

ISSN: 2470-850X

**JSARD**  
**Journal of**  
**School**  
**Administration**  
**Research and**  
**Development**

Vol. 1, No. 2

Winter, 2016



# **The Journal of School Administration Research and Development** **JSARD**

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# The Journal of School Administration Research and Development JSARD

Welcome to the Principal Research Center's second issue of the peer-reviewed Journal of School Administration Research and Development (JSARD), an open access, online and print publication. The purpose of the JSARD is to support the mission of the Principal Research Center Inc., which advocates for the highest quality 21<sup>st</sup> century education of children through the improvement of selection and development of school leaders in our nation's schools. By publishing high-quality research and commentaries on school leadership topics, we hope to connect educational stakeholders from universities, governing agencies, school districts, and other educational organizations interested in improving education for children in the United States. Our second issue includes articles from researchers and practitioners on topics including school leadership development, sustaining arts programs in schools, instructional coaching, and beginning teacher development.

The publication of this journal represents a collaboration between researchers and practitioners currently working in universities, education organizations, and school districts who are actively pursuing the improvement of leadership selection and development in education. We want to thank everyone who supported our journal launch in 2016 and we are looking forward to our second year publishing the JSARD in Summer and Winter 2017.

Sincerely,

Brandon Palmer  
Managing Editor

# The Journal of School Administration Research and Development

# JSARD

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The ever-changing demands placed on school principals has necessitated the development of formal programs for improving the capacity of both existing school principals and those in the pipeline (i.e., assistant principals, vice-principals, and other aspiring school leaders). While there are several well known development programs such as LEAD at Denver Public Schools and Broward County Public Schools in Florida, other school districts and educational institutions in other locales throughout the country have programs that have begun to emerge. In Dallas, Texas, Troy Mooney, Chief Academic Officer of Life Schools and Herbert O'Neil, Chief Talent Officer of Life Schools have developed a preparation guide and development program to meet the demanding needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century school leaders.

Both Troy Mooney and Herbert O'Neil have worked in education in numerous capacities for a number of years. Troy Mooney has served in education for 23 years. He has been a teacher, site administrator, and assistant superintendent in public education. Herbert O'Neil has been in education for 13 years and has served as a principal at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels and currently serves as a district administrator.

The following conversation with Troy Mooney and Herbert O'Neil chronicles the genesis of *Primer* and how it contributes to the development of school leaders and aspiring school leaders within their organization.

**Q1: What support and development does your district offer school administrators to prepare for the principalship?**

HO: We have created a two-tiered leadership preparation program that we have branded *Primer Lead*. The introductory level of the program is the *Life Leaders*

*Academy* (monthly meetings) and the second year program is called *Leadership Fellows* (quarterly meetings). The content for both programs is derived from our competency list displayed in Table 1. We have dedicated instructors who plan the *Life Leaders* and *Leadership Fellows* content lesson plan prior to each meeting. We also integrate developmental content from the *Primer* competencies from these programs in our assistant principal and principal meetings as well. The assistant principal and principal meetings contain a mix of operational and development content so that we continue to prepare our current and next generation of leaders.

The *Life Leaders* program meets monthly and includes developing presentation, collaboration, and leading meeting skills of participants. This program is designed not just to prepare participants for the principalship but rather to be leaders in their current jobs as well. Many of our *Life Leaders* participants have gone on to Assistant Principal and Principal roles, but others have shifted into curriculum or other central office positions.

The *Leadership Fellows* program includes coaching and mentoring for participants from current principals and other district leaders. The meetings are once a quarter and the attendees work on actual real-world projects (not simulations) for the organization. They plan and execute events, address problematic areas, and produce procedure documents. They role-play interviewing and other leadership activities. Our ongoing support beyond these two different cohort groups include the following:

- An annual kickoff meeting for all participants and existing district leadership.
- Videos, podcasts, and other documents to support participant development.

Table 1

*Primer LEAD Competencies, Skills, and Insights Version 1.1*

<b>Leading &amp; Managing Others</b>	<b>Aligning Vision &amp; Goals</b>	<b>Communicating Effectively</b>	<b>Influencing &amp; Empowering</b>	<b>Developing People</b>	<b>Creating a Sustainable Learning Culture</b>
Defining Leadership	Clarifying Values	Essential Exchanges	Explaining Why	Building Capacity	Establishing, Monitoring and Supporting High Expectations
Transformational Leadership	Developing Shared Vision	Contending, Yielding, and Problem-Solving	Involving Others in Decisions that Impact Them	Recruiting	Accepting Responsibility for Each Student's Academic Success and Well Being
Servant Leadership	Goal, Objectives and Strategies	Triangular Conversations	Championing Collaboration	Valuing Diversity	Equity and Reducing Achievement Gaps
Ethical Leadership	Leading and Managing Change	Expectations Reality Gap	Influencers and Decision Makers	Interviewing	Creating and Sustaining Professional Learning Communities
Sources and Uses of Power	Continuous Improvement	Giving Feedback	Empowering and Motivating Others	Onboarding and Induction	Maximizing Instructional Time
Managing and Leading Projects and Systems	Disruptive/Sustaining Innovation	Engaging Stakeholders	Delegation	Mentoring	Designing, Monitoring and Evaluating C, A, & I
Managing Operations, Technology, and Resources	Concerns Based Adoption Model	Stakeholder Communication	Discovery Thinking/Learning	Assessing Employee Capacity	Analyzing Standards
Leading Meetings	Diffusion of Innovation Adopter Categories	Corporate, Community, Family Partnerships	Piloting Projects and Programs	Performance Measurement and Appraisal	Pedagogical Leadership and Instructional Coaching
Perspective		Using Email	Hugs, Handshakes, and High Fives	Employee Work-Life Balance	Digital Leadership and Blended Learning
Flexibility		Using Social Media	Importance of Recognition and Celebration	Dismissing Employees	Competency Based Progression
Situational Awareness			RAVE	Commitment to Personal Growth and Soliciting Feedback	Common Formative and Summative Assessments
Solutions Orientation				Creating a Multi-Year Professional Development Vision	Analyzing Data, Data Chats and Using Data Systems
Financial Management					Differentiated Instruction
Listening					Prescriptive Intervention
Comprehensive Safe School Environment					Student Learning Profiles
Student Centered					
Political Advocacy					
Implementing Policy and Policy Compliance					
Political Awareness					

- A *Facebook* group and social media groups to continue ongoing leadership discussions and development.
- Coaching development training for the actual coaches who will be working with our Leadership Fellows participants. This has given us an avenue to develop and refine the leadership coaching skills of our existing principals and central office leadership.

**Q2: How did the idea for *Primer* come about?**

TM: The original idea for *Primer* came about when I was an Assistant Superintendent in Waller ISD in 2010 and was talking with our high school principal, Brian Merrell, about the fact that there should be a practical guide for new principals. I began writing the *Primer Entry Guide* as a passion project in 2012 and I completed it, with help from Herbert O'Neil, in April of 2016. During the same time as I was creating the entry guide we were developing our leadership preparation program and we ultimately decided to brand everything we were doing to support and develop leaders under the *Primer* brand.

The critical piece of the *Primer* program was our research and development of the competencies for the program. We reviewed existing standards at the state and national level, met with leaders of existing programs, reviewed national research and borrowed from our own experiences. These competencies are the framework for all of our books, articles, podcasts, *YouTube* videos and other *Primer* items.

**Q3: What do you believe are the most important takeaways from *Primer* that a new principal could benefit from?**

HO: The most important takeaway is to begin intentionally developing leaders at your district or at least your campus. A new principal should consider the *Primer Entry Guide for New Principals* as an affordable (.99 cents) and essential resource. The basic theme of the guide is about first building relationships before beginning any "tearing down of fences." There is much more useful information in the guide but I have found that many new principals fail when they begin with trying to implement their own ideas (even if they are good) without first making the necessary connections with their staff.

As far as the existing list of *Primer* competencies some of them mean more to me personally but they are almost all derived from existing National standards or research.

**Q4: The role of the principal has greatly evolved over the last several decades. How do you think the role will continue to change and what development and support will be needed to meet those changes to the role of the principal?**

TM: The role has changed but many districts still do not meet what I think are basic requirements for principal support including:

- Regular principal meetings.
- Supervisors only responsible for approximately 10 principals.
- Expectation that supervisors respond quickly to principal questions/inquiries/concerns.
- Inclusion of development items instead of only operational items at principal meetings.

While much of the principal experience is universal, each district has some specific behaviors that they require of principals. Have those been articulated? Has there been any thought and planning on how to prepare current and future principals for those district specific responsibilities and competencies? Principals need training on how to collaborate effectively. This begins with "involving people in decisions that impact them." Principals also need to train their own leadership teams on how to collaborate effectively. Additionally, principals need to strengthen their instructional leadership capabilities but their first priority is to ensure their campus is operationally functioning at a high level. If the principal is the most knowledgeable person about curriculum and instruction at their campus then they may have hired poorly.

**Q5: What advice would you give a new superintendent who wanted to ensure those school administrators coming up through the ranks are prepared for the principalship?**

TM & HO:

- Commit to developing leaders at all levels throughout the organization. Develop a leadership preparation program that is focusing on developing leaders rather than only just preparing principals. Good organizations need leaders all throughout the system and a campus full developed teacher leaders will be of great benefit to any principal. The district leadership preparation program cannot be an afterthought. Planning is required for the selection of participants, competencies, content, and measurement of outcomes of a leadership program.
- Leadership program participants need to be as-

signed into cohorts, have authentic job embedded experiences, complete meaningful work, and be exposed to mentoring and coaching throughout the process.

- Existing principals should be involved in the program both for content development and for mentoring/coaching and to ensure the program is relevant.

### Conclusion

The preparation of school site administrators is paramount for school leaders to meet the rigorous demands of leading their school sites. Today's educational leaders have unprecedented challenges in ensuring teachers are delivering high-quality common core teaching to prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. School leaders such as Troy Mooney and Herbert O'Neil are building capacity in their school leaders through *Primer Lead*, a comprehensive leadership program centered on developing core competencies. As the principalship continues to evolve in complexity, programs such as *Primer Lead* may serve as an exemplary program to develop school leaders in these demanding and evolving times.

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If you would like to know more about *Primer* it can be purchased for *Kindle* at [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) [https://www.amazon.com/Primer-Entry-Plan-New-Principals-ebook/dp/B01EYY8XQK/ref=sr\\_1\\_fkmr0\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1480957767&sr=8-1-fkmr0&keywords=Principal+entry+guide+primer](https://www.amazon.com/Primer-Entry-Plan-New-Principals-ebook/dp/B01EYY8XQK/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1480957767&sr=8-1-fkmr0&keywords=Principal+entry+guide+primer)

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If you are interested in participating in a future Q and A Dialogue article featured in the *Journal of School Administration Research and Development*, please email [editor@JSARD.org](mailto:editor@JSARD.org) and include a brief letter of interest with the following information: name, title, organization, and area of expertise.

# The Acclimation of New Assistant Principals

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**ABSTRACT:** Although the assistant principal position has been the career path for aspiring principals, some researchers have claimed the position lacks adequacy as a training position. With limited research available, the purpose of this study was to explore the induction and acclimation experiences of newly assigned assistant principals. Following a phenomenological research approach, interviews were conducted with six public school assistant principals. New assistant principals prepared for their positions by seeking prior leadership opportunities and asking questions, but they noted a lack of confidence in making decisions. These new assistant principals, recognizing the importance of professional relationships, worked to build trust with students and teachers. Implications for school district leaders, preparation programs, and aspiring candidates are provided.

**Keywords:** assistant principals, vice-principals, socialization, induction

The role of the school principal has been correlated to student performance and school success (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Retention of school principals and high numbers of predicted retirements are documented concerns (Battle, 2010). With these predicted vacancies, prepared school leaders will be needed. For many years, the assistant principal position has been the career path for aspiring principals, although some researchers have noted the assistant principal position is not an adequate training position for the principal role (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Kwan, 2009). Given that assistant principals can be valuable resources for schools and are being trained as future school leaders, more information is needed to support assistant principals in their career transitions. Although a few recent studies

have been conducted about the assistant principal (e.g., Petrides, Jimes, & Karaglani, 2014; Williams, 2012), much of the literature occurred before 1999 (see Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). Updated information is needed about the challenges and barriers of newly assigned assistant principals, which can assist current administrators and educators in preparation programs by providing timely and relevant support to these new leaders. As such, the purpose of this study is to explore the induction and acclimation experiences of newly assigned assistant principals.

## Review of Literature

The common duties of assistant principals have changed little over the last four decades (e.g., Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary, & Donaldson, 2002; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). Reed and Himmler (1985) reviewed the literature on assistant principals from 1926 to 1985 and concluded that although studies have been abundant, the "nature of the work has escaped clear conceptualization" (p. 60). Many of these studies addressed similar research questions focused on an analysis of duties using questionnaires (Reed & Himmler, 1985). Almost a decade later, Scoggins and Bishop (1993) reviewed 26 studies conducted from 1973 to 1992 to identify the most common roles of assistant principals, which were found to be "discipline, attendance, student activities, staff support and evaluation, building supervision, guidance, co-curricular activities, athletics, community agencies, master schedules" (p. 42). Further, the duties of the assistant principal were determined primarily by the principal (Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). Similarly, Reed and Himmler (1985) concluded the secondary assistant principal was "charged with establishing and maintaining organizational stability" (p. 82), which included developing the master schedule (before the use of

personal computers), planning the calendar of after-school activities, and supervising students. In a more recent synthesis of literature about the assistant principal, Oleszewski et al. (2012) affirmed that most of these previously cited duties remain relevant today, with the most cited roles as “student management, instructional leadership, and personnel management” (p. 274). Interestingly, the significance of instructional leadership tasks was not evident until the 2000s (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Student discipline remains the primary duty of U.S. assistant principals (Hausman et al., 2002; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). Hausman et al. (2002) observed most of the duties of the assistant principal were centered “around management of people, particularly students” (p. 152), requiring assistant principals to have effective human relations skills. Focused on effective student management, Williams (2012) consulted with experts to create a set of skills and dispositions for secondary assistant principals. She concluded the qualities of effective disciplinarians were honesty, visibility, ethical behavior, fairness, and good communication skills. One of the most commonly cited traits of successful assistant principals was the ability to build and maintain positive relationships, and Williams (2012) noted that building relationships was often linked to building a positive school climate.

Many scholars have indicated the role of the assistant principal is problematic and undefined (Armstrong, 2012; Petrides et al., 2014). In spite of the “ad hoc task assignments that traditionally accompany the assistant principal role” (Petrides et al., 2014, p. 176), assistant principals participating in Hausman et al.’s (2002) study were positive about their positions. Balancing work and life was a major concern, and assistant principals who worked 55 hours or more a week reported the lowest levels of balance (Hausman et al., 2002). New assistant principals participating in Armstrong’s (2014) study described “responsibilities and workloads as physically and emotionally stressful,” especially when they “did not have the time, technical skills and the procedural knowledge required to complete everyday managerial and disciplinary tasks” (p. 30). Although some assistant principals wanted to spend more time with instructional tasks (Glanz, 1994; Hausman et al., 2002), their duties as crisis managers outranked “attending to the proactive goals of curriculum planning, instructional supervision, resource allocation, and professional development” (Hausman et al., 2002, p. 152). Armstrong (2012) concluded from a study of 15 new assistant principals the role “remains an underutilized, fragmented, reactive managerial role” (p. 421), and the

position should be reconfigured (Armstrong, 2012; Oleszewski et al., 2012).

