ICPEL
Education Leadership Review

Fall 2023
Volume 24, Number 1
ISSN 1532-0723

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These manuscripts have been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school leadership and K-12 education.

From the Editors

You've been waiting patiently and here it is just in time for the holiday season: The Fall 2023 issue of *ELR*! This issue brings you five outstanding articles on a variety of leadership topics for both higher education and P-12, including research related to leaders' cultural proficiency, instructional leadership, and leadership during crises. Thank you to the authors for sharing your scholarly work through our journal.

As always, I (Ken) want to thank my associate editors, Dr. Casey Graham-Brown and Dr. Sandra Harris, for all their help in the review and decision-making processes. Once again, we want to thank our faithful reviewers for all their work this year to assure we continue to provide our readers with quality research on topics shaping our field.

Enjoy the issue and we look forward to beginning work on the 2024 issue in just a few weeks! Until then, we wish you and yours a most wonderful (and restful!) holiday season.

Sincerely,

J. Kenneth Young, Editor
Casey Graham-Brown, Associate Editor
Sandra Harris, Associate Editor

School Leaders' Use and Value of Culturally Proficient Educational Practice in Rural, K-12 Public Schools Across the United States

Jaime E. Welborn
Saint Louis University

This convergent parallel mixed methods study investigated rural K-12 public school principals' perceptions regarding the degree to which they use and value practices related to cultural competence in their roles as school leaders. While an abundance of literature regarding leadership in rural education, student educational gaps, and school change exists, inequities in policy and practice perpetuate academic and social setbacks for some of our nation's youth, including those who attend rural schools that are often racial/ethnically homogeneous and laden with socio-economic disparity. Using the lens of the Cultural Proficiency Framework, specifically the Essential Elements, this study aimed to address the research questions and add to the literature by examining (1) the school principals' value in using culturally competent practices; (2) the school principals' use of culturally competent practices; and (3) culturally competent policies and practices used in rural, public schools across the United States. The study's findings revealed the most and least important culturally competent practices to rural school principals. They identified culturally competent practices they use most and least frequently in their roles. Three themes emerged from the data: student support services, professional learning communities to support instruction and assessment, and a lack of diversity warranting little need for culturally competent practice. Conclusions were drawn from a convergence of the findings from the data analyses, and implications suggest that applying the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency to school improvement efforts can yield increased equity, access, and inclusion for our rural youth in all regions of the United States.

Keywords: educational leadership, rural public education, equity, cultural proficiency, organizational change, policy and practice

One of the most significant challenges faced in the educational system in the United States is the disparities in student outcomes in public schools. Since the publication of the *Coleman Report* in 1966, research and educational reform objectives have centered around mitigating the disparities in access, opportunity, and educational outcome gaps (Apple & Beane, 1995; Fullan, 2000; Jencks, 1972; Sarason, 1996). Coleman et al (1966) identified educational achievement gaps between and among students of diverse racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds, specifically concluding that differences in outcomes between racial/ethnic groups were primarily associated with socioeconomic differences. Educational gaps persist when poverty prevails in rural settings as well (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017; National School Board Association, 2023). Thomas and Fry (2020) reported that in 2019, 14% of children under age 18, or 10.5 million children, were living in poverty. The Children's Defense Fund reported that in 2021, 1 in 7 children were poor; approximately 72% were children of color, and 2 of 3 lived in working families with most being female-headed households (2023). Further, nearly 1.8 million children lived in poverty in rural communities (Children's Defense Fund, 2023, p. 2). Given the complexities of cultures and demographic realities in current rural communities, socioeconomic status must be approached as a demographic group with our schools that intersect with, and yet are distinct from, the cultural groups of race, ethnicity, language acquisition, gender, and ableness" (Lindsey et al., 2010).

There are approximately 25,200 rural schools in the United States. Nearly 9.3 million students attend these schools, and according to the most recent nationwide data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly one in every five students in the United States attends a rural school. "This means that more students in the U.S. attend rural schools than in the nation's 85 largest school districts combined" (Showalter et al, 2019, p. 1). For this study, *rural* is defined using the three rural "locale codes" determined by the U.S. Census Bureau and the rural category defined by the National Center for Education Statistics as a human population from 1 to 24,999 (NCES, 2007). "Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster" is considered fringe rural, whereas a "Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an Urbanized Area and also more than 10 miles from an Urban Cluster is considered remote rural. (NCES, 2022). Regarding proficiency in reading and mathematics academic performance, as assessed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), "data show that states with high racial/ethnic diversity and high poverty levels have more low-performing students in rural schools. The achievement gap among rural students is an issue of educational equity for this country" (National School Board Association, 2023, p.8).

Given this educational context, school leadership is one of the most critical factors in influencing student outcomes (Byrk & Schneider, 2002; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). Just as each school has its own culture laden with policies, practices, and behaviors of the individuals comprising the school community, the school leader's culture, identity, beliefs, and values inform behaviors consequential for the students who attend their schools (Welborn et al., 2022). Rural schools require transformational school leadership to improve student outcomes. However, rural school leaders are faced with many challenges, such as poverty, lower per-pupil expenditure rates, lack of resources, limited access and opportunity with course offerings, extracurricular activities, college and career support, mental and physical health support, and recruiting, hiring, and

retaining quality teachers (Arsen et al., 2021; Gibbs, 2000; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Further, a lack of cultural diversity, cultural knowledge, and cultural experiences, resulting from the isolation of rural areas, often leads to an unawareness of the need to adapt policies, practices, and behaviors that may be perpetuating the inadequate outcomes of historically marginalized youth in rural schools (Welborn et al., 2022).

It is essential to highlight that culturally proficient educational leaders have led the way through transformative leadership. They have courageously disrupted oppressive educational systems by advocating for students who have historically been underserved (Terrell et al., 2018; Welborn et al., 2022). Educational leaders' practices and behaviors impact student outcomes, as well as students' opportunities to thrive in the K-12 system and beyond. Given this rationale, it is a moral imperative that rural educational leaders, regardless of their culture and the cultures of the populations they serve, invest in building their capacity to lead change in their schools using culturally competent educational practices. Through the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency, school leaders are called to action to develop plans and approaches for transforming policy and practice, thus opening the doors to opportunity and access for all students receiving a rural education (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022).

Conceptual Framework

The *Cultural Proficiency Framework* is an interrelated set of four tools that assist educational leaders in building a mindset of continuous improvement towards equitable outcomes for students (Lindsey et al., 2019). Using the Reflection, Dialogue, and Action (RDA) Process, educators can apply the tools to educational practice and policy in efforts to overcome barriers and transform the system so all students thrive (Welborn et al., 2022). One tool, *Overcoming the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency*, serve as personal, professional, and institutional impediments to moral and just service to a diverse society. Teams work to overcome barriers of culturally proficient practices by understanding how those barriers inform all negative, unhealthy, and inequitable policies, practices, and behaviors in the system. Another tool, *the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency*, provides a moral framework for conducting oneself and organization in an ethical fashion. Teams rely on the guiding principles to counter the barriers and to understand how those beliefs inform all positive healthy, and equitable policies, practices and behaviors, or the change towards increased equity. *The Cultural Proficiency Continuum* is a third tool comprised of six points, three negative and three positive, that depicts people and organizations who possess the knowledge, skills, and moral bearing to distinguish between equitable and inequitable policies and practices. The Continuum guides educators in a systematic review of policies, practices, and behaviors that produce inequities and deny access to the education the system provides. The fourth tool and conceptual focus of this study is the *Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency.* This tool guides a team's actions and planning for increasing equity, access, and inclusion by transforming policy and practice. (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate rural K-12 public school principals' perceptions regarding the degree to which they use and value practices related to cultural competence in their roles. The following research questions were used as a guide to fulfill the objectives of this study:

1. What do rural K-12 public school principals report regarding their value for using culturally proficient practices?
2. What do rural K-12 public school principals report regarding their use of culturally proficient practices?
3. What are rural K-12 public school principals' perceptions regarding the cultural competent policies and practices in their schools?

Review of Related Literature

Rural Education and Student Outcome Disparities

Rural Education in the United States is a complex system that is defined by its own challenges and contextualized by our understanding of the term *rural*. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the term *rural* is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau's locales that categorize a territory anywhere from less than 5 miles to more than 25 miles from an urbanized center (NCES, 2022). Nearly 25,200 rural schools exist nationwide, and 20% of our nation's youth attend a rural public school. This population increases for many states, such as Alabama, Maine, Mississippi, South Dakota, and Vermont, with numbers ranging up to 35% - 56% of elementary or secondary-aged youth attending a rural school (NCES, 2018).

Research, policy, and reform efforts have long avoided attention to the most significant issue plaguing rural school communities – student educational gaps (Croft & Moore, 2019; Lavalley, 2018; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017). These gaps were exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic (Diemer & Park, 2022). Educational inequities in access to digital learning were disproportionately available across social class communities; access to breakfast and lunch opportunities was disproportionately experienced among social class communities; and access to health care was disproportionate across social class communities (Welborn et al., 2022).

The disparities and inequitable outcomes, often synonymous with rural schools, negatively impact the access, opportunity, and overall quality of education for its youth. Academic data collected for reading and mathematics in Grades 4, 8, and 12 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that states with high levels of racial/ethnic diversity, as well as high poverty levels have more low-performing students in rural schools (National School Board Association, 2023). Freire (1970) asserted that societal conditions for those living in poverty and oppressed were created by man and can only be changed by man. This assertation in the context of rural education focuses the attention on rural school leaders' practices to address disparities in student outcomes.

Challenges for Rural School Leaders

Rural public education comes with many challenges. One of the most significant challenges for rural school leaders comes from poverty within many small communities. Often, in impoverished communities, more funding is required due to the state funding formulas (Chingos & Blagg, 2017). Many times, the per-pupil expenditure rate is much lower in rural area schools (Dhaliwal & Bruno, 2021), which leads to a lack of resources and ability of course and extracurricular offerings. Students who attend rural schools often have fewer, or less quality materials, including technology compared to their suburban and urban counterparts (Croft & Moore, 2019). Rural districts often have a more difficult time recruiting, hiring, and retaining high quality teachers and staff (Lavalley, 2018). Professional development may be sparse in supporting the learning and continuous growth of educators as well (Erikson et al., 2012). Further, the lack of access and opportunity to a quality education often lends itself to post K-12 life experiences in college and a career that are less adequate (Roberts & Grant, 2021).

Educational Leadership for Student Achievement

For decades, many prominent scholars have identified the association between school leadership and student achievement (Byrk & Schneider, 2002; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). Leithwood et al. (2004) concluded, "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn in school" (p.5). Grissom et al. (2021) published a report with the Wallace Foundation that added to the connection between school leadership and student achievement by expanding the investigation with consideration to the differences in school leadership from their original report in 2004. Specifically, the report cited changes to leadership including an increase in female principals, lower levels of experience because of high-needs schools, changes in the racial and ethnic demographics of student populations, further dispersing the racial gaps between principals and teachers, and the students they serve (Grissom et al., 2021). Following their synthesis of 6 studies, Grissom et al (2021) concluded that principals matter substantially. To explain, they found that 1 standard deviation increase in principal effectiveness would increase a student's achievement by 0.13 standard deviations in reading and 0.09 standard deviations in mathematics (p.xiii). Further, Edmonds & Frederiksen (1978) identified the goal of public schools was to reach the intended outcome of teaching and learning with their research on the correlates of effective schools (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). Although the effect of educational leadership on student achievement is indirect, compared to the direct effect classroom teachers have on students, the way school principals lead policy and practice implementation and improvement in their schools matters immensely.

