

Communitarian Leadership Practice Acquisition in Educational Leadership Preparation

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Principals have tremendous influence on the schools they lead (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Marzano et al., 2005). Certain leadership behaviors impact school level factors (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1990; Marzano et al., 2005; Orr, 2003). To affect high levels of student achievement, school principals must be responsible for uniting diverse groups under shared purposes with purposeful emphasis on others rather than on self (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1990; Marzano et al., 2005; Orr, 2003). Effective programs in educational leadership preparation include cohort-modeled groupings, among other features (Davis et al., 2005). Because cohorts are a feature of effective programs, yet few aspiring school leaders are prepared through cohort-based programs (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009), a concern regarding a problem of practice is raised.

The purpose of this study was to explore how aspirant school leaders experience the acquisition of leadership practices within their educational leadership preparation program and to contribute to the empirical understanding of how to best prepare school leaders for successful practice. This study was designed to examine: How do school leaders make meaning of their experience in a principal preparation program? In what ways do their experiences support the development of communitarian leadership?

The sample included nineteen school leaders who were alumni of a university-based educational leadership preparation program. Participants were interviewed using a basic interview protocol that followed the semi-structured approach for interview technique outlined by Moustakas (1994). The data analysis was carried out in the stepwise manner, using Atlas.ti 7.0 to code and group significant statements from the interview texts and using a basic memoing process to address any concerns of subjectivity.

Leaders who experienced preparation activities, including activities that gave them practice leading diverse individuals to shared outcomes articulated how preparation influenced the development of communitarian leadership skill, including relationship-building, communication, and values-identification. Communitarian leadership, which includes leadership actions linked to improved school-level outcomes (Marzano et al., 2005), may have utility as a framework for developing aspiring principals through formal preparation programs.

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Introduction and Purpose

Principals have tremendous influence on the schools they lead (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Marzano et al., 2005). The standard roles of the school principal are multiple and complex; they include establishing a community in which teachers work collaboratively to improve achievement for all students (ISLLC-ELCC, 2009). Improving classroom instruction, therefore, is a primary focus of school leaders as a strategy for addressing educational inequity.

The purpose of this study was to identify how current U.S. elementary and secondary district and school leaders who are alumni of one university's educational administration preparation program describe how they acquired skills and experiences needed to be effective in leadership positions. The specific analysis that became the focus of this article was how students acquire communitarian leadership practices in a part-time educational leadership preparation program. The research questions that guided this aspect of the study were: How do school leaders make meaning of their experience in a principal preparation program? In what ways do their experiences support the development of communitarian leadership?

Certain leadership behaviors impact school level factors, including student achievement (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1990; Marzano et al., 2005; Orr, 2003). This leadership skill set includes situational awareness, flexibility, discipline, outreach, monitoring/evaluation, knowledge of curriculum, communication, ideals/beliefs, and relationships (Marzano et al., 2005). Although there has been criticism of the research design (Louis et al., 2010), critics concede that the meta-analysis findings are useful in explaining the contribution of successful leadership to student achievement. Practices that "distance the ego from decision making," (Lashway, 2001, p. 8), and rather, focusing on decision making for the benefit of a community of school stakeholders including students, their teachers, and their families, had the highest correlation with high levels of student achievement. Successful school leaders skillful in the high-impact leadership traits evidenced by Marzano et al. (2005) are well-positioned to establish and nurture communities oriented toward supporting improved student achievement.

To affect high levels of student achievement, school principals must be responsible for uniting diverse groups under shared purposes through forged relationships, awareness of the political situation, flexibility in the midst of interpersonal dissent, and purposeful emphasis on others rather than on self (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1990; Marzano et al., 2005; Orr, 2003). This leadership skill set, which includes the responsibilities evidenced by Marzano (2005), could be labeled "communitarian leadership" in that it acknowledges both the importance of the broad school community and of the rights of individuals situated within the community. Communitarianism is a policy theory that encourages policy makers to seek outcomes that balance individual citizen rights with the good of the entire community of citizens (Etzioni, 1993).

Effective programs in educational leadership preparation are research-based, have trans-disciplinary curricular coherence, provide experience in authentic contexts, use cohort groupings and mentors, are structured to enable collaborative activity between the

program and area schools, and are linked to the standards (Davis et al., 2005). In short, an effective educational leadership preparation program includes focus on communitarian leadership practices. Communitarian leadership practices are supported by structures such as the cohort learning group, the mentor-mentee relationship, and the collaborative relationship between the preparation program and the area school.