### Preparation for the Position

The lack of preparation of assistant principals for their positions has been well documented for some years (Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1995; Hausman et al., 2002). Twenty years ago, Hartzell et al. (1995) concluded new assistant principals did not have the necessary knowledge and skills for their positions and were unaware of the realities of the position and its challenges. One common theme in the literature concerning preparation of assistant principals is the inadequacy of formal preparation programs focused on the role (Armstrong, 2010; Oleszewski et al., 2012). Almost all courses in preparation programs focus on the principal position, with a “disconnect between the relevance of formal training” and the needs of assistant principals (Hausman et al., 2002, p. 152). Assistant principals prepared for their roles on the job through trial and error and with reinforcement from their principals (Mertz, 2006). Further, principals were key in the learning process because they assigned the responsibilities and were in a position to give meaningful feedback (Mertz, 2006). Combined with the lack of pre-service training, Oleszewski et al. (2012) noted few of the professional development opportunities available were specific to the needs of assistant principals.

New assistant principals varied in their levels of teaching experience and knowledge of instructional processes (Hausman et al., 2002). Focused on instructional leader readiness, Searby, Wang, and Browne-Ferrigno (2015) surveyed 461 assistant principals from Alabama. Surprisingly, the researchers concluded there was no significant relationship between the readiness for instructional leadership tasks and years of teaching experience or age. The prediction that teachers with more years of classroom experience would be more prepared for instructional leadership was not confirmed in their study (Searby et al., 2015). In contrast, Hausman et al. (2002) noted additional years of teaching experience was related to time spent in instructional leadership among 145 assistant principals from Maine. Specifically, experiences as teacher leaders contributed to new assistant principals’ perceived readiness as instructional leaders (Searby et al., 2015). Noted teacher leadership activities were mentoring other teachers, planning or leading professional development, and serving on school and professional development committees (Searby et al., 2015). The researchers explained these leadership roles might have “exposed them to the ‘behind the scenes’

aspects of building leadership" (Searby et al., 2015, p. 29).

Many researchers have recommended additional professional development and training for assistant principals (Hausman et al., 2002; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Petrides et al., 2014), particularly with the prevalence of "inappropriate professional certification programs" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 709). Noting a specific concern with handling conflict with teachers, Petrides et al. (2014) recommended "increased support to aid them in establishing ongoing constructive conversations with teachers" and ways to establish "non-intrusive processes for impacting teacher practice" (p. 188). Oleszewski et al. (2012) called for more studies about the professional development needs of assistant principals.

### Conceptual Framework

Theories related to the socialization of assistant principals serve as the conceptual framework of this qualitative study. Career socialization is the process of learning the norms and expectations of a given position. Greenfield (1985) described the socialization process of assistant principals as being informal, random, and varied—a process that differs from that of the principal roles (Armstrong, 2012). Assistant principal training is often on-the-job and informal, random in occurrence, and varied in required acculturation time. In one of the later stages of the socialization process, one's identity changes from that of a teacher to that of an administrator (Greenfield, 1985). Instead of focusing on the stages of socialization, Marshall (1985) focused on the tasks that help the assistant principal assume the new role identity. According to Marshall (1985), initially, the person makes a decision to leave teaching and then learns about the selection process. Next, the new assistant principal experiences the change from teacher to administrator, sometimes described as a culture shock. To adapt to the new role, the assistant principal finds resources and social supports.

Scholars have noted concerns with the socialization process for new assistant principals, referring to the transition as a "trajectory of conflict, resistance, and accommodation" (Armstrong, 2012, p. 418). In a study about the socialization process of 15 new assistant principals, Armstrong (2012) concluded the transition from teacher to administrator is a "complex passage" involving "personal and professional changes" (p. 404) that "destabilize[s] novice VPs cognitively, emotionally, and socially" (p. 418) for which they are unprepared. In a different study, Armstrong (2010) described that new assistant principals were without

support at the induction stages and recommended school districts to work together with universities to improve the transition process.

### Method

This qualitative study employed the techniques of phenomenological research methods (Moustakas, 1994). According to Van Manen (1990), a phenomenological design is appropriate to understand the essence of lived experiences of participants. For phenomenological research, Creswell (2013) recommended 3 to 10 participants. Six participants were recruited for the study using snowball sampling techniques, as we used professional contacts to locate participants who served as assistant principals in public schools for at least one year and no more than three years.

A diverse group of participants took part in this study. Four of the participants identified as White and two as Black. Three participants were male, whereas both Black assistant principals were female. All of the participants served fewer than three years in the assistant principal role. Three assistant principals worked at campuses serving students in Grades 6-8, and three worked at campuses serving students in Grades 9-12. Two had been promoted to assistant principal from a teaching assignment on the same campus, and four were placed in a new setting for their first assistant principal assignment.

After consent was given, participants were interviewed in face-to-face settings. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Interview questions were developed after a review of the literature and piloted with two assistant principals. The pilot interview results allowed for improvements to data collection. Additional demographic data were collected using questionnaires.

In the transcription analysis, a combination of first-cycle and second-cycle coding techniques was employed (Saldaña, 2013). Initially, applied attribute coding was used for each transcript using the demographic data. Next, first-cycle coding consisting of structural codes was used to organize the large amounts of information gathered from the interviews. Using the structural codes, we searched each transcript, applying a combined descriptive and in-vivo coding. After several rounds of first-cycle coding, clusters of meanings and thematic coding in second-cycle coding were identified.

### Results

To describe the induction and acclimation experiences of newly assigned assistant principals, we pre-

sent the findings in three structural categories: preparation for the position, challenges of the new assistant principals, and relationships. Themes within each category are described in the following sections. To ensure anonymity, the six participants were assigned the pseudonyms Amy, Bill, Carl, Dalene, Edgar, and Felicia. Summaries are provided in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

### Preparation for the Position

The assistant principals discussed their preparation for the position as a new administrator and the importance of learning about the role. Dalene stated, "You really have to let it be known you are interested, and you have to put in the time to learn." The assistant principals in this study all dedicated many hours to transition to the role of administrator. The three themes used to summarize the new assistant principals' preparation for the position were (a) leadership opportunities, (b) asking questions, and (c) volunteering. Descriptions of each theme are provided in Table 1.

One theme that developed was *leadership opportunities*, which were the opportunities that assistant principals were afforded before attaining their first administrative position. Amy explained, "I was actually prepared for it [assistant principal position]. And by that I mean I was given the opportunity to serve in

multiple roles in my previous district." Felicia also described leadership opportunities as a teacher: "I was a team leader." She added being part of "the flight team" allowed her opportunities to fill in "when administrators were out."

Another common theme to describe the preparation for the assistant principal position was *asking questions*. All of the assistant principals mentioned the importance of asking questions. Carl shared, "Talking to my dad [an administrator], talking to my uncle [an administrator], and getting some feedback from my high school principal" helped him prepare for the position. Edgar stated, "Don't be afraid to ask questions." The assistant principals shared a spirit of humility and were willing to ask questions to gain a better understanding of the position.

A common theme of *volunteering* was also present among the assistant principals. Many of the participants mentioned the various aspects of the position and the importance of requesting additional duties as a teacher to be better prepared for the role of administrator. Dalene explained, "You have to take on different responsibilities, saying give me Red Ribbon Week or give me this and let me be in charge." Also, Carl added, "It's like anything, you can tell somebody about it, but until you get your feet wet and do it yourself, you just don't know."

Table 1

#### Summary of Themes of New Assistant Principals' Preparation

Theme	Description	Significant Statement Example
Leadership opportunities	Assistant principals described leadership opportunities they were given before the administrative position.	"I was the head volleyball coach which gave me some leadership experience. I also was then asked to serve as the department chair for the business department, and then the opportunity presented itself for me to be the International Business Academy Coordinator."
Asking questions	Assistant principals asked questions from more experienced administrators.	"Asking the current assistant principals I had at the time, continuously looking at them, questioning them how they did certain things."
Volunteering	Assistant principals discussed volunteering for administrative duties.	"Putting in a lot of hours volunteering especially because this district and campus is so competitive. I think being pulled in to observe or being pulled in when administrators were out. I did bus referrals or tardies."

Table 2

*Summary of Themes of Challenges of New Assistant Principals*

Theme	Description	Significant Statement Examples
Meeting expectations	Identifying stakeholder needs and requirements	“I think the biggest challenge was learning my way around, learning who people were, learning what the kids needed. . . . [,] and not sure of the expectations and wanting to do it right.”
Possessing confidence in decision making	Feeling self-assured in performing daily tasks	“Having to adjust from a teacher mindset to an administrator mindset. As a leader, I’ve got to be more decisive in my actions and not defer to someone else.”
Unpredictability of the job	Managing the sporadic nature of the day’s work with constant interruptions	“You realize there is no schedule, and you can’t pencil things in because everybody’s interruption is something and you have to stop and deal with that.”
Evaluating teachers	Conducting teacher evaluations and providing feedback	“I think my biggest challenge especially my first year is going into and really actually evaluating teachers on subjects that I’m not strong in, and then trying to give them helpful advice on how to make it better.”
Time management/organization	Managing time for efficiency and creating systems to produce effectiveness	“Learning to manage everything; it’s a lot to manage. It’s an overwhelmingly large amount of work to manage from just having a system of returning calls, checking in with teachers, following up with kids, communicating with parents, and being responsible to my principal.”

**Challenges of New Assistant Principals**

Each assistant principal articulated numerous challenges faced during their beginning years in the administrative position. Transitioning into a leadership role of teachers and managing all of the unexpected and unplanned crises were difficulties repeatedly mentioned by the participants. For example, Amy explained her biggest transition was “not being in control of the day.” Taking on a role where the landscape of the position changed daily was another challenge expressed by the assistant principals. The five themes used to summarize the challenges faced by the new assistant principals were (a) meeting expectations, (b) possessing confidence in decision making, (c) unpredictability of the job, (d) evaluating teachers, and (e) time management/organization. Descriptions of each theme are provided in Table 2.

One theme that developed was the assistant principals’ challenge of *meeting expectations*. Identifying the needs of the various campus stakeholders and fulfilling the requirements of the multitude of duties and responsibilities were often mentioned. Amy recounted the difficulty in being a new administrator at an unfamiliar campus and the challenges of meeting expectations:

I didn’t know what I was walking into; I didn’t know any of the people on the campus. I didn’t know much about the dynamics of the students, the faculty, or the staff on the campus. The biggest challenge was learning my way around, learning who people were, and learning what the kids needed.

Carl, also new to his middle school campus, is in his first year as an assistant principal and remembered his concerns about meeting expectations of his new peer

group: "Everything was brand new. I knew nothing at all and did not know what to expect."

Another emerging theme was *possessing confidence in decision making*. The assistant principals struggled with feeling self-assured in their new roles and in making administrative decisions. Bill reflected, "I remember when I first started that fear of 'oh, what if I do things wrong?'" His hopes for the first year were to "not screw up." In addition to dealing with learning the expectations required of her, Amy expressed concerns about her abilities. She was worried about "not knowing . . . or having enough confidence in myself that I had all the tools to do that [lead a school]."

A common theme of *unpredictability of the job* was also present among the new campus administrators. Many of the participants mentioned some aspect of the ever-changing daily routine of the assistant principal's role and how a well-planned day could easily be thwarted by an unexpected event. Carl realized, "I'm not in control anymore. I don't have my little bubble anymore." Edgar further noted the irregularity of the position as a challenge:

This job is unbelievably unpredictable. So, to set a schedule out for yourself for a week, or even a day, like today, I'm going to do this, and you do it naturally as organized people do, but [you] never do[.]. . . never does it work out like you want it to.

Also, the less experienced assistant principals struggled in their first year to conduct classroom observations and provide valuable feedback to their teachers. The theme of *evaluating teachers* emerged from the interviews. Carl described "the need for time with your group of assistant principals in the district and talk about how something [observations] would be scored" to aid with conducting teacher observations.

Last, the theme of *time management/organization* was a commonality among the assistant principals. Finding a way to complete all the tasks in a timely, efficient manner, especially with the aforementioned unpredictability of the job, was also a challenge. Bill commented on the challenge of time management:

Knowing how much time I needed to put into different aspects of walk-throughs, investigations, discussing situations with students, and giving time to teachers, making sure everyone is doing what they are supposed to and really trying to get all of your reports and everything done on time.

Felicia concurred she was challenged with "learning to manage everything. . . . It was a lot to learn to manage, so getting organized and getting a system was the

biggest challenge."

### Relationships of the New Assistant Principals

The assistant principals described their relationships as being in transition as they adjusted to their roles as administrators. For example, Felicia described her biggest challenge as adjusting "from a teacher mindset to an administrator mindset." The assistant principals in this study all experienced a transition in their friendships when changing roles from teacher to assistant principal. They had few friendships, and those they had were not part of their workplace. Instead, at their jobs they focused on the professional relationships they were building with teachers. Three themes were used to summarize the relationships of these new assistant principals. These new administrators were *trust builders* and *conflict managers* with *distanced friendships*. A description of each theme is shown in Table 3.

As *trust builders*, the assistant principals discussed the strategies they used to build trust and the development of their relationships with teachers over time. Edgar described his strategy:

My goal really every day is to say hello to every one of my teachers I see in the hallway[,] . . . so if we can build them up enough to know we care about them, um, it's easier to have that tough conversation.

The development of trust was also noted when participants described a success story; all six assistant principals mentioned their positive relationships with teachers or students as one of their successes. Carl described his success with two teachers: "The relationship between us continued to strengthen." He believed the teachers were able "to do a better job in the classroom" because of their supportive relationship.

Another common theme to describe the relationships of the new assistant principals was *conflict managers*. Five of the assistant principals talked about their challenges with addressing conflict with teachers. Bill described the transition from teacher to administrator:

You're worried about stepping on people's toes or hurting people's feelings, and I think for me, that was the biggest change. . . . [.] and typically as a teacher, you avoid uncomfortable situations, and you can get away from them. But as a principal, those you kind of live with.