The abovementioned literature review provided a summary of comprehensive consideration of the literature relative to the object of study. Three themes were included within the review of literature: (1) student outcome disparities in rural education, (2) rural education and challenges for school leaders, and (3) educational leadership in student achievement. The purpose of this study and research questions were designed to fill the gaps in literature around outcomes related to rural school principals' use of and value for culturally proficient educational practice and application of the Essential Elements for continuous improvement and increased

equitable outcomes. While extensive literature exists regarding educational leadership, student achievement, and organizational change for school reform, additional research and scholarship is needed to understand the cultural context in rural communities and provide support for school leaders in closing the educational gaps that exist between and among the students in their schools.

Research Methodology and Design

A convergent transformative mixed methodology was employed to investigate rural K-12 public school principals' perceptions regarding the degree to which they use and value practices related to cultural competence in their roles. The aim of convergent transformative mixed methods research designs is to transform society by addressing inequities or injustices experienced by specific groups. Creswell (2014) defined transformative mixed methods as,

> A form of mixed methods design in which the research identifies one of the qualitative theoretical frameworks (e.g. indigenous populations, females, racial and ethnic group, disable individuals, and so forth) and uses the framework through the mixed methods study, such as to established the research problem, the questions, the data collection and analysis, interpretation, and the call for action. It is used in conjunction with explanatory, exploratory, and embedded designs (p. 249).

For the purpose of this study and the Conceptual Framework of Cultural Proficiency, the intersectionality of all identities that make up each individual was identified as the theoretical framework. The transformative mixed methodology approach was not used to determine specific methods of data collection and data analysis, but rather to inform the convergence and interpretations of the data in purporting a call to action.

The concurrent methods, often referred to as convergent methods, used a QUAN + QUAL method. "QUAL and QUAN capitalization indicates an emphasis or priority on the quantitative or qualitative data, analysis, and interpretation in the study" (Creswell, 2014, p. 228). For this study, the quantitative and qualitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation received the same priority. QUAN + QUAL data were collected by survey from rural K-12 public school principals. The QUAN survey data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, encompassing measures of frequency, mean, and standard deviation. The QUAL data analysis from the open-ended questions on the survey were coded using emergent themes. The analyses of the qualitative and quantitative data were integrated, allowing for interpretation of the convergent databases and a call for action to influence policy, practices, and future research for rural schools across the United States.

Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of United States K-12 public school principals, whose names and email addresses were publicly available in September 2022 through the State Education Departments. The following table shows the states included in the study by Census Region of the United States.

Table 1
Regional States Included in the Study

WEST	NORTHEAST	MIDWEST	SOUTH
Alaska	Connecticut	Illinois	Alabama
Arizona	Maine	Indiana	Arkansas
California	Massachusetts	Iowa	Georgia
Idaho	New Jersey	Kansas	Louisiana
Nevada	Rhode Island	Michigan	Mississippi
New Mexico	Vermont	Missouri	
Oregon	Virginia	Nebraska	
Utah		Ohio	
Washington			

While the survey was sent to all K-12 public school principals listed in the State Departments' databases (N = 50,504), the sampling of this study was from those school principals, who identified the location of their school as rural (total town or community population outside of an urbanized center between 1 and 24,999). A total of 112 individuals responded to the survey with this demographic identification. This is in comparison to the 13,521 rural public schools accounted for through the National Center for Educational Statistics, yielding a marginal response rate. Out of the 112 participants, sixteen respondents served as school principals in the West; 55 served as school principals in the Midwest; 6 served as school principals in the Northeast; and 35 served as school principals in the South Region.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed a three-part survey titled, *Culturally Proficient Educational Practices in Public K-12 Schools across the United States* and utilized it to collect data in this study. Part I of the survey included characteristics of the school administrator and site. Data were collected by role, classification of the school site (public, charter, or other), number of students enrolled, location of the school site (urban, suburban/large city, mid-size city/large town, rural), and state census region (West, Midwest, Northeast, South).

Part II of the survey collected quantitative data regarding school principals' perceptions of their value for and use of specific culturally competent practices. This part of the survey, including the culturally competent practices, was adapted from the *Cultural Competence Self-Assessment* (Lindsey et al, 2019). "The purpose of the original self-assessment is to provide a baseline of information and a starting point for conversation about becoming culturally proficient" (p. 345). The self-assessment included 31-items divided among the five Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. The researcher narrowed the 31-item self-assessment down to 22-items to increase response rates, while maintaining the value of the culturally competent practices divided among the action-based Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. An expert panel was used to validate the content of the modified survey. "Using a panel of experts provides constructive feedback about the quality of the newly developed measure, as well as objective

criteria with which to evaluate each item" (Rubio et al., 2003, p. 4). A user panel was used for increasing reliability of the instrument.

In addition, Part II included duplicative Likert scales, one for value and one for use of the culturally competent practices. Participants were asked to respond regarding the degree to which they value the practices using the following as the scale: (1) Not Important, (2) Slightly Important, (3) Important, (4) Very Important, (5) Extremely Important. Participants were also asked to respond regarding the degree to which they use the practices with the following as the scale: (1) Rarely, (2) Seldom, (3) Sometimes, (4) Often, (5) Usually.

Part III of the survey collected qualitative data regarding rural K-12 public school principals' perceptions regarding the cultural competence in their schools. The first open-ended question asked, "From your perspective, what policies or practices exist in your school or district that led to equity, access, and inclusion so all students to thrive?" The second open-ended question allowed for participants to contribute any other information regarding culturally competent educational practices at their school sites.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection in a convergent parallel mixed methodological research study should be designed to collect quantitative and qualitative data from the same construct. In this approach the research collects both sets of data, analyzes them separately, and then looks for findings that confirm or disconfirm each other (Creswell, 2014). The data collection phase of this study was conducted by distributing the *Culturally Proficient Educational Practices in Public K-12 Schools across the United States* survey to the population of rural school principals, whose contact information was publicly available or retrievable through the State Departments of Education in September 2022 using Qualtrics. A reminder email was sent out to all participants in the last week of September to encourage them to respond. In this convergent parallel data collection process, both quantitative data and qualitative data were collected. Data were stored electronically, organized, and protected.

The analysis step of convergent mixed methods study warranted analyzing the QUAN and QUAL data separately. The QUAN data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reporting the mean, standard deviation, and variance for the 22 Likert-scale statements on the survey for both the perceived value of culturally competent practices and the reported use of culturally competent practices. The QUAL data were analyzed using in vivo coding. Creswell (2014) described analysis as preparing and organizing the data, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes. The final step in completing this convergent parallel mixed methods study was to interpret the QUAN and QUAL data to confirm or disconfirm each data set, answer the research questions, and draw conclusions.

Findings and Analysis

The findings of this convergent parallel mixed methods study are organized by research question. Table 2 highlights the most and least used culturally competent practices, the most and least important culturally competent practices, and then, summarizes the themes that emerged from in vivo coding. The frequency of use, perception of importance, and emergent

themes of culturally competent practice are presented in detail throughout the analysis. Educational leaders and educational leadership professors can utilize the concepts presented through these themes to promote equity, access, and inclusion work in their schools, organizations, and institutions by utilizing the Cultural Proficiency Framework.

Table 2

Research Questions' Relationship to Use, Value, and Emergent Themes

Research Questions	Use, Value, and Emergent Themes
(1) What do rural K-12 public school principals report regarding their value for using culturally proficient practices?	Most Important *I recognize conflict as a normal part of life.* *I work to develop skills to manage conflict in productive ways.* *I speak up if I notice that a policy or practice unintentionally discriminates against or causes an unnecessary hardship for a particular group in my organization's community.* Least Important *I think about my own culture and ethnicity as an educational leader.* *I use my knowledge of the effect my culture and ethnicity may have on other people in my work setting.* *I recognize when cultural norms do not serve everyone in the organization well.*
(2) What do rural K-12 public school principals report regarding their use of culturally proficient practices?	Most Frequently Used *I recognize that diversity is more than gender and race/ethnicity.* *I recognize conflict as a normal part of life.* *I work to develop skills to manage conflict in productive ways.* Least Frequently Used *I think about my own culture and ethnicity as an educational leader.* *I use my knowledge of the effect my culture and ethnicity may have on other people in my work setting.* *I recognize when cultural norms do not serve everyone in the organization well.*
(3) What are rural K-12 public school principals' perceptions regarding the cultural competence in their schools?	*Lack of Diversity, Student Support Services, Policy, Beliefs, Collaboration, Professional Learning, Interventions*

Research Question 1

The first research question explored rural K-12 public school principals' perceptions regarding their value for using culturally proficient practices. Table 3 includes the descriptive statistical analysis of the data collected from 112 rural school principals who responded to the survey. The mean was derived from the average using the following scale: (1) Not Important, (2) Slightly Important, (3) Important, (4) Very Important, (5) Extremely Important. The standard deviation and variance values are used to indicate the variability in school principals' beliefs regarding the importance of these practices in their roles.

Table 3

Rural School Principals' Value for Using Culturally Competent Practices (N = 112)

Survey Prompt	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
I think about my own culture and ethnicity as an educational leader.	3.17	1.33	1.76
I use my knowledge of the effect my culture and ethnicity may have on other people in my work setting.	3.35	1.39	1.94
I recognize when cultural norms do not serve everyone in the organization well.	3.83	1.12	1.26
I seek to learn about the cultures of my organization's clients.	4.08	0.98	0.96
I anticipate how my organization's clients and employees will interact with, conflict with, and enhance one another.	4.15	0.90	0.80
I welcome a diverse group of clients and colleagues into the work setting.	4.35	0.86	0.75
I recognize that diversity is more than gender and race/ethnicity.	4.33	1.02	1.04
I learn from both the challenges and opportunities that diversity brings.	4.35	0.84	0.71
I work to develop a learning community with the clients (internal and external) I serve.	4.31	0.75	0.57
I teach the cultural expectations of my organization or department to those who are new or who may be unfamiliar with the organization's culture.	3.92	0.96	0.91
I proactively seek to interact with people whose backgrounds are different from mine.	3.92	1.02	1.04
I recognize that conflict is a normal part of life.	4.47	0.85	0.72
I work to develop skills to manage conflict in productive ways.	4.45	0.71	0.51

I help my colleagues to understand that what appear to be clashes in personalities may in fact be conflicts in personal or organizational culture.	3.82	1.06	1.11
I check myself to see if an assumption I am making about a person is based upon facts or upon stereotypes about a group.	3.92	1.18	1.40
I accept that the more diverse our group becomes, the more we will change and grow.	4.15	1.01	1.03
I am committed to the continuous learning that is necessary to deal with the issues caused by differences.	4.31	0.89	0.79
I know how to learn about people and cultures unfamiliar to me without giving offense.	4.00	0.90	0.81
I speak up if I notice that a policy or practice unintentionally discriminates against or causes an unnecessary hardship for a particular group in my organization's community.	4.44	0.80	0.63
I take advantage of teachable moments to share cultural knowledge or to learn from my colleagues.	4.11	0.95	0.91
I advocate for the marginalized in my school/district among my colleagues, the students, and their communities.	4.34	0.91	0.84
I seek to create opportunities for my colleagues, managers, clients, and the communities we serve to learn about one another.	4.11	0.84	0.71

The culturally competent practice school principals reported as the most important included *I recognize conflict as a normal part of life.* This practice had a mean of 4.47, a standard deviation of 0.85, and a variance of 0.72, which means rural school principals believe this practice is between very important and extremely important, and the variability in scores shows most values are fairly consistent and not widely dispersed from the mean. Approximately 88% of respondents indicated this practice is very important or extremely important in their roles as rural school principals. This practice aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Managing the Dynamics of Difference.