Despite evidence that the cohort model is a common feature among effective programs in educational leadership preparation (Barber, 2007; Bottoms, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Davis et al., 2005; Orr, 2006), the model is not commonly accessed by the most typical aspiring school leaders: graduate students with fulltime work responsibilities (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009). The ability of these part-time leadership preparation programs to build communitarian leadership practices has not been studied. In this qualitative study, we examined how aspirant school leaders experienced the acquisition of leadership practices within their evening and weekend modeled educational leadership preparation program.

Effective educational leadership preparation is experiential by design (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Davis et al., 2005). Theoretical, ethical, and technical learning are “integrated,” in this model, and the communal structure of the graduate classroom environment, the practical application of leadership skills in the field during preparation, and individual- and group-oriented reflective exercises create a holistic learning experience that is at once personal and communal. Aspiring leaders, in this way, become self-aware of their roles as learner and leader-in-training. In that they experience this preparation as a collaborator within a group of individuals, they may be receptive to leadership practices that “distance the ego,” focusing instead on building effective interpersonal relationships for a common purpose (Bennhold-Samaan, 2004). In community-oriented educational leadership programs, aspiring leaders learn together how to lead people to collaborate for the improved academic achievement and social development of children, leveraging communitarian leadership (Davis et al., 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Murphy, 2005; Levine, 2005).

Conceptual Framework

Communitarianism (Etzioni, 1993) is a framework that emphasizes a balance between the rights of the individual and the individual’s responsibility to his or her community. Though originally conceptualized as a framework for public policy design, Amitai Etzioni (1993) has advocated for a broader application of communitarian concepts in public discussion, in empirical dialogue and, more specifically, in the research and practice of public education (pp. 18-19). A central assumption of communitarianism is that Western thought, American thought in particular, has become far too aligned with the primacy of *personal rights* to the point that *responsibility to others* is obscured as a secondary or even absent concept. Communitarianism, as a policy framework, seeks to identify this imbalance between *rights* and *responsibility*, and to equalize that imbalance by placing less emphasis on individual rights and active emphasis on the obligations people have to one another as human beings. Communitarian thought assumes that humans depend upon one another to accomplish the project of society, or, community; it

assumes that a collection of unique individuals can accomplish more than they could individually.

Communitarian leadership practices, as in leadership responsibilities evidenced by Marzano, et al. (2005), require the identification of the ego and the isolation of the self from decision-making. In this model, emphasis shifts from *leader as individual* to *leader as individual in relation to others*. Marzano describes each of the communitarian leadership strategies explicitly as a *responsibility*. Similarly Michael Fullan (2003), in his book entitled *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*, explicitly demarcates the broader social responsibility of school principals to understand their schools as “the main institution[s] for fostering social cohesion in an increasingly diverse society” and as organizations that “serve all children, not simply those with the loudest or the most powerful advocates” (p. 3). These responsibilities, and the responsibilities enumerated in the ISLLC standards, are explicitly communitarian in that the school leader does not place emphasis on only “each student” or on self, but also on a collected school community equally comprised of multiple and diverse constituents.

Through a communitarian lens, the balance, or imbalance, between community and self in issues surrounding the preparation of educational leaders becomes paramount. The standards, for example, call for principal preparation that balances the approaches of community outreach and promotion of individual student success; the development of professional learning community, and the evaluation of individual teachers. The self/group dichotomy is personified in the educational leadership preparation learning structure; aspiring leaders are, simultaneously, individual candidates with unique career aspirations and also members of a unified class of students engaged in team-oriented group learning activity. Aspiring leaders are held individually accountable for their academic performance and for their performance on the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA), the licensure exam required by many states in order to qualify for an administrative certificate. They are also a member of a broader learning community, responsible for contribution to intellectual discussion and group academic projects. Viewed from a communitarian perspective, it is essential that leadership modeled in such a way that the aspiring leader exists at once as an individual and as a responsible member of a larger community.

Communitarianism is, therefore, an especially helpful perspective for an investigation into the individual aspirant school leader’s experience within a leadership preparation program. Etzioni (1993), invited researchers to “responsively” (p. 19) apply communitarian thought to empirical inquiry in fields outside public policy research. By “responsive” Etzioni meant, quite literally, that the application and development of communitarian thought should take the form of a dialogue among diverse participants. We offer the outcomes of this study as an added unique voice to this discourse. Examining the experiences of current educational leaders who matriculated from one university’s leadership preparation program provides insight into how school and district leaders were prepared to balance the needs of individuals within a community with the needs of the larger group, offering a unique voice to the communitarian discourse and a unique addition to the field of educational leadership preparation.