Carl also described his difficulty in addressing teachers with concerns. He shared, "If they [teachers] mess

Table 3

*Summary of Themes of Challenges of New Assistant Principals*

Theme	Description	Significant Statement Example
Trust builders	Assistant principals discussed the development of relationships with the teachers they supervised over time.	“Building that trust and working with teachers would probably be the biggest success[;] . . . they understand that we’re there to help them.”
Conflict managers	Assistant principals adjusted to the role expectation of addressing problems with teachers they supervised.	“It was harder for me when I had to go correct somebody because there was that knot in my stomach because I had to put friendship on the line, a friendship and comradery I had built up as teachers.”
Distanced friendships	Assistant principals, in their roles as supervisors, described their friendships as acquaintances.	“As AP my first time around, I felt like it was lonely at the top[;] . . . it was different switching into a role where people stayed away from me just because of my title.”

up, you have to call them on it.” His challenge was “knowing how to do that . . . in a professional way . . . to keep them motivated to work and to keep that respect.” Dalene concluded, “Some people took it [correction] really well; others, it crawled all over them,” and some “people just don’t want to be corrected.”

Another theme describing relationships was *distanced friendships*. All of the assistant principals talked about changes in friendships at work, which they accepted as part of their new roles as administrators. Both Carl and Felicia used the phrase “it’s lonely at the top” to describe their changed social positions in their schools. Bill explained that in his role as an administrator, “You don’t usually have really friends, [rather] more acquaintances,” and the “friendship part kind of gets a little tricky [when] you have to look at them and tell them they are doing something wrong.” Commenting on her exclusion from social events with teachers, Dalene explained, “I’m not invited to the social gatherings like I used to be. And it’s not because the friendship isn’t there, it’s just teachers can’t vent.”

Of the assistant principals in this study, two became administrators in the same schools that they were teachers and four were in different schools. Although all of the assistant principals reported a change in their friendships as they transitioned from teachers to administrators, some differences were noted in these two groups. The individuals in unfamiliar settings seemed to experience less difficulty with friendships and their new role. Amy shared, “I started on a new campus, in a new district, and so my role is what

it was, and I didn’t have friends already to have to adjust.” In contrast, Dalene worked in the same school as a teacher and administrator. She explained being in the same school was “easier for me because I had relationships with the staff, and I feel like I had a lot of support.” At the same time, she noted, “It was harder for me when I had to go correct somebody because there was that knot in my stomach because I had to put friendship on the line.”

### Discussion

A consistent finding in our study was new assistant principals prepared for their positions by seeking leadership opportunities, asking questions, and volunteering—activities which have also been noted by Mertz (2006). Participants benefitted from prior leadership positions (e.g., department heads, team leaders, and coaches), confirming the work of other researchers (Hausman et al., 2002; Searby et al., 2015). Also, these new assistant principals sought out informal mentorships from their peer administrators, understanding the importance of asking questions in their new roles. As confirmed in the literature (e.g., Mertz, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012), even after completing master’s degrees, obtaining state certifications, and securing their first campus administrative positions, many new assistant principals in our study did not possess the confidence to make decisions in their new roles.

The many challenges that surfaced during the participants’ beginning years as assistant principals were meeting others’ expectations, handling the job unpredictability, evaluating teachers, and managing time.

Although some of the participants expressed difficulty in knowing what was expected of them by their new peers (especially at a new school), others doubted their self-efficacy in taking action. Some respondents addressed the challenges in adjusting from a teacher role with a structured, daily routine to an administrator role, which lacked structure and routine. Greenfield (1985) and Marshall (1985), who provided early theories about the socialization process of new assistant principals, also noted these concerns. More recently, Armstrong (2015) characterized the assistant principal position as having “hectic and fragmented working environments where challenge and change are the norms” (p. 110). The assistant principals in our study attempted to cope with these challenges using time management strategies; however, we predict the nature of the position will continue to offer repeated challenges for these novice administrators (Armstrong, 2010, 2012).

Similar to prior studies about assistant principal transition (Armstrong, 2012; Greenfield, 1985), participants in this study witnessed changes in their relationships during their transitions. Focusing on the importance of building trust with teachers, parents, and students, new administrators offered positive relationships as a way to manage ongoing conflicts inherent in their new roles. Concurring with Hausman et al. (2002) and Williams (2012), we noted that these assistant principals had to build positive relationships and manage many conflicts – skills for which they were sometimes unprepared.

### Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, instructors of principal preparation programs can assist in the preparation and transition of new leaders. All leadership candidates need time to reflect upon and develop their relationship-building and conflict-management skills. Some participants commented that as teachers, they could avoid conflict-filled situations that were unavoidable as administrators. Specific exercises and case studies designed to help candidates assimilate and practice decision-making skills might be helpful.

Aspiring candidates need a more realistic view of the roles and responsibilities of the administrator. Both preparation programs and school district mentors can assist in the communication of accurate job descriptions, work conditions, and roles. Educators who have accepted jobs with an accurate job preview have been more likely to remain employed and experience higher job satisfaction levels (Ellis, 2014).

After new assistant principals have been hired, school districts help them in understanding their roles as trust builders and conflict managers. From our study, we noted participants voiced many challenges in their transitions from teachers to administrators. School district leaders should provide a support network composed of experienced administrators to help new assistant principals manage the professional loneliness they experience as new administrators. The respondents specifically requested school district leaders be more intentional with support, providing collaboration opportunities and interactive, hands-on professional development. For example, Felicia shared, “They [the individual districts] need to have a system in place to support APs—a system of professional development, a system of go-to people, a system of protocols and procedures that APs should follow.”

Amy and Edgar discussed the need for districts to have better mentoring programs to support new assistant principals allowing collaboration among the new administrators. Similarly, Bill and Carl discussed providing support to new assistant principals in the areas of basic policies and procedures and new information from the state, but with the hands-on approach of role-playing. Bill recommended “more role-playing . . . [and] coaching them [new assistant principals] through it. [For example,] if you do expel a kid or send them to an alternative campus . . . OK, what do you do then?” He expressed that many first-year assistant principals don’t know certain protocols. Carl concluded, “Give them the handbook; let them experience it. [Trainings on] discipline and real-life scenarios[,] . . . giving actual attendance issues and having me go through the court scenario[,] . . . teacher appraisals[,] and how to give proper feedback.” These needs were also noted in previous studies (Hausman et al., 2002; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Petrides et al., 2014).

Based on the study’s findings, there are several implications for assistant principals as they transition into the role. First, new assistant principals should be prepared for the transition into their new role by acknowledging the potential of distanced friendships, increased conflict, and unstructured work environments. New assistant principals might benefit from observing effective administrators handle conflict, build relationships, and manage the tasks of the position. A consistent finding among the respondents in this study was the importance of preparing early by learning the logistics of the organization as soon as possible. For example, one of the participants, Amy, discussed the importance of showing initiative and

being proactive in getting to know the job expectations, the building, and the culture quickly. Having this knowledge could facilitate introductions with students and teachers, possibly making it easier to develop a rapport with them and to feel connected within the building.

Another consistent finding was being teachable and seeking advice. Many of the participants were of the opinion that if a situation arises in which a new assistant principal does not know the answer, then he or she should simply seek out advice. Some of the participants also recommended new assistant principals be willing to open to try new ideas and absorb as much information as possible – being teachable. Bill advised, “Breathe[;] . . . all you can do is the best you can. Don’t be afraid to ask. . . . [and] learn to manipulate your time.” Carl described the importance of flexibility, remarking, “You have to be willing to change it up. Be open, don’t be prideful, and know there are going to be some gray areas.” Dalene, Edgar, and Felicia discussed the relevance of seeking others who have either previously served in the assistant principal role or who are currently serving in the role and have done so successfully for some time. Dalene shared, “With their [others in the profession] experience, they have a different outlook. . . . As a new assistant principal, you may still see it [the duties of the job] as a teacher.” Edgar advised to “buddy with them [seasoned administrators]. . . . Mentor with them. . . . Really ask questions.” Felicia advised new assistant principals to “talk to people and get a different perspective, and then find your own way. Don’t be too hard on yourself.” Learning the logistics of the organization, being teachable, and seeking advice were all important actions recommended to take in the first few months on the job.

### Conclusion

School leaders are instrumental in the education of students (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012; Coelli & Green, 2012; Grissom, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2015). Because a majority of school principals were once assistant principals, the position of the assistant principal is viewed as a training position. However, a need for more information about this position remains, as the literature is dated (before 1999) and scant. Our study was an attempt to add more recent information about the induction and acclimation experiences of newly assigned assistant principals. Although data saturation was reached for the research questions posed, limitations were present such that we recommend future researchers include more voices of beginning administrators. As described in the research litera-

ture, the professional relationships of assistant principals changed as they transitioned from teacher to administrator. Although most of the participants seemed to accept the reduced social interaction at work, they acknowledged the need to build positive relationships with teachers and students to manage the increased conflicts inherent in their positions.

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# School Leader Relationships: The Need for Explicit Training on Rapport, Trust, and Communication

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**ABSTRACT:** An important aspect of school leadership is relationship development, but developing meaningful relationships as a school leader is challenging. School leader relationships are challenged by diverse stakeholder groups, varied contexts, and difficult situations. The complex nature of school leader relationships necessitates explicit training for leaders on relational skills. The purpose of this paper is to provide professional development recommendations for school leaders regarding three aspects of relationships: rapport, trust, and communication. Specific ideas for school leaders regarding how to establish rapport, trust, and effective communication are discussed. Finally, the use of structured role play is discussed as the recommended approach to professional development for school leader relationships.

**Keywords:** school leadership, relationships, rapport, trust, communication, role play, professional development

Relationships are the cornerstone of many aspects of educational leadership. According to Northouse (2015), every situation involving school leaders requires some degree of relational behavior. Current topics in education—such as trust, collaboration, professional learning communities, distributed leadership, supervision, mentoring, coaching, and family-school-community partnerships—reflect the relational nature of the school leader position. Furthermore, the increased involvement of parents and community members in educational processes requires school leaders to develop stronger relationships than ever before (Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008).

The importance of relationships in the work of school leaders is further communicated through professional standards. Nearly all of the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (formerly known as ISLCC Standards) developed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA, 2015)

address the role of relationships in the work of school leaders. Some of the domains focus explicitly on the relational nature of the school leader role. For example, Standard 7 addresses the role of school leaders in establishing a “professional community for teachers and staff” and calls leaders to “empower and entrust teachers,” establish “trust and open communication,” and “develop and support open, productive, caring, and trusting working relationships among leaders, faculty, and staff” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 15). Similarly, Standard 8 addresses the role of school leaders in establishing “meaningful engagement of families and community” and calls leaders to “create and sustain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community for the benefit of students,” “engage in regular and open two-way communication with families and the community about the school, students, needs, problems, and accomplishments,” and “build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning” (p. 16). Many of the other Professional Standards for Educational Leaders speak implicitly to the importance of relationship cultivation. For example, Standard 2 relates to the domain “ethics and professional norms” and calls leaders to “lead with interpersonal and communication skill” (p. 10), while Standard 10 relates to the domain “school improvement” and calls effective leaders to connect “to the district office and external partners for support in planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation” (p. 18). Though relationship development in the school leader position is acknowledged in both the literature (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005; Riehl, 2012; Stronge et al., 2008) and professional standards for educational leaders (NPBEA, 2015), developing these relationships remains challenging.

## Challenges in Relationship Development

School leaders are called to develop meaningful relationships with diverse stakeholder groups repre-

senting varied interests, positions, cultures, needs, values, and beliefs about education (Abaya & Normore, 2010; Henry & Woody, 2013). These stakeholder groups include teachers, students, parents, community members, board members, administrators, and others. The purpose of each of these relationships also varies, as does the school leader's role within the relationships (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012). Adding to the complexity of relationship development for school leaders are the within-group differences that exist. For example, establishing relationships with one family may require school leaders to exhibit a completely different skill set than those required to work with another family. The contexts in which these relationships exist also vary dramatically (e.g., rural, urban, suburban, large school, small school, etc.), and these various contexts present unique challenges for school leaders (Auerbach, 2012).

Relational efforts of school leaders are further complicated by many structural and psychological barriers (Christenson, 2004). Structural barriers are the factors that limit access between educators and other stakeholders, such as time constraints and lack of funding for outreach initiatives. Psychological barriers are the interpersonal factors experienced by educators, families, and community members that impede relationship development. Examples of psychological barriers include distrust, low self-efficacy, fear of conflict, and a blaming attitude (Christenson, 2004).

Principals must rely on a breadth of highly sophisticated relational skills and understand when and how to use these skills to develop meaningful relationships with diverse stakeholders. Unfortunately, principal preparation in this regard is often incomplete (Anast-May, Buckner, & Geer, 2011; Duncan, Range, & Scherz, 2011), and many school leaders are unprepared to effectively build relationships with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds (Epstein, 2011). Leadership preparation programs often stress the importance of relationships for principals, but they stop short of training principals on how to cultivate meaningful relationships with diverse groups of people (Kowalski, 2001). Failure to provide principals with explicit and extensive training on relationship development is problematic and may leave many school leaders involved in highly complex social interactions with diverse groups of people without the skills and experiences necessary to navigate these situations.

### Professional Development Needs

The value of school leader relationships, as well as the highly complex nature of these relationships, suggests the need for explicit and extensive professional

development for school leaders on the establishment of relationships with diverse stakeholders. According to a survey of Wyoming school principals, the areas in which principals needed the most support were related to relationship-building, communication, and conflict-resolution, yet these were the areas in which minimal to no professional development was provided (Duncan et al., 2011). As effective school leaders are called to "develop workplace conditions for teachers and other professional staff that promote effective professional development" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 14) and "tend to their own learning and effectiveness through reflection, study, and improvement" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 15), school leaders must take the charge in seeking and implementing professional development on successful relationship-building.

The sections below contain ideas and recommendations related to professional development for school leaders on relational skills. They are based largely on practices currently taught, implemented, and researched within other fields, such as counseling, medicine, and communications (see Gurland & Grolnick, 2008; Heintzman, Leathers, Parrott, & Cairns, 1993; Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2010). Though the practices were originally intended to facilitate relationships in other fields, it is believed that they apply more generally to the development of all relationships. As such, these practices can assist school leaders in the development of relationships with various stakeholders.

The provided recommendations center on three important aspects of relationships: rapport, trust, and communication. Though these qualities are presented individually, they should be considered concurrently, as rapport, trust, and communication are inextricably connected and interdependent. Building rapport requires trust and effective communication, effective communication requires rapport and trust, and trust requires effective communication and rapport. Specific ideas and recommendations regarding how to establish rapport, trust, and communication within the field of school leadership are provided below and are followed by a recommendation related to the delivery of professional development in these areas.

### Building Rapport

Relationship development starts with building rapport (Ivey et al., 2010). Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2012) summarized the literature in this area and identified eight categories of rapport: disclosure, honesty, and respect; supporting and monitoring; recognizing the individual; sharing, mirroring, mimicking, and matching; interacting socially; availability, accessibility, and responsiveness; caring and

bonding; and communicating effectively. The authors also provided fifty attributes of rapport from within these domains. Examples of rapport attributes include admitting faults and mistakes, listening and paying attention, creating a positive environment, engaging in personal discussions, smiling, using humor, being accessible and responsive, showing concern, and ensuring that communication is comfortable. In addition, supervisor use of the nonverbal behaviors of smiling, touching (e.g., touching on the arm, handshakes, etc.), nodding affirmatively, posturing to show involvement, and maintaining eye contact have been found to increase rapport with subordinates (Heintzman et al., 2013).