The second most important culturally competent practice school principals reported was *I work to develop skills to manage conflict in productive ways.* This practice had a mean of 4.45, a standard deviation of 0.71, and a variance of 0.51, which means rural school principals believe this practice is between very important and extremely important, and the variability in scores shows most values are fairly consistent and not widely dispersed from the mean. Approximately 87% of respondents indicated this practice is very important or extremely important in their roles as school principals. This practice aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Managing the Dynamics of Difference.

The third most important culturally competent practice school principals reported was *I speak up if I notice that a policy or practice unintentionally discriminates against or causes an unnecessary hardship for a particular group in my organization's community.* This practice had a

mean of 4.44, a standard deviation of 0.80, and a variance of 0.63, which means rural school principals believe this practice is between very important and extremely important, and the variability in scores shows most values are fairly consistent and not widely dispersed from the mean. Approximately 89% of respondents indicated this practice is very important or extremely important in their roles as rural school principals. This practice aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge.

Conversely, the culturally competent practice school principals reported as the least important included *I think about my own culture and ethnicity as an educational leader.* This practice had a mean of 3.17, a standard deviation of 1.33, and a variance of 1.76, which means rural school principals believe this practice is important, however, the variability in scores shows a greater dispersion in value from the mean. Approximately 17% of respondents indicated this practice is not important; 8% indicated slightly important; 35% important; 19% very important; and 21% of respondents believe this practice to be extremely important in their roles as school principals. This practice aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Assessing Cultural Knowledge.

The culturally competent practice school principals reported as the second least important included *I use my knowledge of the effect my culture and ethnicity may have on other people in my work setting.* This practice had a mean of 3.35, a standard deviation of 1.39, and a variance of 1.94, which means rural school principals believe this practice is important, however, the variability in scores shows a greater dispersion in value from the mean. Approximately 14% of respondents indicated this practice is not important; 14% indicated slightly important; 22% important; 21% very important; and 29% of respondents believe this practice to be extremely important in their roles as school principals. This practice aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Assessing Cultural Knowledge.

The third to last important culturally competent practice school principals reported included *I recognize when cultural norms do not serve everyone in the organization well.* This practice had a mean of 3.83, a standard deviation of 1.12, and a variance of 1.26, which means rural school principals believe this practice is between important and very important, however, the variability in scores shows a greater dispersion in value from the mean. Approximately 5% of respondents indicated this practice is not important; 5% indicated slightly important; 30% important; 24% very important; and 37% of respondents believe this practice to be extremely important in their roles as school principals. This practice aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Assessing Cultural Knowledge.

Research Question 2

The second research question explored rural K-12 public school principals' perceptions regarding their use of culturally proficient practices. Table 4 includes the descriptive statistical analysis of the data collected from 112 rural school principals who responded to the survey. The mean was derived from the average using the following scale: (1) Rarely, (2) Seldom, (3) Sometimes, (4) Often, (5) Usually.

Table 4

Rural School Principals' Use of Culturally Competent Practices (N = 112)

Survey Prompt	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
I think about my own culture and ethnicity as an educational leader.	3.03	1.17	1.37
I use my knowledge of the effect my culture and ethnicity may have on other people in my work setting.	3.28	1.32	1.73
I recognize when cultural norms do not serve everyone in the organization well.	3.52	1.04	1.07
I seek to learn about the cultures of my organization's clients.	3.84	0.99	0.98
I anticipate how my organization's clients and employees will interact with, conflict with, and enhance one another.	3.87	0.98	0.97
I welcome a diverse group of clients and colleagues into the work setting.	4.06	1.10	1.20
I recognize that diversity is more than gender and race/ethnicity.	4.25	1.02	1.03
I learn from both the challenges and opportunities that diversity brings.	4.16	0.92	0.85
I work to develop a learning community with the clients (internal and external) I serve.	4.17	0.82	0.67
I teach the cultural expectations of my organization or department to those who are new or who may be unfamiliar with the organization's culture.	3.66	0.94	0.88
I proactively seek to interact with people whose backgrounds are different from mine.	3.71	1.06	1.12
I recognize that conflict is a normal part of life.	4.22	0.87	0.76
I work to develop skills to manage conflict in productive ways.	4.34	0.79	0.63
I help my colleagues to understand that what appear to be clashes in personalities may in fact be conflicts in personal or organizational culture.	3.56	1.10	1.21
I check myself to see if an assumption I am making about a person is based upon facts or upon stereotypes about a group.	3.66	1.21	1.48
I accept that the more diverse our group becomes, the more we will change and grow.	3.88	1.07	1.14
I am committed to the continuous learning that is necessary to deal with the issues caused by differences.	4.13	1.01	1.02
I know how to learn about people and cultures unfamiliar to me without giving offense.	3.73	0.96	0.91

I speak up if I notice that a policy or practice unintentionally discriminates against or causes an unnecessary hardship for a particular group in my organization's community.	3.98	1.08	1.17
I take advantage of teachable moments to share cultural knowledge or to learn from my colleagues.	3.84	1.01	1.02
I advocate for the marginalized in my school/district among my colleagues, the students, and their communities.	4.09	0.95	0.90
I seek to create opportunities for my colleagues, managers, clients, and the communities we serve to learn about one another.	3.83	0.89	0.80

The culturally competent practice school principals reported they use the most included *I recognize that diversity is more than gender and race/ethnicity.* This practice had a mean of 4.25, a standard deviation of 1.02, and a variance of 1.03, which means rural school principals reported the frequency to which they use this practice is often, and the variability in scores shows most values are fairly consistent and not widely dispersed from the mean. Approximately 83% of respondents indicated they use this practice often or usually in their roles as school principals. This practice of recognizing that diversity is more than gender and race/ethnicity aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Valuing Diversity.

The culturally competent practice school principals reported as using second most frequently was *I recognize conflict as a normal part of life.* This practice had a mean of 4.22, a standard deviation of 0.87, and a variance of 0.76, which means rural school principals reported they use this practice often, and the variability in scores shows most values are fairly consistent and not widely dispersed from the mean. Approximately 80% of respondents indicated they use this practice often or usually in their roles as school principals. This practice aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Managing the Dynamics of Difference.

The third culturally competent practice school principals reported they use most frequently in their roles was *I work to develop skills to manage conflict in productive ways.* This practice had a mean of 4.34, a standard deviation of 0.79, and a variance of 0.63, which means rural school principals reported they use this practice often, and the variability in scores shows most values are fairly consistent and not widely dispersed from the mean. Approximately 86% of respondents indicated they use this practice often or usually in their roles as school principals. This practice aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Managing the Dynamics of Difference.

Conversely, the culturally competent practice school principals reported they use the least in their roles was *I think about my own culture and ethnicity as an educational leader.* This practice had a mean of 3.03, a standard deviation of 1.17, and a variance of 1.37, which means rural school principals use this practice sometimes, however, the variability in scores shows a greater dispersion in value from the mean. Approximately 14% of respondents indicated they rarely use this practice; 16% reported they seldom use this practice; 33% sometimes; 28% often; and 9% of respondents reported they use this practice usually in their roles as school principals.

This practice aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Assessing Cultural Knowledge.

The culturally competent practice school principals reported they use the second least included *I use my knowledge of the effect my culture and ethnicity may have on other people in my work setting.* This practice had a mean of 3.38, a standard deviation of 1.32, and a variance of 1.73, which means rural school principals use this practice sometimes, however, the variability in scores shows a greater dispersion in value from the mean. Approximately 14% of respondents indicated they rarely use this practice; 16% reported they seldom use this practice; 17% sometimes; 34% often; and 19% of respondents reported they use this practice usually in their roles as school principals. This practice aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Assessing Cultural Knowledge.

The third lowest frequently used culturally competent practice school principals reported included *I recognize when cultural norms do not serve everyone in the organization well.* This practice had a mean of 3.52, a standard deviation of 1.04, and a variance of 1.07, which means rural school principals' use this practice between sometimes and often. The variability in scores shows less dispersion in value from the mean. Approximately 6% of respondents indicated they rarely use this practice; 8% reported they seldom use this practice; 27% sometimes; 44% often; and 14% of respondents reported they use this practice usually in their roles as school principals. This practice aligns with the Essential Element of Culturally Competent Practice: Assessing Cultural Knowledge.

Research Question 3

The third research question was used to investigate rural K-12 public school principals' perceptions regarding culturally competent policies and practices in their schools. Eighty-six rural school principals responded to the qualitative portion of the survey. In reviewing the participants' responses for culturally competent policies and practices, three themes emerged from the data. The themes include: (1) student support services; (2) professional learning communities to support instruction and assessment; and (3) a lack of diversity warranting little need for culturally competent practice. The following section includes responses collected from the qualitative portion of the survey aggregated by theme.

Student support services. Rural K-12 school principals were asked to identify their school's policies or practices that they believe lead to equity, access, and inclusion. While the definition of student support services may vary from state to state or school to school, those participants interviewed identified many of the same services such as English Language Learner Programs, Federal Programs such as Title I, Head Start, Migrant, Homeless Education, Special Education, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, and Restorative Practices. One principal responded, "All students have access to support services." Another wrote, "We provide different services to students, faculty, and staff to meet their needs." A third quote worth mentioning is, "Our school focuses on meeting the needs of the whole child; thereby families and the community are involved in our school."

Another theme that was grouped with student support services was social-emotional learning. While several participants identified social-emotional learning as an equitable practice, one rural school principal expanded upon the concept in detail by writing,

> We have started daily social emotional learning (SEL) groups and hope that by students working in small mixed grade level groups they will learn more about each other and the differences as well as the similarities they have with each other.

It was acknowledged by several respondents that their schools focus on individual students' needs and provide support services accordingly.

Professional learning communities to support instruction and assessment. A second theme that emerged from the qualitative data in which rural school principals were asked to identify their school's equitable policies or practices was the concept of collaboration through professional learning communities to support instruction and assessment. Participants identified many of the same programs and practices related to intervention services such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Response to Intervention (RTI), Title I Schools (Federal funding often used to support low-performing students instructional programing in high poverty schools), and Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS). One principal responded, "We practice tiered intervention for all our students who are at risk of not being successful academically. We work with each other, and our equity lens in decision making on a regular basis." Another discussed the bi-weekly data team meetings to discuss progress of students based upon the interventions provided. A third principal mentioned, "Our response to intervention or multi-tiered support system is structured to be as subjective as possible, serving students based on need rather than status."

A theme that converged with the notion of professional learning communities is the number of principals who talked about practices related to diversity training. It should be noted that some rural school principals talked about diversity training as a common practice, while others expressed the need to better under culture through continuous diversity training. One principal wrote, "Required district diversity training; established by the district. Policies are in place to protect staff and students." Another principal listed specifics of continuous learning around diversity, "Diversity Training for the entire district, Speaker series on diversity, Respect & Dignity Initiative." Additionally, one school principal expressed the beginning of diversity training, "We are a small rural district with a small diverse population that has taken an initiative to bring in programs to better understand all students." Another mentioned the need to increase diversity training, "There is a growing need (for cultural competency) in our community." Others discussed a need for more commitment and a call for more training and understanding of culture.

