques—for, example, survey methodologies, focus group efforts, portfolio processes, rubrics, and performance based assessment processes—commands a significant portion of the assessment practitioner’s time and energies. And, rightfully so. The tools utilized to assess student learning are yet another articulation of the values of an institution’s culture of assessment (Astin, 1991). Research design plans are more than explanations of how statistical analyses will occur. They are articulations of preferred modes of knowing and empowered epistemological and ontological paradigms. Similarly, assessment methods are articulations of the value an institutional community places on comparison, the exploration of difference or deviance from normality, and a focus on populations or individuals, for example.

The use and criticism of valid and reliable measurement tools is also the primary means through which assessment practitioners gain legitimacy throughout their community. Ultimately, assessment tools result in data subjected to human interpretations and are antecedents to new knowledge generated through assessment. As human creations in a value-laden sphere, tools represent the values of an institution’s culture of assessment and carry aspects of this culture’s views of reality and hopes for the future. *Thus, the processes and techniques we use to measure the world are an implied naming of the world, even if they*

*have not been theorized as such.* When assessment tools are selected in communion with colleagues and constituents, a wider collection of meaningful and valuable measurement tools emerge ultimately supporting the generation of highly meaningful and valuable data, subsequent interpretations, and namings of the world.

**Creating experiences leading to outcomes.** Most faculty develop the learning experiences for their course with a motivation to change the world (Latucca & Stark, 2009). This desire to improve society or solve some problem provides higher education with relevance and takes on a deeper meaning when theorized from the Freirian frame of praxis. First, the disconnects between teaching, learning, and assessment are often resolved when assessment practices are guided by a clear grounding in what a professor desires for student learning (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Huba & Freed, 2000). Beyond praxis, learning experiences are often encounters between faculty and students to navigate the complexities of the world as seen through the lens of a specific discipline or theoretical perspective. As such, learning experiences are the point at which dialogue, and thus learning, occurs. Under assessment envisioned as a dialogical act, learning experiences cease to be mere classroom techniques and are transformed into active encounters of naming and changing the world. Learning episodes become more than mere experiences in a class, the lectures or recitations of traditional education. They become the encounter in which faculty, together with students, transform the world. An often-uttered limitation of assessment is that it has become detached from the curricular and cocurricular learning discourses on a campus (Huba & Freed, 2000; Maki, 2010; Suskie, 2009). The inordinate focus on external factors such as accountability and accreditation nearly assure this separation as faculty are often insulated from the intrusions of such influences (Driscoll, de Noriega, & Ramaley, 2006). Moreover assessment conducted from the accountability or accreditation frames of reference are temporally limited, having meaning within the timeframe of a report's purpose or in meeting a mandate. If, however, the overarching philosophy of assessment is dialogue, learning is more likely to be starting point of exploration and a lifelong commitment to feedback and dialogue.

Without a focus on dialogue a unique paradox in the current paradigm of assessment will persist; That is, *current assessment practices have become almost entirely detached from the learning that most colleges and universities provide.* For the most part, teaching and learning are still individual encounters. When the subject of assessment—and especially assessment done for accountability and accreditation-related purposes—enters the fray, the translation of a highly-meaningful, individual-level, formative encounter has not traditionally lent itself well to measurement or representation as population statistics or data. This problem arises not because learning experiences or assessment tools are flawed, as traditional critiques of assessment (Fendrich, 2007; Mentkowski, Astin, Ewell, & Moran, 1991) maintain, though if flaws in learning experiences and assessment tools are noted, learning is certainly prone to ill-depicted measurements or observations of limited worth. Instead, the uncritiqued, seemingly intractable assumption that measurement and assessment can be employed from a traditional, positivist paradigm is flawed not because positivism is wrong, but because it is seldom subjected to the rigors of philosophical inquiry and is mismatched with the deeper meaning and value of higher education assessment.

External constituencies (such as businesses, government agencies, and citizens) desire a level of inclusion in collegiate learning to which higher education people have previously been unaccustomed. These constituencies often question quality in their respective fields, professions and offices and they make subsequent changes in production. These changes are easily measured and documented using methods traditionally associated in conjunction with a positivist paradigm. Moreover, these external constituencies often enjoy successes or at least ease of implementation in obtaining some measured goal and definitively, concretely measuring success.

External constituents desire end results in learning that positivism is poorly equipped to provide. External constituencies desire the end results in student learning constructivism advances, yet they desire the easily digested knowledge about the learning associated with the language and spirit of positivism. While attempts to represent learning in the language of positivism can be made and are, indeed, done daily by assessment practitioners, educators and students are inextricably locked in a constructivist paradigm of learning through creation (Noddings, 2006), the spirit of which cannot be translated to the measured, objectivist truth of positivism. The current assessment paradigm has remained persistently perplexed by this dilemma and meaning and value are lost in translation of formative encounters to bureaucratic purposes assessment must serve.

**Discuss and use assessment results for improvement.** Following the implementation of learning encounters and the collection of data, colleagues should gather to interpret and discuss findings (Huba & Freed, 2001). Interpretation of findings is an interactive encounter between educators to name the world as represented by assessment data. Assessment practitioners spend much of their time supporting this dialogue, though few would label their work as such, deferring instead to what assessment scholars term *closing the loop* (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Maki, 2010). Assessment practitioners advocate for faculty as they name and transform the world in which education occurs (praxis), resulting in a changed reality and the necessity to rename the world. The dialogical process is born anew, reflecting the iterative, cyclical qualities of assessment noted by Bresciani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004), Huba and Freed (2001), and Maki (2010).

### **THE ASSESSMENT PRACTITIONER’S ROLE AS CULTURE CIRCLE LEADER**

A recent administration of the Survey of Assessment Culture <sup>©™</sup> revealed that over sixty percent of America’s institutional research and assessment directors are formally tasked with supporting faculty and administrators’ engagement in assessment processes (Fuller, 2012). This situates them at a critical nexus within the dialogue network of an institution. Assessment practitioners are often the only voice of support for higher education people who have either been silenced or silent, further connecting them to critical and participatory pedagogies. Students, for example, have often stood as a silent majority to whom education is done rather than with whom it is encountered. This exclusion is duly noted in the literature on assessment with many scholars (Ewell, 2002; Maki, 2010; Stiggins, 2007) calling for more liberating forms of assessment. Assessment practitioners have been recognized as agents of change (Suskie, 2009; Wolff, 2005) for higher education. However, their agency has seldom been connected to the wider discourses of social justice and equity, perhaps owing to the objectivist epistemology undergirding positivism. If, instead, assessment practitioners considered the realist ontology of constructivism as favorable, they could serve as *culture circle leader*.

The pedagogical applications of Freire’s dialogue and praxis are lived out through culture circles. In these settings, the culture circle leader and collaborative learners encounter each other, mediated by their view of the world, to discuss *generative themes* that have significance to the learners’ lives (Freire, 1970). Data and ensuing interpretations serve as *codifications* of the world, initial interpretations of the educational context of student and faculty lives. Initial graphical representations—charts, graphs, or statistical output—resemble the codifications of innate meaning inherent in assessment discourse. As these codifications grow in sophistication, learners begin to ascribe words and, thus, meaning and value to data representing their world. This process of translating data from their raw, uninterpreted forms, into codifications, and later, meaningful constructs has been studied by scholars such as Popham (2006) and Stiggins (2007), though few researchers have explored this translation in higher education contexts and none have examined this process from a Freirian frame. It is therefore important to warrant that Freire (1978) was concerned with “the problems of education in a systematic way” (p. 11) and Freire (1995) and Macedo (1970), both caution against the tendency to mechanize Freirian thought in the development of culture circles.

### **Issues of Common Language**

One of the most challenging roles facing culture circle leaders is the issue of communication in light of disparate, varied discourses. In assessment scholarship, much attention is given to benefits of a *common language* (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Maki, 2010; Suskie, 2009; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996) from which assessment encounters can occur. Moreover, virtually every aspect of Huba and Freed’s (2001) *Assessment Process* is enhanced by the presence of a common framework through which assessment can be discussed across disciplines and units. Certainly expediency of process is supported if all involved operate from a normative sense of what words mean. However, no such utopian system of discourse exists. Instead, *dialects of prestige* and *prescribed languages* counter the notion of a common language. As Pullum (2004) stated, prescribed languages result in social differentials since someone trained in the use of a particular language holds a dialect of prestige over someone unfamiliar with the workings of this language. Even with the existence of a common language—in fact, especially in that instance—

assessment practitioners hold a dialect of prestige over the administrators, faculty, and students with whom they engage.

Each discipline has its own highly developed language prescribed through generally accepted practice and regulatory agencies. Accreditation bodies also leverage a dialect of prestige enacting power in higher education settings. Such prescribed language is not, in itself, problematic. One could imagine the chaos and drudgery that would ensue if disciplines did not have specific terms for the intricate issues they face. The problem is not in the existence of prescribed languages; it is in their uncritiqued use as discourses of power. Freire (1970, p. 47) stated, "every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another." The assessment practitioner committed to dialogical assessment cannot cling to a codified lexicon of terms to translate the language of each discipline into a central language of assessment to reinforce their dialect of prestige and power over colleagues. They must, instead remain flexible with their own preferences in terminology and technique while engaging in dialogue with other higher educators to illuminate linguistic differences and explore the relation of power and discourse in daily encounters.

New potentials stem from the realization that assessment practitioners' work relates to the wider body of critical pedagogy and issues of common language are only one such potential. Further exploration is warranted and necessary if assessment is to be reenvisioned as a dialogical act. To that end, I now focus on the implications of this paradigm shift for higher education assessment, addressing first the notion that dialogical assessment is uniquely constructivist and, second, serves liberating, radical ends.

#### **IMPLICATIONS OF DIALOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

Perhaps most significantly, this paradigm shift toward assessment as a dialogical act moves assessment from the positivist or post-positivist theoretical frame in which assessment has traditionally and is currently practiced to constructivist paradigms, of which Freirian thought is one. This shift is dramatically different from the current, positivist or post-positivist persuasion of assessment. First, it signals the need for assessment practitioners to operate not as *technical-gatherers-of-information* but as culture circle leaders and active, yet collaborative agents in institutional knowledge creation processes. The deep meaning of this paradigm shift rests in the advancement of assessment serving not the discovery of singular, objective truths, but in the creation of diverse, multiple perspectives on the world in which education occurs, each negotiated via human encounters. Assessment reenvisioned as a dialogical act requires practitioners to orchestrate negotiations of meaning making. Dialogical assessment relies on a relativist ontology and a subjective epistemology and thus is connected to humanization and participatory pedagogy. Of these epistemological and ontological leanings, Guba and Lincoln (1989) wrote "convinced that there exists some single, true reality, driven by natural laws, open to discovery and harnessing by the methods of science, positivists reject all relativist views, of which constructivism is one, as not only seriously in error but pernicious and repugnant" (p. 16). In contrast, if assessment is practiced under a constructivist paradigm, the objectivist, realist ontology of positivism is accepted as one truth among many, a philosophical stance more fitting of the negotiated nature of assessment encounters. Constructivists may argue the positivist paradigm lacks relevance to reality, but they cannot maintain a relativist ontology and argue that positivism as a paradigm for assessment is wrong or untrue (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The nature of truth in dialogical assessment is one of a constructed reality. It maintains a focus not on knowledge that is generated only through supposedly objectivist measurement, but the socially-constructed nature of encounters between individuals. This is not to say that measurement plays no role in dialogical assessment. Indeed, assessment solely divested from traditional, scientific methods of knowledge derivation seems foreign and meaningless. This framework does not call for the complete renunciation of scientific or quantitative methods. Instead, measurement ceases to be the sole process of understanding in dialogical assessment. Negotiated human encounters assume their meaningful and valuable position in assessment activities. Positivist-oriented measurement processes represent one of many namings of the world, albeit a seemingly intractable naming with a technical language all its own. This framework focuses on the human constructions that occur before, during, and after traditional assessment processes and offers a way for scholars to theorize about the manner in which assessment processes support the generation of new knowledge and how they can best support this negotiated process. The deeper promise of assessment as a dialogical act is not in its ability to provide for better measurement of student learning

but to more broadly negotiate the matters of humanization, individual development, and pluralized visions of quality in higher education and student learning. A synthetic, complete focus on the manner in which assessment makes meaning in human contexts and the barriers to assessment as a dialogical act are absent in the literature and warrant continued theorization. Introducing future educational leaders to constructivist paradigms for assessment improves their capacity to respond to complex assessment-related issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to engage a wider range of constituents in humanizing assessment.

## CONCLUSION

Assessment as a dialogical act requires much consideration by the scholarly community if its humanizing meaning and value are to take root. The implications of this paradigm shift are vast and can re-orient assessment to its touted virtue of humanization and growth rather than adherence to technical standards. The future of this paradigm shift is unclear given the seeming intractability and pragmatism of the current positivist orientation of assessment. Measurement of student learning may, for some time, very well continue to represent the entirety of higher education assessment's meaning and value. However, I, and I believe many other assessment scholars and practitioners, have more grandiose hopes for assessment in higher education. For too long, assessment has remained the possession of the skilled expert or a single administrator. Contextualized as such, assessment is limited in its scope, meaning, value, and, thus, capacity to make realistic change and have any meaningful influence in students' lives. But when reenvisioned as a dialogical act and engaging wider academic and external communities, assessment supports realistic and generative capacities to transform higher education and student abilities. Ultimately, this dialogical paradigm enlivens participatory pedagogical roots for assessment, foundations which will crumble if left unattended.

This paradigm shift will not be without detractors and Freire (1995) encourages educators to embrace the political and contested nature of education. Nothing of any social importance remains unpolitical or easy. Educators must, as Freire (1995) notes, "unveil opportunities for hope, regardless of the obstacles" (p. 9). As the scholarly community of professors of educational administration embarks on a dialogue into the nature and potential of assessment as a dialogical act, a variety of questions will arise. Do dialogue and praxis augment the methods or practice of assessment? How does language draw together or distance individuals? What levels of greater detail can be structured around the notion of assessment as a dialogical act? Despite these uncertainties and complexities, a great challenge is before higher education and it is a challenge that can be met through the careful inquiry and creative innovation of scholars and practitioners. The framework for assessment introduced herein requires mind and skills, heart and soul, and above all, practitioners capable of reinforcing the connections between assessment and higher education's core educational functions of enlightenment and humanization. Many constituencies recognize the need for a higher form of assessment serving student and societal betterment. Now, the community of scholars and practitioners must respond in kind and construct a new perspective on higher education assessment. Though challenging, I see no more meaningful and valuable means to achieving this state than assessment as a dialogical act.

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## ***Racial Disparities in School Discipline: A Matter of Social Justice***

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A concern for social justice is at the core of democracy. The United States prides itself on being a fair and just democracy, a nation in which every citizen is to be treated equally in social, economic, political, and educational arenas (Corning, 2012). According to its Constitution, the United States seeks to establish “liberty and justice for all.” In spite of these goals, U.S. society is composed of many inequities: rich and poor, educated and illiterate, powerful and powerless (Schutz, 2012). Now in the second decade of the twenty-first century, educational leaders must continue to question whether they have an obligation to create a nation whose words are supported by the experiences of its citizens.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution addressed the question of equal opportunity, declaring that “no state shall deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” The mandate that people receive equal protection extends to equal educational opportunity. While this fundamental affirmation of equal opportunity has been part of American discourse since the inception of this nation and is found in the Declaration of Independence and other documents, inequities in the major social, economic, political, and educational institutions continue to exist in American society.

Of particular interest, the purpose of this paper was to examine racial discrepancies in school discipline for Black and White students. Uneven educational outcomes for various subgroups are unacceptable, as stipulated in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 regarding disaggregated subgroups. All children are expected to have the educational opportunities that will allow them to have successful outcomes. As related specifically to discipline policy, racial disparity in school suspensions is not only morally wrong, but also may demonstrate non-compliance with existing law.

### **RACIAL DISPARITY IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE**

The Black-White achievement gap has long been a concern of educators in America (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Howard, 2011; Murphy, 2010; Paige, 2011). Recognized less often is the accompanying disparity in school suspension rates for Black and White students. Black students, especially males, are suspended three times more often than their White counterparts (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Also, these students are often punished more severely for similar misbehavior (Losen, 2011). Further, Black females are suspended four times as often as White females (Losen & Skiba, 2010). What might be referred to as the “racial discipline gap” has been documented since the 1970s (Children’s Defense Fund) and found in discipline records and surveys from single schools (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002), multiple cities (Gordon, Della Piana, & Keleher, 2000), statewide samples (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011), and nationally representative samples of parents (KewelRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007). The disproportionality based on race remains after removing the effects of socioeconomic status (Gregory et al., 2011; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Skiba et al., 2002).

Subgroups experiencing disproportionate suspension from school miss important instructional time and are at greater risk of disengagement and diminished educational opportunities (Losen, 2011). Suspended students are more likely to be truant, drop out of school, receive low grades, and experience increased risk of antisocial behavior following suspension. A review of the available evidence suggests that the racial discipline gap may contribute to the parallel gaps in achievement and graduation rates (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

For more than a decade, researchers have distinguished between characteristics that predict school effectiveness and the social equity of schools (i.e., distribution of achievement across groups; Lee & Bryk, 1989). Federal policy in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that schools disaggregate student achievement data by race and ethnicity. A recent national report on Black and White student achievement provided an informative breakdown by state (Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). On average, the nation had a 31-point Black-White gap in eighth grade mathematics achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test. In recognition of the trends observed in measures of the

achievement gap, the present paper made a similar distinction between suspension rates for racial groups, specifically in those rates between Black and White students.

### FREQUENCY AND RACIAL DISPARITY IN SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS

Policies that result in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions are described as “exclusionary,” because they remove students from school (Losen, 2011). The emphasis of the analysis in this paper is focused on “out of school” suspensions, rather than expulsions, because the numbers of suspensions is significantly higher than the numbers of expulsions. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2006), more than 3.25 million students, or nearly 7% of all students enrolled in K-12 schools, were estimated to have been suspended at least once. In contrast, the same U.S. Department of Education data estimated 102,077 expulsions.

