Frameworks for Innovative Preparation:
Collaborative Programming for Teacher and Instructional Leaders

Courtney C. Bentley and Amy J. Samuels
University of Montevallo

Abstract

This paper posits innovative leadership preparation at one University that established collaborative, shared coursework between instructional and teacher leadership. This re/visioned model focuses on cultural proficiency, distributed leadership, and examination of socially just practices fostering more democratic and inclusive practices. The authors examine how reframing leadership preparation adds legitimacy to leadership roles by better allocating resources to strengthen institutional culture and promote school improvement. Building capacity to develop collaborative, working relationships enhances organizational efficiency and better positions leaders to be agents for instructional excellence equipped with knowledge, skills, dispositions, and vision for socially just leadership within the school and community.

   Key words: educational administration, instructional leadership, school improvement, social justice leadership, teacher leadership

Education is often criticized for abrupt top down shifts in policy and practice that lead to the dissolution of certain roles and the creation of others before determining their impact. These shifts may also lead to renaming, reframing, or even reallocating interpersonal resources at local levels. The ensuing endemic spread of "trendy" programs and new school roles and titles often become fodder for comic commentary, angst, and frustration across teachers' lounges, faculty meetings, and lunchrooms. There are times, however, when the renaming and reframing of these roles reflects the work already being done, thereby adding legitimacy and support for these roles and better positioning school leaders as agents for change. The Alabama State Department of Education has embraced this by renaming and reframing the work of teachers, who assume leadership roles outside of their classrooms, by creating standards and an advanced graduate certificate (i.e., Class AA) for Teacher Leadership. Here, veteran teachers who are committed to curricular, instructional, and institutional improvement designed to promote and sustain overall school improvement, but who do not want to enter administration, are renamed and certified as teacher leaders once they complete an accredited Teacher Leader program. We situate this discussion through presentation of a framework for leadership preparation at one University that established collaborative, shared coursework between instructional and teacher leadership. The goal underscoring our work is to explore how leadership preparation can be executed to better allocate resources, strengthen culture, and promote school improvement.

In codifying and legitimizing teacher leadership, the Alabama State Department of Education provided a framework to guide faculty and local educational agencies as they developed advanced graduate programs at the Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) level (i.e., 30 hours beyond the masters) to prepare these school leaders. One University, however, had a unique challenge. In 2000, the University was granted permission to offer an Ed.S. in Teacher Leadership as an "innovative program," leading to a Class AA teaching certificate. When the standards were opened for all institutions of higher education to seek program accreditation, faculty had to revise the existing program to meet state standards. Moreover, new standards for the Ed.S. Instructional Leadership program, formerly known as Educational Administration, had been issued. Given the charge of simultaneously revising both programs, faculty and local education agency officials decided to challenge the status quo by expanding areas where teacher leaders are not fully utilized in schools and systems by creating a collaborative, shared program between teacher and instructional leadership. The core of the work involved determining how *all* building-level school leaders can work together effectively for school improvement by centering equitable curricular and pedagogical improvements and socially just frameworks for teaching and leading.

Review of the Literature

Although the construct of teacher leadership may seem trendy, it has a long tradition within the literature. For over 40 years, research in the area of school improvement identifies teacher leadership as a significant element for positive change (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Danielson, 2007; Levenson, 2014; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Although teacher leadership is cited as integral to school improvement, the construct itself is often varied and contested, remaining more conceptual than practical (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2012; Helterbran, 2010). While teacher leaders work to improve instruction, strengthen climate and culture, and demonstrate voice in relation to policies that impact schools (Levenson, 2014), the ensuing role ambiguity experienced by teacher leaders highlights an organizational inefficiency and misappropriation of a viable resource for fostering positive and sustainable change (Angelle &

DeHart, 2011; Helterbran, 2010; Hunzicker, 2012; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This misappropriation diminishes the potential teacher leaders can bring as change agents since they are often limited to discrete curricular and instructional decision making rather than school climate and social justice issues that impact equitable access and opportunities. Furthermore, leadership opportunities and career growth for determined and motivated educators have been traditionally limited to administrative roles (Levenson, 2014); but teacher leadership strategically honors the role of teachers and values their work in improving instruction and making schools better. Nonetheless, teacher leaders cannot exist in isolation. Support from administration is critical in encouraging, developing, facilitating, and sustaining effective teacher leadership (Levenson, 2014).