A lack of diversity warrants little need for culturally competent practice. The final theme that emerged from the qualitative data focus on the belief of what is not needed, rather than an answer to the question regarding the current culturally competent policies and practices that are implemented in rural schools. Many rural school principals acknowledged a lack of diversity in the rural communities. One principal wrote, "Our district is not very diverse. This creates obstacles because people don't see it as a need." Another principal responded with, "We are not diverse. Our biggest current diversity issue is gender identity. We have no policy on it." A third wrote, "We are a small rural school located in the Midwest. Although we do have a small amount of diversity in our school we typically just don't see or experience a lot of cultural differences."

Conversely, one principal went on to discuss no need for culturally competent practice, "As a small school, all kids are "our" kids. Don't need policies or practices, just good, honest, committed professionals who love kids." Several other respondents support the notion of focusing on all students rather than naming culturally competent practices or programs to

support the individual needs of students based upon difference. Despite the belief that the work of Cultural Proficiency is not needed; it is important to note that some rural principals acknowledged that the lack of diversity is diminishing. “We live in a very rural area and know most everyone in the school. After COVID, many people began moving into our area from different areas of the country and beyond, it has become increasingly difficult to "really" get to know our families and their cultures, but we continue to work toward that!”

Conclusions

The findings of this study are important to the field of education, both for scholars and practitioners, because of the persistent disparities in opportunity, access, and educational gaps. Inequitable or unfair policies and practices in our rural educational systems, the increasing diversity of student populations, and lack of resources have sustained the need for continuous improvement and school reform. Barriers to equity and access such as systemic oppression, privilege and entitlement, unawareness of the need to adapt, and resistance to change continue to emphasize the ongoing effort towards building a culturally competent organization, led by culturally competent school leaders. The Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency, action verbs for change, serve as standards by which rural school leaders can accept the call to action to open the doors of opportunity and access for all in their rural communities.

This study investigated (1) the school principal’s value of culturally proficient practices; (2) the school principal’s use of culturally proficient practices; and (3) culturally competent policies and practices used in rural, public schools across the United States. The analysis of data from the survey provided explanations that can be insightful to educational leaders and educational leadership professors preparing educators to lead change for increasing equity, access, and inclusion in rural areas throughout the United States.

The convergent main ideas and explanations of the findings, which are related to the use and value ratings of culturally competent practices and emergent themes of the study are grounded in the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. The Essential Elements are: (1) Assessing Cultural Knowledge; (2) Valuing Diversity; (3) Managing the Dynamics of Difference; (4) Adapting to Diversity; and (5) Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022). The following discussion includes the interpretations of the findings and integrated conclusions from the quantitative and qualitative data sets. These explanations are discussed in three conclusions corresponding to the research study’s conceptual framework: (1) Rural School Principals’ Management of the Dynamics of Difference; (2) Rural School Principals’ Disregard in Assessing Cultural Knowledge; and (3) A Call to Lead School Change Using the Essential Elements.

Rural School Principals’ Management of the Dynamics of Difference

Culturally competent school leaders are prolific at managing the dynamics of different people, ideas, beliefs, and behaviors. Effective school leaders are problem solvers. It is estimated that school leaders spend between 20 and 40 percent of a day managing conflict between teachers, parents, and students (Johnson, 2003). Examining the integration of the quantitative and qualitative data, school leaders indicated that the culturally competent practices that they use

and value the most for meeting the needs of their rural student populations include "recognizing conflict as a normal part of life" and "working to develop skills to manage conflict in productive ways." Further analysis indicated culturally competent practices that exemplify managing the dynamics of difference including the emerging theme of the database: decision-making, collaborating around interventions and working with others to solve problems and meet the needs of students.

Managing the dynamics of difference allows educators to frame the conflicts that are caused by difference (Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022). This Essential Element of culturally proficient practice serves as a standard for change by compelling school leaders to learn effective strategies for resolving conflict, particularly among people whose racial and social class backgrounds and values are different (Welborn et al., p. 166). Other specific leadership behaviors that one might see when observing rural, culturally competent leaders is one who facilitates, challenges, and provokes positive conflict and discussion about difficult topics and issues; seeks difference over commonality by helping the group to learn from dissonance and to forge new, more complex, agreements and capabilities that transform the organization to be able to respond to multiple perspectives and voices; acknowledges historical inequity for some groups; and recruits, hires, and promotes people who think and act differently from those already in the system (Lindsey et al., 2005).

Rural School Principals' Disregard in Assessing Cultural Knowledge

The second conclusion drawn from this study is that rural school principals tend to disregard the importance of using culturally competent practices that require them to assess cultural knowledge. The Essential Element, assessing cultural knowledge, exemplifies the inside out process of Cultural Proficiency and allows school leaders to claim difference between and among group and realize the impact those difference have on the situation or outcomes (Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022). Assessing cultural knowledge is about rural school principals recognizing how their cultural identities, values, beliefs, and behaviors affect others. They often can describe the complexities of cultural norms of the school or district, and they typically understand how the organizational culture of their school affects others in various cultural groups (Welborn et al., 2022, p. 166).

This conclusion is drawn from the integration of both a quantitative and qualitative data in the study The survey data indicated while rural school principals believe that the culturally competent practices in which they assess cultural knowledge is important, they rated their value for and use of the following three practices as least: *Thinking about their own culture and ethnicity as an educational leader; using their knowledge of the effect their culture and ethnicity may have on other people in their work setting; and recognizing when cultural norms do not serve everyone in the organization well. I*n paralleling the qualitative data, certain rural principals talked about the lack of diversity and isolation of their rural schools; therefore, negating the need for culturally competent practices or the need to address one's own culture or focus on difference. One rural school principal indicated, "As a small school, all kids are "our" kids. Don't need policies or practices, just good, honest, committed professionals who love kids." Another mentioned, "Culture should seek to accept our differences and look for ways that we are the same. We should be more concerned in moving in the same direction and looking for what we have in common

than to be hyper focused on how we are different. Seems we could be more productive in that regard. This is evidenced by the rifts we have created in society -- we have never been more divided than we are now, and we are more concerned now about our differences (identity politics perhaps) than ever before. That should tell us something." Policy and practice informed by beliefs and behaviors, such as the aforementioned, are regarded as culturally blind using the Conceptual Framework of Cultural Proficiency. Culturally blind behaviors demonstrate a refusal to acknowledge the culture of another by acting as if one does not see difference or does not recognize there are differences between and among cultures. "Cultural blindness includes both an ability and a pretense to not see the differences that their racialized identity and social class bring into the school system" (Welborn et al., 2022, p. 141).

A Call to Lead Change Using the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency

The third conclusion drawn from this study is a call to action for rural school leaders to use the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency in addressing the needs of all students. The Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency are "an interdependent set of standards that are distinguished by five actions verbs to create change in school policies and practices, and individuals" behaviors (Welborn et al., 2022, p. 164). Applying the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency allows rural school leaders to learn about the change process; conduct self-assessment for leading change and increasing culturally competent practices; support change through dialogic processes, develop a strategic action plan, and monitor progress toward equity and access goals (Welborn et al., 2022).

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study overarching conclusion is that rural school principals do believe culturally competent practices are somewhat important. While some practices were rated more important and more used than others, the disparities that exist in rural education can be mitigated by using the Essential Elements: assessing cultural knowledge, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge. Together these five actions constitute a change process for improving policies and practices that are currently perpetuating the educational gaps experienced by our rural youth.

Rural school principals acknowledge the challenges they experience in their schools. They are also committed to all students. With a focus on action and continuous improvement process using the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency, rural school principals can open the doors to access and opportunity for all of their students more than ever before (Welborn et al., 2022). The call-to-action challenges rural school leaders to systematically, examine, challenge, and change policies, practices and individual behaviors by adopting the mindset of Cultural Proficiency, so that we view everything we do through a lens that is transformative in nature. Identifying and acknowledging the barriers that perpetuate educational gaps among and between students in rural schools is essential, and the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency can help us respond in a way that opens the door to opportunity by increasing culturally competent practices (Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022).

Culturally competent rural school principals are called to engage their school communities in continuous reflection, dialogue, and action processes to open the door for opportunity and mitigate the educational gaps, despite all the challenges of rural education. We

must go beyond culturally competent practices mandated by law and those that have the attention as the latest, greatest practice in education. While the sample size of this mixed methods study was not large enough to be a representative sample of the entire nation, evidence from rural school principals in all four census-defined regions of the United States contributed to the findings, exemplifying the importance of use and value of culturally competent practices in their roles at school rural leaders. Further research is warranted to investigate rural education in the context of culturally competent practice in a nationwide study.

As for educational leadership preparation programs, professors are called to consider the use of the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency as they relate the change process in courses that address school improvement, school change, equity in education, and the ethical foundations of educational leadership. While this study focused on rural school principals, all school leaders can benefit from learning how to apply the Essential Elements for change through a continuous reflective, dialogic, and action-based process. Examining, challenging, and changing policies, practices, programs, and individual's behaviors can increase opportunity, access, and a deep sense of belonging for all students in our school organizations.

Drawing from the findings and conclusions of this convergent transformative mixed methods study, the following are implications for rural educational leaders and educational leadership professors responsible for upholding public education in a way that advocates for equitable and inclusionary outcomes for all students through continuous improvement using culturally proficient educational practice. It is when we, as educators, come together and work towards the call to action for prioritizing efforts that target those in our rural communities who have been historically marginalized, that we reach the moral imperative of educating all well. These implications suggest using the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency can directly impact the ways in which students experience education. As we experience the continuous expansion and diversification of student population in rural schools, the moral imperative for educational leaders is to change the context (Fullan, 2001); change the mindset (Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn, 2022); and engage stakeholders in an ongoing, continuous effort to reflect, discuss, and act on policies and practices that continue to deny a high-quality education to historically underserved groups of rural students in the United States.

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"What if we don't get it right?": Leading Schools When the World Shuts Down

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, school leaders searched for new techniques and strategies to help them lead their school communities. This phenomenological research study involved interviews with 17 principals from elementary, middle, and high schools in the southeastern United States who served as principals during the school years between 2019 and 2022. This research was guided by two central questions: (1) How did K-12 school principals effectively lead and adapt their leadership style and actions to meet the extreme challenges incurred during a crisis? and (2) How can educational leadership programs better prepare school leaders to lead during times of crisis? These leaders shared their struggles and fears and discussed how they adjusted to the situation and cared for their students, staff, and parents. Three emerging themes were evident from the interviews: (1) the numerous challenges faced during the crisis, (2) techniques and strategies used to navigate the challenges, and (3) leadership growth and learning. These themes were studied through the theoretical lens of adaptive leadership. Findings indicate that many of the successful strategies these principals used align with the adaptive leadership model. Leader preparation programs and others who develop school leaders must prepare leaders for the next crisis. Intentional consideration of the adaptive leadership model in leadership preparation programming could help leaders better understand how to guide their school communities during intense times of change and uncertainty.