The rapport indicators presented in the literature can be directly applied to the work of school leaders. School leaders can demonstrate both professional and personal care for stakeholders by attending to their personal stories. Finding opportunities to relate with these stories deepens connections and communicates genuine care and concern. Asking about others' interests or spending a few moments to check on their well-being requires minimal effort, but it goes a long way in the establishment of rapport. Respecting the autonomy and individual perspectives of others may also improve rapport (Gurland & Grolnick, 2008). This can be demonstrated by providing opportunities for stakeholders' voices to be heard and allowing them to share in decision-making processes.

Further, school leaders can develop rapport by increasing their visibility and accessibility. Visibility refers to school leaders' presence both within the school and the community. Visibility provides opportunities for school leaders to be seen, but it also provides school leaders opportunities to initiate dialogue with stakeholders. Opportunities to engage in dialogue equate to opportunities to build rapport. Accessibility can also strengthen rapport. School leaders demonstrate that they are accessible to stakeholders when they encourage open communication and provide opportunities for this open communication to occur. It may be beneficial for school leaders to create both formal and informal systems of accessibility. Formal systems could include town hall meetings or public forums, whereas informal systems could involve dissemination of contact information, timely responses to phone calls or emails, and approachability at school events.

Another way for school leaders to establish rapport is through appropriate follow-up on reported concerns and past conversations. For example, a parent may call to discuss a concern regarding his or her

child's academic performance. After discussing the concern and deciding on a plan of action, it may be helpful for the school leader to follow-up with the parent. If the concern has already been addressed, then the parent knows that the school leader heard the concern and cared enough to respond. If the concern has not been addressed, then the principal has created another opportunity to problem-solve on the issue. Either way, the principal demonstrates genuine care and concern for the parent and student—ultimately building rapport and strengthening the relationship.

### Establishing Trust

Research demonstrates the importance of trust in relationship development at the school leadership level (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Tschannen-Moran (2004) defines trust as "one's willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent" (p. 17). Key considerations in the development of trusting relationships include respect, competence, personal regard for others, integrity, vulnerability, honesty, openness, and reliability (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Trust is ultimately dependent on the interplay between all of these factors. Understanding how to cultivate and demonstrate these qualities as school leaders is important in the development of trusting relationships.

Many of the qualities identified above also relate to the development of rapport. However, the distinction between rapport and trust can be found in vulnerability. Vulnerability is the byproduct of relational power dynamics and interdependence (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Recognizing vulnerability and making a concerted effort to relieve the anxiety and discomfort associated with vulnerability "can create a very intense, meaningful social bond among the parties" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 20). In essence, attending to the vulnerabilities of others can foster trust. School leaders can address unequal power dynamics, thus attending to the vulnerabilities of others, by inviting stakeholders to share in decision-making processes. In doing so, school leaders are "willing to make themselves vulnerable by sharing authority and the consequences for joint actions that are taken" (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p. 27). Again, school leaders can create both formal and informal systems to involve stakeholders in decisions. An example of a formal system is the development of a committee that is representative of diverse stakeholder groups (such as teachers, parents, administration, community leaders, and community members) which provides guidance and input related to school initiatives and programs. Informal systems

could include phone calls to elicit parents' input regarding strategies that might assist their struggling students.

Engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes also provides an opportunity to develop shared expectations. According to Bryk and Schenider (2002), "individuals typically withdraw their trust when expectations are not met, leading to a weakening of relationships and, in more extreme instances, a possible severing of ties" (p. 21). It can be difficult for school leaders to meet the expectations of others when the expectations are unknown or are inconsistent with the expectations of the school leader. Conversely, it can be difficult for stakeholders to meet school expectations when the expectations are unclear or inconsistent with their own expectations. It is important for school leaders to invest time in understanding the expectations of others, as well as communicating their own expectations. These conversations provide opportunities to arrive at shared expectations, facilitate shared decision-making, and ultimately, foster trust.

### Effective Communication

Communication, in its many forms (e.g., verbal, nonverbal, face-to-face, written text, etc.), is involved in every aspect of school leader relationships. Understanding how to effectively communicate with diverse stakeholders is imperative for successful relationship development. The following section provides specific recommendations related to the development of various communication skills, including attending behavior, active listening, and questioning.

#### Attending Behavior

Listening is a key factor in developing a trusting relationship (Ivey et al., 2010), and it is communicated through the appropriate use of attending behavior. Attending behaviors are the verbal and nonverbal responses to speakers that demonstrate attention and listening. There are four aspects of attending that school leaders can use to demonstrate listening: eye contact, vocal qualities, verbal tracking, and body language (Ivey et al., 2010).

The first way to communicate listening is through direct eye contact. Eye contact communicates to others that they are attended to and heard. Though maintaining appropriate eye contact may seem obvious, in the fast-paced, demanding work of school leaders, it is a practice that is easily overlooked. Often, there is not enough time in the day to accomplish everything on the school leader's list, so many school leaders become adept at multi-tasking. Unfortunately,

good-intentioned multitasking can become problematic when communicating with others, as it may send the message that the leader is unconcerned with or too busy to address the speaker. Thus, when communicating with others, school leaders must make deliberate efforts to stop performing other activities, establish and maintain eye contact with the individual, and fully attend to the speaker's message.

Second, school leaders should focus on the vocal qualities of their own speech--specifically their vocal tone and speech rate. Often, it is not *what* is said, but *how* it is said that can create problems with communication and ultimately damage relationships. For example, there are many ways to communicate the simple phrase "keep trying." In some cases, "keep trying" might be communicated in such a way to encourage, foster persistence, and exhibit optimism; whereas, "keep trying" could also be communicated in such a way to suggest failure, disappointment, or frustration. Though the words are the same, the tone in which the words are communicated can drastically change the message. Thus, it is important that school leaders use a tone and speech rate that is consistent with their intended message.

Verbal tracking is another attending behavior that communicates listening. Verbal tracking keeps the subject of the conversation focused on the speaker's message. The example below illustrates how abruptly changing topics can thwart communication and potentially damage relationships.

*Teacher:* I don't know what to do about Kyle. He won't listen. He won't turn in homework. He won't work in class. He's becoming a major problem in my classroom.

*School leader:* Hmm. Did you get that message I sent about the faculty meeting tomorrow?

Failing to respond to the teacher's concern likely communicated that the school leader was uninterested in hearing the teacher's perspective or was preoccupied with issues of self-interest. Failure to acknowledge a speaker's message can cause the speaker to feel ignored and insignificant and ultimately damage the relationship.

Finally, school leaders can communicate listening through the appropriate use of body language. Turning the body away from the speaker or displaying a "flat" face can communicate to the speaker that the school leader is bored and uninterested in continuing the conversation, damaging rapport. School leaders should face the speaker squarely, lean toward the

speaker slightly, exhibit an expressive face, and use encouraging gestures when communicating with others (Ivey et al., 2010).

It is important that school leaders develop effective attending behaviors, but it is also important that they become skilled at interpreting the attending behaviors of others. Eye contact, vocal tone, and body language can reveal a great deal about the speaker's perception of the relationship (Ivey et al., 2010), which can ultimately help school leaders target individuals in which concerted relationship-development efforts may be warranted.

### *Active Listening: Encouraging, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing*

Failure to listen can lead to feelings of emptiness, disappointment, and anger from others; thus, active listening skills--the aspects of communication that help others feel heard and understood--are important in relationship development (Ivey et al., 2010). Active listening skills are the verbal and nonverbal responses in a person's dialogue that support open communication, perspective-taking, and relationship development. Specifically, active listening involves the use of encouraging, paraphrasing, and summarizing to "enter [the] person's world as he or she sees it" (Ivey et al., 2010, p. 157).

Encouraging refers to short verbal or nonverbal responses that prompt others to share and elaborate on their perspectives (Ivey et al., 2010). Encouragers can include subtle verbal sounds, such as "uh-huh" or "hmm," nonverbal gestures such as head-nodding, or brief restatements of the speaker's words. The example below illustrates the use of encouragers by a school leader.

*Student:* I hate math! It's too hard. No matter how hard I try, I still don't get it. I'm sick of it!

*School leader:* Uh-huh.

*Student:* I really do try, but I just can't do it. I get so frustrated because everyone else in the class seems to understand.

*School leader:* You're frustrated.

Paraphrasing involves repeating the content or affect of another's message. Paraphrasing is typically stated in a tone that communicates a desire to clarify and understand the speaker's message and involves four dimensions: a sentence stem, key words used by the speaker, the essence of the speaker's message, and a check for accuracy (Ivey et al., 2010). When practicing

the paraphrasing skill, it is helpful to consider "what the speaker's basic thinking and feeling message is" (Symeou, Roussounidou, & Michaelides, 2012, p. 72). The example below illustrates how paraphrasing could be used by a school leader communicating with a teacher.

*Teacher:* I try to communicate with parents, but it can be really challenging. I send home notes. I email. I call when needed. I always encourage parents to talk to me when they have concerns, but I never hear from them. Then when there is a problem, they go straight over my head and come to you. That's so frustrating! I want to work with them, but how am I supposed to know what their issues are if they won't talk to me? Instead, they come straight to you and complain about all the things I'm doing wrong. That's the first I hear about their concerns--when they talk to you. I think they end up feeling like they've won because you listen to them and respond to their concerns. And then I'm the bad guy, and I'm the one who needs to change, even though I'm the one who tried to encourage open communication in the first place.

*School leader:* You're frustrated because you feel like you make effort to communicate with parents, but your efforts are often unsuccessful in reaching parents. You're also frustrated because you want to feel supported by me. Instead, you feel like parents think that I am taking their side. Do I understand you correctly?

Summarizing is similar to paraphrasing, but it incorporates the speaker's message and affect over an extended conversation or multiple conversations and can help clarify complex messages communicated by the speaker (Ivey et al., 2010; Symeou et al., 2012). In summarizing, school leaders should focus on significant concepts and themes communicated over the course of the correspondence, review these significant concepts and themes with the speaker, and conclude with a check for accuracy. The example below illustrates how a school leader might use the skill of summarizing to conclude an annual evaluation meeting with an assistant principal.

*School leader:* You identified many areas in which you excelled this year. You've taken the charge on many aspects of PLC implementation in the building. Specifically, you've helped teachers understand how to make the most of their PLC time, and you've helped them incorporate data into their PLC discussions. You've also done a great job of managing student discipline issues and creating a school-wide system for understanding classroom versus office-managed behaviors. In large part because of these efforts, office

discipline referrals have declined nearly 40% from last year. Over the course of the year, we've also discussed areas in which you would like to continue to improve. One area you consider a weakness is communicating tough messages. You experienced multiple situations this past year with teachers, students, and parents in which you had to deliver unwelcomed news. You found these situations particularly challenging and believe that you did not do an effective job of managing these conversations. In the future, you would like to receive additional professional development on effective communication and delivery of tough messages. Does this sum up your perspective related to your performance this year?

When used effectively, active listening skills allow others to feel heard and understood--thus building rapport and establishing trust; but when used inappropriately, active listening responses can be problematic. Keys to the effective use of active listening responses are timing and balance. When active listening responses are overused, they can annoy or frustrate the speaker. When they are underused, the speaker can feel ignored or insignificant. Cultural differences that may impact verbal and nonverbal communication should also be considered when using active listening skills. Responses used at the right time, with appropriate frequency and consideration for cultural differences, support the flow of communication and demonstrate attentive listening (Ivey et al., 2010).

### *Questioning*

The appropriate use of open-ended questions is also an important aspect of effective communication. Well-stated, open-ended questions can encourage ongoing dialogue and provide an opportunity to clarify the speaker's message; yet if carelessly stated, questioning can seem interrogative and evoke feelings of defensiveness. Appropriate tone and word choice can ensure that questions communicate the intended message. Symeou et al. (2012) recommend "open-ended questions which are nonthreatening and encourage description, namely, questions that require more than a simple yes or no answer, which start with 'how,' 'tell me about,' or 'what?'" (p. 72).

### *Structured Role Plays*

Repeated practice of relational skills is necessary to automatize their use, as "understanding does not automatically indicate ability to perform" (Ivey et al., 2010, p. 203). Thus, it is recommended that school leaders engage in repeated rehearsal of rapport, trust, and communication practices, and the use of structured role plays can facilitate this training. Scenarios

used in structured role plays are carefully and intentionally crafted to evoke specific skill development--in this case, relational skills. Many school leader role play scenarios exist, such as a school leader hosting a community meeting to improve school-community relations, a school leader calling a parent to discuss student discipline issues, or a school board member calling a school leader to discuss complaints of a teacher. Brief scenarios, such as these, provide a starting point for impromptu conversations that can challenge school leader relationships and ultimately strengthen relationship-building capacity.

The primary benefits of structured role plays are opportunities for skill development in a safe and supportive environment and opportunities for immediate and detailed feedback regarding the use of practiced skills. An additional benefit of structured role plays is that school leaders can observe and critique their own skills through the use of video recordings. To maximize the effectiveness of the role play experience, it is recommended that the role play is supervised, at least initially, by an individual specifically trained and skilled in relationship development (e.g., counselors). The role of the supervisor is to provide immediate feedback to the school leader on the use of communication skills and the development of trust and rapport. It is also recommended that the role play scenarios are carefully crafted to represent the unique, contextual needs of the school leader. In other words, the role play scenarios would be most useful if they represent issues or concerns occurring specifically within the school leader's professional context.

Reflection is also an important component of structured role play. Reflection provides an opportunity to assess practiced skills and to consider areas of continued growth and development. Reflection can occur concurrently with the feedback session, or it can occur while watching the video recording of the structured role play. Reflective questions that could guide the school leader in the development of relational skills might include "How did my nonverbal communication impact the flow of communication?," "Did I spend time establishing rapport?," "What words did I emphasize?," "What was the tone of the message--did I speak calmly, gently, sternly, curtly, etc.?", "Did I ask open-ended questions which encouraged open expression and continued dialogue?," and "In what ways did I attend to the speaker's message?."

### **Conclusion**

Today's school leaders are challenged to work in complex environments with diverse stakeholder groups and amidst unprecedented scrutiny (Stronge

et al., 2008). The development of healthy, meaningful relationships with all stakeholder groups is instrumental in helping school leaders successfully manage the complex contexts in which today's schools exist. Unfortunately, many school leaders are currently ill-equipped to develop these types of relationships (Anast-May et al., 2011; Duncan et al., 2011; Epstein, 2011). Thus, additional training in relationship development is needed. Specifically, training is needed that assists school leaders in building rapport, establishing trust, and communicating effectively with diverse stakeholders. The use of structured role plays could provide school leaders with the training experiences necessary to develop competency in these areas.

### Implications for Researchers and Practitioners

Research is needed in the area of school leader relationships. Specifically, research is needed that examines the impact of relational training on the work of school leaders. Research is also needed that provides and examines a more detailed framework of professional development. Symeou et al. (2012) conducted a study of teacher training related to teacher-parent communication in Cyprus and found that teacher participants believed the training assisted in the development of communication skills with parents. This study provides a starting point for program development; however, professional development for school leaders should also consider other important relational components, such as rapport and trust, and it should focus on building relationships with multiple, diverse stakeholders.