Existing data strongly suggest increasing use of exclusion as well as clear patterns of racial disparity. School suspensions have risen steadily since the early 1970s, and racial disparities have increased considerably as well (Losen & Skiba, 2010). (See Figure 1.)

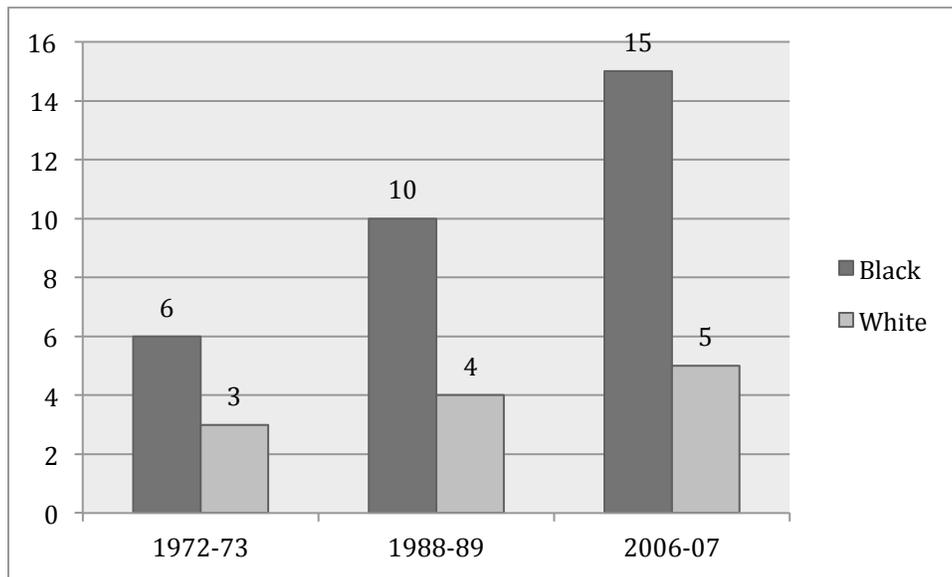


Figure 1. Racial impact of the rising use of suspension.

The data show substantial increases for all students, with a growing racial discipline gap. Specifically, K-12 suspension rates have more than doubled since the early 1970s for Black students. Concurrently, the Black-White gap more than tripled, rising from a difference of three percentage points in the 1970s to over 10 percentage points in 2006, when more than one out of every seven Black students enrolled was suspended from school at least once.

### Middle School, Race and Gender

According to a recent report, *Suspended Education: Urban Middle Schools in Crisis* (Losen & Skiba, 2010), racial and gender disparities at the middle-school level showed much higher rates than appear when aggregate K-12 data are analyzed. For example, based on Office of Civil Rights (OCR) data from every state, 28.3% of Black males in middle school were suspended, compared with just 10% of White males. Moreover, 18% of Black females were suspended, compared with just 3.9% of White females.

### Racial Disparities in School Discipline

Further analysis of the data for 18 of the nation’s largest school districts found that in 15 of them, at least 30% of all enrolled Black males were suspended one or more times (Dillon, 2010). Across these 18 urban districts, hundreds of individual schools had extraordinarily high suspension rates—50% or higher for Black males (Losen & Skiba, 2010). The *Suspended Education* report, based on OCR data, is accessible on-line (see Figure 2).

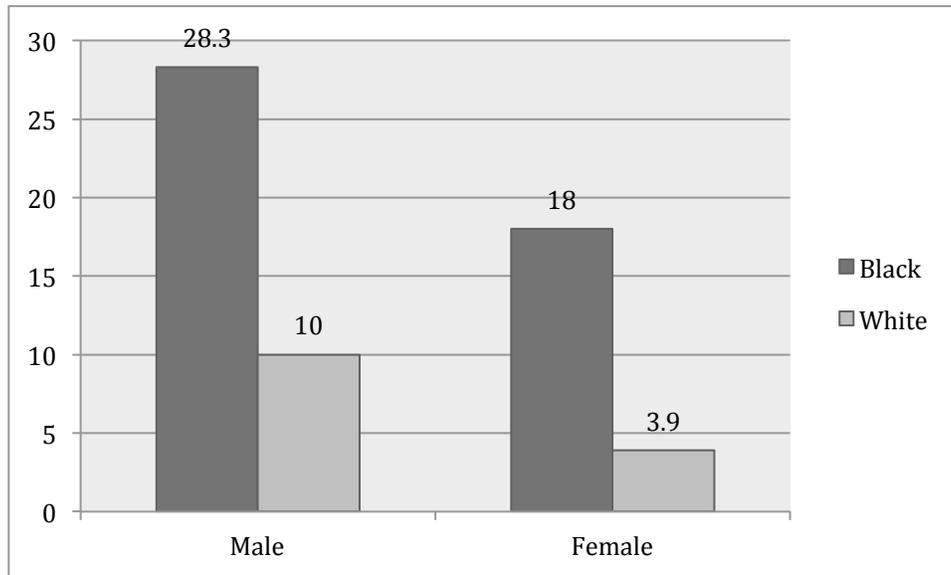


Figure 2. Middle school racial and gender disparities in school suspensions.

### CAN CURRENT RACIAL DISPARITIES IN SUSPENSION BE JUSTIFIED?

The data clearly demonstrate that some student subgroups receive a disproportionate number of exclusionary punishments. Why this situation exists is examined in this section. Are higher suspension rates linked to the severity of misbehavior? Are there educationally justifiable outcomes of suspension? What impact do suspensions have on students who are removed from school?

#### Link between Suspension Rates and the Severity of Misbehavior

Research on student behavior, race, and discipline has found no evidence that Black students’ overrepresentation in school suspension is due to higher rates of misbehavior (Kelly, 2010; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987). In a large-scale study of 21 schools, Bradshaw and colleagues (2010) found that Black students were overrepresented in office discipline referrals compared to other subgroups.

Other studies suggest that racial disproportionalities in discipline are greater in the offense categories that are subjective or vague, and vice versa (Losen, 2011). Specifically, Skiba and colleagues (2002) reviewed racial and gender disproportionalities in school punishments in 19 urban middle schools and found that White students were referred to the office significantly more often for offenses that are relatively easy to document objectively (e.g., smoking, vandalism, leaving school without permission, and using obscene language). Black students, however, were referred more frequently for behaviors that seem to require more subjective judgment (e.g., disrespect, excessive noise, threatening behavior, and loitering). In short, the researchers concluded that there is no evidence that racial disproportionalities in school discipline can be explained by more serious patterns of misbehavior among Black students (Skiba & Horner, 2010). It appears that White students are engaging more often in those misbehaviors that can be documented and counted without much subjectivity or discretion. However, for those offenses that require

a judgment by teachers, school administrators, and others, Black students are disproportionately disciplined more frequently. This suggests two possibilities: perhaps Black students focus their misbehavior on those types of behavioral transgressions that call for a subjective judgment of such misbehavior, or perhaps Black students are being unfairly treated when it comes to disciplining such misbehavior (Losen, 2011).

Similar conclusions are suggested by an analysis of recent data from North Carolina concerning first-time offenders. Black first-time offenders were suspended at higher rates than White first-time offenders for the same minor offenses, including cell-phone use, dress code, disruptive behavior, and public displays of affection (see Figure 3).

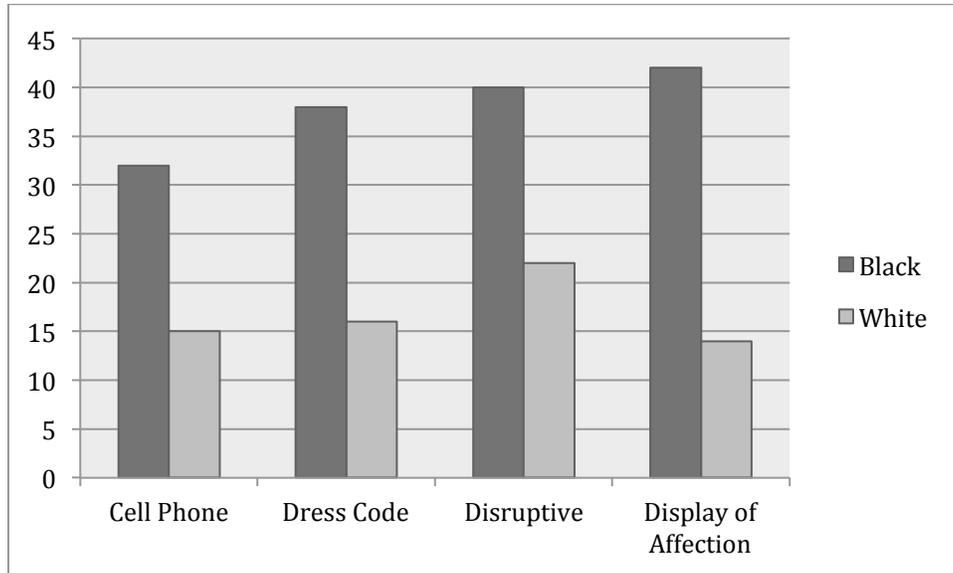


Figure 3. North Carolina black/white suspension rates.

As shown in Figure 3, far higher percentages of Black first-time offenders received out-of-school suspensions than White first-time offenders (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

### Lack of Educationally Justifiable Outcomes of Suspension

Most school suspensions are not for weapons, drugs or violence. Skiba and Rausch (2006) reported that only 5% of all out-of-school suspensions in the state they studied were issued for disciplinary incidents typically considered serious or dangerous, such as possession of weapons, drugs, or violence. The remaining 95% of suspensions fell into two categories: *disruptive behavior* and *other*. Accordingly, the high rates of disciplinary removal from school currently seen in American schools cannot reasonably be attributed to necessary responses to unlawful or dangerous misbehavior (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). What, then, are the arguments that might justify harsh and frequent exclusion policies?

Three reasons appear to account for the common use of out-of-school suspension for non-violent or continual misbehavior (Losen, 2011):

1. Suspension to get parental attention
2. Suspension as a deterrence
3. Suspension to improve the teaching and learning environment

Each one will be discussed in turn.

**Suspension to get parental attention.** The expectation is that more parental involvement will reduce disruptive behavior and, in turn, improve the learning environment. Assuming that a child's

### *Racial Disparities in School Discipline*

persistent misbehavior is a reflection of serious problems or weaknesses attributed to family or home conditions, there is little reason to believe that removing a child from school to spend more time in such a dysfunctional setting will improve future behavior.

Even for the most effective parents, a child's suspension can have harmful ramifications. According to the Academy of American Pediatrics (2003), children who are suspended are often from a population that is the least likely to have supervision at home. According to the 2000 U.S. census, children growing up in homes near or below the poverty level are more likely to be suspended or expelled. Children with single parents are three times as likely to be suspended or expelled from school as children with both parents at home, even when controlling for other sociodemographic factors. Children most likely to be suspended or expelled are those most in need of adult supervision and professional help. Thus, there seems little reason to accept the assertion that suspension will result in productive parental support for the children most likely to be excluded from schools.

**Suspension as a deterrent.** According to the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) and other documentation (Kafka, 2012), there is no evidence that zero-tolerance disciplinary policies and their application to non-violent misbehavior improve school safety or student behavior. Further, in their review of the available research literature on suspension, Losen and Skiba (2010) found that students suspended in sixth grade are more likely to receive office referrals or suspensions by eighth grade, prompting researchers to conclude that suspension may act more as a "reinforcer" than a punisher for inappropriate behavior.

Raffaele Mendez (2003), who studied longitudinal data on students from 150 schools in Florida, found a strong relationship (after controlling for other at-risk factors) between the number of sixth-grade suspensions and the number of seventh- and eighth-grade suspensions. She pointed out that frequent use of suspension alone has no measurable positive deterrent or academic benefit to either the students who are suspended or to non-suspended (observer) students. Others indicated that many urban school districts that suspend large numbers of students provide no real assistance to help them correct their behavioral problems (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). In sum, research offers little support for the theory that suspensions deter future misbehavior.

**Suspension to improve the teaching and learning environment.** Obviously, suspending disruptive children might improve teaching conditions by relieving some of the teacher's stress (Lunenburg & Cadavid, 1992). However, if suspending large numbers of disruptive students helped improve instruction and the learning environment, better academic results should be expected. But this does not seem to occur. Instead, research on the frequent use of school suspension has indicated that, after race and poverty are controlled for, higher rates of out-of-school suspension correlate with lower achievement scores (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

Often, student misbehavior is attributed exclusively to students themselves, but researchers and practitioners alike know that the same student can behave very differently in different classrooms (Losen, 2011). Disruptions tend to increase or decrease with the skill of the teacher in providing engaging instruction and in managing the classroom (Lunenburg & Irby, 2011; Summers, 2012). Researchers also have found a strong relationship between effective classroom management and improved educational outcomes (Emmer & Evertson, 2012; Evertson, Emmer, & Worsham, 2012). And these skills can be learned and developed (Green, 2010). Moreover, research suggests an inverse relationship between student misbehavior and a teacher's ability to engage students (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). As engagement increases, misbehavior and suspensions decrease. Yet despite these apparent relationships to classroom management and quality of instruction, educators often treat student misbehavior as a problem originating solely with students and their parents (Losen, 2011). This ignores the potentially key roles played by teachers, school administrators, teacher professional development, or the school system itself (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012).

### **Impact on Students Who Are Suspended from School**

The notion that schools should remove disruptive students so that well-behaved students can learn violates a commitment to equal educational opportunity for all students. One review of research explored why students drop out of school. The researchers concluded that systematically excluding problematic students from school contributes to student drop out. And failure to provide adequate resources and

supports for such students can contribute to persistent misbehavior (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010) and thereby increase their likelihood of dropping out.

Another study suggests that many students who eventually drop out had exhibited at-risk indicators, including truancy, poor grades, and persistent antisocial behavior, suggesting they need more support or intervention, but adequate help was never provided (Balfanz, 2003; Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Booth, 2011). Consequently, some states and school districts have taken the initiative to treat suspensions and other indicators of misbehavior as early warning indicators of dropout risk. For example, the Massachusetts Department of Education published a report highlighting the high-risk dropout indicators and the need for earlier interventions, citing “numerous suspensions” as among the leading indicators (Vaznis, 2010).

Further, the exclusion of these students presents immediate risks to their academic success in school and overall well-being. According to the Academy of American Pediatrics (2003), without the services of trained professionals (such as pediatricians, mental health professionals, and school counselors) and without a parent at home during the day, students with out-of-school suspensions are far more likely to commit crimes. When youngsters are not in school, they are more likely to become involved in gangs, fights, and to carry a weapon. And the lack of professional assistance at the time of exclusion from school, a time when a student needs it most, increases the risk of permanent school dropout.

In sum, links between suspensions and negative outcomes—such as dropping out and heightened risks to students’ mental and physical well-being—raise serious questions about the justification for suspending children, especially for relatively minor violations. Most expected benefits of suspension have not been documented to date (Fabelo et al., 2011).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

It is important to ascertain what school or educator characteristics can account for the disproportionality in suspension rates for Black and White students. Decades of research on school climate have highlighted the role of student perceptions of the school environment that has relevance for student outcomes (C. Anderson, 1982; Lunenburg, 1983a). This suggests that the application of a school climate/culture framework may prove useful in identifying patterns in suspension rates for Black and White students.

Based on a representative sample of 195 elementary, middle, and high schools from three states (Georgia, West Virginia, and Kentucky), Bulach, Lunenburg, and Potter (2008, 2012), developed a typology of school culture. We classified schools into four types: high-performing, enlightened, permissive, and laissez-faire. We conceptualized the high-performing school as highly demanding (i.e., high standards for academic and behavioral performance) and highly responsive (i.e., students perceive their teachers as caring and concerned about them). Enlightened schools are demanding but not responsive. Permissive schools are more responsive than they are demanding. Schools that are laissez-faire are disengaged, neither demanding nor responsive and do not monitor student performance or behavior.

### **Research on School Cultures**

In a sample of approximately 7,000 high school students from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, Shouse (1996) investigated school differences on academic press (similar to Bulach and colleagues (2008, 2012) (demandingness) and sense of community (similar to Bulach and colleagues (responsiveness)). Shouse (1996) found that a school culture characterized by both academic press and a sense of community was associated with higher achievement gains, especially in low socioeconomic status schools. He concluded that the combination of high academic press and high community was protective for low-income students who may not have academic resources to draw on in their homes and communities. Similar findings were reported in a large-scale Texas study (Jackson & Lunenburg, 2010).

Lee and Smith (1999) examined the combined effects of academic press and social support on achievement in a sample of Chicago middle school students. They found that students with more social support learned the most if they also attended schools characterized by high academic press. This finding is significant, because it indicates an interaction between academic press (demandingness) and social support

### *Racial Disparities in School Discipline*

(responsiveness) in producing what Bulach and colleagues (2008, 2012) term a high-performing school. A high-performing school culture proposes that students are more adaptive to teacher demands when they are made in the context of a responsive, encouraging relationship in a school that is also highly demanding (i.e., high standards for academic and behavioral performance) using Bulach and colleagues (2008, 2012) school culture typology.

Using the same national data set (National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988), Gregory and Weinstein (2004) found that student connection (positive regard for teachers) and regulation (behavioral order in the classroom) predicted growth in achievement through the high school years. Specifically, a combination of high teacher connection and high teacher regulation predicted the greatest achievement for low-income adolescents. High teacher connection reflects responsiveness in Bulach and colleagues (2008, 2012) school culture typology, and high teacher regulation reflects one dimension of demandingness in Bulach and colleagues (2008, 2012) model.

In a nationally representative sample of high schools from the High School Effectiveness Study, Pellerin (2005) examined teacher warmth (similar to Bulach and colleagues (2008, 2012) (responsiveness) and academic press (similar to Bulach and colleagues, 2008, 2012) (demandingness). Pellerin found that schools high in teacher warmth and academic press had the least amount of class cutting, tardiness, lack of preparation for class, and absenteeism, compared to other schools.