Keywords: adaptive leadership**,** crisis, K-12 schools, principal preparation programs

Recently, K-12 school principals have experienced increased demands, public dissatisfaction, and politically driven agendas. The 2019-20 school year, however, brought a new level of challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic; national unrest due to racial tensions; and a politically divided local, state, and national environment. As schools alternated between traditional school settings, virtual classes, and hybrid classes in this uncertain environment, K-12 principals adjusted and readjusted their support and leadership to meet the needs of all stakeholders. Amid uncertainty, principals had to act intentionally and often outside of their comfort zones.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study aims to learn how K-12 school principals led their school communities and adjusted their leadership styles and actions to meet the extreme challenges incurred during a time of compounded national and global crises. Exploring how one group of principals led others and adapted to changes and challenges could inform further development of educational leadership programs, especially in terms of preparing future and current school leaders to better mitigate and lead through complex, compounded crises via the application of adaptive leadership.

Theoretical Framework

Many leadership and crisis management theories could be applied in these difficult times. On one hand, distributive leadership allows members of an organization to anticipate and react to challenges (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008), while transformational leaders establish norms that adjust and change as the organization shifts (Bass & Riggio, 2006). On the other hand, situational leaders modify their behaviors depending on the circumstances, environment, and development level of their people (Gates, et al., 1976). Given that each of these theories includes a level of adaptation, however, we chose to use the lens of adaptive leadership to view principals' experiences during a crisis as they led their schools through uncertainty and confusion.

The origins of adaptive leadership are found in Heifetz' (1994) work where he described this type of leadership as occurring when any person, including those without formal leadership responsibilities, is able to guide others to adapt in challenging or changing times. Challenges, in this instance, specifically speak to any time when an adaptation or change is introduced and is internalized personally by the people involved, meaning they question themselves and their circumstances. Such challenges involve loss of some kind, whether it be temporary or permanent loss. Heifetz (1994) viewed an adaptive challenge as one that the current behavior, processes, and tools cannot meet, and Heifetz and Linsky (2017) referred to problems that cannot be solved through expert knowledge or authority as adaptive challenges. With this in mind, we can see that the challenges in schools during the period under review here were adaptive challenges. Indeed, principals did not have a playbook to follow and were unsure of what was to come as they made decisions during this period.

In terms of the work of the adaptive leader, they help others face the difficult reality they are confronting and adapt quickly and with confidence (Northouse, 2022; Kaiser, 2020). Indeed, Heifetz (1994) stated, "Adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face" (p. 22). Thus, adaptive leadership involves mobilizing people to tackle complex challenges while allowing the organization and people to thrive. This mobilization sometimes includes changing organizational values and strategies (Heifetz et al., 2009). The adaptive leader, therefore, faces reality and helps others to learn and take action. The adaptive leader empowers others to apply new knowledge and create an enduring foundation valued by the organization (Naqshbandi & Tabche, 2018).

When an unusual situation or crisis occurs, adaptive leadership is critical, and specific skills and traits have been associated with adaptive leaders. For instance, adaptive leaders should be flexible in their thinking and astute in scanning the environment and assessing needs. Additionally, an openness to learning and the ability to embrace new ideas is essential for leaders who need to adapt to unique circumstances or situations (Chughtai et al., 2023; London, 2022; Lovett et al., 2023; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). After all, a leader's behaviors during a crisis affect members' attitudes and the performance of the organization (Teo et al., 2017). Yukl & Mahsud (2010) posited that improving skills such as cognitive complexity, social/emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and situational awareness increased the effectiveness of the adaptive leader. The concept of adaptive leadership incorporates four perspectives that when considered together can characterize the adaptive leader:

1. Systems-Adaptive leaders view problems as complex, complicated, and connected to other issues, all of which can evolve and change constantly.
2. Biological-Adaptive leaders understand that people evolve due to internal and external changes and encourage others to succeed in new circumstances.
3. Service Orientation-Adaptive leaders use their experience and knowledge to serve others by helping them understand the problem and find solutions.
4. Psychotherapeutic-Adaptive leaders understand that people need a supportive environment. They know that people can adapt more readily when they face challenges directly and learn new behaviors and attitudes (Heifetz, 1994; Northouse, 2022).

For the purposes of this study, we utilized these four lenses as a foundation for examining the principals' approaches as adaptive leaders responding via crisis management.

From a systems perspective, Dunn (2020) discussed how adaptive leadership is able to succeed in complex, unpredictable circumstances. He acknowledged that even prior to the pandemic, educational leaders were working in unpredictable and complex environments that were constantly facing external and internal challenges. Adaptive leaders encourage a culture of learning and sharing of information (Chughtai et al., 2023). These leaders help others find solutions to difficult problems. There is also a need for a psychotherapeutic approach in the form of empathy and attention to a team's well-being during a crisis (Goniewicz and Hertelendy, 2023).

Epperly, et al. (2022) argued that the use of adaptive strategies during a crisis is typically more successful as most crisis leadership strategies do not address the complexities involved. They contend that leaders must consider the concept of paracrisis and continue to learn from the ways in which their organization adapts successfully or fails to adapt when threats occur. Hess and Lowry (2020) argued that leaders should be bricoleurs who draw upon different resources and strategies to meet the changing needs of their organization. Whether we view crisis management from a paracrisis standpoint or as a bricoleur, it is important in crises that leaders are able to adapt and to encourage their team to do the same. Adaptative leadership models, however, necessitate that leaders expect the unexpected, so to speak, and exploring leaders' actions and how they adapted during a crisis in relation to the four adaptive perspectives noted above may help principal preparation providers coach future and current school administrators for the next crisis.

Methodology

The study included 17 K-12 school leaders who were school principals during the 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22 school years in one suburban school district in the southeastern United States. Eleven elementary school principals, four middle school principals, and two high school principals were interviewed during the spring of 2022 in a virtual setting. This study's focus was on the challenges these principals faced while leading schools during a worldwide pandemic, racial tensions and unrest, and a politically divided nation. The research questions at the center of this phenomenological study included the following:

- How do K-12 school principals effectively lead and adapt their leadership style and actions to meet the extreme challenges incurred during a crisis?
- How can educational leadership programs better prepare school leaders to lead during times of crisis?

Principals were interviewed via an online platform, in a format that ensured "privacy, safety, trust, and rapport" (Sohn et.al., 2017, p.132). Structured questions were addressed, but principals could expand beyond the questioning when they had more information to share. This openness is crucial and seeks to keep "the interview process as close to the lived experience as possible" (Laverty, 2003, p. 19). Interviews were transcribed directly with names of people, places, and other identifying information removed. As respondents used terminology that might be unfamiliar to all the researchers, definitions were provided.

A phenomenological case study approach was used as it allowed participants to impart shared and individual lived experiences during a window of time (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Laverty, 2003). Specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology was applied as it recognizes the researcher's experience/background in the conversation (Laverty, 2003). Moreover, a phenomenological approach allows the "researcher to keep an open mind and listen in a receptive manner to the participants' descriptions" (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015, p. 252).

The researchers underwent four cycles of reviewing the transcripts beginning with the use of inductive coding with interviews divided equally among the three researchers (Saldaña, 2021). Initial codes included the following: Communication, Normalcy, Relationships/Trust,

Leadership/Humanity, Collaboration, Socio-Emotional Skills and Academics, Mental Health and Wellness, Navigating the Unknown, Navigating Diverse Perspectives, and Intentionality and Growth. To increase the dependability of the data, the researchers repeated the process on a second set of interviews resulting in areas of agreement on which codes should be utilized and which were redundant. The third cycle involved identifying key quotes in each of the transcripts that spoke to the code. Finally, using elaborative coding (Saldaña, 2021), the researchers collectively developed "clusters of meaning" (Creswell,2007, p. 61), evolving into the following three themes: (1) challenges faced during the COVID crisis, (2) tools and techniques for navigating challenges, and (3) leadership growth and learning during the COVID crisis.

Findings

Challenges Faced During the COVID Crisis

First, it is important to identify common challenges faced by principals during the Pandemic. Initially, principals were balancing multiple "plates" while trying to keep things as normal as possible. For example, one principal was opening a new school in the fall of 2020 and knew how difficult it would be for parents to leave their children at a new school that they had never visited. She discussed how they tried to replicate open house and school tours virtually. Another principal talked about how she tried to recreate her lunch with students' reward activity called Lunch Bunch. Instead of eating together in the lunchroom, she held an online lunch bunch through scheduled Microsoft Teams meetings with students. And yet another principal videoed her Morning News announcements from her backyard to show students that everything was okay and that she was working from home just like they were. Principals discussed how in the online faculty meetings they would share their life at home with their staff. Eventually, however, many of the principals realized they would not be returning to "normal." One principal even expressed her frustration with others talking about going back to normal, as seen in the following quotation:

> I am so sick of hearing 'when we get back to normal.' ...This is normal. Now, it's just a different normal, but there is no going back to normal as if what we've done the last two years has been a waste or ineffective and it has not been.

Thus, principals went from trying to maintain a sense of normalcy for themselves, their staff, and their students and parents to recognizing that perhaps "normalcy" as it previously existed was not something for which they needed to strive. As leaders, they went from a push to keep things the same to a realization that perhaps change was needed. As another challenge, the leaders of these schools shared how they had to "navigate the unknown" as the pandemic spread. The principals were leaders who were used to being proactive and could usually predict student, staff, and parent needs accurately. Planning ahead, though, became much more difficult during the pandemic, as seen through this principal's response:

> I think it keeps going back to the unknown. You would make these plans and you communicate out what you're going to do because it's based on what you knew at that time. And then 30 minutes later you get information that says differently from what you just said, and so it was just this constant revolving door of trying to communicate, communicate, communicate. But things just kept changing so fast.

Principals discussed how difficult it was for teachers who had to quickly shift to online instruction without all the needed resources and skills. Indeed, teams had to find and distribute technology to students, and teachers, at times, had to be able to switch from in-person instruction to online instruction and back to in-person quickly. Some teachers were teaching online and in-person classes simultaneously. Principals had to plan and facilitate professional learning for online instruction while the online instruction was already taking place. And then there was also the challenge of helping students and parents adjust to online learning. To help her staff navigate the unknown, one principal shared an analogy with her staff where she equated the situation to being in a boat on the ocean. She told them they were just going to row their boat through the storm and talked with them about choosing their oar and just rowing or riding the waves. This caught on among her staff, who referred to it throughout the year.

Principals also shared how they had to navigate and lead communities with diverse perspectives during the crisis. Communities across the country were divided politically over mask-wearing and other divisive issues, and these schools were no different. Several principals indicated that they were dealing with more parents who were in distress or angry over political issues. Parents began reacting negatively to Social Emotional Learning which had been a visible focus in the schools for several years, and some schools suddenly had parents wanting to ban books. One principal described it as people having "less bandwidth." In some instances, teachers felt that they went from being heroes at the onset in the spring of 2020 to villains as the pandemic continued and political tensions were high. Staff members also had diverse perspectives on political issues, and principals had to learn to navigate both parents and staff, as seen in the following analogy that one participant relayed to her staff:

> Our job is to stand on the 50-yard line, and we are going to support people that are in the left end zone and those that are in the right end zone, and people that are strewn along all of the yardage in between. Each child and staff member has a different story, and we need to respect the story. You can learn the story to respect the story, or you cannot know the story and still respect the person.

As leaders, they had to learn to bridge the differences between staff, parents, guardians, students, and community members.

