Navigating the In-Between: Defining the Third Space for Educational Leadership Programs

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Because the role of the principal has changed dramatically, preparation programs have adapted to better prepare these leaders. This study examines one program using surveys and interviews of completers. Results showed that these leaders found themselves in an uncomfortable new area, what we deem "the in-between." Using the theoretical framework of the third space, this qualitative study found three areas defining this space: sense of self, transition of thinking, and complexity of the third space. Deconstructing this space with the realization that it is an area for growth and meaningful dialogue should be an aim of principal preparation programs.

Keywords: *Principal Preparation Programs, Third Space, Sense of Self, Transition, Principal*

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> The education field is finally embracing school leadership as an essential ingredient in reform, worthy of investment in its own right. Facing pressure to have all children meet high standards, states and districts increasingly are recognizing that successful school reform depends on having principals well prepared to change schools and improve instruction, not just manage buildings and budgets. (Mitgang, 2012, p. 15)

National recognition of the pressures facing educational leaders in their complex roles has resulted in a shift in the focus of principal preparation programs. Whereas in the past these positions were often viewed as purely building or personnel management, the understanding of the complexity of these roles and the skill sets required have expanded to become a more realistic portrayal of what is needed. As noted by Mitgang (2012) in the opening quotation, the principal today not only has to worry about safety, financial, and maintenance concerns, but also must be able to increase student learning, create a collaborative and professional learning environment, and build school and community partnerships. They must be, as McKibben (2015) stated, "lead learners." As the understanding of this job has developed, principal preparation programs (PPP) have evolved to equip aspiring leaders to be ready for the challenges of the role. In this paper, we examine completers of one educational leadership program to determine their readiness for the work. In our qualitative study, we discovered these candidates viewed their learning as influential but were finding themselves in a new space, what we deem "the in-between." Using the concept of the third space, we delve into their sense of self, their transitions of thinking, and the complexity in the in-between and provide a conceptual framing for creating programs that incorporate this third space as a place for leadership candidates to grow as individuals and as a community of leaders.

Literature Review

To begin, it is important to discuss the ways in which educational leadership is defined and the current expectations of these roles. School leadership has a strong impact on student achievement, second only to classroom instruction in school-controlled variables (Leithwood et al., 2008; Marzano et al., 2005). The most common term, though somewhat overused, is that the principal is an instructional leader. Instructional leadership includes setting high expectations, developing a strong mission and vision, providing necessary resources, protecting learning time, and providing instructional support and professional learning (Blase & Blase, 1999; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hattie 2009; McEwan, 2003). Louis et al. (2010) stated that a principal should be able to redesign the organization to increase collaboration and monitor the work of the teacher.

Principals today also must contend with changing societal norms. Indeed, school leaders will face issues surrounding the topics of increased enrollment of minoritized students, increased enrollment of students whose first language is not English, extreme poverty, and bullying. In a study addressing challenges principals face, Wise (2015) identified six major issues including the following: lack of financial resources, home/community issues, test scores/accountability, instruction/assessment, lack of time, and too many responsibilities. As seen in the diversity and span of these issues, principals need the capacity to create strong learning environments while balancing the critical needs of the community.

The demand for highly trained principals has led to the revision of principal preparation programs (PPP) across the nation. A 2007 Wallace Foundation Study (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) examined exemplary pre- and in-service programs. Exemplary programs contained several components, including an emphasis on instructional leadership and school improvement, student-

centered instruction with a problem-based focus and a mix of theory and practice, performance-based internships, and portfolios with feedback from university and P-12 school mentors. These programs have a coherent curriculum aligned with national standards led by faculty who are expert practitioners and follow a cohort model. Finally, the goal of the PPP is to find the best candidates through targeted recruitment. Graduates of the principal preparation programs discussed in the Wallace study self-rated significantly higher than their peers rated them in the areas of building collaborative learning environments, professional development, utilization of data, engaging staff, leading change, planning for improvement, re-designing schools, and continuous learning. Most notably, graduates of these programs were more positive about their abilities to be effective principals.