Methodology

The sample in this study included nineteen school leaders who were alumni of a university-based educational leadership preparation program. Potential participants were current school leaders, including school principals and central office administrators, who were graduates of an educational administration program housed within a private institution that grants degrees in the field of education in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Within this sample, participants were not excluded or selected based on race, ethnicity, or gender. Participants' email addresses were identified through alumni records of this Education Administration program and were subsequently recruited into the study by email. All participants graduated in the year 2000 or later. While the university-based program underwent various structural changes over the years, and participants studied at various satellite campuses, the sample is constrained by the fact that the leadership preparation programs were each housed within a single private university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

The sample included twelve females and seven males, with a range of seven to twenty-five years of experience in the field of education. The sample included thirteen school-based leaders, or those who identified their current position as Assistant Principal (4) or Principal (9). The remainder of the participants (6) served in Central Office professional roles within local education agencies. Participants also served in a variety of school communities: ten served in suburban public school settings; four served rural public school settings; four served in urban public school settings; and one served in an independent private suburban setting. Each member of the study was assigned a randomly generated alias (Lofland & Lofland, 2006), to which they are referred in this article.

Thematic Analysis

The research team used a basic semi-structured approach to interview each study participant in an individual 45-60 minute session. We carried out the data analysis in the stepwise manner. First, we used ATLAS.ti software to highlight “significant statements” from the transcripts of participant interviews (Moustakas, 1994). We identified significant statements in response to the research questions for this study: How do school leaders make meaning of their experience in a principal preparation program? In what ways do their experiences support the development of communitarian leadership? We captured significant statements from passages where a) participants reflected directly on their own experiences in leadership preparation, b) participants reflected on how these experiences related to the development or the hindrance of their own school leadership mindsets or actions, and c) participants reflected on how they related to and interacted with others both in their preparation experiences and in their subsequent professional school leadership. Throughout the analytic process, using Microsoft Excel, we maintained a running record of reflective memos (Lofland & Lofland, 2006) to track methodological, theoretical, and personal developments.

Next, we used ATLAS.ti software to group 663 significant statements into ultimately 57 distinct codes or themes that respond to the proposed research questions.

After multiple iterations of revising and merging codes, we analyzed the frequency and concurrence of themes across study participants using Microsoft Excel. The theme communication occurred on 89 discreet occasions across all interviews, and it was the most frequently occurring theme overall. The second most frequently occurring theme was relationships (73), followed by knowledge of curriculum (65), authentic experiences (47), and values and beliefs (43).

Van Manen used the metaphor of a spider web to describe how themes emerge in qualitative analysis. Following this metaphor, each experience articulated by a participant in an interview is a unique thread in a spider web (1990). There are particular points in the web where multiple threads cross, and these points of intersection emerge as knots; when there is a large confluence of threads, the knot becomes more prominent. By parallel example: when we noticed evidence that multiple study participants had articulated a common experiential theme, we noticed that theme as prominent. While communication emerged as the overall most frequently articulated theme, we used Van Manen’s metaphor as a methodological guide to analyze the data more closely to discern which themes emerged most commonly across all participants (Figure 1). This analytic approach fit with a communitarian framework, as we valued the identification and inclusion of individual perspectives within a given community or group (Etzioni, 1993).