Almost all the principals discussed mental health concerns. From the pandemic's start, principals were concerned about their staff, as many expressed concerns over the stress teachers had to endure. One principal talked about how she had to step out of her comfort zone in online staff meetings to help her staff accept the harsh realities of their situations (Heifetz, 1994) and see that "this is what it is, and we're just going to move on." Using quotations from a famous comedian, she motivated her staff to see that we all have bad days and they would persevere. Considering both the pandemic and the political situation, one principal discussed how different people needed different types of support. She said her administrative team was trying to meet the varying needs of students, staff, and parents and it was taking its toll on the team. Parents needed support with how to help their children learn at home and in dealing with the fear of illness when they initially reopened schools; teachers needed help with adjusting to a new way of teaching and a new way of viewing expectations; and students needed reassurance and emotional support as well as academic support and resources.

Many expressed increased challenges with students when they returned to in-person instruction and a rise in student crisis meetings due to mental health issues. A high school

principal discussed how they would learn of a student's mental health issues through social media posts or friends. Their counselors were seen as having to double their efforts. Although difficult to navigate, some practices that began during the pandemic, such as trauma-informed practices, continue to benefit students today, as seen in the following participant quotation:

> We are so focused on being trauma-informed now, and a lot of the things that we put in place because of COVID we've kept because they are good trauma-informed practices like, you know, we don't have 300 kids all at their lockers in the hallway anymore. So some of the things we did because of COVID also helped us with our trauma-informed practices. So that really helped us. Now the staff is becoming more knowledgeable about, you know, what trauma does to the brain and how kids can be impacted and how to de-escalate situations instead of escalating them.

Additionally, there was a renewed focus on the whole-child approach to learning as students struggled when returning to school. This is reflected in the following principal's comments:

> Now if you take the last two years, these kids that are coming back in, we're starting to see the social, emotional issues that they don't know how to carry on conversations, they don't know how to follow a schedule. They don't know how to get along. They don't know how to do school, and the self-awareness pieces are not there from the social, emotional learning standpoint.

While they struggled to support students in their return to in-person learning, schools became more focused and intentional with social and emotional learning, and principals indicated that they felt they were doing a better job in this area.

As another challenge, school administrators and teachers discussed addressing the gaps in learning and inequities that became evident during the pandemic. Schools went virtual in March 2020, and while schools reopened the following fall, many families chose to keep their children at home. Among those who returned in August, they experienced breaks in their education as they were quarantined sometimes multiple times, resulting in a lack of continuity and consistency. Additionally, some students had inadequate internet, and many did not have devices to use. Some schools loaned mobile internet connections and digital tablets to families who needed them. Many schools were also preparing meals for families in need. As one principal shared, these inequities impacted students' learning, as seen in the following quotation:

> So there were all these inequities that were exposed that we just had to figure out. How are we going to mitigate these as best we can and help these kids learn? Because at the end of the day, that's what we were trying to get to, but also realizing that there was so much more support needed outside of just the academics.

In addition to inequities, middle and high school principals observed that many students stopped submitting work altogether. When students returned to the classroom, teachers had to prioritize standards and focus on the most important concepts. Some teachers came to understand that students could still learn without the extra practice work previously required. An example of this realization can be seen in a story one principal shared about a student who, previously, was an advanced student who always turned in all her work and received good grades. When she returned to school, she experienced a mental health crisis and missed many days of school, resulting in her inability to finish 8th grade and move to high school. Teachers, however, realized that they could excuse some of the practice work and only test her on the most necessary concepts. As a result, she passed 8th grade and was thriving in high school the following year.

Tools and Techniques for Navigating Challenges

During this crisis, principals faced unanticipated challenges, never having been through a pandemic before, and part of the difficulty in this included finding ways to cope with running schools in online and face-to-face capacities; ensuring faculty, students, and families had mental health supports and structures in place for overall wellbeing; navigating the ensuing political, social, and economic crises that seemed to accompany this pandemic; and trying to ensure that students were learning throughout the crisis. They truly were navigating the unknown. As one principal stated, "And so it was like, my biggest fear was, 'What if we don't get it right?'" And another worried, "I don't know how to do this from afar." Whether they recognized it during the actual pandemic, however, they utilized a specific set of tools to navigate these challenges. In fact, the most prominent code found during the analysis centered on the importance of "communication." Another significant code was "collaboration," and together, communication and collaboration led to "relationships/trust" as a final significant code. These three elements resulted in the principals' success in navigating this new and unanticipated world.

In terms of communication, most principals would agree that this is an important part of leadership in the best of times; however, the type and level of communication required during the pandemic was different than before and did not always come naturally. As principals noted, the pandemic required a new level of communication with all stakeholders—staff, students, and families-and it also necessitated a level of vulnerability on each principal's behalf. As one principal noted, the difficulty of communication during this time was "being as honest and as transparent as I possibly could be with where we were … You're being as honest as you can. You're admitting that you don't have all the answers." Communication needed to take multiple forms and be frequent. Of course, schools were virtual during this time and communication was therefore virtual as well, but principals recognized that email communication was not the best mode. As one principal stated, "emails lead to distrust and we don't want to go down that path either. And so I felt like if we take the time to call, that we're connecting with our families … You're talking over 1000 phone calls within a month period." And yet another stated, "there's so many changes coming so fast. And you know the absence of information is a dangerous thing because then people start kind of telling themselves their own story." Principals felt the need to establish that "constant communication space," and while many thought that they "over communicated," this was vital to ensure "that we were supporting our teachers and supporting our families with all the knowledge that we had because everybody was so scared."

Additionally, principals had to think carefully about exactly what was communicated and how the messages were constructed and shared throughout this time. As one principal stated, "so just having that understanding of, you know, how you communicate with people isn't just your intent of communication, it's how your communication is received." With the pandemic, families, students, and teachers were scared, and, thus, it was vital to have "proactive, consistent clear messaging to our families and staff." Almost all of the participants interviewed discussed how teachers did not know how to support students during this time, families did not know how to support their children during this time, and everyone was learning together. As previously noted, there were families with kindergartners who had never stepped into the school, there were students who were not eating at home or did not have access to technology, and there were individuals suffering with mental and physical health concerns. Additionally, political and

social issues took center stage and certain voices were looming louder than others. Regarding navigating political and social issues, one principal stated the following:

> We're going to have to demystify what's happening here. Come, here's the agenda. If you have issues that you feel need to be raised, please add to it so that we can truly have a dialogue and a conversation.

The key was to create spaces where those voices could be heard and dialogue could occur; otherwise, miscommunication and divisiveness would take over. Through an intense focus on communication, though, leaders learned to communicate in ways that were truly engaging and resulted in meaningful dialogue rather than mere information sharing.

Indeed, in many cases, leaders noted that enhanced communication led to stronger collaborative efforts with families, staff, and other leaders. Overall, there was a message of "togetherness." As one principal stated, they kept reinforcing the message, "we're going to get through it because we're together." In terms of leadership, collaborative efforts amongst principals changed the way that many viewed their positions, as seen in the following quotation:

> I ended up collaborating a whole lot more with other principals. When you're in the principalship, it's very easy to be siloed in because you are just focused on your school, but I spent more time asking other principals, "OK, how are you doing this?" Not necessarily to copy them, but sometimes just to reinforce that I was on the right track. And then they would also contact me and be like, "how are you handling that?" So we spent more time aligning ourselves and we actually found out that by being aligned with our approach, it created a better message.

In many ways, the idea of the principalship moved from being a very individualized role to one that required a network of support. Another agreed stating, "having that critical network of other leaders, whether it's, you know, you're sitting in an AP role or you're sitting in a principal's role, or you're sitting in a district level role and you've got to have those people around you … and you need to be able to listen to them." And another agreed, "it created a space as a leader where I was able to collaborate so much more than we ever had before." This level of administrative support was critical to their survival as leaders during this time.

In addition to collaboration amongst their leader colleagues, principals created a sense of collaboration amongst the teachers and staff in their schools. Just as with the principals, teachers were scared—they, too, were not prepared with the tools needed to succeed during a pandemic. What they needed above all else, though, was each other. Throughout the pandemic, teachers "shared how much their collaborative teams had meant to them, even just those times where they're really over-planning. And it wasn't even just back in the spring when they were home. They just wanted to talk to somebody, you know?" And once principals developed these spaces for teachers, "we had a real sense of collective efficacy there for a minute that I don't know that we've ever had before." Another agreed, stating, "We all work together and we just wanted people who had our vision for the school and wanted to work for the kids. And we just kind of kept that, just repeating that mantra of we're here for the students." Principals quickly recognized the importance of these collaborative spaces not only for planning but for survival.

Both collaboration and communication emphasize the significance of building and nurturing relationships and trust during this time. As one principal admitted, "I think what got us through that and now this is what everybody kind of says is the relationship piece." After all, "schools are not places that should feel impersonal," but this was highlighted even more during

the pandemic, and principals noted that they had to intentionally work to emphasize connections and relationships among their teachers and students during this time so that everyone felt supported. This included Zoom meetings where principals checked on teachers and asked about their lives, but it also included instances where they shared more about their personal lives in a concerted effort to humanize themselves, make themselves more vulnerable, and connect on a deeper level. In one case, it even included a virtual cocktail hour. Regardless of the focus or set up, regular meetings for team building were vital. As one participant said, "We started having an everyday town hall meeting. That's what I called faculty meetings, and it was something we had already started monthly with our initiative. But it was amazing how it brought us together as a faculty, just having 15 minutes with each other every day."

Similarly, leadership worked to connect with parents, especially those who may have been parents of kindergarteners, sixth graders, ninth graders, or any of those grades where students were entering a new schooling environment (elementary, middle, or high) for the first time. For example, parents of kindergarteners, as noted, had never visited the schools—they did not know what the car rider line looked like, what happened at lunch, or what the halls of the school looked like. This took specialized care from principals to ensure parents and guardians that their children would be supported, as indicated in the following quotation:

> So, dealing with that anxiety and saying I know you can't come in the building, but the availability of meeting with me, we'll meet this way. We'll meet virtually. I'll show you my office. I'll talk to you about my kids. Like we'll find ways to connect. And That bridge, that gap. So that when we can meet in person we are able to build upon the relationship we already have. You know, parents who are upset if we don't have a
>
> relationship to begin with, it's a very challenging for me to work alongside you. You may not be willing to partner with me because you have no idea who I am. You have no idea what I stand for. You have no idea what our school is about because you've never been in here.

Several participants mentioned creating these bonds with parents and guardians whom they had never met, and there was a critical need to find different ways in which to build trust.

Leaders also recognized the importance of placing an emphasis on building and rebuilding trust with marginalized and underrepresented groups. As stated above, political, social, and economic issues were heightening during this time, and many students and families were experiencing the ramifications not only of COVID but also of disenfranchisement and oppression based on race and class. This can be seen in the following participant quotation:

> … there were groups of kids that were hurting and, you know, they just, they just, you know, for whatever reason felt wronged and this, that, and the other. So it was every conversation, every day, every week. And it was just, you know, you just had to win every interaction and every interaction had to be a winning interaction to try and build that trust back. And so that took a long time. And I feel like we're starting to emerge from some of that. But some of our groups still feel somewhat disenfranchised.

Whether it came down to wearing masks, including books with supposedly "divisive concepts," or other issues, principals had a responsibility to ensure that those voices who had been previously silenced had room to emerge and be heard. Moreso than before, there was a divide between individuals that had to be navigated carefully by leaders.