In their efforts to improve principal preparation, the Wallace Foundation has been at the forefront in revision of principal preparation programs. In their 2010 report, Louis et al. confirmed that leadership has the second greatest school related impact on student learning with quality classroom instruction being the highest influence. A review of school leadership found no evidence of school improvement without strong leadership (Leithwood et al., 2008). This influence is indirect in that the principal's actions affect the teachers, which ultimately affect the students (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2008; Marzano et al., 2005). According to the Partnership for Excellence in Education's Top Ten Issues to watch 2020, there are three components to this revision. First, there should be quality courses with on-the-job experiences. Secondly, university-district partnerships should be established and strengthened. Then, changes in licensure requirements and accreditation comprise the third component.

In a 2016 Wallace Foundation study, Davis synthesized reports from four key organizations, including the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), The School Superintendents Association (AASA), the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). The first theme was that district leaders are dissatisfied with principal preparation programs. Superintendents ranked university preparation the lowest in key areas such as instructional leadership and building collaborative teams. Feedback from university officials indicated there were areas where they felt the need to change their structures for principal preparation. All agreed that strong university-district partnerships were important but were lacking, thus forming the second theme.

The third theme stated that the work in principal preparation programs does not mirror the true work of principals (Davis, 2016). The investigation indicated the need for real-world applications in the curriculum and suggested that professors for these courses should be current or former effective principals. The report also highlighted clinical preparation as a key component, which was defined by AACTE as full school-based integration that allows candidates to be involved in all facets of the school in authentic leadership work. This includes working with adults and engaging in reflective practices. Candidates are to be effectively mentored by supervisors in the field and university professors.

The final theme of the Wallace 2016 study dealt with university procedures that impede change (Davis, 2016). This could include lack of funding, faculty resistance to change, and the desire on the part of superintendents for practitioner-led teaching. This is often difficult at the university level because the salary for these practitioners would be lower, and the desire by the university for a terminal degree may limit who is qualified to teach. The study closes with the theme that reinforces the need to be proactive in improving principal preparation. Many do this through licensure requirements and accreditation of programs. As noted in the Wallace report, "Many respondents felt that the state legislators and policymakers have very

little knowledge or investment in education, let alone principal preparation, leading to bad and un-actionable policies" (Davis, 2016, p.15). Superintendents argued that their expertise should be part of these processes so that the outcomes do not hinder the principal pipeline.

Mitgang (2012) examined principal preparation with the goal of teaching, recruiting, and retaining "school leaders who are knowledgeable, highly skilled and relentless" (p.10). These lessons encapsulate themes in the Wallace study (Davis, 2016), beginning with rigorous selection processes that aim to identify whether candidates have relevant experience and the aptitudes and dispositions to lead school improvement. Another lesson calls for relevant instruction that enables the candidate to improve instruction and lead change. The course of study educates participants to use systems thinking, communicate clearly, coach teachers, utilize data, set high expectations, and provide professional development. These programs emphasize internships where participants are actively involved in the leadership process.

Similarly, Sutcher et al. (2017) examined the key factors of effective principal learning programs in a study published by the Learning Policy Institute. They established the need for partnerships between the university and the district with the goal of targeted recruitment. Successful programs include a cohort model and field-based internships. The curriculum is problem-based, connecting theory to practice. Finally, the focus is on creating collegial and collaborative environments centered on school improvement. As the authors indicated, "Developing excellent principals who can set direction, develop people, redesign organizations, and lead instruction requires a system of high-quality preparation and professional development" (Sutcher et al., 2017, p. 2). Principal preparation programs must take this into consideration when developing or revising their programs.

Lastly, we also know that the art of reflection is an underlying component in the literature for principal leadership. Reflection is a process that practitioners use to learn through their experiences (Dewy, 1933). Over the years, models have been developed to define the steps of this process (Gibbs, 1988; Johns, 2009; Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1991). These models have been researched and proven effective for practitioners to gain insight, knowledge, and a deeper understanding of the complexities of their work. The process of reflection is especially valuable for building new knowledge for individuals entering the practice of school leadership. All the models suggest identifying an event or incident that might be novel or new to the practitioner, providing a concrete description, and then reflecting on or thinking deeply about what occurred, what was learned, and how things could have been handled differently. Using a framework for what is learned, such as the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), helps to advance the skill set needed for practice as effective school leaders.