In a large-scale, statewide sample of 199 schools, Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) found that schools low in structure (Bulach and colleagues (demandingness) and support (Bulach and colleagues (responsiveness) had the highest schoolwide suspension rates for Black and White students after statistically controlling for school demographics. Furthermore, schools low in both structure and support had the largest racial suspension gaps.

A major implication of Gregory and colleagues (2011) findings highlight the importance of an academic dimension of structure for discipline outcomes. The researchers noted that even in a culture of low support, the degree to which students perceive that teachers pushed them to work hard and tackle challenging assignments (high academic press) was associated with lower suspension rates compared with schools with low academic press. These findings extend previous research showing teachers' expectations for student success are related to the development of students' academic self-concept (Lunenburg, 1983b) and achievement over time (Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2001). A similar process is likely to occur at the school level and in relation to positive behavioral outcomes. Further, a culture of high academic expectations could have a socializing effect. That is, students may internalize the academic mission of the school and become more invested in following school rules (Lunenburg, 2005).

Another possible explanatory association between academic press and low suspension rates has to do with how staff perceive and react to student misbehavior (Lunenburg, 1991). Perhaps in schools with high academic expectations, staff may respond less punitively to student misbehavior and successfully reengage misbehaving students in the learning process, because of their greater emphasis on developing academic talent compared to staff in schools with low academic expectations. Or high rates of student misbehavior may result in teachers lowering their expectations (Lunenburg, 1984; Lunenburg & O'Reilly, 1974).

A related issue to the link between school culture and suspension rates is the wide suspension gap between Black and White students. Researchers have concluded, after controlling for race and poverty, that the attitude of a school's principal toward the use of suspension correlated highly with its use (Losen, 2011). Principals who believe frequent punishments help improve behavior and those who tend to blame behavioral problems on poor parenting and poverty also tend to suspend more students than those principals who strongly believe in enforcing school rules but who regard suspension as a measure to be used sparingly (Lunenburg & Irby, 2006; Rausch & Skiba, 2005; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). This evidence suggests that factors other than student behavior (in this case, principals' beliefs) can influence suspension rates.

In sum, the five aforementioned studies examined achievement-oriented outcomes or disengagement from classroom activities as they relate to school culture (Gregory, et al., 2011; Gregory & Weinstein, 2004; Lee & Smith, 1999; Pellerin, 2005; Shouse, 1996). Using a model of school culture (Bulach et al., 2008, 2012), the current paper addresses the question—whether a positive school culture (high demandingness) and (high responsiveness) accounts for school disciplinary outcomes. Based on previous research, I conceptualized that a high-performing school includes a combination of

“demandingness,” an academic dimension and an affective dimension, termed “responsiveness.” Given past research (Bulach, 2008, 2012), I conceptualized demandingness in two different ways—including a behavioral dimension related to school rules and an academic dimension related to academic success, which seem to be interlinked.

Further support for the link between behavior and scholastic success is provided by Irving (2002) who found that teachers who are warm demanders build trusting relationships with low-income, minority students. Taken together, prior research on school culture suggests that schools with high demandingness/responsiveness should be beneficial not only for both Black and White students, but also for closing the suspension gaps between Black and White students.

### **Other Explanations for Suspension Gaps**

Studies of racial differences must consider four key sociodemographic factors: urbanicity, poverty, racial composition, and school size. First, urban, low-income schools tend to have higher rates of self-reported misbehavior than suburban, wealthy schools (Skiba, Rausch, & Ritter, 2004; Stewart, 2003). Second, schools with more students who qualify for free or reduced-priced meals (an index of family poverty) have higher rates of victimization, delinquency, and suspension (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002). Third, racial composition is another sociodemographic factor related to higher suspension rates. For example, schools with higher percentages of Black students have higher rates of suspension (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002) and higher rates of teacher-reported victimization (Gottfredson, et al., 2005).

A final school sociodemographic factor is school size. Several researchers reported that larger schools experience more student misbehavior and violence than smaller schools (Astor, Meyer, & Behre, 1999; Duke, 2002; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1985; Klein, Cornell, Fan, & Gregory, 2010). A recent meta-analysis of 57 studies on school size favored small schools across a wide variety of student and organizational outcomes, including academic achievement, school culture, student engagement, and cost-efficiency (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009). Taken together, prior research suggests measures of school urbanicity, student poverty, racial composition, and school size are important factors that may account not only for greater suspension rates for all students but also racial suspension gaps.

It has been reported that schools with high Black enrollment tended to suspend more White students and more Black students and to have higher suspension gaps (Gregory et al., 2011; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002). Of special interest, then, is why the discipline gap widens in schools with greater numbers of Black students. Put another way, why would Black students be suspended at a higher rate in schools where, in some cases, they constitute the numerical majority population of the student body? Could processes related to disparate impact and implicit bias lead to greater reactivity to Black student behavior and more severe discipline sanctions (Losen, 2011)?

Disparate impact is considered unlawful under Office of Civil Rights (OCR) regulations (Zehr, 2010). Under the *disparate impact* theory, a method of discipline that is racially neutral on its face but has a discriminatory effect may be found unlawful, excepting sufficient justification such as educational necessity. Even if a school’s action is found to be justified, it still may be unlawful if equally effective, less discriminatory alternatives are available (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

The disparate impact approach enables enforcement agencies to address intentional discrimination veiled behind apparently neutral practices as well as unconscious or *implicit bias*, where there is no conscious attempt to discriminate (Bower, 2006). The prevalence of implicit bias, including racial bias against Blacks, is well supported in psychological research (Kang, 2010). Such bias may affect the choice of a policy or practice resulting in disproportionate suspensions for minority children. Similarly, disciplinary decisions made by individual teachers with unconscious racial bias may cumulatively add up to large racial disparities at the school or district level (Graham & Lowery, 2004; Losen, 2011).

Another explanation is that the neighborhood conditions of predominantly Black attendance zones could have an effect on student attitudes and engagement in school that engenders conflict with school rules and expectations. Based on extensive observations in high poverty, Black neighborhoods, E. Anderson (1999) outlined in his book *Code of the Street* how students might experience conflict with school authorities. Attitudes of self-assertion, independence, and toughness that are prevalent in some

### *Racial Disparities in School Discipline*

inner-city neighborhoods are unsuitable in school settings where compliance with school rules and authority is expected.

Further, a recent study found that schools with larger compositions of Black students tend to administer more severe discipline for student misbehavior, even when taking into account the poverty of enrolled students, delinquency, drug use, and the disadvantaged neighborhood surroundings (Welch & Payne, 2010). The authors argue that their findings support the *racial threat hypothesis*, which means that where there are larger percentages of Black students, there is more social control. An earlier large-scale study of 45 urban, suburban, and rural schools supported the racial threat hypothesis (Lunenburg & Schmidt, 1989). The authors found differences in pupil control ideology, pupil control behavior, and quality of school life among urban, suburban, and rural schools. Urban schools were significantly more custodial in both pupil control ideology and behavior and had lower quality of school life scores.

### **CONCLUSION**

Disproportionality in suspension rates for Black and White students remains a problem in American schools, especially in middle schools and high schools. Schools with the highest suspension rates were those perceived by students as low in demandingness and responsiveness, based on Bulach and colleagues (2008, 2012) school culture typology. This conceptualization was amply supported in the research, albeit slight variations in terminology used by different researchers. One implication, based on previous research, is that efforts to improve student behavior and lower suspension rates should consider the potential role of school culture. Schools in which the students experience neither a strong sense of caring and concern (responsiveness) nor high standards for academic and behavioral performance (demandingness) appear to be the most vulnerable. Identification of those schools is not on its own sufficient, however. The Black-White suspension gap, in many cases, parallels the Black-White achievement gap. In many schools, Black and White students tend to have very different educational experiences. This is a matter of social justice.

In its simplest form, social justice is linked to redressing institutionalized inequality and systemic racism. Harvard philosopher, Rawls (2010), argues that social justice is defined by four principles. The first is based on equality of treatment of all members of society (equal rights and liberties). The second is based on all people being regarded as individuals. The third involves giving everyone a fair chance (equal opportunity). The fourth involves giving the greatest social and economic benefits to those least advantaged. The application of these four principles of social justice to education would mean that more resources should be allocated to improve circumstances of those historically least served by the system rather than treating all individuals equally. The notion of social justice suggests that treating all people equally may be inherently unequal. Rawls argues that all education stakeholders are obligated not only to safeguard individual's rights, but also to actively redress inequality of opportunity in education. This notion posits that educational leaders are obligated to examine the circumstances in which children of color and poverty are educated. This includes racial inequities in school discipline.

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***Factors that Increased Black Student Scores and Narrowed the Achievement Gap at One High Performing High School***

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A challenge for 21<sup>st</sup> century leader educators is that of the continued achievement gap among student groups, such as African American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, and others, in the United States. As evidenced by data disaggregation and performance tracking required by NCLB, one student group that repeatedly falls behind the others in academic performance is the African American student population (Borek, 2008; Brown, 2003; Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Gutierrez, 2000; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). According to *The Nation's Report Card* (National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2009), an achievement gap between Black and White student groups identified in the 1971 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was still present in 2008. The NAEP tracked student performance at the national, state, and local levels in order to assess trends and progress in the United States educational system (NCES, 2009). The knowledge and skills assessed have essentially remained constant since the assessment was first administered.

From 1971 until 2008, the achievement scores for both Black and White students increased in both mathematics and reading at all three tested ages (9, 13, and 17 years). In addition, the achievement gap between Black and White students narrowed through these years. However, data identify the continued existence of an achievement gap between Black and White students. Therefore, the challenge continues to be eradicating the achievement gap by better meeting the educational needs of Black students without experiencing a decline in the performance of White students (NCES, 2009). Table 1 shows the national NAEP achievement scores for both Black and White students from 1971 for reading and 1973 for mathematics, to 2008 (NCES, 2009).

Table 1  
*National NAEP Scores and Achievement Gap between Black and White Students*

	Reading			Mathematics		
	1971			2008		
Age	Bl	Wh	Gap	Bl	Wh	Gap
9	170	214	44	204	228	24
13	222	261	39	247	268	21
17	239	291	52	266	295	29

*Note:* Bl = Black student scores; Wh = White student scores; Gap = Achievement gap (points) between Black and White student scores.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study investigated the following research question: What are the perceived contributing factors that increased Black student scores on accountability measures and led to the narrowing of the achievement gap between the Black and White populations at one high performing high school? Specific research questions were:

1. What are the perceived contributing factors that increased Black student scores on accountability measures?
2. What are the perceived contributing factors that led to the narrowing of the achievement gap between Black and White student populations?
3. How has this improvement impacted various aspects of the school culture?
4. What efforts were made at the school to promote family and community involvement?
5. How have the training needs been addressed for teachers and campus personnel in cultural proficiency?

## **ACHIEVEMENT GAP AND HIGH STAKES TESTING**

The 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* redirected the focus of school quality to student achievement outcomes rather than the amount of resources received and gave rise to federally imposed guidelines for accountability (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). Furthermore, it increased the federal influence on education and served as a catalyst for future educational reform legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Hewitt, 2008). According to Borek (2008), the concerns highlighted by *A Nation at Risk* still remain valid issues.

Because mathematics and reading are considered fundamental skills for successful employment and are essential for access to higher education, through the NCLB, the federal government has identified mathematics and reading as subject areas in which 100% of students will reach proficiency by the year 2014 (Ketterlin-Geller, Chard, & Fien, 2008; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). In order to adhere to the NCLB mandates, the K-12 educational system has placed a great emphasis on assessment and accountability (Biesinger & Crippen, 2008).

Following NCLB mandates, states created accountability systems for the purpose of tracking student progress over time. In Texas, the Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) is a comprehensive reporting system used to determine accountability ratings and to produce a variety of assessment reports (Texas Education Agency, 1999). Texas was the first state to use a “state assessment test in order to measure school performance directly and both to sanction those schools not meeting improvement norms and to reward schools exceeding norms” (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002, p. 306). Although a high-stakes testing accountability system was partially designed to ensure the educational needs of all learners were met, some researchers argue that it has negatively impacted the graduation rates of the very students it was designed to protect (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008). In Texas, high-stakes assessment was identified as the driving force in approximately 135,000 high school dropouts recorded by the state each year, with minority students being at greatest risk (McNeil et al., 2008).

## **THE ROLE OF CULTURE**

Due to the multicultural populations attending United States’ schools, professional educators must be equipped with essential tools required to meet the educational needs of diverse learners (Barlow & Villarejo, 2004). Educators interested in addressing the achievement gaps with Black student populations must implement a culturally sensitive research approach that reflects knowledge of the cultural norms that exist within the Black culture (Stanfield, 1994), because, as King (1995) noted, African American culture differs from that of the European American culture in many ways, such as worldview and value orientations.

### *Factors that Increased Black Student Scores*

According to Gutierrez (2000), school culture greatly influenced the performance of Black learners. She identified five specific characteristics that influenced the academic performance of Black students: (a) a rigorous curriculum and the necessary assistance needed to make it through the course, (b) a campus actively committed to students, (c) a commitment of everyone to work for the good of the team, (d) a resourceful and dynamic campus leader, and (e) teacher access to and utilization of standards-based instructional resources. Gutierrez noted the campus goal was for as many students as possible to participate in Advanced Academics classes; however, for this to occur, students had to be exposed to the prerequisites necessary to ensure success and students had to be coached through these courses by effective teacher-leaders.

Teachers should be challenged to make learning meaningful in the lives of their students because students will not retain the information if it is not relevant to them (Campos, 2008). Campos (2008) suggested that in order to reach Black students, teachers had to think outside of the box; they had to make new learning connect to what students already knew and make it relevant to what students experienced everyday. Highly productive teachers who worked with Black students viewed themselves more like a coach rather than an orator and guided students through the new learning; they avoided judgment and responded in non-evaluative ways that encouraged students to ask questions, to explore, and to take risks.

Murphy (2009) cautioned addressing interventions for Black student groups as a whole due to identified racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic status within the group and reminded educators that there is no “silver bullet to increase the achievement of Black students” (p. 12). Murphy also argued that educational design must disproportionately be provided for those students on the “wrong side of the achievement gap, supports must be implemented for the long-term, and supports should continue even when gaps are reduced in order to maintain the level of achievement” (p. 12).

## **METHODOLOGY**

A phenomenological case study was used to investigate the perceived contributing factors that increased Black student scores on standardized accountability measures, and led to the narrowing of the achievement gap between the Black and White populations at one high performing high school.

### **Participants and Setting**

Using the state of Texas’ Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports from 2006 through 2010 (Texas Education Agency, 2010), the researchers identified four campuses within a metropolitan area that met the following criteria: (a) the Black population represented a minority of the campus population; (b) Black student passing rates on the state’s accountability measure TAKS testing exceeded those of the state; (c) the campus experienced a sizeable decrease in the achievement gap between Black and White student populations in passing rates on the state’s accountability measure; (d) a high percentage of students of poverty; (e) Black students at the school had experienced continued improvement in all TAKS scores; and (f) the White students had continued success in increasing their percentage of passing all TAKS tests. Of those schools, the researchers identified one academically high performing high school campus to participate in the study, based upon the school’s cumulative score on the state’s measure of student performance, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), and the administrator’s willingness to participate in the study. The district and campus names were not used in order to ensure anonymity of the school, the students, and the study participants.

The participating campus population included 31% Black students, 57% Hispanic students and 12% White students with a total student population of 4414 students. A campus with a minority Black population was intentionally chosen in order to study interventions implemented to meet the needs of a minority campus population. Over 64% of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged. The student to teacher ratio was 15 to 1, and the core content area (English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies) subject classes averaged 21 students per class. The campus had a mobility rate of 17.5%, and 59.5% of the student population was identified as being at-risk. Students who graduated on the minimal graduation plan made up 15% of the student population, while 85% chose graduation plans that included more rigor and more advanced measures.

### *Factors that Increased Black Student Scores*

School personnel invited to participate in interviews were the principal, assistant principal, ninth grade team leaders, core content teachers, and elective teachers. The campus administrators recommended the teacher leaders chosen for interview. The ethnicities of the educators interviewed included Black (29%), White (43%), Hispanic (14%), and Asian (14%).

#### **Data Collection**

The sources of data collection were archival data from the campus, campus and district websites, and the Texas Education Agency website, as well as structured interviews of campus personnel. In addition to individual interviews, a focus group interview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) using the individual interview protocol was held with three teachers who were the ninth grade team leaders. All interviews were electronically recorded and later transcribed (Creswell, 2007). Archival data (e.g., campus publications, websites, and AEIS data) were used to triangulate findings (Creswell, 2007).

#### **Treatment of Data**

The analysis of data began with transcription of the campus group interviews with participant identification language omitted, as well as, unnecessary words such as “uh,” “um,” and “you know,” in order to preserve both the anonymity and usefulness of the data (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). Participants reviewed the transcripts of the interview and made additions, corrections, or added clarification where needed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A constant-comparative (Creswell, 2007) approach was utilized in which comments from the interviews were read and compared in several iterations to identify emergent themes. Peer review was utilized to ensure the bias of the researchers’ personal opinion was minimized (Creswell, 2007; Heppner & Heppner, 2004). Once the themes were identified, two peer reviewers from different study sites checked the transcripts and compared the script to the identified themes. Through repeated conversations with the peer reviewer, the researchers made revisions and narrowed the themes to best reflect the data collection.

In order to effectively capture the true nature of this research, the researchers adhered to Tillman’s (2002) culturally sensitive research framework to understand “the experiences of African Americans, particularly in educational contexts” (p. 4). Tillman argued that “research frameworks that are grounded in the knowledge and culture of Blacks cannot only contribute to educational research, but more importantly, validate knowledge that can promote educational excellence for this group” (p. 9). In order to effectively capture the true nature of the research, Tillman (2002) acknowledged the importance of using a culturally sensitive research framework to understand “the experiences of African Americans, particularly in educational contexts” (p. 4). Thus, it was important to have culturally specific knowledge, to make culturally sensitive data interpretations, and to be culturally informed of theory and practice.