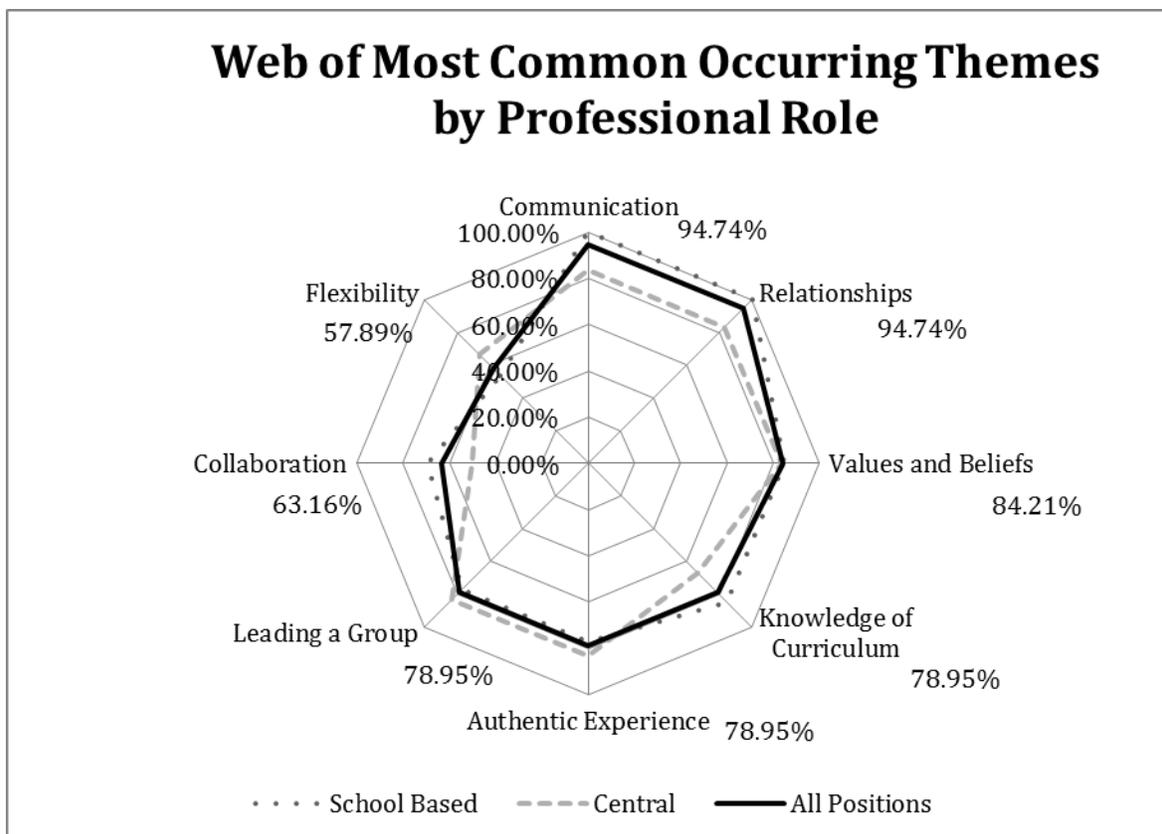


Figure 1. Most Common Occurring Themes by Professional Role

Findings

We examined which themes were articulated by the highest percentage of all participants. Using Van Manen’s web metaphor (Figure 1), we found three main themes stood out more prominently than the rest as experiences common to most participants: communication, relationships, and values and beliefs (Table 1). These themes include communication, relationships, and values and beliefs, and are consistent with the high leverage communitarian leadership responsibilities evidenced by Marzano, et al. (2005).

Table 1
Most Common Occurring Themes by Professional Role

Theme	School Based	Central	All Positions
Communication	100.00%	83.33%	94.74%
Relationships	100.00%	83.33%	94.74%
Values and Beliefs	84.62%	83.33%	84.21%
Knowledge of Curriculum	84.62%	66.67%	78.95%
Authentic Experience	76.92%	83.33%	78.95%
Leading a Group	76.92%	83.33%	78.95%
Collaboration	69.23%	50.00%	63.16%
Flexibility	53.85%	66.67%	57.89%

Note. Sorted by All Positions

In the following sections, we present significant statements from study participants and analyze how these experiences contributed to the development of communitarian leadership. In their own words, participants described how they experienced themes including communication, relationships, and values and beliefs in their principal preparation experience.

Communication

Eighteen of nineteen total participants (94.74%) reflected on experiences in their leadership preparation that prepared them to communicate effectively in their work as leaders. We classify communication as a leadership action that fits within a communitarian framework because communication assumes interaction between the self and others (Etzioni, 1993). Assistant Principal Desiree Summers said succinctly what was echoed commonly among most leaders in the study: School leaders, “need to be able to communicate effectively with people,” and, “learning to work with a variety of people with a variety of skill levels,” in the leadership preparation program was one way to develop communication skills. Participants experienced communication in educational leadership preparation in various ways. In the following excerpts from interviews,

participants described in their own words how they experienced communication in their leadership preparation program.

Participants identified the challenges of working in settings where group members had disparate skill levels, talents, and perspectives. For example, central office school leader Willie McBride reflected:

Absolutely [working in groups was challenging]. When you are half-hazardly [sic] grouped with a group of individuals, which is the reality of the world, there are inevitably differences; not just differences in personalities, perspectives, opinions, motivations, agendas, but also in work ethic. That's what was the biggest challenge for me . . . there were times when I'd be in a group . . . and two of us were doing the lion's share.