With this literature in mind, the authors of this paper re-created one principal preparation program in Georgia and utilized interviews, focus groups, and surveys to determine the effectiveness of these revisions. For background on this program and certification, in June of 2015, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission published new Educational Leadership Program Guidelines. These guidelines are aligned with the Georgia Educational Leadership Standards (GELS) and based on input from educational leadership faculty across the state. The GELS are aligned the Professional Standards for Educational Leadership (PSEL) and with the Georgia Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES), the tool utilized to measure performance of educational leaders in the state of Georgia. This particular program is located at a large university in northeast Georgia that serves students in rural, urban and suburban areas. The program includes six courses and utilizes a hybrid model of both online and face-to-face instruction. All classes are

led by current and former principals, as well as central office leaders. The students in this study are gaining Tier 1 certification, which allows them to be assistant principals. Students also complete a 250-hour performance-based internship with a site supervisor and a university professor. Persons who want to be in the role of an assistant principal must have Tier 1 certification and then complete Tier 2 to become a principal. A Tier-2 candidate must complete 750 hours of internship and must align these performances to leader dispositions with the idea that a candidate may have the knowledge to do the work but not necessarily the disposition to carry it out successfully.

For the purposes of this paper, we examine the Tier I certification program and its impact on emerging leaders, but even with all these studies in mind, what we discovered was that there still was a gap in terms of program content, internships, and then the first year(s) of leadership experiences. From previous studies, we understood what material should be covered in a program and we increased the number of clinical hours, as we saw the importance of applicable experiences. What was missing, however, was a literal and figurative third space. It is this liminal space that becomes the mechanism for navigating and applying the content. What is absent from the literature, then, is the methodological approach to these programs rather than the content or approaches to andragogy/pedagogy and leadership in theory.

Theoretical Framework

For our theoretical framework, we employ the concept of the third space, which was theorized by Homi Bhabha (1994) as a decolonizing, linguistic space. For Bhabha (1994), the third space provided "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (p. 2). Particularly for "dissonant, even dissident histories and voices," the third space was a place to deconstruct identities and culture in an effort to also deconstruct dichotomies of power and oppression, particularly in relation to the dominant culture (i.e., white, middle class, heterosexual, Christian) (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5). As he further described, "The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 3). The third space is not an easy space in which to exist—deconstruction and examination of binaries, of identity as related to power and oppression, is difficult work, but it is necessary in order to create change (Anzaldúa, 1998; Bhabha, 1994). As Bhabha (1994) stated, "Being in the 'beyond,' then, is to inhabit an intervening space … But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revision time … *to touch the future on its hither side*" (p. 10). This third space is uncomfortable and yet is the locality where change truly happens.

Many scholars have applied the theory of the third space to K-16 classrooms and to educator development (O'Meara et al. 2019; Pereira, 2019; Steele, 2017; Zeichner, 2010). In reference to the classroom, for example, Kawalilak et al. (2017) noted, "It is within these spaces where potential resides for co-creating knowledge in support of collaborative, engaging, learner-centered communities" (p. 142). Scholars have used the third space as a description of how we can change education and our educational communities to be places where social justice is at the crux of pedagogy and policy. We say this, of course, with the understanding that third spaces, as theorized by scholars such as Bhabha and Anzaldúa, were envisioned as places where

those who had been oppressed, those who were underrepresented, could begin to deconstruct dominant ideologies to allow room for change. We do not want to take away from the third space as a tool for dismantling dominant ideologies, but we do want to recognize its value in applying similar approaches to education. As a mirror of society, our educational system in the states, for instance, has a history of oppression and misuse of power to provide continuing privilege to students, teachers, and leaders from dominant cultures.

In applying this approach to classrooms, educational programs, and educator preparation, we recognize that this same approach can be applied to leadership programs as well—and should be. If we are seeking educational change, then we need to extend this to our principal and leadership preparation programs. After all, if change stops at the level of the teacher, then the obstacles these teachers face in truly developing democratizing educational practices will be too large of a burden to bear. We argue, then, that to create leadership programs with the power to truly initiate educational change, a third space approach to such programs can help potential and nascent leaders discover more about their leadership identity, form a community of leaders dedicated to initiating change, and develop a group of leaders with the tools necessary to impact educational policy at more macro levels. At the same time, we recognize the complexity and difficulty of future and current leaders existing in these third spaces, as these liminal spaces can be frustrating and scary. Yet while professional and state standards are important, one-size-fits-all approaches to leadership are not going to result in leaders with the potential to catalyze the changes needed in our educational system to increase opportunities for students, their families, and their teachers.