Overview of Collaborative Programming

The new program for educational administration in Alabama, at the Ed.S. level, was deliberately designed to encourage and develop a collaborative relationship between teacher and instructional leaders and generate opportunities for them to work together authentically and facilitate meaningful change. To develop this collaborative relationship, where professionals learn how to collectively build off each other's strengths, instructional and teacher leaders take four core courses in concert with one another to frame the practical with the theoretical and to prepare and support collaborative, justice-oriented, school leaders. Specifically, teacher and instructional leadership candidates take the following courses together:

- EDL 606: Mentoring and Professional Development
- EDL 612: Strengthening Community Relations through Restorative Leadership
- EDL 645: Data Driven Models for Curriculum Development and Assessment
- EDL 648: Leadership for Educational Equity and Social Justice

These courses include content and theory designed to connect school leaders in areas critical for sustained school improvement, including: (a) teacher induction, mentoring, retention, and professional growth; (b) developing positive communicative practices across varied stakeholders to promote restorative leadership, (c) empirically-based curriculum development, implementation, and assessment; and (d) equity auditing and action planning for socially just practices, programs, and policies. Candidates are provided opportunities to work and learn together and create and facilitate innovative projects. In addition, they research to critically examine and explore practical strategies to positively influence student learning, teacher performance, and school climate and culture.

Mentoring and Professional Development

As the field has shifted from educational administration to instructional leadership, so have the roles of local administrators with respect to supporting instructional practices and evaluating teachers' effectiveness. School leaders are now expected to be the instructional leaders of the school, where they play a fundamental role in building and sustaining a climate of instructional excellence. They are tasked with dedicating focused attention and being actively involved in promoting consistent quality teaching, student learning, and positive educational outcomes for all students.

Instructional and teacher leader candidates examine knowledge, models, and skills critical to effective mentoring and professional development. Emphasis is given to the impact of positive relationships on the local school environment and on school renewal. Collaboratively, teacher and instructional leadership candidates explore best practices for engaging effective mentoring and coaching (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2009; Knight, 2018), as well as examine how reflection, growth mindsets, and justice-oriented frameworks can serve to enhance professional development (Kumashiro, 2015). Opportunities are provided for self-analysis to explore strengths and areas for growth in relation to supporting the development, effectiveness, and retention of both novice and veteran teachers. Since it is critical to learn to validate, share, and honor the perspectives and experiences of teachers (Ríos, 2018), this course also provides a space where "teacher voices" as agents for change are valued. Teacher leaders develop key dispositions to work as liaisons between instructional leaders and classroom teachers to determine what is best for students and teachers. Here, the "dark side" divide between administrators and teachers is bridged by collaboratively learning skills and techniques needed to lead effective and equitable teaching and learning through quality mentoring, coaching, and professional development. Placing an emphasis on situational leadership (Green, 2017), instructional and teacher leaders analyze best practices in instructional coaching and how to effectively provide feedback to accelerate teacher growth and positively influence student achievement.

Strengthening Community Relations through Restorative Leadership

Along with developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to support effective teacher practice, school leaders must also build a strong foundation regarding relationships with stakeholders. This course provides students the opportunity to develop multidirectional communication with community stakeholders to develop a clear understanding of the interconnections of the school organization and its community. Emphasis is placed on building positive relationships, establishing effective partnerships, and executing clear communication between the school and community to empower and promote shared goals, assets, and knowledge to improve learning and engagement opportunities for students and families (Fiore, 2016; Houston, 2010). Although most school-wide communication is disseminated by principals (i.e., instructional leaders), they rely on teachers on the ground to identify some of the critical issues impacting students in the classrooms. Social media has further complicated stakeholders' expectations for *seeing* meaningful happenings in classrooms.

Principals, now more than ever, must work with teacher leaders to craft the narrative to share and celebrate what is happening in classrooms. EDL 612 provides multiple opportunities, including constructing a media release and assessment of community resources, to connect teacher and instructional leaders as they seek to craft relevant and accurate narratives for stakeholders and constituents. Given the increased entry points for communication that social media and other online resources provide, it is not surprising instructional leaders need support as they seek to embrace multidirectional entry points for stakeholder engagement (Houston, 2010). It is essential they have a pulse on the classroom by working with teacher leaders to consider what can be interpreted as competing classroom narratives. This collaboration enables school leaders to collectively narrate the message they need to convey to both internal and external stakeholders. Working toward this collective promotes increased cohesion among the school faculty and provides leaders with a way to confidently tap into multidirectional entry points, thereby

amplifying their collective voice to be heard by stakeholders and constituents including pressure groups, community agencies, and the news media.