The recommendations and practices discussed above are not intended to oversimplify or downplay the complex realities of school leader relationships. No set of behaviors can guarantee quality relationships with everyone, but practices related to building rapport, establishing trust, and communicating effectively could improve relational efforts. It is through professional development in the areas of rapport, trust, and communication, with multiple opportunities to practice learned skills, that school leaders could develop the skills necessary to navigate the complex relational terrain that surrounds their positions.

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# Sustaining Arts Programs in Public Education

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this qualitative research case study was to investigate leadership and funding decisions that determine key factors responsible for sustaining arts programs in public schools. While the educational climate, financial constraints, and standardized testing continue to impact arts programs in public education, Eastland High School, the site of this case study, managed to sustain its visual and performing arts program. The foundation of this research study was shaped around understanding the key factors that sustained the arts program at Eastland High School. A qualitative lens utilized three research questions that investigated arts programs at the school, leadership decisions that supported the arts program, and funding decisions made at the site. Data triangulation was used to identify several emerging themes relevant to the three research questions. The implications of this case study indicated collaborative leadership and resourceful funding decisions sustain viable arts programs in public schools.

**Keywords:** leadership, visual and performing arts, public schools, funding decisions

The current educational landscape threatens the survival of arts programs in public education throughout the United States. Current trends in education indicate public schools have increasingly narrowed their curriculums to enroll underachieving students in additional remedial reading and math courses with less time available to pursue visual and performing arts (Beveridge, 2010). Political and societal pressures have forced school districts to improve academic performance among students struggling to improve their reading and math scores on standardized tests. As a result of these shifting priorities and accountability demands, many school leaders have reduced their arts programs (Anne, 2010). Accountability to increase standardized testing results impacts all stakeholders, from teachers and administrators to leaders at the lo-

cal, state, and national branches of government (Anne, 2010; Beveridge, 2010). Amid bureaucratic levels of accountability at schools, administrative leaders, department leaders, and leadership teams make decisions that impact their visual and performing arts programs. However, some school leaders continue to maintain viable arts programs in the face of these changes. This research study investigated the administrative and funding decisions that contribute to the success of a viable arts program at Eastland High School.

## Benefits of Arts Programs

The arts have the potential to promote motivation, confidence, and social skills among children and teens (Alejandro, 1994; Creedon, 2011; Tredway & Wheat, 2010). Children have the potential to embrace a lifelong appreciation for the arts through school curriculums that support comprehensive, interdisciplinary arts programs. As children enter their teen years, their involvement in arts programs provides opportunities to collaborate and interact with others, develop leadership skills, and become global citizens. Alejandro (1994), Creedon (2011), and Olshansky (2008) agreed that arts programs provide academic and social benefits for at-risk students.

Creedon (2011) observed that at-risk students in urban schools responded favorably to arts programs. He argued their participation in a multidisciplinary arts program provides students with an educational solution that counters stress they may develop from other classes, interactions with peers and teachers, their families, and urban neighborhoods. Music, dance, theater, and visual arts have the capacity to connect productively with the emotional and physical needs of children. Olshansky (2008) found at-risk students experienced significant improvement on reading and writing tests in a controlled case study that measured the use of visual literacy to support instruction and the learning process.

In a case study with elementary students, Alejandro (1994) found that her methodology using visual literacy in her English language arts curriculum effectively motivated students to improve their reading and writing skills. Students created colorful visual narratives to demonstrate their reading comprehension, and they produced artistic paintings to aid in memorization of new vocabulary. These students posted significant gains on standardized tests, and findings from her study contributed to a growing awareness among students, faculty, parents, and other stakeholders of the benefits of arts in education (Alejandro, 1994).

Arts programs are also experiencing success in alternative curriculum formats at charter schools. The growing charter school movement, which began in 1992, accounts for over 4,000 schools throughout the nation (Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). Given the constraints evident in traditional public schools, parents, educators, and community leaders have embraced autonomy in a concentrated effort to develop curriculum and educational missions at their charter schools (Gratto, 2002). In her analysis of alternative arts programs at charter schools, Gratto (2002) found arts curriculums produce favorable learning outcomes among both at-risk and high-achieving students.

An education grounded in the arts elevates the capacity for students to collaborate with each other and foster metacognitive abilities across all subjects (Music, 2010). A comprehensive arts education empowers students to share their learning experiences across the curriculum. Understanding the value of learning through active participation in an arts program that is integrated across the curriculum provides life-long benefits for students (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010; Juno, 2010). Findings from recent research studies support the assertion that students enrolled in interdisciplinary curriculum involving core subjects and the arts enjoyed notable academic outcomes (Gratto, 2002; Kratochvil, 2009; Juno, 2010). Moreover, it seems arts programs are gaining in popularity. Barone and Eisner (2006) cited the emergence of arts-based educational research, while several case studies found visual literacy continues to expand its appeal beyond elementary education and gain wider acceptance at secondary schools (Bryce, 2012; Carpenter & Cifuentes, 2011; Frey & Fisher, 2008).

### Arts and Student Achievement

Active participation in arts education programs has produced positive learning outcomes with interdisciplinary curriculum tied to standardized testing and student academic achievement. Vygotsky recognized

that arts contribute to the learning process and construction of knowledge (Gullatt, 2008). An interdisciplinary nature is evident in successful arts programs that bind together curricular themes and encourage cross-department collaboration. Recent case studies have documented success at public school arts programs and their impact on academic achievement among disadvantaged students and long-term contributions to low-income neighborhoods through community partnerships (Kratochvil, 2009; Noblit, Corbett, Wilson, & McKinney, 2008; Olshansky, 2008; Tredway & Wheat, 2010).

Case studies investigating at-risk, low-income, and struggling students enrolled in arts-integrated courses at public schools found their standardized test scores increased (Kratochvil, 2009; Gullatt, 2008; Rabkin & Redmond, 2003; Strickland, 2008). Skills gained in dramatic arts and music programs encouraged students to apply their knowledge and motivation to learn other core subjects (Gullatt, 2008). Alternatively, patterns of discouraging enrollment in arts courses were noticeable among at-risk and low-income students who had dropped out of school. According to Strickland (2008), high school dropouts reported that they spent significantly less time enrolled in arts courses and more time in remedial instruction to learn math and reading skills.

Students living in low socio-economic neighborhoods have performed academically better on standardized tests when actively enrolled in arts courses (Rabkin & Redmond, 2003). Rabkin and Redmond's (2003) research found current educational leadership tends to ignore research studies that document the social and academic benefits that at-risk and low-income students gain from their participations in arts programs. At 23 schools in Chicago with art-integrated programs, case studies found noticeable increases in reading and math standardized test scores among students identified as disadvantaged and at-risk to drop out (Rabkin & Redmond, 2003). Rabkin and Redmond also discovered low-income, at-risk students showed more motivation to participate and learn at schools when involved in interdisciplinary arts programs.

Alejandro (1994), Creedon (2011), and Tredway and Wheat (2010) agreed that the arts contribute toward student achievement. In a case study with her second grade students, Alejandro documented significant gains in reading and writing on standardized tests after integrating visual arts and visual literacy into her curriculum (Creedon, 2011). Tredway and Wheat found the principal at East Oakland School of the Arts

reported significant academic improvement and success among students when he fully integrated arts into a school-wide curriculum and made a long-term commitment to support the arts program. Their research found that a single leader who makes an arts program an active element in an interdisciplinary curriculum yields academic gains in student achievement. Additionally, a single leader with exceptional social and political skills can advocate for interdisciplinary collaboration among faculty to accept an arts curriculum (Tredway & Wheat, 2010). Trends evident in the literature suggest academic achievement increased at schools where administrators supported the arts (Farbman, Wolf, & Sherlock, 2013; Freedman, 2011; Kratochvil, 2009; Olshansky, 2008).

In her case study at a middle school in California, Kratochvil (2009) found sustained long-term leadership and faculty collaboration contributed to the successful school-wide integration of arts across all subjects. The school underwent a collaborative transformative process to develop a school-wide action plan to support a dance program. The success of the dance program defined the culture of the school with intrinsic and extrinsic benefits for students, parents, and community members (Kratochvil, 2009). However, measuring success and achievement in performing and visual arts disciplines requires a mixture of professional arts experience and objective reflection with respect to the individual artistic achievement of each student (Davis, 2008). Although recent case studies show pockets of success throughout the educational landscape, the literature reflects the ongoing struggles to maintain and sustain arts programs in public schools.

### **Funding for Arts Programs**

The decline in traditional public school funding sources, which arts programs relied on for financial support, has motivated the implementation of prudent fiscal accountability, innovative fundraising initiatives, and community partnerships. Title I funds were originally intended to support schools with low-income students across all subjects, including the arts, and they have become the financial lifeline to support remedial intervention courses and improve standardized test results that meet Annual Measurement Achievement Objectives (Stillwell-Parvensky, 2011). In response to less availability of Title I funds to support arts programs, recent research has focused attention on arts programs with leaders that cultivate financial investment through community partnerships (Anne, 2010; Beveridge, 2010; Sabol, 2010). As traditional funding sources decline, school leaders seeking

to support their arts programs have proactively developed partnerships with local and national arts organizations as well as coalitions with social media and corporate organizations to recognize artistic talent among students (Music, 2010; Tredway & Wheat, 2010).

The growth of charter and magnet schools has triggered a concurrent emergence of arts academies designed with progressive mission statements and visionary leadership teams that support arts programs in local communities (Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). Gratto (2002) found successful arts programs at alternative public schools. One example is Orange County High School of Arts in Santa Ana, California, which is a specialized high school with a comprehensive arts curriculum and active community partnerships. Business and community partnerships among arts organizations represent a core element of charter schools, alternative schools, and specialized schools throughout the nation (Gratto, 2002).

Castaneda and Rowe (2006) conducted an analysis of the 10-year Los Angeles Unified School District Arts Prototype program, and they found schools with high academic reputations and consistent leadership were more inclined to develop strong partnerships with arts organizations. Trends among the 200 arts organizations that partnered with Los Angeles Unified schools suggested that successful partnerships involve schools with an arts-focused professional development plan and an interdisciplinary arts curriculum. In addition, the schools implemented an active calendar of art exhibits, musicals, and theater performances that appealed to parents and the local community (Castaneda & Rowe, 2006). These partnerships provided an ongoing culture of collaboration between the arts programs and the community.

According to Castaneda and Rowe (2006), schools with higher Academic Performance Index (API) scores secured stronger financial partnerships. Through their partnerships with schools, arts organizations contributed to professional development, sponsored exhibitions, and maintained the visibility of the school and its artistic achievements within the community. While schools with lower API scores in Program Improvement (PI) status received Title I funds to support low-income and disadvantaged students, the authors found school leaders tended to divert Title I funds toward intervention programs to improve test scores and ignore arts programs. As a consequence, Castaneda and Rowe found underperforming schools lacked the leadership required to develop community partnerships with organizations that could support

arts programs and contribute positive outcomes to the neighborhood.

Arts education programs in public schools face a restrictive climate of accountability and financial constraints. Alejandro (1994), Creedon (2011), and Olshansky (2008) found effective school leaders advocated for the benefits of arts programs and their influence on student achievement. Intersecting political and societal agendas and issues will determine the future sustainability and success of arts education programs in K-12 curriculums. The history of arts education reflects an ongoing, persistent struggle to remain relevant in the current climate of accountability and high-stakes testing. Policy makers, educational leaders, and teachers represent a cross-section of stakeholders with the capacity to advocate for arts programs in public schools that serve disadvantaged students in low socioeconomic neighborhoods (Anne, 2010; Creedon, 2011; Kratochvil, 2009; Tredway & Wheat, 2010). Sustaining arts education programs in public schools requires investigating and justifying the benefits of arts programs and their impact on academic student achievement in the current era of high stakes standardized testing and accountability.

This review of literature identified the significance of school leaders who embrace arts education and support the integration of interdisciplinary arts programs across core subject curriculums to enhance academic achievement (Anne, 2010; Castaneda & Rowe, 2006; Gratto, 2002; Music, 2010; Tredway & Wheat, 2010). While past case studies and research acknowledged the benefits of arts education programs in K-12 public schools, a gap in the scholarly literature fails to sufficiently identify and explain the factors involved in sustaining arts education programs (Anne, 2010; Beveridge, 2010; Creedon, 2011). The review of literature indicated a gap existed regarding how leadership and funding decisions impact arts programs in public schools (Merriam, 2009). This case study was conducted to investigate and understand the key factors in sustaining an arts program by utilizing three research questions:

- What are the arts programs that exist at Eastland High School?
- How does leadership at Eastland High School support arts?
- How are funding decisions made at Eastland High School?

## Methods

### Research Design

The research design used a qualitative case study approach to collect and analyze data required to understand the phenomenon explored in the three research questions that defined the foundation of the research study (Creswell, 2009). The rationale behind the survey, interview protocol, and observation protocol was developed from the literature. Data triangulation was achieved by using four data collection instruments to provide four distinct data sources to address the three research questions.

A conceptual framework, displayed in Figure 1, was developed to understand the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supported and informed the research (Maxwell, 2009). A viable arts program involves two essential interconnected components that contribute to effective leadership: financial constraints and accountability. As expressed in the conceptual framework, the term *viable* indicates that an enduring arts program has longevity, capable leadership, funding, and other foundational, influential components.

The conceptual framework reveals how faculty make decisions and how those decisions influence the culture, climate, and leadership at the school. The model shows how the two inputs determine school leadership decisions and impact resources and priorities. Stakeholders, partnerships, facilities, time, and funding impact the use of resources and priorities involved in a successful, viable arts program. The conceptual framework also indicates how multiple aspects of the school infrastructure, including the curriculum, instructional components, and the staffing, contribute to a viable arts program. The conceptual framework provided a road map with a visual representation of a viable arts program to guide the research study (Maxwell, 2013).

### Setting

The setting for this case study was selected based upon several criteria:

- The presence of a viable visual and performing arts program.
- Graduate placement with awards, recognition, and success of graduates.
- Three years of operation and longevity with the same leadership team.