Methodology

The data for this ongoing qualitative case study is based on one year and includes focus groups with program completers one year after completion and survey data from in-program participants and completers. Surveys included Likert-scale questions focused on state and national standards and program logistics, as they were originally developed for general program improvement, and they included open-ended questions on program improvements. We then based the focus group questions on an expansion of the initial survey data. Focus group interviewees included six program completers, four females and two males, all of whom are currently employed in leadership positions. To garner participation, program coordinators emailed past participants to assess who would be willing to participate in a focus group to discuss the impact of the program on their leadership work one year after program completion.

In terms of data analysis, the three authors initially read all transcripts and then met to discuss potential codes. After an initial review of the transcribed interviews, we emphasized six areas where we chose to code the data using in-vivo coding to remain true to the participants' voices (Saldaña, 2013), and we all returned to the transcripts to code accordingly. These codes included voice, perspective/lens, mindset, andragogy, agency, and collaboration. After initial coding, we met again to discuss potential themes emerging from these codes, and then re-coded the data based on themes, creating charts outlining these themes and then reviewing where themes merged across our three individual analyses. The focus group and survey data were generally very supportive of the program, but one overarching theme and three subthemes emerged from the interviews. As our candidates embraced new roles, there was a discomfort in this new area, what we call the "in-between" or third space, which became our overarching theme. Like most institutions, schools exist in dichotomies, but there is always

that third space. This is not a bad place to be; in fact, it is necessary. Yet candidates expressed trepidation in this space, and they had a low level of consciousness to the complexities of the role. Given this discovery, we went back to the transcripts and coded for three subthemes, which included transition of thinking, sense of self as a leader, and complexity of the position.

Findings

Sense of Self in the 'In Between'

What we found as we analyzed our data is that candidates found themselves in a liminal space, where they were not quite sure who they wanted to be as leaders, and they were not quite sure of their roles. As candidates started in their position in this new space, it was evident that this was an unfamiliar place for these individuals despite the level of success in their principal preparation program. Their sense of self as a leader was not yet developed. Sense of self is a person's way of viewing themselves, their beliefs, and abilities in whatever situation (Combs et al., 1999). We all have many beliefs about ourselves, which we gain from our life experiences. As a leader, sense of self impacts the way we make decisions, interact with people, and run the organization. Respondents lacked confidence, were somewhat naïve, and were not prepared for the complexities of the role. It was also evident that they were navigating in this third space and growing this sense of self with their experiences and responsibilities in their daily interactions with their stakeholders.

While in this third space, respondents began to develop their sense of self through experiences and building awareness. For the first time, they understood that they had a voice and they were part of the conversation about making changes and improvements. This is an unfamiliar position for many of our respondents. When asked what was surprising about their job, one respondent indicated the following: "Being a part of the leadership conversations with the admin team regarding colleagues that I was not previously a part of those conversations, performance-based conversations about and strategizing about instructional weaknesses on our faculty." Another commented, "Understanding that you have a voice that matters to others is a revelation." One respondent said it was the first time "…that you have face time and you have the opportunity to lead meetings and to make suggestions that can improve our effectiveness in schools and just really having , feeling like you have the opportunity and the voice to contribute in a meaningful way." As program participants moved into leadership roles, they were learning that their voices mattered, at the same time they had to learn how to utilize that voice to make changes.

Indeed, respondents in the in-between lacked a positive sense of self as leader and suggested that they were naïve about the new work (Combs et. al., 1999). As one respondent stated, "I guess I've been a little disillusioned, and now it's been eye opening just to understand the obstacles that leaders face every day." Another commented, "…you're a little idealistic of how you're going to change the world and help all kids and be the best leader ever. The day-to-day things that really actually happen in the school, it's more realistic perspective I think now." In this liminal space, respondents find that though they have learned much, there is a vast expanse of information for which they have little or no experience.

The program provided respondents ways to see how supervisors, colleagues, students and parents view their work as a leader, which influences their sense of self in this position. As one stated, "I learned a lot from Tier 1 the program in that understanding that the community stakeholder group is really crucial to continuous school … As a classroom teacher, you get a little

siloed in that you're responsible for those that are in your four walls." In this space, respondents are beginning to understand how their function coincides with the larger groups of staff, parents, and community, as well as understanding the part they will play in contributing to goals such as improving school performance.