Data Driven Models for Curriculum Development and Assessment

In addition to being able to support instruction and effectively communicate with stakeholders, school leaders must have a solid mastery of curriculum and assessment and how data can be used to purposefully guide instructional decisions. Since curriculum at the pre-service level is often presented as a collection of prescribed, static standards or learning outcomes (Oakes, Lipton, Anderson, & Stillman, 2013), at the advanced graduate level, curriculum should be examined from socio-historical and political frameworks to understand curriculum theory and development (Glatthorn, Boschee, Whitehead, & Boschee, 2016). As students explore the varied definitions of curriculum across theoretical perspectives, they see how its meaning is also fluid, moving from "traditional" to "experiential" to "multinational" (Ellis, 2004; McLaren, 2014). They also examine how curriculum change, or lack thereof, can serve to marginalize or perpetuate inequitable learning opportunities and outcomes (Glatthorn, Boschee, Whitehead, & Boschee, 2016).

In this shared course, students explore and examine the foundations, design, development, organization, and implementation of curriculum and initiatives in K-Plus settings and the use of assessment data to develop best practice models for curriculum decision making and instructional improvement. Connecting curriculum to socially just practices, students are asked to reflect upon the idea of what it means to say a school is doing well (Eisner, 2017). Furthermore, students are given opportunities to inquire about their professional contexts and practices by considering: (a) if there are rigorous learning expectations for traditionally underserved students, (b) whether the school's vision speaks to the academic performance and college preparation of traditionally underserved students, and (c) how educators demonstrate confidence and expertise necessary to successfully address the challenges of traditionally underserved students (Villarreal & Scott, 2008).

The course emphasizes the voice school leaders can have to prepare instructional and teacher leaders for positive curricular and pedagogical changes in relation to quality and accountability. The course also challenges the prescribed understandings of curriculum and standards-based education, so teacher and instructional leaders better understand the ways teachers' daily instructional choices drive curriculum and the potential for change in their schools. Teacher and instructional leaders are challenged to gather curriculum data from classroom teachers, in addition to assessment reporting and accountability measures, in order to audit and evaluate such practices. Then, using the inquiry to drive action, candidates are expected to recommend curricular changes based on the qualitative analysis of teachers in addition to more traditional data sets. This model, again, values the voice and role of teachers in schools. More importantly, it prepares school leaders to tap into this valuable resource and build teachers' capacity to collaborate in curricular reform efforts.

Leadership for Educational Equity and Social Justice

Collectively considering instructional practices, relationships with stakeholders, and curriculum and assessment, in order to strengthen organizational culture and promote authentic school improvement, school leaders must be conditioned to always consider implications of educational (in)equity and social (in)justice. Despite continued calls for cultural competencies, critical multicultural researchers grapple with why they are not infused throughout educator preparation programs or meaningfully assessed at the in-service level (Sleeter, 2012). The perpetuation of "color-blind" policies and practices, despite the inclusion of diversity standards, limits the ways schools address inequitable practices, policies, and programs that serve to marginalize specific groups and contribute to continued gaps in access and outcomes. If teachers do not understand how oppressive ideologies manifest themselves in policy and practice, they are more likely to perpetuate inequitable practices and less prepared to confront dominant narratives (Ríos, 2018). As the student population becomes increasingly diverse, while a predominantly White teaching population remains static, such colorblind discourses form a societal curriculum that perpetuates biases and stereotypes from as early as Pre-K (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016). Shifting demographics and stagnant policies necessitate a need for an equity framework for teacher and instructional leaders seeking to enact continuous school improvement and the development of equitable opportunities to learn (Theoharis, 2009; Terrell, Terrell, Lindsey, & Lindsey, 2018).