Other participants articulated a main challenge of motivating those who are initially reluctant or oppositional as identifying and respecting the differences that individuals bring to participation in groups. Motivating others to take particular action through communication was an experience that participants encountered in the preparation setting and in the work place. Central office school leader Roberta Riley described how she experienced communication as a tool to motivate her classmates to complete a group presentation project in the leadership preparation setting by defining the scope of communication:

I did work in a group that had one person that talked it to death. . . . There comes a point you talk about it but then you got to move on and you gotta get it done, and this person never got out of the chewing portion. . . . Pretty soon, the teacher in me just pops out [because our time was up]. I say, "Okay that sounds great. Now let's do this," and then I ended up sort of directing [my classmate].

We also found one way leaders experienced the development of communication strategies in leadership preparation was through projects and coursework where they used researched -based data to support arguments and decisions. Assistant Principal Darcy Kennedy, through the experience of an administrative internship associated with the leadership preparation program, was responsible for synthesizing student achievement data to argue for a strategy to improve science instruction in the school that hosted her field experience:

We had to establish, by looking at data . . . a school need. The science scores were not very strong; the kids that I was working with didn't have a lot of experiences, and so we build from a problem at the school, try to come up with a solution and then work towards establishing that [Outdoor Classroom solution]. I think that was a great learning experience for me because I had to start from the data, problem solve the solution, figure out if the administration was on board and then seek outside resources and support to make that happen.

Parallel to a data-oriented communication approach, leaders described preparation and leadership experiences where they learned how to have difficult conversations with members of the school community. Principal Ariel Maddox described a drive she feels to communicate candidly with teachers and an associated need to not, “be afraid to . . . explain what your decisions are or let people know that [things] are going to be tough.”

Principal Maddox described finding the courage to not “be afraid” to initiate challenging conversations with members of the school community; Principals Charles Perry, Ophelia Guy, and Erna Gregory each also referred to the recurrent work-embedded challenge of initiating “courageous conversations” regarding instructional issues with oppositional staff. Principal Gregory first stated that she wished her leadership preparation program included more explicit focus on having these challenging conversations, but then reflected:

Maybe when you’re doing group work [in the leadership preparation setting], sometimes you have to say, “So-and-so, you really gotta step up. We need you to do your part. You haven’t turned in your work yet.” That may be a courageous conversation.

In summary, leaders in this study articulated that communication is a leadership action they valued in their preparation and subsequently prioritized in their work. In parallel, meta-analyses of research on the influence of school leadership on student outcomes identified communication as a leadership action positively correlated ($r = .23$) with improved school level student outcomes (Marzano, et al., 2005). Participants identified group work as an instructional activity they experienced that helped them to internalize the importance of diversified communication and to learn and practice strategies for diversified communication. Leaders in this study described how they experienced the development of communication strategies to motivate individuals from “talk” into action. Leaders reflected on coursework and associated assignments that initiated experiences using data in communication. These findings align with the research literature on problem-based learning (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Davis et al, 2005) and cohort-modeled leadership preparation (Barnett, et al., 2000) that credits the group learning dynamic with producing improved interpersonal problem solving skills, including communication.

Relationships

Assistant Principal Desiree Summers succinctly captured what was related by others in the study in reflecting on their preparation experiences: communication was a critical tool to interact with other people to build working relationships. Eighteen out of nineteen interviewees articulated experiences associated with developing relationships as central their leadership preparation. Central Office leader Willie McBride reflected that his work was, “nine times out of ten, [focused] on relationship building,” and that leadership preparation provided opportunities to build relationships with diverse personalities. Interpersonal relationships are central to a communitarian model of leadership where the leader continually negotiates organizational decisions considering at once the interests of

individual community members and the interests of the group at large; leaders who are effective in balancing the interests of the individual with the group are well-suited to build and to nurture relationships, and to build community (Etzioni, 1993).

Participants shared that group projects provided opportunities to build working relationships with individuals that have different perspectives. Participants reflected on how the collaborative act of academic group work helped them build awareness of the need for communication; participants also identified how working together towards common outcomes helped to establish relationship-building skills. Principal German Walker discussed how participating in projects where he had to collaborate with a collection of individuals strengthened his mindset of accountability and helped him exercise skills that held team members responsible for the quality of their work:

I've always been an individual where I like to hold everyone accountable. I don't have a problem with being outspoken. I feel like that if it's a group grade then there should be contribution in equal amount from everyone in the group. And there weren't many situations where there was tension, but there were some.