As they gain experiences, how others see them as a leader also contributes to their sense of self (Combs et.al., 1999). Respondents had confidence that others saw them as supportive and approachable. One explained, "I think they would describe me as approachable just based on the number of times they come into my office…I think that they are comfortable coming to me with questions and know that I will stop what I'm doing and help them with even the smallest things to make their day a little bit easier." How respondents see themselves as leaders is reflected in how teachers and staff start to depend on them in this new role. While in this in between, they find themselves willing and eager to perform whatever tasks necessary while they begin to sharpen their focus. They have not yet figured out what their niche is as a leader, so they stay with what is comfortable.

In developing their sense of self as a leader, respondents frequently reflect on their experiences. They understand that with experience comes knowledge and a positive sense of self as a leader: "I really don't think until you have an opportunity to get in and do it that you can, in any way, understand how you're going to impact your team members or your committee members." Reflection was an essential component of the PPP observed.

In finding their sense of self, partially through these opportunities to continuously reflect, candidates noted a growing sense of efficacy as leaders. As one respondent said, "I feel like we have made some progress towards true collaborative planning and that we're really fostering that reflective mentality of let's try this, even though it's not something I've ever done before. And then, let's collaborate." They all agree with this statement made by one of their peers, "the program has given me a sense of assuredness with going to administration and asking to make changes in the sense that I feel like something is not working." Although the work is challenging, they are making progress and attribute this growth to their experiences and the opportunities they had during the internship as well.

Transition of Thinking in the 'In Between'

As candidates' transition into this new space, ways of thinking changed in a myriad of ways. Deepening understanding of policies and law, gaining new perspectives on leadership, and working with adults on a new level contributed to this transition of thinking. One quotation particularly captures this transition:

> I used to think that leadership was the people who worked really hard and stayed really late and were willing to do anything that people asked. And I think my understanding is now that leadership is inspiring others to be the ones who work late with you and are willing to try new things and jump in the deep end, as well. It's not just about being the hardest working person. It's about being a magnet that gets other people to do similar work alongside you, I guess.

As seen in this participant's words, transitioning to the third space changed the binary perspective of leadership to a better understanding of the many lenses involved in these roles.

A deeper understanding of school law and polices was a consistent theme highlighting the uncomfortable part of being in the third space. One respondent stated, "You just look at things differently. Whereas, when I'm at the car ride line, you're putting scenarios through your head.

What would happen if?" Though candidates expressed deeper understanding, apprehension over the application was apparent in many responses, particularly in the area of special education. This was captured by one respondent saying, "Yeah, especially special ed laws. I'm nervous. It's like every time I open my mouth, I'm like let me check that." Entering this new space creates context for policies and procedures not deeply considered or understood before the changeover.

For those moving from the classroom, transition to the third space is described as a challenge in that they felt comfortable in the classroom but not as confident in coaching teachers. Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of teacher evaluation. It is often eye-opening when effective teachers turned administrators visit classrooms and observe different levels of instruction. One participant stated,

> … but now as I'm going in, and I'm observing and I'm evaluating teachers and realizing that your three levels, you have your rock stars, and you have your really good teachers that might just need a few things to be going from good to great, and then you have the other ones that you just really need to be on their team to help them grow and develop.

There is the complex mixture of desire and anxiety around helping teachers improve by providing the necessary tools, and leaders recognize but are unprepared for the shift between pedagogy to andragogy.

Working with adults in this new space provides challenge for new leaders, as seen in this participant's quotation:

> So, the most difficult transition has been working with adults and working through the communication in order to achieve a successful outcome, and whether that be working through a deadline, delegating tasks so that you have trust that it's going to be done to the level in which you want to put out a high quality product or whatever you're doing. And it's also understanding how others communicate and receive information and learning how to do that with adults, I think, has been the hardest transition. Spending years in the classroom, you hone your skills on being able to communicate with students and with young learners, but it's a whole different bottle of wax.

There was anxiety around getting reluctant teachers to buy into an initiative. They express surprise that colleagues might not follow up on deadlines, are not receptive to change, or even refuse to get involved. And again, this shift creates anxiety, as previously these leaders felt confident in their skills in the classroom.