A foundational objective of both the Instructional Leadership and Teacher Leadership programs is to prepare practicing teachers and administrators to exercise leadership for continuous school-wide improvement for educational equity and social justice. Thus, while it is certainly intended that students will advance their own pedagogical practices, the programs' shared objectives are larger in that they intend to graduate practitioners with the requisite knowledge, skills, dispositions, and vision to enact socially just leadership within the school and community. In this sense, graduates of both programs become teacher and instructional leaders who are integral contributors to reflective practices and active, sustainable educational improvement. Specifically, capacities for leading systemic curricular improvement in diverse educational settings is emphasized by analyzing interrelationships of identity differences within policy contexts and practices with attention to Alabama schools' equity data. Equitable access to institutional structures of support, including technology, is also examined.

Embracing an anti-bias framework, EDL 648 facilitates meaningful opportunities for students to unpack and reflect upon social justice standards in relation to identity, diversity, justice, and action (Teaching Tolerance, 2016). The course begins with an analysis of "self". The "personal journey of cultural competence begins within" and "culturally proficient leadership is distinguished from other leadership approaches in that it is anchored in the belief that leaders must clearly understand their own assumption, beliefs, and values about people and cultures different from themselves in order to be effective in cross-cultural settings" (Terrell, Terrell, Lindsey, & Lindsey, 2018, p. 9). The analysis of self is explored in tandem with subjective social constructs, including race, ethnicity, class, language, gender, sexuality, ability, and national origin (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Teacher and instructional leadership students are expected to complete positionality statements in which they delve deeply into their own perceptions and identities to understand their assumptions about their students' identities and capacities to learn. Through this intensive activity, students are asked to stretch their thinking by reflecting on the ways that owning and negotiating their own subjective stance extends beyond differentiating instruction. They move

forward to complete equity audits (Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009) of their schools and equity action plans aimed at strategically addressing an identified area of inequity. As such, the anticipated outcome is an increase in equitable opportunities to learn through more socially just practices, policies, and programs.

Discussion: Leader Preparation as a Framework for Change

Creation of a collaborative, shared program between teacher and instructional leadership provides the opportunity to reframe perspectives on how to add legitimacy to leadership roles by considering how to best allocate resources to strengthen institutional culture and foster school change. While leadership programs are traditionally designed to prepare educators to lead, manage, and evaluate school improvement, this program is innovative in that it is intentionally aimed to encourage teacher and instructional leadership candidates to build relationships, collaborate, embrace new perspectives, and initiate sustainable school reform for educational equity and social justice. Although knowledge of content and theory are essential to leadership development, just as important are practical opportunities for candidates to examine how to apply concepts to real-world settings to influence real-world change. The collaborative design of the program prepares teacher and instructional leaders to generate substantive change by establishing practical partnerships with one another to enhance school reform. In addition, the program design provides opportunities for candidates to demonstrate inquiry, commitment, and excellence thorough their words and actions while always framing their thoughts on making people, schools, and communities better. By inspiring others, strengthening outcomes, holding each other accountable, and advocating for equitable access and opportunity, teacher and instructional leaders working collectively not only fulfill the duties of their roles, but promote school improvement. Moreover, they serve as cooperative change agents for positive learning environments, student achievement, and teacher development.

The collaborative programming is deliberately structured to build capacity and strengthen habits of mind, so teacher and instructional leadership students are more likely to sustain collaborative efforts in their schools and systems. Since the courses are centered around a framework that advocates for interconnectedness and partnership, strategies learned can be employed in practical settings which better positions school leaders to challenge dominant narratives and influence change. Given the perpetuation of achievement gaps, as well as inequitable access and opportunities in schools across the country, it is evident current policies, practices, and ways of doing cannot remain unquestioned and uninterrupted. It is imperative leaders are properly prepared to advocate for equitable access, opportunities, and outcomes for all students, as well as structure mentoring and professional development to accelerate teacher growth and promote instructional excellence. Equipping leadership candidates with knowledge and tools to increase their awareness about existing inequities makes them more willing to see value in questioning their beliefs, actions, and dispositions. As such, the programming is designed to centralize unlearning, so students are better positioned to see value in questioning assumptions, as well as current guidelines, systems, and procedures, and develop a curiosity and passion for change. When students question what is, they are empowered to envision what can be. Generating a vision where leadership is not limited to instructional leaders (educational administrators) in the building, but rather distributed and joined in concert with teacher leaders, emboldens schools and systems to fully invest their resources to authentically encourage improvement and advance equity and excellence.

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