A common theme emerged as study participants reflected on how they have established and maintained successful relationships in their preparation and in their professional experiences. To paraphrase generally: when teachers trust a leader, they will listen to and follow the leader; this makes relationships very important. When teachers are in a comfortable relationship with a leader, they will tell the leader what they really think. Trust is a common theme that emerged as participants talked about experiences that helped them learn to build working relationships. To reemphasize a statement by Assistant Principal Desiree Summers, "if you are a strong communicator, you can form relationships, build a rapport, and build a trust level with your faculty. . . . *from my experience, if you have the trust of your faculty, they will do anything for you* [emphasis added]." Ariel Summers noted that others will follow when they see a leader is willing to do and to understand the work that they do when she talked about cleaning up the school grounds with community members, "'You're going to pull weeds too?' I said, 'Well it's my garden, so come on.'"

Central office leader Elijah Cook described how the mentor principal with whom he worked during his intern field experience taught him to lead by placing trust in others through distributing responsibilities:

[She] put a lot of trust in people and allowed people to work in areas that they felt that they were best at and that they were happiest in. And she did model a lot of distributive leadership in terms of allowing people to take over and she [managed] those people but [didn't] lay down the law [nor do] a lot of top-down type stuff.

Cook learned a style of relationship-based leadership from a mentor principal that emphasized placing responsibility and trust in others. Cook reflected that the mentor sought out opportunities to give others independent space in their work.

Participants talked about the value of trust in relationships, how they learned to build relationships by nurturing trust, and how they went on to leverage trust in building

working relationships in their service to schools. Some participants also reflected on the actual relationships they experienced with mentors in the preparation process. Interning with a mentor during the leadership preparation program was an influential experience for some leaders in the study. One way these relationships influenced the development of the leadership style and behaviors of participants was through modeling by the mentor. Central office leader Elijah Cook, for example, previously described how he learned to build trusting relationships through a mentor principal he encountered during his leadership preparation experience. He reflected specifically on how a different mentor administrator demonstrated a strategy for building relationships with students that was influential:

He was very personable. I mean, we learned all the kids' names. Well, he did. I tried. But he learned all the kids' names, you know, before summer school. So I learned the importance of that kind of stuff from him, so it was good. It was a good experience.

In summary, leaders in this study articulated that relationship-building is a leadership action they valued in their leadership preparation and that they prioritize in their work. That participants valued learning associated with relationships fits with meta-analyses of research on the influence of school leadership on student achievement, which identified a positive correlation ($r = .18$) between leadership actions that were relationship oriented and improved student achievement. Participants identified group work as an instructional activity they experienced that helped them to internalize the importance of identifying and respecting the diverse perspectives and motivations of individuals and to learn and practice strategies for building working relationships. Leaders described the importance of establishing working relationships with a purposeful foundation in trust. Leaders reflected on mentor relationships with host principals and professors they experienced in preparation, and articulated how those experiences influenced the development of their approach to establishing and nurturing working relationships in their school leadership. Each of these findings regarding how mentorship and field-based internship experiences influenced how study participants developed skills in building relationships support evidence in the research literature that internship and field experience in the educational leadership preparation process is influential to aspiring leaders (Milstein, 1990; Murphy, 2005; Restine, 1997; Young, 2009).

Values and Beliefs

Leaders reflected that preparation experiences that helped them develop skills in communication and relationship-building were of value to them. Leaders also talked about why emphasis on communication, on relationships, and on other personal values and beliefs were central to their leadership practice. Sometimes participants pointed to particular leadership preparation experiences that influenced their values set; other times participants reflected that the development of their personal values set began long before they aspired to become school leaders. Leaders said the program helped them to identify values and to see the importance of values, but many reflected that their values set was

developed almost exclusively outside leadership preparation. In the following excerpts from interviews, participants describe in their own words how they experienced values and beliefs in their leadership preparation program.

Participants also identified experiences outside formal leadership preparation that influenced their development as leaders. Some participants referenced overarching values and beliefs that were, for them, guiding principles in their lives. Others referred to particular childhood or family experiences that influenced their beliefs. The values of some school leaders interviewed in this study were shaped by experiences they had in their work lives before and since administrative preparation. Principal Constance Norton pointed to a pre-established set of spiritual values that she uses to guide leadership decisions:

I would first have to say my own spirituality and my own ability to find and draw from strength and encouragement from a higher power [influences my leadership]. I first have to say that. I feel like, I know this is confidential, that if you don't pray you'll probably be a drinker. So you either drink or pray. [Laughs] I've chosen prayer.