#### **FINDINGS AND EMERGING THEMES**

The findings of this study suggest that a high school campus can experience a transformational change in the campus culture from one that propagates low student achievement and a high number of discipline issues to a culture of high academic achievement for students across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines and appropriate student behavior. Paramount in the cultural shift was the belief that all students had the potential for high academic achievement and teachers did not make nor accept excuses for sub-par student performance. Teachers accepted personal responsibility for students who were not successful and provided students with the means for improvement, all the while, ensuring parent awareness throughout the process. The findings are discussed in depth based on the five research questions.

#### **Research Question 1**

Research question one investigated the beliefs of those interviewed regarding contributing factors that led to the increased achievement of Black students on accountability measures. The participants agreed upon the importance of high expectations for all students, academic teaming in grades nine and ten, data-driven decision-making, parent involvement, and accountability for all.

***High expectations for all students.*** Across the board, almost the first response to this question from each of the participants was that the campus had high expectations for *all* students. Students were not segregated or targeted based on race or ethnicity; they were targeted based on academic performance. The principal commented on how students were not allowed to have zeros. Students who had zeros on assignments were pulled out of an elective class in order to complete the assignment with the core area teacher. He further stated that it did not take too many times missing band, choir, or football for the students to figure out they had to do their homework.

High expectations for all extended to behavioral expectations as well as academic. The campus administrators, faculty, and staff modeled culturally proficient behavior that spilled over onto the students. The district's customer service policy also assisted administrators, faculty and staff in keeping a positive focus on all interactions with each other, with students, with parents, as well as with other stakeholders.

A school culture had been developed in which, barring a major infraction, the majority of student discipline issues were resolved in the classroom, in academic team meetings, or in athletic team meetings. Teachers did not want students out of their classrooms so the majority of discipline issues were settled between the teacher and the student. When ninth or tenth grade teachers experienced discipline issues with a student, the team was notified and the student was pulled out of an elective to discuss the issue and to develop a plan to change the behavior. According to the elective teacher/coach, athletic coaches also played an effective role in student discipline management issues because they had students who had a desire to participate in their programs.

Although the high school was located in the middle of a high gang populated area, signs of gang membership were not present on the campus. Five or six years prior to this study, campus personnel would have considered "tagging" and students wearing clothing depicting gang membership to be common occurrences on the campus. Because of the development of a school culture that promoted a sense of belonging and respect, gang activity on campus was almost extinct. By consistently modeling high expectations in their own interactions, faculty, staff, and administrators held students to the same high standards in all student interactions with both peers and adults alike.

***Academic teaming in grades nine and ten.*** The school implemented teaming, a process where students were equally divided into academic teams for the grade level. The students had the same four core teachers (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies) and they were provided an additional "teaming" period in which they were required to meet on a daily basis to discuss student needs, meet with students, provide academic tutoring, and contact parents. Those interviewed indicated the academic teams were instrumental in developing school pride and providing every student group membership. The academic teams were considered the most influential component of the high school culture for laying a successful foundation for every entering freshman. As suggested by Brown (2003), students needed an environment that addressed the cultural, ethnic, social, emotional, and cognitive needs. The academic teams were viewed as fulfilling those student needs. The teams provided ninth and tenth grade students with a sense of belonging and provided teachers with an effective avenue of tracking student success in the core academic areas.

Academic competitions bolstered the team spirit among students. Because the competitions were academic in nature, a successful team represented successful students. The academic pep rallies were considered highlights of the school year. School spirit was displayed through students' adornment of their academic team shirt and by their participation in the team events included in the pep rallies.

Teams developed a familial environment for students. Often throughout the interview with the academic team leaders they referred to themselves as "family," "co-parents," "extension of their family," and other familial titles. The teachers commented on how the majority of their students resided in poverty and within dysfunctional family units. One teacher commented regarding the team's commitment to each individual student, "They know we've got their backs!"

The teams served as an extension of the single classroom teacher. During their team meetings, educators would meet individually with students to discuss grades, academic deficiencies, behavioral issues, as well as celebrations. An important part of the meeting was the phone call to the parent geared toward keeping the parent informed regarding their child's academic progress.

### *Factors that Increased Black Student Scores*

**Data-driven decision-making.** Every individual interviewed touted the importance of making data-driven decisions for each individual student. In essence, teachers developed an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for every student on campus based on TAKS data, district curricular assessments, as well as benchmark assessments. Students were tracked in order to identify areas of need in order to address that need during the school day. Students in grades nine and ten were pulled from elective classes two to three times per week, if necessary, in order to address identified needs and to fill the gaps in instruction. In addition, all participants mentioned Saturday tutorials as an important piece of the equation. Students were invited to attend based on academic need and they were rewarded for their attendance through door prizes, giveaways, and food. According to Murphy (2009, p. 11), teachers and school must “disproportionally advantage those students” in order to accelerate the learning of a disadvantaged group with an identified achievement gap. For students in grades 11 and 12, the majority of tutorials were held before and after school but they also included Saturday tutorials.

Academic teams held data talks with the students on their team. They would call a student in during their teaming time in order to impress upon the student the need to improve academic performance. The team leaders would review TAKS scores as well as their scores on district assessments in order to develop a plan to change failure into success. An additional component to the data talks were parent phone calls informing them of the student’s area of need as well as of the plan that had been collaboratively developed to address those needs.

Following a district assessment, the Advanced Placement (AP), the district specialist, and the team leaders or department chairs would have data-driven conversations that they were responsible for turning around and sharing with their department or team. Teachers openly discussed passing student rates and developed plans to meet the identified needs. One of the academic team leaders stated how it was very common for one teacher to ask another for help in one of his or her own weak objectives. The teachers had developed a culture of responsibility for all students, whether or not the student was in their classroom. They also took responsibility for the success of their team members and their academic peers. They did not consider themselves successful unless they were all successful.

**Parent awareness.** Parents were considered an important asset in the learning process for all students. Teachers worked diligently to keep parents abreast of their child’s progress in their classrooms. The campus administration set expectations and guidelines requiring students to make parent contacts on a regular basis. When a student was struggling academically, the teams would bring the student to a meeting, develop a plan, and would always involve the parent in the conversation. One of the academic team leaders commented on how appreciative parents were of the phone calls made on the behalf of their child.

**Accountability for all.** A recurring theme in the conversations the researcher had with all of the participants was accountability. The principal was accountable to the superintendent, the assistant principals (APs) were accountable to the principal, teachers were accountable to the principal, APs, and to their peers, and, above all, they were all accountable to students and parents. The principal was held accountable for the scores of his campus and the APs were held accountable for the scores of their teams or academies. The campus leadership served collaboratively in data talks with teachers.

In team and department meetings, teachers held one another accountable for their student data. The academic team leaders as well as the core area lead teacher all mentioned how meetings with their peers could sometimes become heated because some conversations were difficult to have when not everyone has experienced success. They stated that the effort was worth it because what they had experienced was a continued improvement in student academic achievement across the board.

The academic team leaders repeatedly mentioned holding students accountable in spite of their personal circumstances. The male lead teacher commented on how he and his wife had both attended the high school. He shared with his students that he had “walked the same streets and sidewalks” that they walk today and he knows what it is like; however, that was no excuse to not perform to “your academic potential.”

### *Factors that Increased Black Student Scores*

The AP spoke about holding teachers accountable for their student data. This sometimes led to tough conversations; however, they were considered to be necessary conversations. The purpose was not to make the teacher feel bad about the scores but rather to help them improve. Teachers were paired with a peer who experienced high student scores in a specified area and the teacher was expected to learn from his or her peer.

#### **Research Question 2**

The second research question explored the perceived contributing factors that led to narrowing the achievement gap between Black and White student populations. The participant responses closely mirrored that of the previous research question regarding the reasons for the increased achievement for Black students on the state's accountability measure. The educators reiterated the importance of high expectations for all students, academic teaming in grades nine and ten, data-driven decision-making, parent involvement, and accountability for all. Additional reasons given were the importance of societal changes, effective hiring of campus personnel, publicly celebrating student successes, increasing parent awareness as to the importance of the student's education, and knowing their students.

***Societal changes.*** Societal changes were reported as contributing factors to narrowing the achievement gap between Black and White student populations by five out of the seven participants. The principal stated that many racially-mixed families lived in the area where the high school was located. The principal commented on how 50% of second grade students at one of the district's elementary campuses would consider themselves to be of more than one race or ethnicity. Thus, the principal felt racial issues were naturally diminishing because racial lines had become blurred. The academic lead teachers and the elective teacher/coach all concurred that because of the societal changes and their impact on the younger adults who taught at the campus, they considered themselves culturally proficient.

***Effective hiring of campus personnel.*** The principal considered hiring the right person to serve as an AP on his campus as a paramount decision in providing an environment centered on the success of all students. He emphasized the need for APs with effective people skills and those who avoided major conflicts. Although he had final say in the hiring of an AP, he entrusted the process to the other APs on his staff and challenged them to find an individual that met his criteria and who would work well with the AP team.

The hiring of teachers was also considered to be a critical component of positively affecting student achievement and, thus, narrowing the achievement gap. The principal reported that he actively sought out "minority teachers with a good heart" to serve on his campus. He said he could work with weak content knowledge but he needed positive role models for his students who would "love them just as much as we do."

The AP served on hiring committees for his campus and was typically involved in hiring most instructional personnel. He stated that low teacher turn over limited the need for this process. Lead teachers were recruited to serve on the teacher interview committees, and they sought out high performing individuals with a heart for all students.

***Publicly celebrating student successes.*** Every participant interviewed commented on the importance of publicly celebrating student successes as a contributing factor to narrowing the achievement gap between Black and White student scores. The principal took photos of students demonstrating academic success and hung 11" x 17" photos of those students in high-traffic areas in the school. They highlighted "students of the month," as well as students in classrooms just doing the right thing. The principal personally photographed many extracurricular events as well as academic competitions and displayed a multitude of photos highlighting the students on his campus.

Academic successes were highlighted in a variety of ways through the campus. All students who made A/B honor roll had their names displayed for their peers to view. Students with a GPA of 3.6 or higher had their names printed on placards and were displayed on the "Wall of Honor." Clubs, organizations, and athletic teams displayed posters and photos of their student successes. In regards to the displays, the AP commented, "We celebrate all kinds of successes, not just athletic achievements . . . ."

### *Social Justice Issues*

Students like to see their picture on the wall and the majority of our focus is on academic success.” The school newsletters also devoted many articles to publicizing student successes.

***Increasing parent awareness.*** Teachers commented on the importance of increasing parent awareness of their student’s education as a contributing factor to the narrowing of the achievement gap. The elective teacher/coach commented on how parents were more apt to support teachers in getting their child to tutorials and encouraging them with homework when they truly understood the importance of their student’s need to attain a high school diploma. Parents were provided information regarding their student’s progress but also information about what the student could do educationally once they graduated from high school. The elective teacher/coach stated she felt this process had made a difference in parent support for the educational process.

***Knowing their students.*** All educators interviewed voiced the importance of knowing their students. Teachers stressed the importance of developing relationships with students in order to create an open line of communication with them. The elective teacher/coach commented on how well the academic team teachers knew all 150 students on their team and how they knew where they were at academically. The AP avowed, not only do you have to know them, but also “you have to love them!” The principal summed up this belief by stating the following:

If you put kids in the right situation, you treat them with respect, and you love them, regardless of the hurdles they have in front of them, they will make you look like a genius...but if you don’t know those kids, you don’t have a chance.

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question focused on the impact the increased achievement of Black students had on various aspects of the school culture. Educators at this campus shared a primary focus, which was obviously the academic achievement of each individual student. That fact was apparent in every conversation with faculty, staff, and administrators, thus they brought understanding to the phrase “success builds success.” Additional campus factors impacted by the increased achievement of Black students were low teacher turn over, decreased gang activity, decreased failure rates, and a decreased number of discipline referrals.

***Low teacher turn over.*** According to all of those interviewed, the impact of increased student achievement made this high school the place where everyone wanted to teach! The principal stated he only had to replace three teachers last year as compared to 46 teachers the first year he was on campus. He further commented, “Everyone wants to be a winner” so this campus basically has its choice of new hires in the district. The teachers interviewed mentioned this in their interviews as well.

***Decreased gang activity.*** One of the female academic team leaders commented as follows in regards to gang activity on the campus:

Seven years ago, many Black students were not concerned about academic performance....Students brought negative things to school and the desks were covered in tagging....Today, our Black students are no different than any other group....they want to do well academically....

The assistant principal stated that success took away the negative focus of what was actually “happening in the streets.” This group of educators agreed that the need to belong to a gang had been replaced by simply filling that need to belong with an academic team during the students’ freshman and sophomore years and then with academic academies their junior and senior years. Every single student belonged to an academic group on campus.

### *Factors that Increased Black Student Scores*

**Decreased failure rates.** The increased student achievement of Black students naturally decreased failure rates. When the principal joined the campus seven years prior, he had over 460 students who were taking Algebra I for the second year due to failure of the course their freshman year. Last year, that number decreased to 19 and he was anticipating fewer than 10 for the current year.

The assistant principal stated that in 2001-2002, the campus had approximately 190 students completing their freshman year without the number of credits required to go to tenth grade. In order to more efficiently address the needs of those students, the district opened a “Center for Success” where students were allowed to participate in credit recovery in order to get caught back up with their peers credit-wise. In 2010-2011, there were only nine freshmen students identified as not ready for tenth grade; therefore, the district had targeted the center for closure due to the fact the program was no longer needed. The principal also commented that six years ago the campus had approximately 800 students who had failed at least one section of their state assessment; in 2010-2011, the campus had only 68 students who had failed one section of their state assessment.

**Decreased number of discipline referrals.** As the achievement level of Black students has increased on the campus, the number of discipline referrals has decreased. In particular, the AP said that the number of serious offenses had significantly decreased. He commented, “Although we still have to deal with serious issues, they are few and far between compared to what they were when I first started working on this campus. Our students know how to behave well and choose to do so most of the time.”

According to the elective teacher/coach, six or seven years ago campus personnel had to concentrate on the mechanics of running the school such as getting students to come to school and dealing with disciplinary issues. She stated, “At that time, we hardly ever spoke about scores or data because we were too busy dealing with the poor behavior and poor choices of our students.” Currently, she seldom has to write a discipline referral. Instead of focusing on discipline issues, teachers were now able to focus on instruction. The teacher confirmed that in the past teachers would pray that the period would end because they simply could not take one more minute with a student they had in class; now, teachers were always asking for more time.

#### **Research Question 4**

Research question four discussed the efforts made at the school to promote family and community involvement. All participants agreed upon the importance of parent involvement, parent communication, and community participation.

**Parent involvement.** The principal shared that in his experience if the campus had more than two parent meetings each year in order to provide information, the parent participation rate would decrease. He had a fairly high parent attendance rate at his two meetings each year and had experimented with increasing the number of meetings but did not find it a successful effort.

The academic teams experienced high parent participation in all of their events. In August of each year, the newly arriving freshmen were invited to an orientation. In addition, their parents were also invited. While students learned about the opportunities on the campus for their success, parents were also learning what their children would be doing on campus, about the student expectations, and then what the parents could expect from the teachers on their student’s academic team. They were made aware of clubs and organizations available to their student. Parents were also invited to attend academic pep rallies as well as team awards ceremony at the end of the school year. At the awards ceremony, parents were obviously proud of their child’s accomplishments and would bring balloons and flowers to give them as if they were attending a graduation ceremony. Both the content lead teacher and elective teacher/coach conferred the active parent participation at the student events. The elective teacher/coach described parent participation in the events to be similar to that of sporting events.

**Parent communication.** The academic teams as well as all teachers did an effective job of communicating with parents regarding their student’s academic progress. Campus administration required teachers to submit their parent contact logs to their AP for review every three weeks so most teachers did an effective job with parent communication. Teachers were expected to make positive contacts regarding

students in addition to those related to low academic performance or discipline issues. Academic teams met individually with students regarding academic concerns as well as celebrations and then called the parent to inform them regarding the purpose of the meeting and to let them know if there was anything the parent could do at home to support their student academically.

***Community involvement.*** The campus family/community volunteer coordinator assisted the campus in enlisting approximately 10 family and/or community volunteer adults who were present on campus each day. Those interviewed agreed that the additional adult visibility on campus assisted with modeling appropriate behavior for students each day on campus. Adults were enlisted through local community churches, as well as requesting assistance from campus faculty, staff, and administrators in getting the word out that volunteers were needed. In addition, youth pastors from local churches had lunch with their students on campus each week. The parent/community volunteers were stationed in high volume areas before school, during lunch, and after school. The participants agreed that students on the campus treated all adults with respect, including the parent and community volunteers.

Community organizations such as Rotary Club International provided monetary support to the campus as well as a means for student recognition and scholarship opportunities. The campus's co-op program is designed for students to attend school for half of the day and then go to work for the remainder of the day. Many students participate in this program and it is often the means by which they attain their first job.

#### **Research Question 5**

Research question five invited the participants to describe how the campus had addressed the training needs for teachers and campus personnel in cultural proficiency. This was one of the more difficult questions for participants to answer because they did not really think about themselves or their peers as needing training in this area due to the culture since its focus on high achievement for all had been developed on the campus. The participants identified the following in regards to training the faculty, staff, and administrators receive in cultural proficiency: district mandated training, district customer service policy, effective modeling by administrators, and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model.

***District mandated training.*** When new employees are hired into the district, they are required to attend an informational training based on cultural proficiency. The training highlights appropriate interaction within ethnic and racial groups and provides the employee with a foundational knowledge level of diverse cultures on which to build. Because it was a one-time training, the participants indicated that the training did not have a significant impact on teacher interaction with students.

***District customer service policy.*** All faculty, staff, and administrators received training on the district's customer service policy. Because the policy was implemented at all levels of responsibility on the campus, the policy implementation was evident to the researcher at multiple levels. The campus secretaries, custodial staff, teachers, and administrators all followed the policy guidelines that provided effective communication and an attitude of respect throughout the campus. The attitude of respect naturally flowed over to students and, in return, the students treated the adults on campus with respect.