Respondents agreed that the program helped in easing into this third space from hearing the diverse voices of their colleagues in the program. Collaboration with leaders from different schools, districts and levels proved beneficial. Cooperatively learning about initiating change, building cultures, and developing mission and vision was enhanced by hearing voices from rural and suburban school districts. Candidates left the program with a sense of efficacy, but then enter into this third space with varying levels of confidence and anxiety.

Complexity of the Third Space

As noted above, then, this third space for these candidates is a space of learning and growth as related to their sense of selves as leaders and their definitions of the role of school leaders. In part, their role is liminal in the sense that they are new leaders, most of whom are in roles where they are assistant principals—roles where they are not classroom teachers, but they are also not the head of the school. They have to learn, then, to navigate a role that by its very definition is "in-

between." Several participants noted the difficulty of navigating this role, but the following participant described this particular issue as being one of the most difficult:

> I would say that one of the hard things for me has been, or the most difficult, and I don't know that it's necessarily unique is the idea of shared leadership and trying to increase the capacity of those around you, but people can be.,. They may have less attention to detail or may do things in a way that wouldn't be the way that you would do them. So, I guess letting go of some of that, especially when you're on an administrative team and there's blurred lines of who's doing what. And you don't want to step on their toes, because you're not officially an assistant principal. And you want to be helpful, but you don't want to just run with, "Oh, here, just let me do that. I'll just get it done." So, trying to play the... to be a good team player without being overbearing, I would say. I've been careful not to be overbearing. Does that make sense?

These new administrators are trying to figure out these "blurred lines" between educator and leader, and it is more complex than many of them initially realized when first taking on these positions.

This role sometimes comes to a head, as new school leaders try to navigate their vision of this role with the reality of it. In addition, they are struggling with the dichotomy created between the teacher/leader roles—a binary that should not necessarily exist. As noted above, leaders struggle with how to move from pedagogy to andragogy and how to navigate the world of adult learners when they previously felt more comfortable in a classroom setting. What they realize, though, as they move forward in these roles is that the roles of teacher and leader are intertwined and interrelated. As one participant noted, it took a while to realize "I'm having to influence teachers, which would then therefore influence students." As another asked, "How can I help my teachers to see what the kids in their class need, and then how can I give my teachers those tools so that they can serve their kids academically and increase their academic achievement in that way?" They are learning, though, that this new role is more complex than the teacher/leader dichotomy would present. This is evidenced by comments of many of our participants, but this particular student described it aptly in the following quotation: "I think the most difficult part has been just all of the roles that I have to play and not anticipating how overwhelming all that can be when you have to wear so many hats and work with so many people, and then the expectations that you have from a lot of people." As they move forward in these roles, though, they begin to recognize that they have to move out of these binaries. As one participant noted, "a lot of times, teachers tend to fit in their little box and stay in their niche. But when you're bringing opportunities to them as a leader, because you have that chance to do that, I think that that has allowed me to impact far more learners than I've had a chance to impact in the past." Here, this leader is recognizing the importance of merging teaching and leadership—teachers are leaders and leaders are teachers and moving past the binary is important for truly making change in a school environment.

Discussion

Again, the important element that these leaders are recognizing is that this third space is a location in which they can learn and grow as leaders, but it is also a space in which they can invite in their colleagues and work through the difficult work of education. This is not necessarily a space from which we strive to move on, but it is the very place where the difficult work occurs—a place where leaders should learn to reside in what is a sometimes uncomfortable necessity.

Educators strive to meet the needs of the whole child. Successful administrators must see the whole school. The notion of instructional leadership is multi-faceted. They must set the mission and vision and work collaboratively with their faculty in order to create a positive learning community. They must monitor instruction and evaluate teachers. They must manage crises that may happen during the school day. They need to be visible and they need to build relationships with partners and the community. Setting high expectations and setting strategic goals for school improvement are imperative. On top of that, in most scenarios they do have to "manage building and budgets" (Mitgang, 2015). The intricacies of the work of educational leaders assures they are often in this third space.