Lastly, in terms of relationships, principals quickly recognized that they needed to collaborate with one another to plan for their schools and support teachers, students, and families. Beyond mere collaboration, though, they realized the significance of stronger relationships amongst their colleagues. As one principal stated, “You know, it’s find your tribe, like, find that group of principals you can collaborate with.” This was especially key for newer principals with whom we talked—for those who were early on in their careers, such relationships were vital to their growth and survival in leadership during this time.

Leadership Growth and Learning During the COVID Crisis

Creating spaces for intentionality and growth was a theme that emerged throughout all the responses, as participants focused on their own personal growth and the growth of others, including future leaders. Successful leaders are reflective leaders, and these leaders utilized this interview process to deeply reflect on their experience. Many spoke of the need to be vulnerable and transparent, along with a healthy dose of self-awareness. Knowing their core values and mission enabled the leader in making decisions that meet the needs of students. One interviewee stated this clearly in the following quotation:

> One, is you have to really know who you are at your core. You've got to know kind of your guiding principles, your beliefs and that is what's going to get you through difficult things like you know how you make decisions, why you make decisions because you're going to have a bazilian decisions that you never knew.

Another tied self-awareness to mental well-being stating, “if you're not there as the leader, if you don't get yourself through the grief process You cannot guide other people through it.” A sense of self and vulnerability were key factors in these principals’ leadership during the pandemic.

With any leadership position, the presupposition is that because of the position, the leader has all the answers, as stated here:

> When anytime people come to you with a dilemma, all the heads just turn. It’s like you're supposed to have all the problem’s right answers and you really don't have and you’ve got to work through that. But the weight that you carry is absolutely exhausting and making sure you understand how to balance.

Leaders acknowledged, relying on their core values, that they did not have all the answers, but they made it a goal to create that space where staff feels they could come to them for guidance and support. Having mentors was key for each of the respondents, with some having regular principal gatherings and others seeking more diverse input, as seen in the following quotation:

> So that vulnerability space of being able to say, you know, have your go-to, find your go-to people whether that be your mentor that is assigned to you, do not be afraid to tell them. I don't know what I'm doing or I need help here. What would you do in this situation?

It was through this collaboration that leaders were able to balance the burden of leadership during the pandemic, express vulnerability, and collaborate and distribute the work.

Leaders came to understand the importance of knowing all facets of their building and recognizing that this is a “relationship business.” Certainly, there is a need to understand the operations side of the building, but “really understanding the perspective and the purview of everybody in the building and how if even one piece goes away, you can’t function or function as

well" was fundamental to continued growth. This was especially daunting for the principal who was opening a school when the pandemic occurred, because those operational and relational components had not been established.

When asked what they would share with future leaders, the focus was on understanding the change process and a realization that there will always be challenges:

> … yes, the pandemic was hard. But I mean, you remember when you were in that role, you're going to have the death of a student. Um, the work, even in a good year, the work is hard and draining, and when you have to make hard decisions and people don't understand, I mean, you know. Somebody is always upset about something. It's not an easy job.

These principals reiterated the need to engage in transparent communication and be thoughtful and deliberative as "most things are not emergencies." Clearly these respondents, while acknowledging the difficulty of navigating through this time, modeled self-awareness and vulnerability and recognized the value in creating spaces for intentionality and growth.

Discussion

Heifetz's (1994) adaptive leadership theory was posited with respect to the evolution of society or an organization as it goes through inevitable changes, including crisis management. We see its benefit in understanding how these principals came to adapt and help others adapt during this compounded and complex crisis. Adaptive leadership takes a process approach (Northouse, 2022), and understanding the complexities of the situation and interaction of the players, the leader observes, interprets, and intervenes to successfully lead the organization through adaptive challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009). Applying the theory of adaptive leadership proposed by Heifetz (1994) and further explained by Northouse (2022) to the findings in this study, we see a connection. Indeed, adaptive leadership incorporates four perspectives: systems, biological, service orientation, and psychotherapeutic, as noted earlier. Communication, collaboration, and relationship/trust building emerged as overarching skills the principals used to adapt during this crisis. From a systems perspective, communication was altered and increased immensely in the complex environment as principals sought to comprehend and interpret the daily changes the pandemic brought about, along with addressing the politically divisive environment. The importance of building relationships and trust among stakeholders can be viewed through biological and psychotherapeutic biases. It was vital for principals to support others in understanding that they could adapt and thrive in this new environment. Many stressed to their teachers that it was all right to try new solutions even if they made mistakes. The principals did not temper the situation, but, rather, they helped stakeholders face the harsh reality of the situation and supported them through it. They also understood that they were tasked with caring for their students, staff, and parents. According to Heifetz (1994), service orientation involves having a practical and prescriptive view of the situation. The principals looked for ways to use their skills and knowledge to help others but also found that they had to analyze the situation and look for new solutions and different ways of leading.

The following are six leadership behaviors pivotal to adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2022) to which the principals' actions are aligned:

1. Get on the Balcony – Principals had to step back and look at the entire picture and how each group (students, staff, and parents) was affected by the multiple challenges.
2. Identify the Adaptive Challenge – Principals indicated that they had to identify different challenges that arose daily, or hourly as one principal described the situation. They had to consider cultural norms that were in place, such as grading practices and work completion requirements, while they worked with staff to adapt.
3. Regulate Distress – All principals discussed their efforts to calm those around them and encourage and motivate them to persevere.
4. Maintain Disciplined Attention - Principals constantly monitored several challenges, focusing on what was best for students.
5. Give the Work Back to the People – While the principals provided direction, many spoke of collaborating with their teachers, support staff, counselors, and parents. Several realized that different groups needed different levels of direction and guidance.
6. Protect Leadership Voices from Below – Principals described how they sought input from all groups. Some called on parents to see if they were getting the support they needed. Principals shared how they had to listen to all sides of the divisive political views and maintain neutrality while continuing to do what was best for students.

The leadership tools most prominently explored and implemented by principals in this study were communication, collaboration, and relationship/trust building, which can be seen across the spectrum of adaptive leadership approaches.

Research Study Implications

Principal Preparation Programs (PPP) certainly cover multiple types of leadership, but we posit that adaptive leadership may need to be incorporated more fully, especially when it comes to leading during crises. As Epperly et al. (2022) noted, current crisis management models do not necessarily meet our needs. We posit, however, that stronger leadership foundations are needed, before we can expand on crisis management models for school leaders. For the leaders in this study, they learned to continually adapt, and enable their staff and community to adapt, to situations happening on a daily, or sometimes hourly, basis. While experts at communication, the forms of sharing information changed drastically and quickly. They quickly recognized the need to continually find ways to demystify new information and at times misinformation. They realized the importance of adapting to leading over video conferencing systems and creating mechanisms to reach those who did not have access to certain platforms. These leaders found they needed to collaborate more frequently and be vulnerable and honest in their interactions. They recognized the value in creating spaces where faculty, parents, and most importantly, students, felt safe and had the tools necessary for learning, and for physical and mental health. In short, these leaders realized that they needed to think differently. While no PPP can fully prepare a leader for every challenge they may face, they can certainly provide real-life scenarios where the candidate should demonstrate adaptability.

Adaptability certainly took center stage in dealing with issues of mental health, their own and others, and with the rise in distrust over masks and curricula associated with diversity and inclusion. It is clear in reading through all the transcripts, many struggled with their own mental health with the added burden of worrying about everyone else in their stakeholder circles,

encompassing school, community, and home. Seen as heroes at the outset of the pandemic, a growing national distrust added to that burden. In varying degrees, these leaders adapted to these challenges. It was clear that several of these leaders drew from their own core beliefs and sense of strength in navigating this new space, and this reminded us that we need to focus on how PPPs can prepare aspiring leaders to better understand their core beliefs and attain an understanding of the need to take care of themselves so they can take care of others. Maak et al. (2021) in their study of how global political leaders managed the Covid crisis, argued that it is time to re-examine leader development "and encourage 'real world learning' through programmes which challenge participants to face challenges first-hand, whether these pertain to global pandemics, climate change, poverty, or inclusion" (p. 81). PPPs need strong partnerships with districts that afford residency experiences where aspiring leaders can experience this real-world learning.

This begins with the strong mentorship of candidates for the principalship, which is central to the research for improving PPPs (Herman, et al., 2022; Louis, et al., 2010; Mitgang, 2012). PPPs would benefit from helping candidates identify their strengths and areas for growth along with a focus on the dispositions needed to lead in situations that require adaptive leadership. Not only that, but almost every principal interviewed discussed the need for leaders to be comfortable with being vulnerable and honest in their decision-making and communication. This necessitates practice and having a team or group of colleagues on which to lean. While the principals in this study had to discover that group along the way, PPPs can assist in developing such groups earlier on so that these networks already exist.

Recommendations for Future Research

We recognize that there are limitations to this study as we interviewed principals only from one school district. Our experience, however, indicates that these stories are not unique to this setting. PPP's would benefit from more research on how effective principals from different school environments manage during a crisis. It would also be helpful to know which adaptations made during a crisis have continued to be sustained and beneficial.

We also do not want to insinuate that all principal preparation programs are lacking in terms of preparing leaders to be adaptive. Indeed, we keep the words of Heifetz in mind when he stated, "We own collective responsibility for the global conditions that we impact and that impact us. We will not make these changes based on authority-based leadership, but rather with each of us taking a leadership role" (Metcalf, 2016, n.p.).

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic was an unprecedented phenomenon causing major disruption to many organizations, including schools. Leaders across the spectrum utilized multiple approaches to leadership depending on the situation, and certainly these types of leadership overlap in meaning and action and have value in different ways. As we read through these thick and rich descriptions of the leadership of these 17 principals, though, adaptive leadership became the foundation that stood out amongst other leadership approaches.

There is no doubt that “global conditions” will continue to impact the school building, and principals must be prepared to lead in these environments. Adaptive leadership has been a driving source in all sectors across the world (Goniewicz & Hertelendy, 2023). As stated before, our participants worried, “What if we don’t get it right?” and it is realistic to understand that we will not always “get it right.” We can, however, create spaces where leaders feel more prepared to enter crises, and adaptive leadership is one approach that could help current and future leaders to be proactive rather than reactive amid complex and compounded crises.

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Developing School Leaders' Instructional Leadership Practices Through Reflection

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Professional development (PD) for school leaders is focused primarily on documenting professional learning and identifying growth areas. However, the impact of reflections related to PD on sustaining school leaders' instructional capacity remains rather unaddressed. We examined how practicing school leaders develop their instructional leadership practices through the use of the Reflection Cycle included in PD. This study was anchored in the conceptual framework of the Reflection Cycle offered by Author et al. (2001). Reflection and transformation are two central components in this framework. To this end, we collected the data through school leader participants' reflections related to PD. The constant comparative method of the data analysis led to the emergence of three major themes as to how school leaders reflect on the improvement of building instructional capacity to improve teachers' pedagogy. Our findings revealed an increased awareness of instructional leadership and decision-making as informed by the practicing school leaders' reflections. Structured reflections via the use of the Reflection Cycle show promise for enhancing school leaders' plans for transforming and improving their instructional leadership practices.

Keywords: reflection; instructional leadership; professional development (PD); school leaders; high-needs schools; transformation.