***Effective modeling by administrators.*** All of the participants commented on the effectiveness of modeling cultural proficiency by both district and campus administrators. The principal credited the superintendent as being the ultimate model for cultural proficiency. The assistant principal stated that the best training in cultural proficiency their campus received was that modeled by its principal. Through his interactions with students, faculty, and staff, the principal set standards and expectations for appropriate interaction within all cultural groups on the campus and he held others to those same high standards. The assistant principal made the following comment regarding his principal: "Talk is great but it is what you do that really makes the difference and our principal does the right thing."

### *Factors that Increased Black Student Scores*

Each of the teachers commented on the effectiveness of the campus principal and APs in modeling cultural proficiency in all dealings with students and teachers. The APs were viewed as setting high expectations regarding their interaction with students. In return, the APs and teachers expected reciprocal treatment from students.

***Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model.*** The academic team leaders mentioned the SIOP model as being one means by which their faculty receives training in cultural proficiency. The focus of the SIOP training is to assist core area teachers in implementing effective instructional strategies with ELLs in the classroom. The strategies used are differentiated instructional strategies and are considered good strategies for all students. One of the academic team leaders commented that the strategies are “good to use with all students so teachers use the strategies all of the time...It helps us keep our content active and engaging.”

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND CONCLUSIONS**

The findings of this study provide several suggestions for educators that could be implemented to increase the achievement of Black students. For example, effective hiring practices at all levels should lead to the hiring of culturally proficient individuals, who can serve as role models for students. High visibility of administrators who also serve as instructional leaders on campus and in the classrooms is recommended. Educators should consider implementing academic teaming that includes planning time for teachers built into the school day in addition to their conference period. Involving parents is important and is supported by requiring teachers to make regular parent contacts, scheduling organized parent informational meetings, and utilizing a family/community involvement coordinator to increase the number of adults on campus and provide additional volunteer support for student activities

In efforts to provide an equitable education for all students, the United States places a great emphasis on assessment and NCLB has federally mandated that 100% of all students will be successful academically by the year 2014 (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008). Although every professional educator wishes that statement were true, the fact remains that increased student achievement is only attained through a highly functioning family of professional educators who are not willing to accept sub-par performance from their students based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or any other condition. There is no doubt that an achievement gap exists between Black and White student populations as is evidenced in national NAEP scores where Black student performance continues to fall below that of White students. However, the professional educators on this campus were not willing to accept excuses from students based on economic need or on dysfunctional families. These educators committed to providing all students with highly engaging instruction on a consistent basis and then supporting every student if and when they stumbled.

The process of developing a culture of high expectations for all students began with effective district and campus leadership willing to think creatively and to look beyond ethnicity and socioeconomic status in order to lead professional educators to believe that ALL students have the ability to be academically successful. They then led teachers in the development and implementation of the processes necessary to accomplish the goal of high achievement for all students. The campus leadership led in the development of a culture of respect and responsibility for every student and kept parents aware of student progress along the way. They involved parent and community member volunteers in the daily workings of the campus in order to provide additional adult role models as well as to deter unacceptable student behavior.

Building relationships with students was important to the educators at this school. Repeatedly in conversations they spoke of their “family responsibility” with students, they referred to themselves as “co-parents” and their “father at school” and they stated how much they “loved” their students. Every participant emphasized the students’ need to belong and the processes in place designed to meet that need. Students on the campus belonged to something larger than themselves and they had a vested responsibility to that entity. That vested responsibility was high academic achievement. Extracurricular teachers and coaches were willing to assist in every way possible to ensure the academic success of their students, not only because of state mandates but because they cared about the future success of the individual student. As educational leaders committed to meeting the challenges on their campus and for all students in this 21<sup>st</sup>

century, everyone on this campus understood that to accelerate the learning of a disadvantaged group with an identified achievement gap, educators must indeed “disproportionally advantage these students” (Murphy, 2009, p.11).

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***Is Value Added a Socially Just Route to Increased Student Learning?  
An Analysis of Tennessee's Value Added Assessment System***

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Value added, the “estimated contributions to student test scores made by educators” (Harris, 2011, p. 2), is all the rage within the policy world. Bolstered by the Race to the Top requirement that participating states develop educator evaluation systems that incorporate measures of student learning, districts and states across the country are rushing to embrace value added models:

Value-added measures of teacher effectiveness are the centerpiece of a national movement to evaluate, promote, compensate, and dismiss teachers based in part on their students’ test results. Federal, state, and local policy-makers have adopted these methods en masse in recent years in an attempt to objectively quantify teaching effectiveness and promote and retain teachers with a demonstrated record of success. (Corcoran, 2010, p. 1)

This begs the question: To what extent do value added models produce the increases in student learning (measured by standardized tests) that educators and policy makers alike salivate over? This paper examines the outcomes of the nation’s longest standing value added program—Tennessee’s Value Added Assessment System—to see to what extent its advent and incorporation into teacher evaluation is associated with achievement gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Findings suggest that value added is not the panacea for increased achievement that policy makers and educators yearn for. On the contrary, there are important social justice challenges to value added assessment.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**What is value added?**

Accountability systems generally utilize one or more of the following: status models; cohort-to-cohort models; growth models; and value added models, which are a subset of growth models (National Research Council & National Academy of Education, 2010; Scherrer, 2011). Status models measure student performance at one point in time. Cohort-to-cohort models compare the achievement of multiple cohorts of students over time. Growth models track the test scores of the same students over time to identify progress (gains)<sup>1</sup> and require observing multiple data points over time on vertically aligned tests. Growth models take into account students’ baseline scores and thus allow an “apples to apples” comparison of a student’s progress to her own starting point. “Given that the starting gate inequalities are outside of school control, growth is a more fair way to compare than attainment [or status]” (Harris, 2010, p. 67). Growth models are not without their limitations: They “implicitly and erroneously assume that all achievement levels ought to be expected to gain at the same rate” (Scherrer, 2011, p. 124) and may not address or control for non-school factors that could impact growth.

Value added models are a subset of growth models that use a statistical process that attempts to identify the unique contributions of districts, schools, and teachers on student achievement gains (Betebenner, 2009; Jennings & Corcoran, 2009; Linn, 2008; Papay, 2011; Sanders, Saxton, & Horn, 1997). There are multiple value added models, including class average gain using normal curve equivalences, which is the approach used in Ohio; analysis of covariance, with one or more previous scores as a covariate; and the univariate response model (URM) (Sanders, 2006). Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) uses Sanders’s mixed methods model (Sanders, Saxton, & Horn, 1997), now known as the multivariate response model (MRM) (Sanders, 2006). Sanders’ model is quite complex, and a thorough

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<sup>1</sup> Changes (gains) over time are not always positive; they can be negative or zero.

explanation of it is beyond the scope of this paper. Essentially, though, the MRM uses all available achievement data on a student (up to five years of data for all tested subjects on vertically aligned scales) to predict how the student should perform in a subsequent year. The student's actual performance is compared to her predicted performance. A teacher's effect is generally the mean difference between her students' predicted and actual scores.

While conceptually this may seem straightforward, MRM is a sophisticated and complex statistical model. For example, MRM uses a "shrinkage estimate" that provides "rigorous protection against misclassification" (Sanders, Saxton, & Horn, 1997, p. 143) of a teacher by:

protecting against spurious estimates due to the accumulation of random errors [such that] teachers with a smaller number of students may have their estimates "pulled" closer to the district average, thus making it harder for their estimates to be measurably above [or below] the reference gain. (Sanders, 2004, p. 175)

MRM also uses a "layered" model to account for the decreasing residual effects of prior years' teachers (Ballou, Sanders, & Wright, 2004). Thus the addition of another year's data can be used to improve the precision of earlier estimates of teacher effects, which is why a Tennessee teacher's value added effect for one year, say 2010, can be revised upward or downward in 2011. In other words, a teacher's measured effect on students in a given year may change upon a subsequent year's data being added to the analysis (after the teacher no longer works with the students). This unintuitive and complex process can be difficult for educators to grasp and trust.

One of the main concerns with the MRM model is that it does not address or control for factors such as socioeconomic state (SES). Architects of the model, however, argue that each student acts as her own control or "blocking factor": "Because the value-added method measures gain from a student's own starting point, it implicitly controls for socio-economic status and other background factors to the extent that their influence on the post-test is already reflected in the pre-test score" (Ballou, Sanders, & Wright, 2004, p. 38). Nonetheless, some experts find this argument insufficient and contend that student background factors affect not only achievement but gain rates as well: "Consistent evidence confirms the intuitive conjecture that socioeconomic factors are correlated with student gains even after prior achievement has been accounted for (Kupermintz, 2003, p. 295). The failure of TVAAS to account for demographic factors could pose a social justice issue for teachers and schools that serve high populations of students whose non-school factors negatively impact their gain rates.

Some value added models, including one-level, two-level, and three-level hierarchical linear models (HLMs), can incorporate student characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Rose, Henry, & Lauen, 2012). An HLM has been used, for example, in the Dallas value added system (Millman, 1997). Nonetheless, currently there is no single value added model that is the consensus among experts as strongest.

### **What are the concerns regarding value added?**

While a complete discussion regarding the limitations/concerns of value added is too involved for thorough coverage here, this section provides an overview of some of the most cited issues, all of which have social justice implications<sup>2</sup>.

- 1) Issues with transparency and scrutiny: The statistical processes that produce some value added models, such as SAS Institute's EVAAS, are proprietary and therefore a black box (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010; Corcoran, 2010). Given high stakes uses of these models, they must be made available for scrutiny and critique. Additionally, some value added systems, including TVAAS, have very few scholarly, peer-reviewed analyses conducted of them (Kupermintz, 2003).

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<sup>2</sup> For a more thorough treatment of the limitations of value added, see the National Research Council & National Academy of Education (2010) and Baker et al. (2010) reports.

- 2) Issues with tests: Value added measures are only as good as the tests upon which they are based. Some tests used for calculating value added—especially grade level proficiency tests—do not provide sufficient stretch to accurately pinpoint students' achievement levels and gains. Additionally, tests often demonstrate substantial score inflation over time (Price & Koretz, 2010). Further, tests assess only a subset of a grade level's standards such that there is not only a narrowing of the curriculum towards tested content areas but also within content areas. Additionally, tests must be of equivalent complexity and difficulty from year to year; inadequately equated tests can lead to wildly skewed data (Richards, 2010).
- 3) Issues with stability and accuracy of value added data (Keeves, Hungi, & Afrassa, 2005): Rothstein's (2009) study of North Carolina 5th grade value added data showed large effects of 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers on their students' 4<sup>th</sup> grade learning. This, however, is inconceivable and actually indicates the bias that non-random assignment of students to classrooms introduces into value added estimates. Because of this sizable bias, it is "hazardous to interpret typical value added estimates as indicative of causal effects" (p. 27). In another study (Baker et al., 2010), there was a 36% error rate of distinguishing low/high teacher performance:  
...among teachers who were ranked in the bottom 20% of effectiveness in the first year, fewer than a third were in that bottom group the next year, and another third moved all they way up to the top 40%. There was similar movement for teachers who were highly ranked in the first year. Among those who were ranked in the top 20% in the first year, only a third were similarly ranked a year later, while a comparable proportion had moved to the bottom 40%. (Baker et al., 2010, p. 12-13)
- 4) Issues with equity: In some schools/districts, there are large percentages of students for whom data is missing (due to high mobility, illness, etc.) and whose learning may not count—or not count as much—towards teacher effect, as data from the Houston Independent School District (HISD) shows:  
Among all grade four to six students in HISD, only 66 percent had both of these [needed] scores [to calculate value added], a fraction that falls to 62 percent for Black students, 47 percent for ESL students, and 41 percent for recent immigrants. (Corcoran, 2010, p. 21)  
There could be a disincentive, then, for teachers to focus on students whose data will not contribute to teachers' and schools' effect estimates. This is an important social justice concern. Additionally, districts/states must decide how to use value added data to evaluate teachers in non-tested subjects and grades; these individuals often account for the majority of teachers in a building. This raises equity issues between teachers who do and who not get this data, and it also raises questions about the practice of using school level value added data to evaluate teachers outside of tested subjects/grades (as done in Tennessee).
- 5) Issues with identifying teachers' unique effect: There are many confounding and exogenous variables that can interfere with accurate and trustworthy value added estimates (Amrein-Beardsley, 2008; Linn, 2008). There are difficulties in adequately addressing spillage (effect on one content area by other content area teachers), attribution (which students count towards which teachers' effects), and residual effects (effects of prior teachers on current gains). Additionally, aspects of teacher quality (e.g., caring, efficacy, collegiality, etc.) cannot adequately be measured by state standardized achievement tests (Harris, 2011).
- 6) Issues of normativity (Kupermintz, 2003): Generally, value added models are not constructed to an independent metric of teacher effectiveness. Teacher effects are identified as above, below or not detectably different from the average teacher. In normed systems, some teachers will be winners and others will—necessarily—be losers. This normativity could de-incentivize teacher collegiality and collaboration.
- 7) Issues of ethical and efficacious use of value added data: Many educators and leaders do not adequately understand value added measures, yet they are being evaluated by them and expected to use the data formatively. Additionally, some inequitable and unsound practices may occur, based on poor understanding of value added (e.g., tracking students by teacher effect; assigning teachers unnecessarily to corrective action or otherwise "punishing" what may not actually be ineffective teaching; and issues surrounding assigning students to a teacher whose data suggests that she is significantly less effective than her peers).

## TVAAS

When the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) launched in 1992, it was the first statewide value added accountability system. TVAAS was the core component of comprehensive reform legislation known as the Education Improvement Act (EIA) of 1992 (Ceperley & Reel, 1997). The EIA was “one of the most sweeping pieces of K-12 education legislation in Tennessee history” (Morgan, 2004) and—in addition to providing substantial increases to school funding—incorporated a number of reforms beyond TVAAS, including infusion of technology, alternative schools, class size reduction, mandatory kindergarten, and moving from elected to appointed superintendents (Morgan, 2004). The legislation resulted from school funding litigation brought forward by a coalition of small districts (*Tennessee Small School Systems v. McWherter*, 851 S.W.2d 139). The Tennessee Supreme Court ultimately found that the state’s educational funding system was inequitable and therefore unconstitutional (Morgan, 2004, p. i).

The EIA legislation included sizable funding increases for Tennessee’s schools, and—in order to make the funding increases politically viable and palatable to the business community—great emphasis was put on the need for a rigorous accountability system (Ceperley & Reel, 1997; Kupermintz, 2003). Thus entered Williams Sanders—father of educational value added—who at the time was a researcher at the University of Tennessee. Sanders testified before Tennessee’s legislature regarding his mixed model value added methodology, which had been piloted in several locations within Tennessee at the time. The legislature was smitten:

His testimony was so convincing that within a week of hearing Sanders’ testimony about the model, both houses of the legislature amended their respective versions of the education reform bill. The wording of the amendments was based largely on a paper that Sanders had prepared for the state officials; even the bibliography was included in the legislation. (Ceperley & Reel, 1997, p. 135)

Starting in 1993, educators and the public have received annual value added reports by school and district. In 1995, the state released two reports of value added. In April of 1995, Baker and Xu released a report that concluded the following:

1. Given concerns raised about both the theoretical and statistical foundations of TVAAS, the system needs further evaluation.
2. The value added data is unstable, as evidenced by wide changes from year to year that educators are at a loss to explain.
3. “The value-added model does not address student, family, or peer group variables, nor does it specify clearly how much of student gain is, or should be, attributable to a teacher in the classroom, or the school or district” (Baker & Xu, 1995, p. ii).
4. “The complexity of the model makes it difficult to convince those most affected by the evaluation that it is an appropriate and reliable means of measuring the impact educators have on student learning” (p. ii).

One of Baker and Xu’s (1995) recommendations was that “all components of the TVAAS be evaluated by qualified experts knowledgeable of statistics, educational measurement, and testing” (p. iv). In June, 1995, Harville, a professor of statistics, released his two-and-a-half page review of TVAAS, which concluded “TVAAS appears to be a statistically sound and appropriate system for estimating the influence of individual teachers, schools, and school systems” (p. 1).

In the fall of 1996, the state began providing teacher-level value added reports to teachers and their administrators, and two years later began using teacher value added data as part of teachers’ evaluation: “Since 1998, the degree to which each Tennessee teacher has added value, as measured by average score gains, is one component of the teacher’s annual evaluation process” (Tennessee Department of Education, 2011, para. 2). While in the past value added data accounted for up to 8% of a teacher’s evaluation in Tennessee (The Center for Greater Philadelphia, 2004), “in an attempt to receive Race to the Top funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Tennessee passed legislation that requires 35% [to

50%] of a teacher's evaluation to be based on TVAAS data" (Eckert & Dabrowski, 2010, p. 89). Tennessee's RttT plan, dubbed First to the Top, was awarded \$500 million in the second round of RttT funding.

Tennessee's new teacher evaluation system, known as TEAM<sup>3</sup> (Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model), launched in the 2011-2012 school year. Under the model, 50% of a teacher's evaluation is based on observation data; 35% based on value added data; and 15% based on an additional student achievement measure selected by the teacher and his or her supervisor, which can be a teacher's value added data.

TVAAS uses state TCAP data in grades 3-8 in reading, language, math, science, and social studies, as well as end of course exams in English I, II, and III; Algebra I and II; U.S. History; and Biology I. For teachers in currently untested grades and content areas—which accounts for more than 50% of teachers (Heitin, 2011)—the 35% of their evaluation based on value added data comes from the school-level TVAAS data.