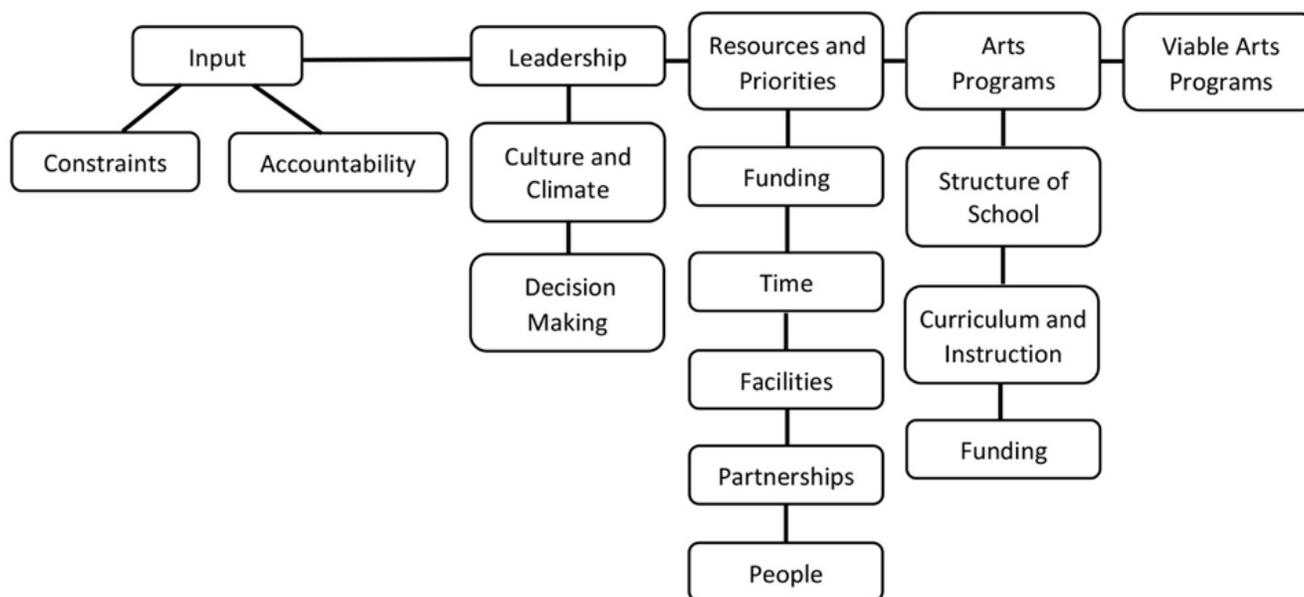


Figure 1. Viable arts program conceptual framework.

- Similar Schools Ranking of 8, 9, or 10 (with a viable arts program).
- Diverse student body.
- Evidence of planning as a visual and performing arts school.

Eastland High School, the selected school site, is one of eight comprehensive high schools in a rural, urban district, located in California. The school has approximately 2,600 students, 100 teachers, and five administrators. The language of the majority of students is English-only, while 12% of the population is designated as ELLs. Over 50% of students are Hispanic, 31% are African-American, 14% are White, and 2% are Asian/Filipino/Pacific Islanders. The majority of students are economically disadvantaged, and over 80% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

Eastland has an active visual and performing arts program that met the school site criteria required to participate in the research study. The arts program has maintained a stable leadership team that has guided it in successful operation since the school opened in 2005. The program includes an annual awards and district-wide student recognition system, a diverse student body, and consistent organizational and cross-curricular planning. The visual and performing arts program has also received numerous accolades. Robbie, the department chair of the visual and performing arts program, was one of the co-founders of the school in 2005. Under her leadership since 2005, Robbie has

improved the quality and reputation of the visual and performing arts program among students, parents, and alumni. In 2009, when the school moved to a newly constructed campus, the school opened a new theater with modern technology to serve the campus and local community. Since 2012-13, the Eastland High School theater has hosted musicals, dramas, dances, symphony performances and art exhibitions.

### Procedure

A review of documents preceded the implementation of a school-wide survey and a structured sequence of interviews and observations. The varied approach to data collection reinforced reliability and validity of the data (Creswell, 2009). Participants in the study were informed of the purpose of the study. The researcher discussed with participants the research questions, interview questions, data collection instruments, and timeline to conduct the data collection process. Each participant was identified with a pseudonym to protect his or her privacy. Participants were assured that the research study was objective and purposeful.

The two visual and performing arts department chairs, Robbie and Ted, shared historical details about the visual and performing arts program at Eastland High School. Their interviews provided the research study with an opportunity to capture the history of the program (Creswell, 2009). To address Creswell's (2009) caution about interviews occurring outside their natural setting, interviews with each participant

occurred on campus in their natural classroom settings. The interviews and observations complemented each other as separate sources of data for triangulation. The researcher wrote field notes based on the context of each interview, adding observations to complement transcribed interviews with additional descriptive data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The review of documents and implementation of surveys, observations, and interviews transpired at one site during a limited time in fall 2013. Therefore, the responses were unique and reflect a designated time period among participants in the study.

### Data Analysis

Data from an analytical review of documents, transcribed interviews, observation notes, and survey results underwent a thematic coding process conducted by the guidelines recommended by Creswell (2009). Bolman and Deal's (2003) four frames, or perspectives, of understanding and analyzing the workings of organizations were used to analyze the data. The four frames, identified as the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic, informed the thematic interpretation of the data to examine the organizational aspects of the arts program at the school (Bolman & Deal, 2003). For the purpose of this case study, the structural frame applies to the organizational structure of the school and departments in the school. The human resource frame concerns the interpersonal relationships and needs of teachers, administrators, parents, and students within the school organization. The political frame concerns the bureaucratic nature at Eastland High School and how each stakeholder and department navigates the political structure of the organization. The symbolic frame refers to the reputation of the school and the symbols that define its culture as a brand and institution within the community (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

### Results and Discussion

While the review of literature acknowledged declines in school budgets and other constraints to maintain arts programs, the literature also discussed research studies regarding viable arts programs and key factors responsible for their success in the current educational climate (Anne, 2010; Beveridge, 2010; Music, 2010; Sabol, 2010; Tredway & Wheat, 2010). Funding, leadership, partnerships, promising practices, and student achievement through arts programs were explored in the literature and applied to the design of data collection instruments. Each topic influenced the themes and trends found in the data analysis. Data was coded into three emergent thematic categories,

finding that leaders at the site embraced a collaborative leadership style, developed community partnerships, and implemented resourceful funding decisions. These themes represented the three key factors responsible for sustaining the visual and performing arts program at Eastland High School.

The first theme recognized the strength of collaborative leadership that cultivated support for the arts programs at Eastland High School. The principal and the leaders of the visual and performing arts departments showed a consistent effort to collaborate, contributing toward a supportive culture in the campus community. A collaborative culture contributes toward the longevity of arts programs in public schools (Robert, 2010). Bolman and Deal (2008) recognized the importance of leadership in the four frames of an organization.

Findings from this research study found that department leaders Kate, Robbie, and Ted cultivated significant social and political capital as leaders of their departments. Each leader developed his or her individual effective, visionary leadership style. While Kratochvil (2009) found consistent leadership and faculty collaboration helped arts programs succeed across the curriculum, leaders with longevity in their positions held more influence. The findings complemented evidence reported in the literature review, which recognized the importance of leaders capable of building social and political capital among all stakeholders to support and sustain arts programs (Anne, 2010; Castaneda & Rowe, 2006; Gratto, 2002; Music, 2010; Tredway & Wheat, 2010).

Interviews and observations captured an example of collaborative leadership at an interdisciplinary meeting on October 23, 2013. Robbie led the meeting with visible support from Kate and other administrators and department chairs. She sought to connect core subjects with the arts curriculum through common themes and collaboration. As a successful art teacher with a highly regarded reputation among her colleagues, students, and parents, Robbie demonstrated she was a capable instructional leader who influenced positive learning outcomes at interdisciplinary art department meetings. Robbie acknowledged the need for teachers to recognize emerging trends with the California Common Core State Standards. She encouraged faculty to proactively collaborate with each other to support the college and career themes found in the new standards.

A second example of collaborative leadership involved the school's interdisciplinary project *Wasteland*:

*Turning Illegally Dumped Waste into Art.* The school-wide project initially involved the visual and performing arts faculty, their partnership with the local museum, and approximately 660 visual and performing arts students who took action against illegal dumping in the local community. Students collected objects from trash dumpsites to create works of recycled art. Exceptional pieces of recycled art premiered at the annual Eastland High School visual and performing arts showcase and at the local museum. As more departments and faculty integrated learning objectives from *Wasteland* into their curriculum, the project eventually motivated over 2,000 students and approximately 60 faculty members to become involved in supportive activities. Learning outcomes from the *Wasteland* project inspired stakeholders at all school levels and the local museum to support the subsequent *Crosswinds* interdisciplinary project, which underscored the importance of collaborative leadership as a central theme that emerged from the data analysis.

A second theme found school leaders developed community partnerships with local organizations and museums to support the arts. The *Wasteland* and *Crosswinds* projects represented two interdisciplinary art projects financed with grants through the local museum and other organizations. Without community partnerships, Eastland High School and the local community may never have experienced the benefits gained from each project. The significance of community partnerships that support public school arts programs was discussed in the literature review (Castaneda & Rowe, 2006; Music, 2010; Sabol, 2010; Tredway & Wheat, 2010). The interdisciplinary art projects, marching band performances, and plays produced in the new school theater represented work achieved through a collaborative culture and strong leadership that resonated with the community. Each project and event defined symbolic activities that defined the school culture and further strengthened the reputation of the school in the local community.

A clear example of community partnerships was evident within the performing arts program, which holds a strong reputation in the local community. The marching band and color guard were considered symbols of pride at Eastland High School and in the city. Their parades, dance performances, and pep rallies at football games, tournaments, and local events defined members' reputations as high quality leaders and representatives of the performing arts program. Leaders of the arts program at Eastland High School found it mutually beneficial to forge long-term community partnerships with the local museum, civic leaders, and

the annual fair. In an interview, Saul, a performing arts leader, explained the significance of the marching band and its role as a symbol of pride in the local community:

We're the pride of the school. We keep the school moving, kind of like the heartbeat of the school when we play at football games and at the pep rallies. We want to be a presence on campus to show the students that high school is very important.

The third theme involved the resourceful funding decisions made among leaders to support the visual and performing arts program. While Eastland High School remains under program improvement and receives Title I funds to close the achievement gap, leaders of the visual and performing arts program implemented resourceful strategies to raise funds through parent-led booster programs and community partnerships. Ted, Robbie, and Saul expressed concerns regarding the narrowing of core curriculum with fewer ninth grade students enrolled in arts courses. While previous research indicated many Title I public schools tend to exclude at-risk, low-income students from the arts in favor of enrolling them in reading and math courses (Sabol, 2010; Stillwell-Parvensky, 2011), evidence from this case study offered a counterpoint. Eastland High School has maintained high enrollment numbers for marching bands, color guards, drama courses, and visual arts courses. Given the success and growth of the visual and performing arts program, as traditional funding sources decline, implementing resourceful funding decisions represented a significant theme responsible to sustain the arts programs at Eastland High School.

The resourceful funding theme complements the collaborative leadership and community partnership themes. As the 2013-14 academic year concluded, raising funds through the booster club, community partnerships, and grants represented a necessary financial decision to sustain the visual and performing arts program at Eastland High School. Reflecting on each theme that emerged from this case study, collaborative leadership, community partnerships, and resourceful funding decisions represented the three essential components evident in the arts program.

Given the evidence triangulated from site documents, survey, interviews, and observations, a need exists to create and implement an arts education plan at the site. Eastland High School is not a fully integrated arts school. The visual and performing arts program provides a developing arts pathway with approximately 600 out of 2500 students enrolled in arts courses. An organizational goal among the visual

and performing arts leadership team seeks to transform their operations with an arts pathway into a formal academy with financial and creative autonomy based on the original vision of the school as the main visual and performing arts school in the district.

While this case study found two interdisciplinary art projects cultivated school-wide support, a visual and performing arts academy may limit future school-wide, cross-department support among faculty unaffiliated with the academy. Given the financial constraints and declining budgets available to support the arts, educational leaders have learned to cultivate community partnerships and implement resourceful funding decisions. Robbie and Ted believe a visual and performing arts academy would ensure financial and creative autonomy for the arts programs.

Results from data triangulation collected from the site documents, survey, interviews, and observations found school leadership should reevaluate its organizational approach to support arts education at Eastland High School. Based on the results, administrators and faculty should consider the creation of a unified arts education policy that clearly supports arts education at the site. An arts education plan would define the role of the visual and performing arts program at Eastland High School and determine the pros and cons of a proposed visual and performing arts academy.

From a structural perspective, the visual and performing arts program has hired the best and most qualified instructors. The structural frame of an organization informs all stakeholders of its expectations and goals and connects with the human resource, political, and symbolic frames (Bolman & Deal, 2008). While many aspects of the organizational structure were evident, including supportive administrative leadership and interdisciplinary collaboration, the evidence suggested that the visual and performing arts program should revisit its structural design and support the creation of a school-wide arts education plan. A strong organizational structure, with goals and objectives, would influence the other three frames.

### Limitations

The limitations in this qualitative case study included conditions that the researcher could not control. The case study was limited by its geographic location and the time constraints to collect data. While the researcher conducted the case study at a site where he also worked as a teacher, the principal and school leadership team held the power to approve or

deny his research proposal. To address the limitations, the researcher reflected on research bias and his direct and indirect influence on responses from participants (Maxwell, 2013).

### Implications and Recommendations

This case study provided a qualitative lens to understand how effective leadership and funding decisions support a viable arts program that empowers students and faculty to share learning experiences through the arts and across an interdisciplinary curriculum (Creswell, 2009). Sustaining the arts in public education is increasingly relevant as schools wrestle with financial constraints and external pressure to increase standardized test scores in math and reading. Educators in visual and performing arts programs found students enrolled in art, music, and drama programs develop an intrinsic motivation to succeed across all disciplines (Posnick-Goodwin, 2013).

A viable arts program provides life-long benefits for students. This research study determined that the arts program has elevated the social and political status of Eastland High School among students, faculty, parents, and other stakeholders in the local community. Results from this case study found administrative, departmental, and faculty leadership exercised a consistent, collaborative leadership style responsible for the successful visual and performing arts program at Eastland High School.

Given the current challenges confronting educational leaders to adopt the California Common Core State Standards, the arts have endured as a source of stability throughout the history of public education. Findings from this case study will contribute to the scholarly literature devoted toward understanding the benefits that students and school communities experience as a result of effective leadership that supports and sustains arts programs. While financial constraints, standardized testing, accountability demands, educational reform, and other interconnected challenges remain visible on the horizon, effective, collaborative leadership emerged as the essential factor responsible to influence productive funding decisions that sustain viable arts programs in public schools.

Based on evidence analyzed from the data, implications from this research study include a need to further investigate the role of leadership in viable arts programs at public schools. Findings from the case study suggested effective leadership, with a consistent motivation to support the arts, represented an essential element required to sustain arts programs in pub-

lic education. Data analysis and exploration of the findings encouraged five recommendations for future research:

- Investigate Title I funding in public education with a research focus to understand their availability to support visual and performing arts programs.
- Explore how public schools with viable arts programs integrate the arts across the curriculum and improve math and reading skills.
- Investigate the positive learning outcomes among children enrolled in student-centered arts curriculums at public schools that integrate arts across an interdisciplinary curriculum.
- Align arts education with a school-wide and district-wide instructional plan.
- Improve the visibility of the arts program in the local community to strengthen community partnerships with local museums, organizations, and businesses that share an interest to financially support the arts.