Norton purposefully described spirituality as her “first” influence, above all others. For Norton, there existed foundational and pre-established beliefs and values upon which her leadership philosophy has been built. Other leaders, in this way, referred to undergirding values that influenced their leadership in the school setting. For example, central office leader Willie McBride valued optimism. His worldview was framed in a generally positive way:

My worldview [is] always looking for that silver lining, always staying on the positive side, finding a way to take a negative and turning it into a positive. I think just staying on that positive side is crucial because if you plant a seed of positivity, the positivity will grow. If you plant a seed of negativity, that will grow, too.

Whereas McBride believed in keeping an optimistic mindset and “staying on the positive side,” central office leader Carla Curtis described her belief that people’s actions are most important to her. Curtis reflected, “I really believe in your actions, the way that you respond to people, how quickly [you] respond to them with accuracy and articulation, all of that is very important. . . . It's almost like leading by example.”

Norton, McBride, and Curtis described values that were foundational to them and that influenced the decisions they made as leaders. Life experiences outside the education administration program were influential to the values and beliefs of most participants in this study. Some articulated how experiences inside the preparation program contributed to the development of new values and beliefs, and strengthened long-standing values trainees brought with them as they engaged in principal preparation. The overarching experience of graduate study, for Principal Erna Gregory, was one that strengthened pre-established values of diligence and persistence. Gregory said, “I think graduate work just

forces you, shows that you're capable of learning and that you can persevere and finish, so I think that's what people find if you can persevere and finish.”

Principal Gregory reflected on her graduate studies as a holistic experience while others in the study discussed how a particular class within the overall course of study shaped their values. For example, Principal Kristie Bradshaw talked about how her coursework in School Law influenced her to not necessarily follow policy to the letter, but to give value and self-awareness to one's own moral voice:

I think [the professor who taught the School Law course] is a fascinating person. [She taught me to consider that] morals in education is very important. I think it really opened up a lot to me and I think I look at things very differently. I mean, I know there are legal responsibilities I have to report things, but then I also like the fact that here I have judgment that I get to use.

For Bradshaw, the experience of this course in School Law helped her to value engaging in challenging dialogue with individuals who have diverse perspectives. She said, “I think that is because the topics were so passionate to everyone involved . . . you had very impassioned people kind of coming together and having to, in the end, have [reached consensus].”

In summary, this university-based leadership preparation program helped leaders identify their own values and beliefs and understand the usefulness of communicating their values and beliefs to inspire and to motivate others into productive relationships. Some values and beliefs were developed in preparation experiences including being inspired by professors, learning from the internship field experience, or being compelled by the data-driven presentations of classmates. More commonly, participants articulated that they developed their core values and beliefs through experiences outside their formal educational leadership preparation. The sources of these experiences included family, church, and the workplace. The value of the preparation program in the development of leadership is helping aspiring leaders identify their own pre-established values and teaching them the importance of using those values as a guiding force in their future leadership. This should be done with intentionality, rather than by accident over the course of the leadership preparation experience. Values and Belief-based leadership was positively correlated ($r = .22$) with improved student achievement in a meta-analysis of research on the influence of school leadership on student outcomes (Marzano, et al., 2005).

Discussion and Implications

Participants learned through their preparation experiences to communicate in order to build relationships with others that they can leverage in their leadership. First they make meaning through their interactions with others--through learning to communicate in challenging settings; learning to build working relationships; identifying values and beliefs; and learning to communicate values and beliefs in order to build relationships that inspire and motivate others. These findings support the development of communitarian leadership, where there is an emphasis on an awareness of the

relationship between the self and others: how one communicates with others, how one builds working relationships with others, and how one respects the values and beliefs of others.

There is a deep body of research literature focused on effective preparation of educational leaders (Davis et al., 2005; Peterson, 2001; Sparks & Hirsch, 2000). Effective programs in educational administration focus on recruiting selective cohorts of trainees, engaging trainees in curricular content that is focused and coherent, and facilitating opportunities for aspiring leaders to engage in experiential learning in authentic contexts. While communitarian themes emerged when leaders reflected on their preparation experiences in this study, development of community-oriented leadership was not an explicitly articulated purpose of the program. Programs can be built to better emphasize these community-oriented themes. This section describes implications for practice in the development of communitarian leadership in the university-based educational administration preparation setting, and is organized in to four main subsections: cohorts, administrative internship or field experience, coherence of curricular content, and program recruitment.