Currently, Tennessee does not have a statewide incentive or performance-based pay system, but individual districts can decide to enact such systems (T. McClure, personal communication, November 30, 2011). Regardless of whether performance pay is linked to teacher-level value added data, the TEAM evaluation model substantially raises the stakes on these data. Is this prudent? Is it likely to result in desired outcomes of increased student achievement? What unintended consequences will result? Findings from this paper speak to these questions and fundamentally call into question the effectiveness of TVAAS as a reform/accountability strategy.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

For the last decade—since the launch of No Child Left Behind in 2001—an outcomes-based discourse has dominated educational reform and accountability. Indeed, an outcomes-based orientation is so ubiquitous as to be almost invisible. As an example, consider two premises of the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project, an extensive project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation involving almost 3000 teachers that seeks to “improve the quality of information about teaching effectiveness available to education professionals within states and districts—information that will help them build fair and reliable systems for measuring teacher effectiveness” (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010, p. i):

1. First, whenever feasible, a teacher's evaluation should include his or her students' achievement gains. (p. 4)
2. Second, any additional components of the evaluation (e.g., classroom observations, student feedback) should be demonstrably related to student achievement gains. (p. 5)

These premises clearly indicate that it is the *outcome* of teaching—as measured by student achievement gains—that is important for evaluating the effectiveness of a teacher, as opposed to who a teacher is and what the teacher does, which are inputs. Further, the MET Project uses achievement gains as the measuring stick for other teacher data (observation, student feedback) used to build a “fair” evaluation system. This assumes that an outcomes-based approach can be “fair.” The US system of education is plagued by inequities (English et al., 2012); yet the outcomes-based discourse tacitly promotes the idea that outcomes from an inherently unfair (inequitable) system can—nay will—be fair. This is a considerable social justice issue.

Finn (2000), long-time and vociferous proponent of outcomes-based accountability, captures the crux of the discourse:

The real test of a good school isn't what goes into it but what comes out. How much and how well are the students actually learning? That's the real test of a school and the real definition... We have increasingly begun to follow the organizational model that much of the business world

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<sup>3</sup> All information about TEAM found in this paper is available through multiple resources on the Tennessee Department of Education's TEAM website at: <http://team-tn.org/teacher-model>.

has already adopted, which is to obsess about the results and lighten up about the processes, about the methods, about the inputs. (p. 8)

Finn (2000) applies this outcomes-based discourse to teacher quality:

A good teacher is quite simply one whose students acquire the requisite skills and knowledge, one who adds sufficient academic value to her pupils... That is the only definition of being a good teacher that truly matters in the real world. (p. 8)

By such a definition, a “good teacher” would include one whose individual value added data are sufficiently acceptable, regardless of whether she treats students equitably and with dignity; whether she inspires them and cultivates their talents and aspirations; whether she helps them become adaptable, culturally literate, interdependent, critical thinkers; whether she cares for students; and whether she serves as a teacher leader, contributing citizen, and mentor to other professionals in her school.

The purpose of this paper is *not* to provide a critique of the outcomes-based accountability discourse but rather to apply it to the examination of the effect of value added on student learning—the extent to which value added is associated with accelerated student achievement gains as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

## **METHODS**

The analysis that follows examines National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data from 1992 (when TVAAS was introduced) to 2011, focusing particularly on 1998-2011, as 1998 is when value added became part of teacher evaluation. NAEP is an ongoing, periodic, and representative national assessment of student knowledge and skills. NAEP is commonly referred to as the “gold standard” of assessments (Institute of Education Sciences, 2010, p. 2). This analysis examines the degree to which Tennessee has made gains in NAEP over the years in which TVAAS has served as a major component of Tennessee’s approach to reform and accountability.

For this analysis, I used data from the national NAEP and state NAEP assessments to compare Tennessee’s gains over time to those of the nation as a whole and to those of other states. I elected to use data from NAEP in grades 4 and 8 in reading and math for several reasons:

1. Value added data in these grades and content areas has been provided in Tennessee since the inception of the TVAAS program;
2. NAEP has assessed these content areas and grades consistently over time with both the main (national) NAEP and state NAEP;
3. Under NCLB, math and reading are the content areas used to determine whether Adequate Yearly Progress has been met.

For the national comparison, I included data from 1992, when TVAAS was first introduced, through 2011. For the state comparisons I used data from the 1996 NAEP math assessment and the 1998 reading assessment.<sup>4</sup> The analysis of state NAEP data is not included here, as the findings mirror those of the national mean data, which includes the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense schools.

Tennessee began using value added data as part of teachers’ evaluations in 1998. Therefore, I wanted to use NAEP state data from immediately before 1998 to serve as a baseline in this *post facto* research design. The NAEP state assessment was administered in math in 1996 and in reading in 1998. NAEP assessments are administered during a window that ranges from the last week of January to the first week of March. As such, it is important to note that using the 1998 NAEP state reading data is not ideal, as it was administered during the first school year for which value added data was used to inform teacher

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<sup>4</sup> NAEP state assessment began in 1990, and from 1990-1994 was known as the Trial State Assessment. From 1996 on, administration of the state NAEP has included grades 4 and 8 in reading and math.

evaluations. However, based on the availability of 1998 NAEP reading gains data (and not 1994), 1998 data are used for these analyses.

Additionally, as a way of considering the impact of states' changing demographics on states' gains, I examined poverty data from the Digest of Education Statistics (1998 & 2010). Included in my analysis are poverty data for 1996 (to serve as a baseline) and 2009 (the most recent year for which this data is available). This data includes the % of children ages 5 through 17 who are living in poverty for the nation as a whole and by state.

Statistical analyses are always limited in some ways. This analysis is restricted in the following ways:

*Limitations:*

1. As mentioned, using 1998 NAEP data for reading is not ideal, as the assessment was administered part-way through the first "treatment" year—the first year from which data were used for teacher evaluations;
2. The most recent poverty rate data available are 2009, even though 2011 NAEP data are included;

*Delimitation:*

3. Other differences amongst states, including racial/ethnic demographics, differences in education funding, etc. are not considered; these factors could all impact NAEP gains made by states. While this analysis does include examination of changes in poverty demographics over time, it does not incorporate—nor control for—other factors that could serve as important variables.

Despite these constraints, this analysis provides meaningful findings on Tennessee's gains on the NAEP, as compared to US mean gains, and provides an opportunity to extrapolate from this comparison inferences about the outcomes of Tennessee's reform and accountability efforts—the crowning glory of which is TVAAS.

## **FINDINGS**

Table 1 displays Tennessee's mean scale score in comparison with the national public mean score (hereafter referred to as US) longitudinally from 1992-2011 for 4<sup>th</sup> grade math and reading and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math and reading. Light shading indicates Tennessee scores not statistically significantly different than the US mean. Darker shading indicates Tennessee scores below the US mean (significant at the 0.05 level). With the exception of 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading<sup>5</sup>, Tennessee mean scale scores have been lower than the US mean each year since 1998, when Tennessee began linking value added data to teacher evaluations.

Figures 1-4 illustrate longitudinal data graphically, with a marker indicating 1998. With the exception of 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading in 1994, Tennessee's scores have lagged behind US scores<sup>6</sup>. While the difference between Tennessee and US scores has fluctuated over time, Tennessee now lags modestly further behind the US in each tested area than it did just prior to beginning to tie teacher evaluation to value added data.

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<sup>5</sup> Ironically, Tennessee's 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores in 1998 and 2011 are statistically indistinguishable from one another, indicating that Tennessee made no real gain in 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading from 1998 to 2011.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Tennessee and US differences in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading in 1998 are statistically indistinguishable.

Table 1  
*Longitudinal Comparison of NAEP Scores for Tennessee and the US.*

Assessment			Mean Scale Score			
Subject	Grade	Year	Tennessee		National public	
			Mean	SE	Mean	SE
Mathematics	4	2011	233	(0.9)	240	(0.2)
		2009	232	(1.1)	239	(0.2)
		2007	233	(0.9)	239	(0.2)
		2005	232	(1.2)	237	(0.2)
		2003	228	(1.0)	234	(0.2)
		2000	220	(1.4)	224	(1.0)
		2000 <sup>1</sup>	220	(1.5)	226	(1.0)
		1996 <sup>1</sup>	219	(1.4)	222	(1.0)
		1992 <sup>1</sup>	211	(1.4)	219	(0.8)
	8	2011	274	(1.2)	283	(0.2)
		2009	275	(1.4)	282	(0.3)
		2007	274	(1.1)	280	(0.3)
		2005	271	(1.1)	278	(0.2)
		2003	268	(1.8)	276	(0.3)
		2000	262	(1.5)	272	(0.9)
		2000 <sup>1</sup>	263	(1.7)	274	(0.8)
		1996 <sup>1</sup>	263	(1.4)	271	(1.2)
		1992 <sup>1</sup>	259	(1.4)	267	(1.0)
	Reading	4	2011	215	(1.1)	220
2009			217	(1.2)	220	(0.3)
2007			216	(1.2)	220	(0.3)
2005			214	(1.4)	217	(0.2)
2003			212	(1.6)	216	(0.3)
2002			214	(1.2)	217	(0.5)
1998			212	(1.4)	213	(1.2)
1998 <sup>1</sup>			212	(1.5)	215	(0.8)
1994 <sup>1</sup>			213	(1.7)	212	(1.1)
1992 <sup>1</sup>		212	(1.4)	215	(1.0)	
8		2011	259	(1.0)	264	(0.2)
		2009	261	(1.1)	262	(0.3)
		2007	259	(1.0)	261	(0.2)
		2005	259	(0.9)	260	(0.2)
		2003	258	(1.2)	261	(0.2)
		2002	260	(1.4)	263	(0.5)
		1998	258	(1.2)	261	(0.8)
		1998 <sup>1</sup>	259	(1.3)	261	(0.8)

<sup>1</sup> Accommodations were not allowed for this assessment.

# Rounds to zero.

! Not applicable.

Note: Standard errors (SE) are shown in parentheses.



Higher than National public  
 Not significantly different from National public  
 Lower than National public

This report was generated using the NAEP District Profiles <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/districts/>

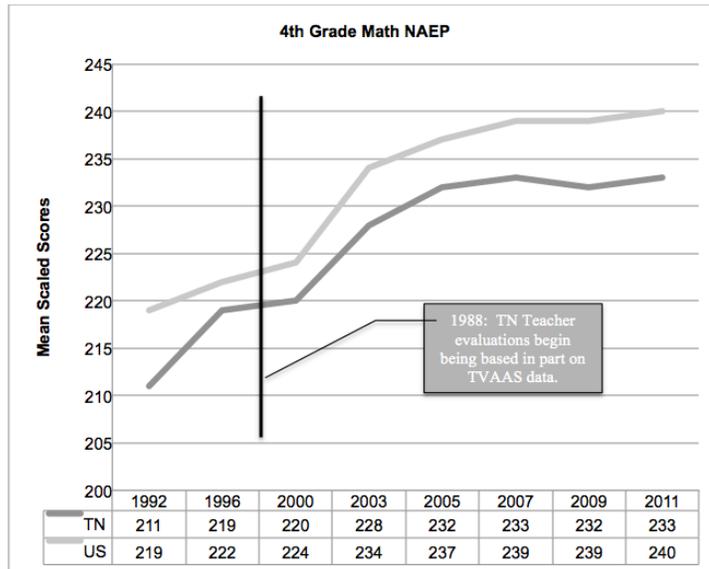


Figure 1. Longitudinal Trends in 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Math NAEP Scores for Tennessee and the U

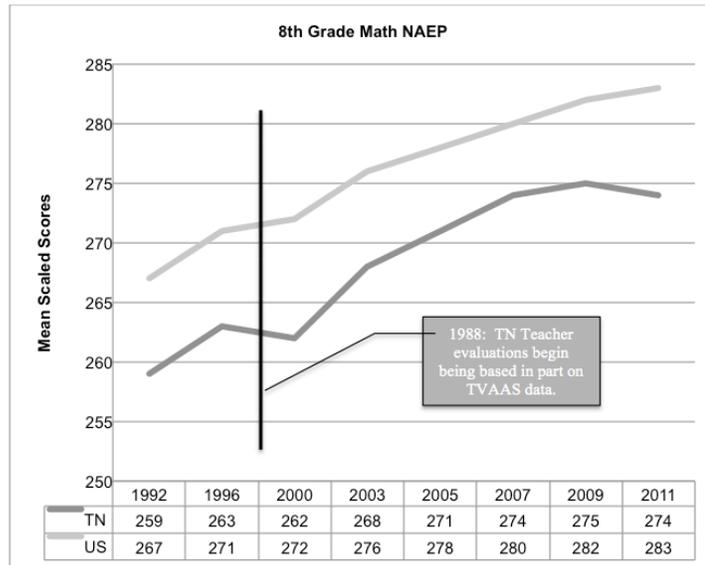


Figure 2. Longitudinal Trends in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Math NAEP Scores for Tennessee and the US.

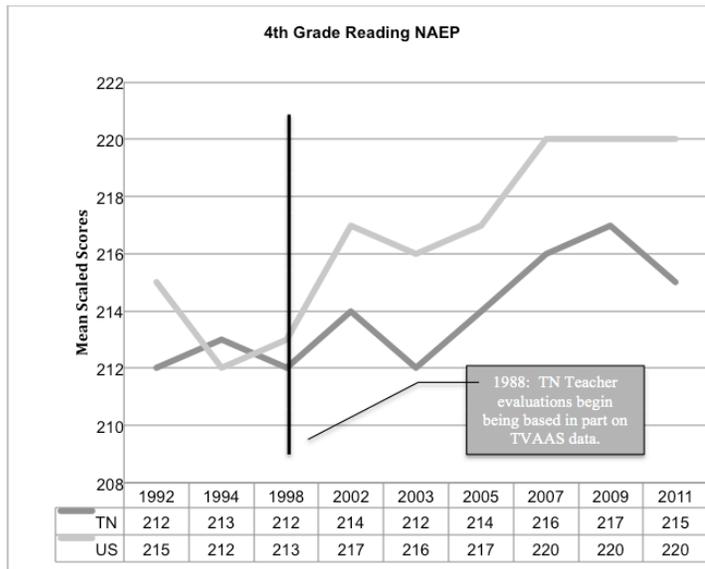


Figure 3. Longitudinal Trends in 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading NAEP Scores for Tennessee and the US.

*An Analysis of Tennessee's Value Added Assessment System*

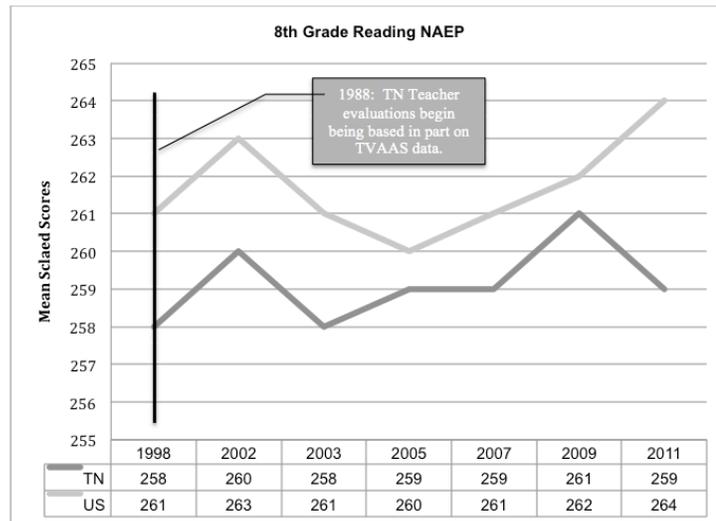


Figure 4. Longitudinal Trends in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading NAEP Scores for Tennessee and the US.

Table 2 compares mean scale score gains for Tennessee and the US from a baseline year to 2011.<sup>7</sup> Gains for Tennessee range from 1.27 (SE 1.579) in 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading, which, given the standard error, signifies no real gain, to 13.72 in 4<sup>th</sup> grade math. US gains range from 2.93 in 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading to 17.77 in 4<sup>th</sup> grade math. Given the standard errors for the mean score gains, the gains in 8<sup>th</sup> grade math for Tennessee and US are statistically indistinguishable from one another. While the gain differences between Tennessee and the US in 4<sup>th</sup> grade math and reading exceed the standard error—with the US gains exceeding those made by Tennessee—further analysis would be required to determine if these differences are statistically significant. It can safely be said, however, that Tennessee's gains *at best* keep pace with those of the US as a whole and that Tennessee has not closed its achievement gap from US means since the use of value added for teacher evaluation began.

<sup>7</sup> Due to differences in administration years for the NAEP, 1996 serves as the baseline year for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> math, and 1998 serves as the baseline year for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> reading.

*Issues of Social Justice*

Table 2  
*Tennessee and US Gains on NAEP from Baseline Year to 2011*

		Baseline*		2009		Gains	
		Mean Scale Score	SE	Mean Scale Score	SE	Scale Score Difference	SE
4th Grade Math	US	222.34	1.029	240.11	0.219	17.77	1.052
	Tennessee	219.18	1.400	232.90	0.881	13.72	1.654
8th Grade Math	US	270.51	1.210	282.73	0.196	12.22	1.226
	Tennessee	263.12	1.395	274.04	1.167	10.92	1.819
4th Grade Reading	US	212.82	1.217	220.03	0.309	7.21	1.256
	Tennessee	211.80	1.413	214.64	1.119	2.84	1.803
8th Grade Reading	US	260.66	0.785	263.59	0.230	2.93	0.818
	Tennessee	257.94	1.210	259.21	1.015	1.27	1.579

\*Baseline is 1996 for 4th and 8th math; baseline is 1998 for 4th and 8th reading.

Table 3 illustrates Tennessee’s 2011 NAEP performance compared to all other US states. Tennessee ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in the nation in 4<sup>th</sup> grade math, and only one state (Mississippi) statistically significantly (at the 0.05 level) underperformed Tennessee. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade math, Tennessee ranked 45<sup>th</sup>, and only two states—Mississippi and Alabama—performed at a statistically significant lower rate. Tennessee’s standings are slightly more encouraging in reading, where it ranks 41<sup>st</sup> amongst the states for both 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and outperformed 4 and 5 states respectively at a statistically significant lower rate.