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# Instructional Coaching Implementation: Considerations for K-12 Administrators

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As school leaders, 21<sup>st</sup> century school administrators are in the spotlight for their role in promoting an environment of academic achievement. Along with organizing and planning for the fundamental workings of their staff, students, activities, and building, administrators are expected to encompass numerous roles. In fact, two primary, yet conflicting activities expected from school administrators are leading and managing (Hall & Simeral, 2008). At the intersection of these primary activities is the evaluation and development of teachers as a means to improve student learning. While the management of formal teacher evaluations and observations is important for ensuring teacher accountability and quality, administrators are also needed to use evaluation data along with student achievement data to improve teacher practice.

Administrators create the environment where best practices are supported, encouraged, acknowledged, and expected. However, teachers matter more to student achievement than any other aspect of schooling, and there is much research indicating a strong relationship between student achievement and teacher quality (Archer, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001; Goldhaber, 2002; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2004; Haycock & Huang, 2001; Kaplan & Owings, 2003; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). With a focus on student learning and growth, schools are continuously looking for professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators to positively impact student achievement. One trending form of professional development is instructional coaching. Schools are embracing the concept of coaching as an on-site instructional support for teachers and administrators versus the traditional one- or two-day workshop style formats in which the “experts” are brought from outside of the school organization. While instructional coaching, on paper, seems to meet the instructional leadership support needs of both teachers and administrators, there are many considerations to be made at the building level to ensure suc-

cessful implementation. With the growing popularity of instructional coaching, school administrators must critically evaluate the purpose and background of coaching as professional development, their role in the successful implementation of coaching, and the qualities and experiences they should look for when hiring instructional coaches in their district and school buildings (Heineke, 2013).

## Professional Development

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 entrusted states to ensure that professional development for all teachers was “high quality;” however, it did not define “high quality” or explain how it was to be measured. While the law emphasized that activities were not to be isolated workshops or short-term conferences, there was little evidence that these recommendations were followed. With the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), NCLB’s replacement, there have been many changes, including the elimination of the “high quality” terminology. Professional development expectations have been updated to “ensure personalized, ongoing, job-embedded activities” that are “available to all staff (including paraprofessionals), a part of broader school improvement plans, collaborative and data-driven, developed with educator input, and regularly evaluated” (Civic Impulse, 2016, n.p.). Along with providing a more descriptive definition of professional development (now United States policy), ESSA also transformed the professional development language from scientifically-based to evidence-based (Civic Impulse, 2016). Evidence-based professional development practices will push for greater emphasis on increasing student outcomes through teacher quality. But regardless of the federal legislation, effective professional development is vital to school improvement when administered appropriately (Guskey, 2002). For school administrators to effectively implement and hire instructional coaches, they must first have a deep understanding of instructional coaching, their partner-

ship in the role, and the hiring of instructional leaders to support and share their vision for success.

### Why Coaching?

Joyce and Showers (1980) were the first to propose peer coaching as a form of internal professional development. Instructional coaches are on-site professional developers who work to empower teachers through collaborative partnerships to incorporate research-based instructional methods into classrooms (Knight, 2007). Their purpose is to accelerate learning and close achievement gaps for all students by building the instructional capacity of teachers (Casey, 2006). Instructional capacity refers to teachers' ability to gather resources to support instruction and, most importantly, to use those resources effectively to enhance and engage student learning. One way that principals can increase the instructional capacity in their schools is to provide sufficient opportunities for collaborative work (Jaquith, 2013). Coaching, while not a new phenomenon, is designed to be an "authentic learning opportunity" based on teachers' daily experiences. Coaches facilitate learning over continuous interactions, and reflection, dialogue, and analysis are the foundation of problem solving through the teaching craft (Lieberman, 1995).

One of the guiding concepts that support this type of teacher learning and professional development is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). This concept suggests that teachers have the potential to achieve a greater degree of success (i.e., student learning) when supported by other knowledgeable professional educators. With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and more inquiry-based learning across the country, teachers are required to implement pedagogical practices that are frequently different from their own experiences as students. Coaches can guide these teachers through a reflective process of evaluating current beliefs and practices in conjunction with new knowledge and skills to shift thinking and instruction (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). With coaching as a facilitated professional development model, teachers are better equipped with the dispositions, skills, and knowledge necessary to implement new research-based classroom practices (Dziczkowski, 2013). Showers and Joyce (2002) found that fewer than 5% of teachers understand or implement new

strategies or skills presented to them during professional development sessions, even when given the opportunity to practice the skill. Effective coaching and descriptive feedback dramatically increases this implementation rate to dramatically to 95% (Knight, 2007).

### Administrator-Coach Partnership

In preparing to implement instructional coaching, administrators must have a clear vision of the role and responsibilities of the instructional coach in the school and then communicate that vision. While coaches are instructional leaders that facilitate, model, and execute the professional development, school administrators still play a major role in the process. The line between the role of a coach and an administrator is often blurred, and the key to improving teacher capacity and effectiveness is creating a partnership. As supervisors, administrators are responsible for collaborating with coaches to identify and develop a plan of action for their professional development and also for coordinating logistics and evaluating progress with coach feedback (Hall & Simeral, 2008). Successful instructional coaching relies on a critical understanding: Coaches are not evaluating teachers or providing information for the evaluation of teachers. Instead, administrators must support conditions in their schools that enable teachers to learn from others in a non-threatening environment (Jaquith, 2013). Jim Knight (2006) stated that coaching requires trust and time, and without the establishment of a trusting relationship over a sustained amount of time, the impact of the coaching model is severely damaged. Eliminating appraisal of performance allows both the instructional coach and teacher to have open dialogue and reflection regarding instructional practices.

Along with a shared understanding of roles, stakeholders in an organization must also develop shared goals and actions for future success (Senge, 2000). While coaches partner with teachers to improve student achievement, coaches must partner with administrators to fully understand their vision for school improvement as the instructional leader (Bean & DeFord, 2012). Not only does the administrator inform the coach of the most pressing concerns and goals for the school, but the coach also frequently informs the administrator of interventions, practices, and goals of the staff (Knight, 2006). Overall, administrators need to know how to build, lead, and support instructional experts, like coaches, who can help conduct research-based teaching experiments, learn collaboratively, and continuously improve both teacher and student learning (Jaquith, 2013).

## Hiring Effective Coaches

Hiring effective instructional coaches may be the most challenging, yet vital role for administrators. Having a strong program and vision in place is irrelevant without the right people. In order to successfully fill this unique educational leadership role, coaches must be equipped with certain professional qualities and characteristics in addition to strong interpersonal skills.

The hiring of professionals who are professionally credible in the eyes of both the teachers and administrators is an important aspect of a rigorous, selection process. Much attention is necessary to ensure that the process of hiring is clear and fair to ensure that the coaches are credible and knowledgeable in the eyes of all stakeholders (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Professionally, coaches are expected to model lessons and aide teachers in various instructional and management processes. For this reason, first and foremost, coaches must be excellent teachers (Knight, 2006). A thorough understanding of both current and past content-specific pedagogical knowledge is a professional characteristic that will create teacher buy-in and confidence in their instructional partners. Many coaches are coming out of the classroom with little to no experience coaching or working with adult learners. Having relevant research to support “best practices” demonstrates a professional responsibility to life-long learning and growth (Kinkead, 2007). Coaches must also be deeply respectful of classroom teachers, their professionalism, and their ability to make decisions that are best for their students (Knight, 2006). The ability to recognize and appreciate teacher differences and uniqueness informs the teacher that the teacher-coach relationship is truly a non-threatening partnership, free of judgment and focused on student learning. Along with avoiding judgment, coaches are required to maintain confidentiality when talking to other teachers and their administration. Coaches viewed by teachers as “classroom spies” have a difficult task of being perceived as partners in supporting instruction and learning (Bean & DeFord, 2012). Administrators must recognize that the nourishment of this trusting relationship may come at the expense of knowing everything about the teacher-coach relationship.

Administrators must also find great leaders who are ambitious for the greater cause and mission of student achievement, not for themselves (Knight, 2006). Additionally, coaches must express their confidence and belief in the teachers they work with, internalizing the message “I believe in you, I’m investing in

you, and I expect your best efforts” (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002, p.62). Due to their interest in the development of others, instructional coaches are often referred to as *servant leaders*. Robert Greenleaf (1977) described servant leaders as people whose ultimate goal is not to control or manipulate, but to establish an environment and relationship of shared power and autonomy. While coaches must be driven to support the instructional progress of teachers to impact student learning, they must also foster a relationship with teachers that honors their professionalism. Administrators will need to focus on hiring coaches who have the ability to balance this type of situational leadership (Hershey & Blanchard, 1988). Hiring the most effective coaches will mean that these individuals can be flexible to the needs of individual teachers and also be able to drive the building or district level goals set by school leaders.

## Implications

Instructional coaching is a reality in many schools today, yet administrators often lack experience or background on how to utilize this professional development model effectively. Instructional coaching can help administrators balance the managerial and instructional leadership responsibilities required of their role. As districts adopt the practice as a part of their professional development model, administrators require a clear understanding of the opportunities and factors associated with coaching. Instructional coaching has the potential to positively impact the way teachers teach and students learn in our schools, and when effectively implemented, it can also positively affect the way administrators lead. While not a quick fix, administrators have the opportunity to use instructional coaching to improve their school’s success one teacher and one student at a time and hence their overall success as a school leader.

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# Beginning Teachers' Experiential Learning in the Era of Common Core: A Case Study

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**ABSTRACT:** This qualitative, single-case study described the professional learning experiences of a group of beginning teachers who participated in a California teacher induction program. The study contributes to an understanding of factors that form the foundation of professional learning as perceived by the participants. Furthermore, the study adds to extant literature on induction, including the transition period between pre-service and in-service phases, experiential learning throughout day-to-day events and action research undertaken during inquiry-based projects. The following themes emerged from the study: transition from pre-service to induction, context for teaching and learning, collaboration with peers, subtle shift from content standards to Common Core standards, questioning and ascertaining the merits of inquiry as professional development, learning by experimentation and from life experiences, current practice as the ultimate payoff, nurturing experiential learning, obstacles to induction, and managing the 21st century classroom. While beginning teachers perceived induction as one aspect of their professional learning, they deemed other factors, such as school climate, leadership, and bureaucracy as elements that could either advance or thwart their development.

**Keywords:** Professional learning, induction, inquiry, experiential learning, Common Core.

Beginning teachers' first round with their own classrooms, beyond student teaching, or their stab at an internship, fresh out of college, is rife with trepidation (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Quite often, their fears, during the first couple of years, revolve around the complex combination of classroom management issues, survival in the maze of education standards and the keys to obtaining tenure (Hong, 2010). With subject matter competence in hand, whether obtained by examination or college major specialization, most are

relatively confident in curriculum knowledge (Kereluik, Fahoe, & Terry, 2013). However, what quickly bubbles up to the surface is the political dynamics embedded in institutions and the need to exercise delicate diplomacy to cautiously navigate them in an era of shifting curricular, technological and instructional paradigms (Demski, 2013; Goodwin, 2012; Curry, Kim, Russell, Callahan, & Bacais, 2008).

To enable a practical transition from pre-service to professional practice, some states in America and other countries around the world offer induction to beginning teachers (Kearney, 2014; Bullough, 2012). In most induction programs, mentors are assigned to beginning teachers with whom they meet routinely for support, classroom observation feedback, and reflective conversations. These mentors can be the bedrock of teaching and learning or just another group in the circle of many with whom these novices interact, such as parents, administrators, and ancillary staff.

Moreover, beginning teachers must understand the tenets of teacher evaluation. With only two years in most public school systems to prove teacher effectiveness, every day is a continuum of the initial job interview, whereby they seek to demonstrate pedagogical skills and positive assessment results as the measure of their expertise (Feiman-Nemser, 2012a; Feiman-Nemser, 2012b). Beginning teachers' experiences with mentors and administrators run the gamut: these figures of support and authority, respectively, may perform lifesaver roles or leave beginning teachers to sink-or-swim (Ingersoll, 2012).

The purpose of this article is to present relevant findings on beginning teachers' experiences during the induction phase with mentors and administrators from a research case study on beginning teachers' professional learning as experiential learners during a school district's transition to Common Core standards (Dakwa, 2016). The research study set out to explore: What is the induction experience for beginning teach-

ers during the implementation of Common Core Standards in a California suburban high school district?

### Theoretical Framework

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory was used as a framework lens to view the problem of practice. The primary focus of the theory is a move away from the behaviorist method of learning, in which the learner passively absorbs knowledge, to an active stance, befitting the constructivist paradigm, in which the learner is intricately involved in the cognition of the learning experience (Kolb, 1984). The emphasis of the theory is not to pose a separate theory of acquiring knowledge but to offer experiential learning as "a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behavior" (Kolb, 194).

The central theme of the Kolbian theory is its characteristics that portray learning as a cyclical process (Kolb, 1984). These characteristics include: the conception of learning as a process, not an outcome; a continuous process grounded in experience; the necessity to resolve conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world; learning as a holistic process of adaptation to the world; and transaction as an element of learning between the person and the environment (Kolb, 1984). There are four modes in the cycle of learning: "concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation" (Turesky & Gallagher, 2011, p. 6). Hansen (2012) ascribes specific interpretations to each mode: concrete experience – direct encounter with the experience; reflective observation – reflection and internalization of the experience; abstract conceptualization – creation of rules and strategies related to the experience, and active experimentation – application of strategies and rules related to the experience.

### Review of Literature

As teacher candidates transition from pre-service to in-service practice, they sit on the threshold of self-directed learning (Snyder, 2012). Defined by Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007), self-directed learning occurs when people engage in "planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences" (p. 110). Thus, instead of attending formal college lectures and participating in student teaching practicums, beginning teachers have to acclimate to professional training, usually delivered via workshops from which they – mostly independently – will need to decipher relevance to their instructional environments (Fletcher, 2012). In addition, beginning teachers routinely engage in informal learning, amassing and fil-

tering ideas, throughout their day-to-day interactions with colleagues whose professional experience varies from novice to veteran. Their ability to determine best practices is contingent on whether they can evaluate if these practices are beneficial in their individual settings (Clayton, 2007).

As beginning teachers acquire new strategies, implement them in the classrooms, and reflect on their success or failure, they develop new levels of schema in which the metacognitive process helps refine new approaches to their pedagogy (Snyder, 2012; Ball & Forzani, 2011). According to Snyder (2012), teaching and learning must be experienced in multiple formats on several occasions. She argues that teachers should experience teaching methods as teachers and as learners to understand the nuances that come with pedagogy.

Coupled with the knowledge that beginning teachers gain from learning on the job are the reflective practices that could be seamlessly integrated into their work (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). This notion suggests that it behooves professional development facilitators to carve out time for beginning teachers to engage in purposeful reflection (Feiman-Nemser, 2007). According to Merriam et al. (2007), one of its benefits is the ability to move backward and forward in complex situations that require sound judgments. The literature clearly notes that reflection can occur on action; that is, "thinking through a situation after it has happened" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 174) or in action; that is, suddenly becoming aware of a new understanding of a previously held notion (Schon, 1987). Both types of reflection are relevant to the beginning teachers' induction experience and readily occur when they engage in teacher inquiry or action research (Giles, Wilson & Elias, 2010). Since these activities take place in the context of the workplace, they form the basis of job-embedded professional development and conveniently fill the gap that teachers face from theory to practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2012b).