It is evident that principal preparation programs are changing to prepare leaders for this changing world. What is not evident is whether these leaders gain the tools for navigating this third space, this in-between. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015) specify numerous actions needed for successful principals. Standard 10i requires effective leaders to "manage uncertainty, risk, competing initiatives and politics of change with courage and perseverance, providing support and encouragement, and openly communicating the need for, process for, and outcomes of improvement efforts" (p. 18). This standard speaks to that uncertainty. Principal Preparation Programs can provide simulations or case studies for dealing with ambiguity, but we posit that the uncertainty of the in-between becomes reality on the job. With all the improvement, there is no one-size-fits-all leadership preparation program. That said, infusing this theory of the third space into principal preparation programs might benefit candidates helping them anticipate dealing with and being comfortable with this ambiguity.

With our focus on standards and results, however, this third space is not always seen as vital to the success of our leaders because our focus is on the day-to-day, which is important. Some may see the time for self- and group-reflection as less pertinent to the daily logistics. It is this very self- and group-reflection, though, that makes the community as a whole stronger: "theories of hybridity of the post-colonial world assert a different and arguably more potent resistance in the counter-discursive practices they celebrate" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 184). The internal and group focus on sense of self and shifts in thinking, along with recognizing the difficulty and complexity of residing in such a space are part of the process that makes a leadership team that much stronger. The potential of such spaces spans far beyond to impact the very culture and climate of a school as well. In reference to the world of the third space, Dunlop (1999) noted the following:

> By accepting multiplicity of voice, the intertwining of speech and silence, ellipses, autobiography and fiction, it seems possible to create new discourses that cut across gender and ethnicity. This language of pedagogy may be found through the discourses of interculturalism. These discourses acknowledge differences, as official tenets of multiculturalism would have us do, but they also seek to find places of understanding, some borderland or third space between cultures, by enabling the learner to find or recognize the "other" within her/himself. (p. 59)

While Dunlop was referring specifically to classroom pedagogy, we see the importance of the intercultural conversations and self-reflection on these topics as just as important for our current and future leaders. The program studied here provides a space where they create these support networks—places to reflect but also dialogue with one another even after the program ends. Nationally, our leadership demographics do not match the students for and with whom they are working, and this place of self-discovery and dialogue with colleagues is vital to ensuring that these intercultural conversations and self-introspection occur. If we do not take the time to live

within these spaces, then our leaders may struggle to reach our students and their families on a deeper level.

Conclusion

As seen here, our purpose is to stress the importance of integrating this literature and framework of the third space not only into the context and materials of Educational Leadership programs but also into the underlying structure. The framework of the third space as a place of complexity needs to be fundamental to the development and presentation of these programs.

We recognize that there are limitations to this study in that we interviewed and surveyed a small number of participants, and generalization cannot and should not be drawn from one small sample. This research needs to continue with additional cohorts and graduates from Educational Leadership programs. In addition, we plan to expand this study to include supervisors of program graduates. Moreover, this is not meant to provide a one-size-fits-all approach to educating K-12 leaders, and this should not be the goal. Rather, we hope that this study contributes by providing possible frameworks for program development and program revisions.

We recognize, as well, that district-level support is vital to the success of new leaders. And while we know that many districts have strong programs in place, others may have fewer resources with which to mentor and support their incoming leaders. As one of our participants noted of his experience as a first-year leader and his district's training, "There's no formal induction or even informal. I was thrown to the wolves." It is not only important for new leaders to have this support in place, but what this support looks like is also key. We need to recognize the importance of providing spaces for change and reflection both within our programs and within that first year of leadership and beyond. The third space is not only a place to reside in during one's program, but it extends beyond this to encompass leaders new and veteran as a space where they can learn alongside of one another, in a changing culture, climate, and environment.

This leads us into our final point, which is that there is much research to be done on the third space as a space for cultural reconstruction, and this is another topic for further research. This space, however, allows for these much-needed conversations to occur about the impact of power, privilege, and oppression from a leadership perspective. Originally developed as spaces to deconstruct dominant culture, this focus for the third space should continue, as many of our leadership spaces are confined by dominant ideologies. While much work has been done in this area, it is still an area that needs continual focus and refinement for educational leaders to be prepared to lead in the 21st century. This is of most importance now, as leaders grapple with the unknown of safely re-opening schools due to Covid-19 and issues of social justice that have surrounded us in the past months. As Bhabha (1994) reminded us, "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (p. 208).

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