Table 3  
2011 NAEP: How Tennessee Compares to Other States

<b>4th Grade Math, 2011</b>	
TN Ranking:	46
# States Outperformed TN	43
# States Not Significantly Different	6
# States Underperformed TN	1
<b>8th Grade Math, 2011</b>	
TN Ranking:	45
# States Outperformed TN	44
# States Not Significantly Different	4
# States Underperformed TN	2
<b>4th Grade Reading, 2011</b>	
TN Ranking:	41
# States Outperformed TN	36
# States with About the Same Performance	10
# States Underperformed TN	4
<b>8th Grade Reading, 2011</b>	
TN Ranking:	41
# States Outperformed TN	35
# States Not Significantly Different	10
# States Underperformed TN	5

\*Reported differences are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Significant changes in Tennessee's demographics could be a mitigating factor in its lackluster gains on the NAEP over time. In consideration of this possibility, Table 4 includes Tennessee and US poverty data from 1996 and 2009 (the most recent year for which these data are available). While other demographic changes could influence Tennessee's gain patterns, poverty is likely to be the most salient. Table 4 shows that the US poverty rate of related children ages 5-17 was 18.9% in both 1996 and 2009. Tennessee's was 20.6% (SE = 3.96) in 1996 and 21.0% (SE = 2.70) in 2009. Given the standard errors, Tennessee's child poverty rates for 1996 and 2009 are statistically indistinguishable. As such, it is unlikely that demographic changes in socio-economic status of school-age children are a confounding factor in Tennessee's limited growth as compared to that of the US. In other words, Tennessee's lackluster gains on the NAEP are unlikely to be unduly influenced by factors external to education policy and reform.

Table 4  
Poverty Status of Related Children 5 through 17 Years Old

	1996		2011		Difference
	% in Poverty	SE	% in Poverty	SE	%
US	18.9	0.49	18.9	0.30	0.0
Tennessee	20.6	3.96	21.0	2.70	0.4

**DISCUSSION**

Analysis of NAEP longitudinal and gain data indicate that Tennessee continues to lag behind the US mean in NAEP achievement. Additionally, since Tennessee began using value added as part of educator evaluations, it is *at best* keeping pace with gains made in other states and the US as a whole and is failing to close the achievement gap.

It is impossible, however, to extricate the impact of using value added to inform teacher evaluations from the many other reforms being enacted in Tennessee as part of the TEI Act (and since), including, for example, infusion of technology, alternative schools, class size reduction, mandatory kindergarten, and moving from elected to appointed superintendents (Morgan, 2004). As such, the gains made in NAEP by Tennessee are most likely a combination of the contributing and limiting impact of numerous reform efforts. This is a bit analogous to the difficulty of identifying the unique contribution of any given teacher to a student’s gains, given innumerable contributing factors, including the “spillage” effect of other teachers the student currently has, school climate, and changes in the student’s personal life (e.g., family divorce, situational poverty [Jensen, 2009], etc.).

While the use of TVAAS data to inform teacher evaluation is by no means the only reform effort that Tennessee has pursued since 1998, there is no evidence that using TVAAS to inform teacher evaluation has helped Tennessee to make gains in NAEP scores in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math that outpace the gains made by other states and to close the achievement gap with US means. Indeed, Tennessee continues to lag behind most states in NAEP achievement and outperforms only a few.

This analysis does not support the notion that the use of value added data for teacher evaluation is likely to result in Tennessee’s becoming “First to the Top.” While proponents of outcomes-based evaluation may argue that increasing the percent of an educator’s evaluation that is based on value added will have a greater effect on student achievement gains, there is no current empirical research that supports this argument. If value added does not have a clear and positive impact on teaching and learning, then its use might be little more than “satisfying the whims of policymakers” (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 248).

This analysis—while being suggestive as opposed to conclusive—raises serious questions about the effects of TVAAS on improving teaching and learning as well as about the wisdom of replicating Tennessee’s approach in other districts and states: “The TVAAS fad seems to be one of those phenomena that receive widespread attention and adoption in the absence of much data” (Bracey, 2004, p. 717).

While other researchers have raised serious questions about the *inputs* (tests) used for calculating value added (Eckert & Dabrowski, 2010; Mariano, McCaffrey, & Lockwood, 2010; Martineau, 2006; Millman, 1997) and the *processes* (statistical procedures) utilized for determining value added (Amrein-Beardsley, 2008; Keeves, Hungi, & Afrassa, 2005; Kupermintz, 2003; Rothstein, 2009), the findings of this analysis raise questions about the *outcomes* of value added for use as a reform/accountability strategy to accelerate student achievement gains.

As argued by McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, Louis, & Hamilton (2004), an aggressive, rigorous research agenda on use of value added measures for teacher evaluation should be pursued. Such an agenda should examine not only the outcomes of TVAAS and programs like it but should also include validation research (Kupermintz, 2003); examination of the assumptions underlying value added models and the procedures of analysis of varying models (Keeves, Hungi, & Afrassa, 2005); the consequences of value

added measures (Darling-Hammond, 1997); investigation into the ways in which educators make sense of and use value added data; and the social justice concerns articulated earlier.

The rush to embrace value added as a panacea for education reform and improved student learning should be halted and reexamined since the outcomes-based evidence does not support its effectiveness.

While the use of value added data for teacher evaluation may have limited use as a reform/accountability strategy, value added models can serve important purposes as research tools (Darling-Hammond, 1997; National Research Council & National Academy of Education, 2010) and for program evaluation (National Research Council & National Academy of Education, 2010; Rubin, Stuart, & Zanutto, 2004).

While Tennessee did make gains on the NAEP over time, these gains—at best—kept pace with those of the nation as a whole, and Tennessee's achievement gap with the national mean did not decrease. These findings raise serious questions about whether value added as a reform/accountability strategy is any more effective than other, existing strategies. Additionally, reform efforts focused on the use of value added measures for teacher evaluation are unlikely to see marked gains in national achievement data and may foster social justice concerns. To say that the TVAAS reform/accountability effort has—at its best—helped Tennessee to keep pace with gains made by other states is no ringing endorsement for the outcomes of TVAAS.

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*An Analysis of Tennessee's Value Added Assessment System*

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***Data Use and the Work of Social Justice Leaders to Remedy  
Injustice at Their Location of Practice***

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**INTRODUCTION**

This paper will focus on the findings of an inquiry into indicators of successful social justice leadership and the role that data played in defining that work. To create context for social justice leadership and how the participants used data, this paper will briefly contextualize the notion of social justice leadership from the works of McKenzie et al. (2008), possible remedies to injustice in practice from the thoughts of Gewirtz (2006), what is understood about educational indicators, and indicators of successful school leadership in K-12 education.

**CONTEXTUALIZING SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION**

McKenzie, Christman, Hernandez, Fierro, Capper, Dantley, Gonzalez, Cambron-McCabe, and Scheurich (2008) link social justice leadership in education to three key components: academic achievement, critical citizens, and inclusive practices. Even though all three components were part of a broader inquiry looking into indicators of successful social justice leadership, this paper's emphasis is on the findings surrounding social justice leadership and data use for academic achievement for all students. According to the McKenzie et al. (2008), the onset of NCLB has made academic achievement a key component of social justice leadership goals within a school setting. Even though McKenzie et al. acknowledge student success in those states that espouse a basic skills approach to the assessment probably will not overcome oppressive mechanisms in society, test scores do matter. Test scores matter as both a marker of perceived school success and as an open door for punitive action by the state or federal accountability systems (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Keating, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2008). As McKenzie et al. point out, "Currently, however, achievement test scores are the education's marketplace currency and, in most schools, they are one form of data collection that can clearly unmask inequities in student achievement" (p. 116).

**A TYPOLOGY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION**

McKenzie et al.'s (2008) framing of a pragmatic understanding for the need of a social justice leadership's emphasis on student assessment results is further informed for this paper by Gewirtz (2006), who utilizes the thoughts of Young (1990) and Frazer (1997) to construct a typology for the multi-dimensional nature of social justice. Gewirtz's typology of social justice in education contextualizes the agent's location and decisions in practice, the mitigating factors embedded in organizational behavior, and the sometimes-contradictory remedies to problems of injustice in education.

Gewirtz (2006) delves deeply into the context of justice by claiming that it has a multi-dimensional nature both at the abstract and practical levels. She points to Young's (1990) assertion that justice can have a multiplicity of meanings. Frazer (1997) then takes Young's (1990) assertions and points to the tensions that arise from the multiplicity of meanings that justice or injustice derives from context and enactment. Frazer sees two different types of injustices that in practice are integrated but have inherent tensions: socioeconomic and cultural/symbolic. Frazer's recognition of the differences between types of injustice and realization that in practice all forms of injustice disadvantage one group or groups of people for the benefit of another at once identifies the critical mass of oppressive practices as well as its subtleness. In the remedies for such injustices is where Frazer identifies the tension between just acts and their outcomes.

Gewirtz (2006) adds to the complexity surrounding just acts by not only claiming that pursuing one course to remedy an injustice means that in practice other possible courses may be neglected or even constrained, but that “justice concerns are always in practice likely to be mediated by other kinds of concerns that motivate actors” (p. 70). Here actors seeking justice within organizations need to account for the complexity surrounding the remedy for injustice, and also, the procedural, regulatory, safety or confounding factors external to the organization (economy, social crisis, etc.). Gewirtz calls this the “mediated nature of just practices” (p. 70).

Gewirtz (2006) contends that much can be understood by constructing a typology that accounts for injustice’s multi-dimensional nature and its remedies. Again Gewirtz builds on the works of Frazer (1997), Young (1990), Rawls (1972) and adds the thoughts of Powers and Gewirtz (2001) in order to define three categories of just acts and outcomes: Distributive, recognitional, and associational justice.

Distributive justice is the absence of exploitation, marginalization, and material or cultural dispossession. Such justice concerns also take into account how cultural or social resources are accessed or constrained by institutions or social norms. Recognitional justice refers to the absence of cultural imperialism, disrespect, or domination and nonrecognition. Gewirtz (2006) believes that recognitional justice nullifies cultural imperialism by restoring dignity to a group of people through respect for one’s way of life and the restoring of voice and cultural self-determination. The final form of justice is associational. Gewirtz (2006) borrows from one of her previous works in collaboration with Powers (2001) to define associational justice as, “Patterns of association amongst individuals and amongst groups which prevent some people from participating fully in decisions which affect the conditions within which they live and act” (in Gewirtz, 2006, p. 75). In essence, associational justice implies a participative democracy both in the political form as well in the workplace.

## **EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS**

Critical to understanding the acts of the participants surrounding data use was the concept of educational indicators. Jones and Nielsen (1994) state that educational indicators may come from either quantitative or qualitative data. According to the authors even though there is no universally acknowledged indicator model, what is important is that the information used from the data acquired should provide information “to the extent to which the education system is achieving its objectives, and information on fundamental features of the educational system—information that is relevant to policy and decision making” (p. 6).

When developing educational indicator systems, Jones and Nielsen (1994) further contend these indicators need to be linked empirically to develop a framework that details how the educational system works and identify trends in practice which enable decisions to be made that lead to educational improvements. Three types of indicator models identified by the authors were context indicators that focus on the conditions within a specific environment that impact the system; process indicators that uncover the practices or activities that are enacted to derive educational outcomes; and outcome indicators that describe the results of the educational system.

## **SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES**

A core set of leadership strategies and practices have been detailed through a synthesis of evidence associated with effective leadership by Leithwood and Riehl (2005) and further refined by Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006). These core set strategies and practices that are indicators of successful leadership are setting direction, managing the instructional program (teaching and learning program), understanding and developing people, and developing the organization (or redesigning the organization).

Evidence from the research suggests that the first critical strategy/practice of successful leadership is setting direction. Here successful leaders assist an organization or group in developing a common understanding about organizational goals and activities through articulating a vision and a sense of purpose. In setting direction, Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006) identify specific indicators of successful leadership practice “as identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and creating high performance expectations. Visioning and establishing purpose also are enhanced by monitoring organizational performance and promoting effective communication and collaboration” (p. 61).

## *Data Use*

In managing the instructional program (teaching and learning), Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006) differentiate certain practices between specific management strategies at the school site and at the district level. At the school site, successful leaders plan and supervise instruction through considering teacher expertise when filling positions, conducting regular visits to classrooms to observe both teaching and learning, working directly with teachers to improve instruction, securing and coordinating resources to support instructional programs, to allow teachers to solve the problems they face. Other indicators of successful school leadership are the continual monitoring of student progress and the willingness to be available and visible. Finally, successful school leaders buffer staff from inhibitors to instruction.

Successful leadership at the district level to manage the instructional program starts with the ability to create operational planning teams responsible for specific goals and to develop, review, and refine plans to achieve the district's overall strategic plan. This ability is related to the second important practice, which is the collection of key information for planning by the district as well as for individual teams. According to Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006), "All groups served by district administrative teams know that they have had the opportunities to express their views about operational plans...and know their view have been given due consideration" (p. 65).

Understanding and developing people is when the leader focuses on practices that build both the knowledge and skills of teachers to effectively impact learning and the attitude of teachers to implement what they have learned in the right context. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) describe the more specific leadership practices as, "Providing individual support and consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation, and modeling appropriate values and behaviors" (p. 30).

Leaders who are successful in developing the organization (or redesigning the organization) do so by supporting a sustainable structure of processes that enhance the performance of administrators, teachers, support staff, and students. Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006) draw on evidence that has come forward from work on the nature of learning organizations and professional learning communities. Embedded in the evidence is the notion that in developing organizational culture and structures to be performance driven and flexible, successful leadership will facilitate the daily practices of its members to empower individuals to adapt to the changing context of their work for the best interest of the students.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Through theoretically grounding the context of social justice leadership concerning academic achievement to a typology for understanding remedies of injustice with empirical evidence from educational indicators of successful school leaders, this paper now connects findings from a broader study on indicators of successful social justice leadership to how such leadership used data. Importantly, as the dialogue between myself and these social justice leaders unfolded, it became clear that data use was foundational in their pursuit for remedies to the social justice problems that they encountered at their place of work.

## **METHOD**

Key-informant interviewing is a methodological procedure taken from anthropology where the term is defined by Wolcott (1990) as an "individual in whom one invests a disproportionate amount of time because that individual appears to be particularly well informed, articulate, approachable, or available" (p. 195). For the purpose of this investigation, the researcher used and slightly modified Seidman's (1998) methodology for in-depth key informant interviewing. The goal of this interview technique was to have the participants reconstruct her/his experiences of successful social justice leadership focusing on what was considered indicators of the desired outcomes, remedies (strategies and practices) to perceived injustice, and any institutional constraints or tensions between hoped for outcomes and the enactment of the remedies.

## PARTICIPANT SELECTION

Each of the participants in this study had evidence of successful social justice leadership outcomes as identified by McKenzie et al. (2008): academic achievement, critical citizens, and inclusive practice. For expediency and initial consistency of selection, academic achievement gains of at least ten percentage points on NCLB state assessments by historically marginalized student groups was the key criterion. It was not a requirement that participants had fully implemented a successful inclusive process for all students given the mediating nature of just practices; however, failure to produce any evidence in developing strategies or practices for inclusion of all students during the initial contact would disqualify the participant from the study.

Ten adults that self identified themselves as social justice leaders participated in this inquiry under a purposive sampling plan. In purposeful sampling, the number of participants was not as critical to the study's conclusions as are the qualifications of the key-informants (Johnson, 1990). Johnson suggests that the key-informants are selected because they are all theoretically representative and meaningful in terms of the researcher's problem of study.

Table 1  
*The Participants' Institutional Level of Practice*

Participant	Position	Type of Position	Years in Service
Kim	Building Leader	Large Urban	31
Willie	Building Leader	Large Urban	14
Kerri	Building Leader	Large Urban	23
Barbara	Building Leader	Large Urban	31
Diana	Building Leader	Mid-sized Urban	29
Tami	Building Leader	Mid-sized Urban	9
Pat	District Leader	Large Urban	18
Sarah	District Leader	Large Urban	27
Alex	District Leader	Large Urban	25
Charles	District Leader	Large Urban	20+

## ANALYSIS

Glesne (2006) looks to sociology and the most commonly used method for data analysis, thematic analysis, as a key tool for finding meaningful narratives for which to tell one's story. Glesne defines thematic analysis as "a process that involves coding and the segregating the data by codes into data clumps for further analysis and description" (p. 147).

As data were collected from the participants, a matrix was constructed that became populated by the strategies and practices (context, process, outcome indicators) of the social justice leaders that were associated with the potential outcome/goal and type of justice. These practices or strategies were tied empirically to what is known in the research on indicators for successful school leadership.

Such theoretical grounding to practice is supported by Gewirtz (2006) who echoes McKenzie et al. (2008) in that one cannot rely on the abstract notions of social justice leadership or its outcomes—but what truly counts as justice "can only be properly understood within specific contexts of interpretation and enactment" (pp. 69-70).

## TRUSTWORTHINESS

Merriam's (2001) procedural framework was utilized to address credibility and transferability. Merriam identified six basic strategies taken from the literature and her own experiences: triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory or collaborative modes of research, and research bias. To triangulate the analysis through multiple sources of data, ten participants were

## *Data Use*

utilized with a semi-structured interview protocol. Member checks occurred after construction of drafts for both the findings and discussion sections, and then, to enhance collaboration were sent to all the participants. Long-term observation through repeated observance of the same phenomenon happened by the application of the in-depth interview technique. Finally, peer examination to assist with uncovering research bias occurred throughout the study with the help of two fellow researchers familiar with the methodology used and concepts investigated.

### **FINDINGS**

The role of data as an indicator of successful leadership for social justice and how data informed practices that remedied perceived injustice(s) could be initially understood through the empirical work of Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006). Therefore, I framed these leaders' responses into themes under the core indicators identified by Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi: Setting Direction, Managing the Instructional Program, Understanding People, and Developing the Organization.

**Setting Direction.** Six of the leaders used strategic planning as one means of spreading their vision for the school or district organization. Of note, all four district leaders used strategic planning but of the two school leaders, only one saw any positive outcomes of its use. However, all ten participants dialogued with staff, community members, and students to provide a vision and direction for organizational action to mitigate injustice in their workplace. Out of this dialogue, a definition for the key measure of organizational progress was uncovered: student performance data.