### The Role of Induction Programs

Framed as "the transition from pre-service preparation to practice," induction, as posited by Feiman-Nemser (2001), "brings a shift in role orientation and an epistemological move from knowing about teaching through formal study to knowing how to teach by confronting the day-to-day challenges" (p. 1027). According to Fry (2007), the subject of effectiveness of induction programs is a growing area of research, but so far, there is limited information in the literature on whether or not induction programs are beneficial to teachers and truly impact student achievement. Fry's

(2007) contention is that they tend to be of mediocre quality, and there is lack of consistent monitoring by school leaders to support their improvement. She also argues that induction programs are inclined to lack differentiation, a necessary element for success.

Moreover, once the induction period is over, beginning teachers may still need continued support in the form of collaboration and authentic professional development for the challenges that will present themselves each year (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In a longitudinal induction report, Smith et al. (2012) report that over the past few decades, the need for high teacher quality and retention have spurred the expansion of induction activities. Nevertheless, induction without the proper infrastructures may be self-defeating. Researchers also assert that, although beginning teachers face unique challenges during this initial phase, they are held responsible for demonstrating high quality content, while ensuring order and safety (Smith et al., 2012; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Smith et al. (2012), "found that even when program supports for new teachers were intensive, frequent, and highly regarded, a poor school climate and weak leadership could undermine the [induction] program" (p. 225). In addition, if administrative support and leadership are lacking, the beginning teacher might not experience professional growth (Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Breaux & Wong, 2003). Given these shortfalls, teacher educators and professional developers call for a sustained system of professional learning with job-embedded features that set the stage for lifelong learning and shifting paradigms (Drago-Severson, 2009; Zhao, 2010).

Nevertheless, there are documented benefits that accrue from induction. Although programs vary in duration of term and number of services, many offer teachers the opportunity to collaborate with a mentor for support, and in some cases, participate in action research as a component of formative assessment (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). According to University of California, Santa Cruz's New Teacher Center, "Today, 27 states require new teachers to participate in some form of induction or mentoring and, as a result, more new teachers receive mentoring or induction support than ever before" (Goldrick, Osta, Barlin, & Burn, 2012, p. iii). The center purports that beginning teachers need a strong transitional experience via a robust induction program, which seamlessly bridges pre-service to professional practice.

### Methodology

A qualitative design (Creswell 2007) was employed to elicit and report on beginning teachers' experiences as expressed by their authentic points of view. The

selected methodology was case study. Yin (2014) purports that "case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" that "allows investigators to focus on a 'case' and retain a holistic and real-world perspective..." (p. 4). Hence, a single case study was conducted within a secondary level, suburban school district in California in which participants originated from a pool of former beginning teachers who had completed the district's induction program during the implementation phase of Common Core standards. Drawing on Chein's (1981) and Patton's (1990) definition of *purposive* and *purposeful*, respectively, Merriam (1998) claims that "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight, and therefore, must select a sample from which most can be learned" (p. 61). Working from this definition, and Merriam's (1998) directive that criteria must be established, criterion-based, purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. Through an emailed recruitment letter, ten teachers consented to participate in the study, representing a cross-section of content areas: English language arts, math, science, special education, and world languages.

The data collection process consisted of three phases: one-on-one interviews, examination of documents and artifacts, and a review of mentor-recorded observations. Saldana (2013) proposes several types of preliminary coding methods to ferret out the substance of raw material gathered from interviews, documents, and artifacts. Among them are initial coding and in vivo coding that were used in the first cycle of the analysis. He also offers a second cycle during which focused coding "highlights major categories or themes from the data" (Saldana, 2013, p. 213). Through the development of categories from the iterative analysis, primary themes emerged, representative of the participants' voices (Creswell, 2007).

### Thematic Findings

Emergent themes addressed the research questions and were expressive of specific interactions between the participants, their peers, and administrators; systemic professional development systems; and practices as experiential learners. The themes are organized chronologically, indicating the participants' developmental and experiential learning as well as their needs throughout the induction process:

#### Theme 1: Transition from Pre-Service to Induction

Participants' transition experiences varied by the status in which they entered the education field. Ranging from former emergency permit holders and in-

terns, who received little to no mentoring, to individuals who did student teaching with a master or cooperating teacher, their transitional experiences varied from tedious to smooth. Those who had early learning opportunities with a veteran teacher or supportive administrators seamlessly integrated. Those who had gaps in mentoring or field experiences expressed that they had “some catching up to do.”

### **Theme 2: Context for Teaching and Learning**

The Context for Teaching and Learning (California Induction, 2012), a module in the induction curriculum, strongly resonated in the participants' experiences. Reflecting on this medium, participants expressed that “teachers do not teach to a sea of faces” or in a “vacuum.” Instead, students access the curriculum with increased engagement when teachers make connections through the students' life experiences, gleaned from eliciting students' background knowledge.

### **Theme 3: Collaboration with Peers**

Collaboration with peers emerged as a compelling focal point among participants. They recounted invaluable experiences that served as an impetus for progress in the induction phase. “Having a shoulder to cry on” or “a joy to express” amounted to cathartic bonding and a comfort zone for the participants to thrive. This provided an environment to build self-confidence and emulate leadership abilities that were demonstrated in many of their members. Besides the emotional benefits of collaboration, the participants reveled in the opportunities to tap into the knowledge of others with whom they shared the same content areas. Moreover, wherever possible, cross-curricular lesson plans could be pursued. All of these collaborative factors led to strong relationship building and networking, many of which have continued into present practice.

### **Theme 4: Subtle Shift from Content Standards to Common Core Standards**

Participants did not experience a dramatic change in the implementation of Common Core. Some expressed that they were not fully educated on the standards and the manner in which they should facilitate instruction, whereas others either felt they were already teaching according to the Common Core style or that administrators were not monitoring classroom instruction for Common Core strategies. Some participants who looked to their mentors and other veteran teachers for modeling were left unsatisfied because they, too, were either inexperienced or reverted to the

content standards, since there was no accountability in place for transition to Common Core.

In a few instances, district initiatives and programs enabled participants with the requisite skills for incorporating the standards into classroom instruction. Participants who were either exposed to or had joined the integrated curriculum teams reported having relatable experiences with cross-curricular peers and felt confident returning to their classrooms to practice cooperative learning with students.

### **Theme 5: Questioning and Ascertaining the Merits of Inquiry as Professional Development**

While three participants were clear in their dissent of inquiry as a form of job-embedded professional development, others who assented, were also mindful of the drawbacks, even though they did not espouse those views. It was evident that the dissenters had little faith in their projects as evidenced by Charles' perceptions of limited validity of results, Fred's fear to experiment with a time-consuming, potentially non-valuable endeavor, and Lucy's dissatisfaction with a unilateral project. While the dissenters found some merits of activities within the inquiry-based projects, as a whole, they did not perceive it to have long term impact on their professional learning.

### **Theme 6: Learning by Experimentation and from Life Experiences**

Learning through experimentation and from life experiences was meaningful to the participants. Reportedly, having to navigate by trial and error and problem-solve for solutions within their work environment proved beneficial to them. Whether they came to the profession with skills from previous careers or felt imbued by their disciplined mindsets, the participants were cognizant that experimentation and life lessons proved valuable in their day-to-day decision-making in the classroom. From learning through failure, tapping into background experiences and balancing their professional workloads, the participants incorporated their experiential skillsets into practice as an attempt at enabling a feasible work environment for professional success. Others who had limited experience relied on their gut instincts and learned mostly by “doing,” aiming to recover early from the mistakes they made.

### **Theme 7: Current Practice as the Ultimate Payoff**

Participants reported that the challenges, battles, and experiential learning during induction were deemed a fundamental investment in learning how to teach. According to the participants, current success-

ful practices were the ultimate payoff. Time spent in trainings, collaboration with peers, and reflections with their support providers proved to be valuable in the development of instructional practices, utilized in their content areas. In the content area of math, the participating teacher reported using inquiry strategies to get his students to accept failure as a part of learning. In science, one participant found investigation and discovery were high-yield strategies for her practice, whereas the other relied on best practices from other teachers and her own research. In English language arts, participants extolled the virtues of cooperative groups, analyzing complex texts and investigative projects. The two world language teachers utilized thinking maps, visuals, and listening and speaking strategies. Finally, the special education teachers emphasized skills for real-world applications, such as job applications and expanded literacy opportunities

### **Theme 8: Nurturing Experiential Learning**

Participants reported being nurtured along the induction path by site administrators, support providers, peers and family. Notably, the level of nurturing varied among site administrators: three participants named their principals as having contributed outstanding support to their development; the remaining participants reported that their administrative staff provided the enabling environment, but there were no significant efforts to nurture them. Reportedly, elements of frequent communication, meaningful classroom visits and just-in-time support were available from support providers. As well, peer-to-peer support through teamwork and an established learning community bolstered experiential practices.

### **Theme 9: Obstacles to Induction**

Participants stated that despite the benefits of the induction program, a number of obstacles needed to be addressed. Practical and time-sensitive district and site orientations surfaced as areas of deficiency as well as lengthy after school induction meetings. Absence of flexibility within the program to enroll beginning teachers throughout the year was deemed problematic for individuals who had no mentors or support during this phase. In addition, time spent on compiling an evidence binder was perceived as burdensome and needed to be reduced. Lack of efforts to streamline higher education enrollment with the induction process was also a factor that emerged as a deficit.

### **Theme 10: Managing the 21st Century Classroom**

On preparation for the complex 21st century classroom, participants reported that while the induction

program prepared them in significant ways, there is much room for improvement. Classroom management, for example, that addresses integrating technology into instruction was lacking. Furthermore, learning how to prepare students for the rigor and endurance of pursuing careers that may occur before or after college was non-existent. Similarly, ascertaining the means to facilitate a socio-cultural learning community that embraces ethnicity, sexual orientation and religions often proved challenging.

### **Implications for Practitioners and Researchers**

Based on the research findings about the *induction experience of beginning teachers during the implementation of Common Core Standards in a California suburban high school district*, factors emerged that may have implications for practice and future research.

### **Value Placed on Student Data Analysis**

Participants expressed satisfaction with the process of data-gathering to assess measurable outcomes from their teacher-created assessments (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). Although they had not received formal training in analyzing assessments, they expressed that they acquired considerable advantages when they made meaning of the data that resulted from their inquiry projects (Ross & Bruce, 2012). Given the contemporary appeal to plan and differentiate instruction based on the results of data analysis, it is essential that teachers are skilled in this competency (Reeves, 2010). To enhance practice, further professional development in data analysis via curriculum rubrics and assessment metrics is warranted for these teachers as they advance in their careers.

### **Participation in Integrated Curriculum Teams**

Participants attributed strengthening of curricular knowledge as one of the benefits of collaboration with peers and veteran teachers, toward their success in induction and transition to Common Core standards. Participants who had voluntarily enrolled in the district's integrated curriculum teams found the experience meaningful to their content area and cross-curricular content areas. Given the opportunities to collaborate with teachers at all experience levels, they quickly discovered and acclimated to instructional strategies that yielded success in the classroom. In fact, lesson planning during the curriculum teams' unit design was often used to augment their inquiry projects. The practice of engaging beginning teachers in integrated curriculum teams needs to be further developed and facilitated in light of the era of shifting paradigms.

## Providing Context for Teaching and Learning

Given that the participants expressed tremendous praise for tools that they used to learn about students' backgrounds and cultural connections, it may be worthwhile to build on this mechanism for practice. One of the biggest challenges in today's schools is lack of student engagement (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Students often drop out because they do not feel connected with teachers of different class, culture, and socio-economic status (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Pursuing additional and consistent professional development on student connections could be a fruitful investment for improving student engagement.

### Future Research

Throughout the study, former emergency permit holders and interns asserted that they would have been better served if their assimilation into the teaching profession had begun with formal induction. This was in reference to the gap phase during which teachers had to wait for a new cycle of induction enrollment if they earned their preliminary credential months after the school year had begun. Teachers who were in this situation persevered through challenges without a mentor, feeling frustrated and unsupported throughout this turbulent period. However, once they eventually began the induction program and came to terms with its structure and procedures, they surmised that they reaped significant benefits for professional growth. Further research is necessary to identify the specific needs of teachers who enter the education profession through alternative means without any pre-service practicums or experience. It is apparent that the professional development needs of these teachers need to be addressed through the design of a bridge phase to induction. Furthermore, stronger alliances and collaboration between induction programs and institutions of higher education should be explored to accommodate their needs.

Five beginning teachers in this study that came from a previous career brought skills and talents that enabled a modicum of confidence in their experimentation with instructional strategies. This level of initial success warrants further research on beginning teachers who enter the profession from previous careers. While they tend to bring more maturity and fortitude toward the challenges that surface, it may be necessary to determine further the type of professional development best suited for them toward the goal of differentiated professional learning.

Since some participants identified recordkeeping of induction paperwork as burdensome and, in some

instances, an obstacle to time for lesson planning and assessment activities, there may be a need to consider minimizing the bureaucratic elements involved in the induction process. Further research is necessary to analyze the cost benefit of requiring records that capture individual progress for program data versus allowing maximum time for beginning teachers to pursue curricular activities.

### Conclusion

This qualitative study set out to discover experiences of former beginning teachers in a California district induction program as they entered the profession during the curricular, systemic shift from state content standards to Common Core standards. The participants expressed that while they had faced significant challenges in adapting to their classroom and school environments, the induction program provided multiple tools for a practical transition. Participants reported that they developed skills to navigate the world of students, mentors and administrators when given opportunities to learn experientially and to incorporate background knowledge they brought to the profession.

Collaboration with peers stood out as a major success among the participants' perspectives. Having a community in which they shared successes and failures without judgment of others proved cathartic to the beginning teachers. The opportunity for first year teachers to connect with second year teachers was of considerable benefit since the second-year teachers could inspire them with success stories and extoll the virtues of "learning by doing."

While the curricular shift to Common Core did not surface as an impediment or challenge to teacher development, the beginning teachers perceived it as a subtle call for "rigor and relevance" without clear directives. According to their accounts, there was little to no pressure to transition to the new standards or any accountability to show evidence of adhering to them. Ostensibly, their school leaders and mentors were not yet comfortable with the change effort, and participants reported that authentic expertise was lacking. Nevertheless, some participants indicated that undergraduate coursework in the disciplines of science and English language arts, existing district initiatives and participation in curriculum integrated teams functioned as their preparation.

Despite perceived obstacles, all participants were grateful for the induction experience and highly recommended it as a mandatory prerequisite for pre-service transition to professional practice and recom-

mentation for a clear teaching credential. Although they initially perceived induction as “one more hoop to jump through,” they conveyed emerging as stronger teachers than when they began their journeys.

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