Despite evidence that the cohort model is a common feature among effective programs in educational leadership preparation, the model is not commonly accessed by the most typical aspiring school leaders: graduate students with fulltime work responsibilities (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009). The participants in this study attended programs that were structured to meet in an evening and weekend model. While some participants described experiencing preparation in a cohort setting or a cohort-like setting, because of the part-time nature of the program, none of the participants' learning was structured in a full-time cohort program. One practical recommendation for future preparation of aspiring leaders is to create opportunities for a cohort structure where a cohort structure does not currently exist. Some study participants reflected that even though their fellow aspiring leaders worked in a variety of school settings, and were sometimes geographically dispersed, they still identified as a "cohort." In some instances, this was simply because the group was labeled a "cohort" by the university. Groups who were geographically dispersed sometimes collaborated as a unit meeting by telephone and on the internet. Opportunities to create a cohort community among part-time students who work during the day and attend class in the evening and on the weekends might include leveraging social media, creating professional networks within the group based on the interests of trainees, and purposefully calling the group a "cohort," encouraging members to brand their cohort with a name and a mission.

Study participants described a wide variety of internships in which they engaged. Some were meaningful to participants, while others described the experience as unhelpful. University-based programs should not wait for the state to detail parameters for improved internships. University programs in educational administration, particularly programs geared toward individuals who have full time jobs in addition to their studies, should take a more purposeful approach to tightening their internship processes. This more purposeful approach would include identifying and building relationships with host school leaders who demonstrate aptitude and desire to coach more novice leaders in their development, and who agree to focus on the development of community-oriented leadership through their relationship. While study participants did not reflect on the

planning of the internship phase of their leadership program, the research literature indicates universities should also make the expectations for hosting and supporting a trainee through an internship very clear to both the intern and the host. Expected outcomes and participation should be discussed and agreed upon before the internship begins.

One feature of many leading programs in educational administration is a coherence of curricular content. In other words, the content and all of the learning experiences are explicitly and purposefully linked together in a way that makes sense and that drives trainees toward a set of standard learning outcomes. While some trainees articulated how particular learning activities contributed to their development as community-oriented school leaders, there were only a couple of instances where trainees made a meta-cognitive recognition that the purpose of a given activity was to develop a leadership skill they would use later in their careers. One recommendation for programs in educational leadership preparation is to spiral connections with communitarian outcomes, such as improved relationships and improved communication skills, very explicitly throughout the course of study.

Finally, in this study, we identified themes that were common to the experiences of trainees who went on to serve as school leaders in roles including Assistant Principal, Principal, and central office leader. These themes included communication, relationships, and values and beliefs. These themes also emerged in Marzano et al. (2005) as leadership actions linked to improved student performance through meta-analyses. They also appear in the standards for administrative licensure. Programs in educational leadership studies should use the themes from this study as characteristics that could be used to screen candidates for employment as instructors, and target traits within their student selection model. These themes might also be employed as curricular anchors as educators engage in leadership training program design, providing a concise set of thematic units of study. Titles of learning units might include question-themed titles that guide aspirant leaders to generate their independent understanding of how they will grow within these community-oriented leadership traits (Pink, 2013).

Unit titles might include:

What Do I Believe?

Who Is My School Community?

How Will I Build Relationships?

How Will I Communicate with Others?

How Will I Listen?

Suggestions for Future Research

While research has determined particular leadership actions that support improved school level outcomes and has identified preparation structures that contribute to the successful development of school leaders, there remains much to be learned about how aspiring leaders best acquire leadership skills that help them to develop relationships. With the findings of this research, we highlight the importance of developing leaders prepared to build and sustain working relationships with diverse individuals, to communicate

effectively, and to relate in a values-driven way. Some participants found value in particular preparation activities for developing these skills, but more research is needed to determine in which other ways trainees effectively develop community-oriented leadership. Most importantly, continued research is needed to better understand how aspiring leaders acquire a communitarian leadership skill set in evening and weekend modeled programs. In particular, an expanded study that includes a more robust and diverse sample of the experiences of aspirant leaders studying in an added three to four evening and weekend modeled programs would give the educational administration training workforce sharper and more employable recommendations for shifting instruction in ways that ready leaders for the realities of the roles they will play in schools.

In summary, leaders who experienced preparation activities, including activities that gave them practice leading diverse individuals to shared outcomes articulated how preparation influenced the development of communitarian leadership skill, including relationship-building, communication, and values-identification. Communitarian leadership, which includes leadership actions linked to improved school-level outcomes (Marzano et al., 2005), may have utility as a framework for developing aspiring principals through formal preparation programs.

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