Student performance data for this inquiry came to be defined as a quantitative measurement of student skill mastery of a particular instructional concept that was utilized to identify skill needs to change or co-create organizational processes to support pedagogy and verify its efficacy. Each of the leaders used student performance data to establish urgency and direction, and to distribute leadership across the organization for the design and implementation of initiatives that mitigated injustice (differential test results not favoring historically marginalized student populations). For example, Pat created urgency in program implementation through data talks with teachers given the injustices that faced the students:

And when I talk to these teachers I don't sugar coat it. I lay the data out there. I tell them that this is what you are faced with and this is what it is going to look like if we don't intervene because these kids can be very smart; I had, you know, my mentee . . . he is on the streets now his next step is jail. We have to do something!

Willy talked about how data added to his visible leadership and drives what he does now as a school leader compared to when he first took the position:

The quality of my questions, I think, are a little bit different now because they are really centered around student achievement, around things that work; and why doesn't that work and if it doesn't work why are you still doing it? Things like that. So I guess pushing things a little further, I guess probing but I was probing before, I guess pushing now pushing back a bit further. Why are we still doing that? You know, does that really work? What data do you have to show that it does work and if you can't then why are we doing it? What good is it? And then I've seen some results, some anger, and some pushback, some frustration, and even some tears. But the questions have to be asked.

Student performance data also facilitated the teachers' role as key decision-makers who set direction instructionally based upon information taken from classroom-based assessments. Student performance data allowed teachers to highlight skill deficits that contributed to inequities in educational outcomes amongst groups of students, and then, set organizational direction for its elimination. Chuck saw data derived from gate-keeper assessments (e.g., the ACT) as the key driving force to ensure his vision was actualized—so much so, in fact, that he has set aside valuable resources to hire a full-time *psychometrician* from a national testing company to develop assessments that provided data to coaches who taught teachers.

### *Issues of Social Justice*

His reasoning for this approach below shows how data set direction and maintained organizational momentum through assisting teachers in becoming critically reflective within the decision-making process by understanding the link between student performance data and professional development.

We have been fortunate that we have been able to put instructional coaches in every one of our schools. I told the staff that we will be working on it for at least seven years because it is going to take that long to embed it in the culture. And that is improving instruction, improving instruction, improving instruction. And so every time I walk into a building I want to be able to talk about what are we doing on instruction—to improve instruction in these classrooms? And a major part of that instruction is looking at data and understanding what is happening in your classroom.

Tami also saw the teachers as a fundamental part of the transformation process. Teachers to Tami were the ones who knew the student, and this necessitated her to enter dialogue with them about the student. Notice also how she openly rejected the notion of teachers being doers of her vision when I asked this question: “It sounds like and I don’t want to put words in your mouth—that the teachers are empowered to make those decisions to create the equitable outcomes you are looking for?” Tami answered:

Oh absolutely, they are the grunt workers; they’re the ones that know that child and knows what that child needs. And who better to know that? I don’t believe sitting up here and throwing a program at them and saying, “hey do this, it works”. And again you don’t want to clump all these kids together, you got to look at them as individuals and fill a need.

It cannot be overstated how much these successful social justice leaders pushed their vision of justice and set organizational direction through assigning others the fundamental role of deconstructing injustice. The data grounded the teachers in a perception of reality where their collective actions upon the students provided data that located them and pointed out where they both were and where they both need to go instructionally. As Tami clearly articulated, “the data is the map, the data is the GPS. That’s what it is; it gets you to where you want to go to your destination. If you don’t have that map you are going to be lost.”

**Managing the Instructional Program.** All ten leaders were proponents of a unified curriculum delivered through multiple methodologies of instruction to ensure a high level of student engagement. Importantly, Kim, Tami, and Kerri utilized a tightly scheduled system of instruction designed around multiple methods to target student skill deficits through the effective distribution of resources. This scheduling structure counted on teachers to utilize the student performance data to change not just instruction, but the time or place resources were available to the students in the classroom.

Each leader’s ability to effectively align what needed to be taught based on student needs (that corresponded to state standards or high stakes gatekeeper assessments) to attain an efficient instructional program design through assessments varied. Nevertheless, as seen in the conversation below with Kerri, she provided student performance data for teachers and students that constructed intentionality with program alignment, design (in this case differentiation), and response to student needs (teaching). What was also evident in this discussion was that even with the specter of the mitigated nature of just practices influencing the school (central office initiatives), Kerri’s leadership was unwavering. I stated during our interview, “You showed me your data system and everyone has access to your data system and it’s really about using assessments for intervention. You don’t really—I mean, you monitor, obviously, progress, but that is not the reason for assessments; the reason for assessments is for intervention.” Kerri affirmed, “They are formative assessments.” I then asked, “Do you give any assessments that you don’t use other than to benchmark or is everything involved towards driving and differentiating instructional need?” Kerri clarified and then elaborated:

## *Data Use*

I don't think we give any, why would we do that? I mean we used to have to do them, downtown (central office) would ask for these science assessments, like this year we are doing a CFA in science, and right now we are not using it. I see where we are going with it, and eventually we will use it. Right now we are just seeing if the instrument itself is functioning.

Kerri's response critically uncovered the need for teachers not to be doers within the assessment process by compliantly accepting test instruments, but to actively evaluate not just the content of the assessment, but the instrument itself. It is the intent and the quality of the instrument that provides meaningful pedagogical information regarding student performance. Therefore, it is necessary for these leaders to continue to place the teacher in the role of developing assessments that build a tight scope and sequence along with acquiring a complementary curriculum that gave meaning to student performance data focused on equity

Student performance data measured the individual's progress towards skill acquisition as well as how equitable the child was treated by the educational system. All the leaders placed strong emphasis on students demonstrating both mastery on formative assessments through the pedagogical response to classroom learning outcomes as well as summative outcomes on high-stakes tests (state or national).

Kerri detailed the use of formative assessments to measure student learning and acquiring the needed resources to mitigate students' skill deficits:

Well we do assessments. We look at where we are. We don't hide the data; we do a lot of data talk, and we have conversations even though they are difficult. Nothing is a sacred cow; we do whatever it takes, if a kid needs more time we find a way to get more time. If the right thing to do with money is to get a person, I will go to the mat trying to get a person so I can get more time or smaller groups or more intensity of instruction.

These social justice leaders also saw the link between formative assessments and summative assessments. Chuck described how the entire district's scope and sequence and formative assessments are structured to ensure student success on the ACT. Tami like Chuck also constructed local formative assessments to prepare students for the state assessment. Even though she did not have the resources that Chuck had, she was able to get similar results from a high poverty student population through common assessments based upon a curriculum and an instructional program with a humanities theme. As my conversation with Tami showed, she had in her building a system of assessments that impacted student learning, dictated teacher response, and prepared the student for the state test. I asked Tami whether common assessments were constructed across grade-levels and subjects. Tami's response highlighted her school's emphasis on student mastery of concepts through student performance data used to guide instruction:

No, the common assessment would be for the humanities class, another one in math, another in science and they are State Assessment formatted so they look just like the State test. Also, about the assessment, the teachers have a mastery manager which also is an assessment tool that the assessments are scanned in and gives a print out to the teachers of what goals were accomplished so they get together with their counterpart and talk about, 'okay these kids missed all these—Is the question bad, or we didn't teach it right, or do we need to go back?'

It is quite evident that assessments did more than monitor instructional outcomes for students. Assessments drove the instructional efforts to mitigate inequities in performance outcomes, which were believed to be systemic in nature and added to the professional decision-making culture established by these leaders. Placing teachers in a decision-making role ensured that program design and alignment was directed by student performance data.

**Developing the organization is developing people.** The participants in this study did not separate out developing the organization from developing people. Throughout this study, these leaders voiced that their work was located in the students, teachers, and community practices that made up their

school or district organization. The participants placed a great deal of emphasis on teachers being agents of change which implied that leadership must be distributed across the organization for structures that inhibited just outcomes to be eliminated. There was also strong consensus amongst the leaders that it was the role of the district or school to set direction but it was the teachers and building administrators who should have decision-making discretion derived through utilizing student performance data to impact pedagogical outcomes.

Another way that the participants' sustained effective strategies and practices to increase equitable student outcomes across the organization was to utilize professional development. To ensure effective professional development, three of the leaders brought reading coaches into the worksite to provide knowledge and increase teacher skill development for reading instruction in the classroom. Chuck, as superintendent, highlighted the organizational importance of student performance data when he ensured there were coaches available to professional staff to make certain reflection of student performance data occurred and provided staff with a multiplicity of available responses to pedagogical outcomes.

Other leaders either personally or through direct feedback from teachers in the workplace provided professional development specific to the needs of the particular location of the worksite. Willy gave an excellent example of how he and other leaders used the little time allocated to them (because of union contract or district obligations) to get professionals to use student performance data to better their pedagogy in the workplace:

The teachers meet in grade-level teams and they are very good at meeting and there is not a single grade level team that is not about data. Every single one of them is about data and about kids. If they don't bring data to the table then they don't meet. There are a couple teams; probably my first and second grade teams that meet every week. By contract I cannot ask them to meet more than three times a month. I've given up whole faculty meetings so they could get the work that I am asking them to get done. And when RTI [Response to Intervention] came into place that's when I gave up the whole school faculty meeting because that first meeting of the month is about kids, so any kid that they have concerns about either behaviorally or academically are brought to the meeting.

Professional development was directed by student performance data and decision-making teams looked to acquire knowledge and skills that positively impacted instruction across the workplace. Although, there was no evidence that traditional off-site professional development was curtailed, when it was used, the social justice leaders stated it had a specific purpose for the benefit of the organization and its people.

## **DISCUSSION**

Although, it is still useful to utilize the framework provided by Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006) of indicators for successful school leaders because of the commonalities between the research and the participants' behaviors for setting direction, managing the instructional program, and developing the organization and its people, how these leaders constructed their leadership from these behaviors sets them apart. I look to Freire (1970) and his use of the term *praxis* to provide context and meaning to the participants' data use in remedying injustice within their location of practice. Freire believed that praxis embodied the notion of humanities liberation, which was directly tied to one's ability to combine action and reflection against oppressive structures.

Significantly, these leaders' established dialogue with the institution through their use of student performance data to contextualize injustice at their level of practice. This institutional dialogue created a situation where individual student performance data became a measure of institutional equity, which set organizational direction, drove the instructional program, and determined why and how the organization and its people would be developed. In essence, praxis was located at the individual student level where injustice would be mitigated by organizational reflection of practices that negatively impacted academic achievement.

## **SETTING DIRECTION**

Critically, it was not knowledge about student performance data in and of itself that unleashed praxis; rather such knowledge provided the leaders with an opportunity to establish dialogue within the institution, and therefore, set organizational direction for a social justice agenda. My use for the concept of dialogue and its relationship to the knowledge that these leaders had on student performance data is best explained by how Freire (1970) coined the term. Freire states:

Dialogue is the encounter between men [sic], mediated by the world in order to name the world. . . . Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants . . . it is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another. (pp. 88-89)

The participants' knowledge and use of student performance data became a mechanism for united reflection through dialogue at the level of practice. Student performance data for this inquiry was defined as a quantitative measurement of student skill mastery of a particular instructional concept that was utilized to identify skill needs (context indicator), to change or co-create pedagogy to meet those needs (process indicator), and to verify its efficacy (outcome indicator). Throughout the discussion with the participants it became quite evident that all these leaders utilized student performance data to create dialogue on organizational goals, develop a need for a professional decision-making processes to analyze data, design instructional interventions for individual students, mark injustice and its mitigation at both the individual and institutional level, and provide professional development based on individual and communal reflection of student skills. These leaders understood that the importance of student performance data was in its use to identify organizational structures that constructed injustice, developed and actualized institutional praxis upon those structures, and analyzed context, process, and outcome indicators to ensure equity for all students.

## **MANAGING THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM**

For these leaders, an instructional program that mitigated injustices relied on the teachers and students as the foundational force for change. It is clear that the participants viewed leadership as distributed throughout the organization and not centered in positional authority. For the purpose of this paper's claims, distributive leadership is a descriptive tool that considers how leadership tasks are dispersed socially and contextually in schools (Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). The goal of leadership from this understanding of organizational behavior is to create the conditions for improving teaching and learning in schools through defining processes to support and establish a culture of effective practices (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2005). Through my discussions with these leaders, it was evident that they utilized a distributive leadership view of school organizational behavior to manage the instructional program and unleash praxis against oppressive structures within the institution.

These leaders supported a balanced, unified, and differentiated approach to instruction where student performance data became the tool for measuring individual and group performance to provide both the right curriculum and methodology to mitigate student skill deficits. Instructional or personnel resources were also distributed based upon student performance data and were allocated to give the flexibility provided by the use of multiple methodologies. None of the leaders were proponents of instructional programs such as direct instruction that took the teacher or student out of the decision-making role during pedagogy.

**Data Driven Instructional System.** These leaders advocated for a constant cycle for re-evaluation of student progress within the organizations that can be best described as a Data-Driven Instructional System (DDIS). All ten leaders utilized DDIS to manage the instructional program and ensure that equity based initiatives were effectively implemented. This is not surprising since Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, and Thomas (2005) believed it was essential that schools access data, help teachers and leaders understand what the data mean through reflection, create a plan through determining what needs to be done from the data, and assess the results of the plan.

These leaders employed all six components of DDIS (data acquisition, data reflection, program alignment, program design, formative feedback, and test preparation) as a mechanism to ensure that student performance data to identify injustice were effectively utilized. Whether it was acquiring and displaying the student performance data from formative assessments, providing time for reflection to change instruction to mitigate skill deficits, or ensuring program alignment, organizational action was taken to make sure that students had equitable outcomes be they distributive, recognitional, or associational in nature. Another key benefit of DDIS for these leaders was that it placed teachers in the key decision-making role where there was a constant emphasis on reflection and action against identified skill deficits or structures inhibiting student achievement. I would argue that for these leaders, DDIS provided such unifying processes and, when founded upon student performance data, was the structural manifestation of praxis at the organizational level.

### **DEVELOPING THE ORGANIZATION IS DEVELOPING PEOPLE**

Throughout my discussions with the informants, it became clear to me that one should not differentiate between indicators for successful leadership in developing the organization and practices for understanding and developing people. As previously stated, Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006) reported that leaders who are successful in developing the organization do so by supporting a sustainable structure of processes that enhance the performance of administrators, teachers, support staff, and students. Since teacher agency was foundational to the development of praxis across the school or district organization, these leaders would not differentiate between developing the organization and developing its people; it was one and the same.

**Professional development: no disengagement from practice.** It is clear that whether it is in, at, or outside of work, professional development was driven by these leaders' praxis that was informed by the student performance data and acted upon co-intentionally with the professional staff of the school or district to mitigate injustice. Professional development for these participants then needed to support the organizational praxis, which entailed building the knowledge and skills (the capacity to teach) of those engaged in the social justice work. When professional development was deemed most effective by these leaders, it was the teachers and school level administrators who directed the type and length of the training based upon student performance data.

Bredeson (2003) supports these leaders' emphasis on workplace focused professional development when he contends that after a thorough review of the educational research, when professional development was deemed effective, it became a lived experience that engaged in the daily pedagogical practices of teachers.

### **DISTRIBUTIVE, RECOGNITIONAL, AND ASSOCIATIONAL JUSTICE: THE IMPACT OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE DATA**

**Student performance data.** Student performance data cut across all three typologies of justice in its use by these social justice leaders. Student performance data provided information on student skill deficits within a particular content area that then allowed for the organizational understanding of context and process indicators to then distribute resources (curriculum, staffing, materials, etc.) to elicit outcome indicators that measured both pedagogical efficacy and equity progress. Student performance data because it highlighted individual skill deficits when constructed by an inequitable educational system, put the emphasis of change on the instructional system and not the student or groups of students. There was no need to utilize labels (that promoted deficit thinking) on students through a classification system built to

### Data Use

distribute resources (as in the long history of categorical aid to schools) to identified and segregated groups because student performance data were measuring sticks for enhancing individual skills (acting as a process indicator) and the equity of the pedagogy delivered to all in the classroom (outcome indicator). It ensured that the educational system recognized and valued the student for who she or he was without institutionally imposed classification impacting classroom pedagogy (however, the mitigated nature of just practices manifested across the organization through maintaining bureaucratic classification labels on students for funding categories because of requirements mandated by federal and/or state reporting).

Finally, student performance data set direction for praxis at the organizational level and, in the hands of teachers, data were utilized to make substantive decisions on the instructional program and the development of the organization and its people, thus elevating the level of associational justice across the organization. Student performance data applied across the organization drove collective decision-making and, lacking it, educators would have been left without the information needed to be agents of change. Student performance data used to measure both progress on pedagogical and equitable organizational initiatives elevated the experience of those working in the context of pedagogy to a level of responsibility and empowerment to make decisions that impacted the lived experiences of both teachers and students.

### IMPLICATIONS

What is clear is that the way these leaders used data has empirical capital is evident from the voices of successful school leaders themselves. However, there is a need to explore the ambiguity around the connections between student performance data, the impact on organizational leadership, the creation of substantive decision-making, and how student performance data positively or negatively manifests in the processes to promote student achievement. Other areas of study would be the relationship between what counts as foundational student performance data for judging student achievement, types of pedagogical methods practiced by teachers, and the difficulties of using technical rationality from a critical pedagogical standpoint. Finally, the seemingly lack of substantive strategic planning by these leaders is also an area needing further study especially in relation to school organizations that have fully formed DDIS systems or strong evidence of distributive leadership.

Finally, we need to act reflectively. The social justice leadership location does not debate inequity in education—only what we can do for our students. Therefore, we who believe in social justice must focus on efforts in understanding, developing, and avoiding the perils embedded in our ideology and in that of the location of work we practice in to drive pedagogical praxis. We must be both successful social justice leaders and school leaders to serve our students in a manner that provides them the tools and the will to be foundational change agents for a just society.

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*Issues of Social Justice*

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