Instructional leadership development requires reflection and action (Author, 2019), and school leaders' busy, demanding schedules often make it difficult for them to regularly reflect upon their instructional leadership. Reflection has been one of the key competencies for effective school leaders as the workplace becomes increasingly complex (Roberts, 2008). Encouraging reflective practice on the part of school leaders, as Author (2001) stated, fosters self-awareness of their limitations in addition to learning from past practices, events, and experiences. However, what constitutes reflective school leaders serving underserved schools is still a matter of debate and is relatively unexplored in the research literature. This study was anchored in the conceptual framework of the Reflection Cycle offered by Author et al. (2001). Reflection and transformation are two central components in this framework. We examined how the practicing school leaders develop their instructional leadership practices through reflection.

As a result of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) standards, according to Bengtson et al. (2020), school leaders have been challenged to think beyond traditional notions of instructional leadership. This suggests that school leaders must reconsider the use of data to include community, individual, and organizational aspects of their positions. For our study, we used the Texas Principal Standards as outlined in the Texas Administrative Code (Title 19, Part 2, Chapter 149, Subchapter BB, RULE §149.2001). The standard related to instructional leadership is as follows:

The principal is responsible for ensuring every student receives high-quality instruction.

(A) Knowledge and skills.

(i) Effective instructional leaders:

(I) prioritize instruction and student achievement by developing and sharing a clear definition of high-quality instruction based on best practices from research.

(II) implement a rigorous curriculum aligned with state standards;

(III) analyze the curriculum to ensure that teachers align content across grades and that curricular scopes and sequences meet the needs of their diverse student populations;

(IV) model instructional strategies and set expectations for the content, rigor, and structure of lessons and unit plans; and

(V) routinely monitor and improve instruction by visiting classrooms, giving formative feedback to teachers and attending grade or team meetings.

(ii) In schools led by effective instructional leaders, data are used to determine instructional decisions and monitor progress. Principals implement common interim assessment cycles to track classroom trends and determine appropriate interventions. Staff have the capacity to use data to drive effective instructional practices and interventions. The principal's focus on instruction

> results in a school filled with effective teachers who can describe, plan, and implement strong instruction and classrooms filled with students actively engaged in cognitively challenging and differentiated activities. (Texas Administrative Code, 2014, p. 1).

Principals and assistant principals are assessed with the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (TPESS; Texas Education Agency, 2023) using the Texas Principal Standards. The TPESS incorporates the following instructional leadership competencies: (a) implement rigorous curricula and assessments aligned with state standards, including college and career readiness standards; (b) develop high-quality instructional practices among teachers that improve student performance; (c) monitor multiple forms of student data to inform instructional and intervention decisions, and maximize student achievement, and (d) ensure that effective instruction maximizes the growth of individual students, supports equity, and eliminates the achievement gap.

Review of Literature

In this section, we reviewed (a) reflection for school leaders and (b) reflection related to professional development for school leaders. The review of literature follows in that order.

Reflection for School Leaders

Dewey (1933), who promoted that the function of reflective practice is to transform a conflict situation into a coherent and settled one, first introduced the concept of reflection. Dewey's concepts related to reflection provided a foundation for current theories and were inclusive of a knowledge base for thinking. For Dewey (1933), critical reflection entails "(1) a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty in which thinking originates, and (2) an act of searching, hunting, inquiring to find materials that will resolve the doubt, to settle and dispose of the perplexity" (p. 12). Much of the work related to reflection into the 21st century followed Dewey's concepts.

The continual process of reflection, as Shamir and Eilam (2005) and later Jefferson et al. (2014) noted, is a key to improving one's leadership. For leaders to meet their work-related challenges, they need to enrich and deepen their understanding of current theory and practice, attend relevant professional meetings, and seek dialogue with colleagues while being reflective (Fisher & Waller, 2013; Gümüs, 2019). Without the predisposition to reflect on their practice, school leaders are less likely to improve their performance and transform schools.

In the 1990s, Author (1995) and Short (1997) examined how reflection contributed to the improvement and growth of school leaders as professionals. They noted that reflection improves leadership skills by assisting school leaders in: (a) solving problems, (b) monitoring progress, (c) accelerating leading change, and (d) enhancing organizational success and student achievement. When leaders take time to reflect on meaningful topics, as suggested by and Aviles (2021), they often come to view reflection as a key factor in school improvement.

Previously, researchers (i.e., Drake et al., 2023; Genao, 2016; Glanz & Heimann, 2019; Jefferson & Anderson, 2017; Patterson, 2015) revealed that reflection is a highly valued attribute for effective leadership teams. Branson (2007) described reflection, used by Queensland primary

school principals, as an effective tool for providing principals with the necessary self-knowledge of their values to enhance their authentic leadership practice. Patterson (2015) and Smith and Shaw (2011) had empirically examined how reflection contributes to leadership capacity but did not describe how this could be made mainstream. Also, Moller (2023) revealed a more nuanced understanding of collective participation using reflection practice, collective dialogue, and along with developing agency for school leaders. Given the demands under which school leaders work, it is critical for administrators to discover "their own readiness" for change by becoming reflective (Zimmerman, 2011, p. 107). Wu and Crocco (2019) examined reflection for leadership development, revealing that the measurement for reflection remains rather unaddressed in the literature. Reviewing the application of reflection, they suggested that the outcomes of reflective practices vary, ranging from personal development to team efficiency. Thus, reflection has been found to be valuable in helping school leaders understand, evaluate, and, if necessary, adapt their leadership strategies. Furthermore, Blase and Blase (2002) have identified reflection and growth as two major themes needed to define an effective instructional leader. Principals who were effective instructional leaders from the perspective of teachers tended to use a wide range of strategies, including inquiry, reflection, exploration, and experimentation. They found that effective principals talked with teachers to promote reflection and professional growth.

Reflection Related to Professional Development for School Leaders

Professional development (PD) for school leaders is focused primarily on documenting professional learning and identifying growth areas. However, the impact of reflections related to PD on sustaining school leaders' instructional capacity remains rather unexamined. Thus, practicing school leaders need to reflect on the nature of their professional leading and learning through development of artifacts. Zur and Eisikovits (2016) indicated that successful school leaders constantly use the reflection process through the development of artifacts to improve their leadership and enhance collaboration. Specifically, they found that reflection through the process of portfolio development promoted the following among superintendents, principals, and teachers: (a) collaboration and communication, (b) trust-building in a non-threatening environment, (c) leadership growth, and (d) problem solving skills (Zur & Eisikovits, 2016).

At the turn of the century, principal PD captured in portfolios were common tools for assessing what practicing principals had learned and how their learning could improve future actions (Author, 2001). Foundationally, Author (2001) suggested that PD for school leaders should meet the following assumptions:

1. The principals' practice greatly influences school outcomes.
2. Leadership expectations are understood by everyone.
3. Active reflection is necessary to set goals and learn from past experiences.
4. Professional development (PD), mentoring, and coaching are key to the appraisal process. (p. 19)

According to Author (2001), reflection captured in portfolios involves: (a) the selection of an artifact; (b) sharing leadership experiences with the artifact, and (c) an action plan. Principal portfolios, which represent participants' growth as evidenced by a collection of artifacts, not only encourage reflection but also improve professional learning and growth (Author, 2001). Thus,

reflection became an integral part of the portfolios related to PD for principals, for it motivated school leaders to seek new understanding of and solutions to arising issues.

In studies employing reflection related to PD, researchers (e.g., Chikoko et al., 2011; Knoeppel & Logan, 2011) found that the reflection process has resulted in improved leadership practice in such areas as problem-solving, resource management, and most importantly, student progress. Slepcevic-Zach and Stock (2018) confirmed a significant and positive impact of reflection related to PD, helping principals to improve their self-regulation, engagement, and awareness. Reflection related to PD requires more systematic higher-order thinking about events and experiences leading to deep-level analysis (Nesbit, 2012). Using a transformative learning theory, Klar et al. (2020) revealed that the consideration of the practicing school leaders' problem through reflection allowed them to increase their leadership capabilities and act more systematically through participating in a leadership learning community.

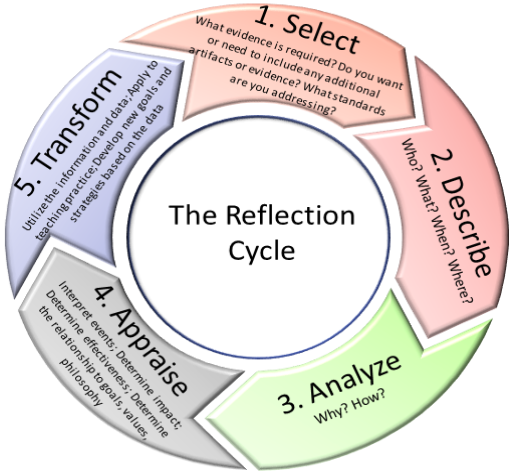
Conceptual Framework: The Reflection Cycle

Previously, researchers (e.g., Hallinger, 2003; Nir & Hameiri, 2014; Printy, 2010) suggested that school leaders play a central role in implementing instructional practices such as supervision of instruction, communication with teachers, resource allocation, and budgeting. We built our conceptual framework on the Reflection Cycle (Author, 2001). Though reflective practice has been brought forward by Schön (1987), this Reflection Cycle (Author, 2001) was groundbreaking as the first reflective framework specifically developed for principals and other school leaders to improve their leadership practices.

Inspired by the idea of a personal and professional reflection that is placed within a PD for school leaders (Author, 2001), we aimed to determine how well the practicing school leaders developed their instructional leadership practices through the Reflection Cycle in PD. To gather these perspectives, the Reflection Cycle (Author, 2001) was embedded at the end of each module of online PD content to facilitate school leaders' reflections. Participants moved through five stages as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Reflection Cycle (Author, 2001; Used with permission)



The Reflection Cycle served as a guide for continuous and reflective learning and transformative thinking about practice. Author (2001) offered five steps for developing reflective activities, including: (a) select the artifact; (b) describe the circumstances related to the artifact; (c) analyze the *why* of the selection of the artifact and *how* of its relationship to the activities; (d) appraise the artifact and evaluate how it relates to knowledge; and (e) transform the existing practice by translating theory to practice and developing plans for future practice (see Figure 1).

Reflective practice (Schön, 1987), participatory action research (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019), and experiential learning (Dewey, 1933) explained how individuals learn through experience. This framework helped us understand different cycles of reflection in the development of individual reflections. This helped us better understand the Reflection Cycle as a structure embedded in the PD.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to examine how the practicing school leaders develop their instructional leadership practices through the use of the Reflection Cycle included in PD. We sought to answer this research question: In what ways did school leaders develop their instructional leadership practices through the use of the Reflection Cycle included in PD?

Method

Research Context and Approach

This study was derived from the project XXX (Grant # XXXX; Author, 2017) grant under the U.S. Department of Education SEED Program, which focused on school leaders working in high-needs schools across the state of Texas. The project incorporated multiple innovative approaches to developing school leaders in building instructional capacity at the campus level.

In our study, we examined school leaders in Texas who serve many English learners (defined in government documents as students who speak a language other than English as their home language; however, we will use the term, “emergent bilinguals,” in this paper). In Texas Education Code (TEC) 29.08, at-risk students are defined as those at risk of dropping out of school, which includes EB students. In general, high-needs schools or schools with high-needs students serve EBs and any student group within TEC 29.08.

In the larger grant, we worked with the leadership teams, including principals, assistant principals, and instructional skill specialists, from 18 school districts across the state of Texas. Following the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017-2018), our districts fell into four basic types: City (n = 6, 32%), Suburban (n = 7, 38%), Town (n = 2, 12%), and Rural (n = 3, 18%), including charter schools. With the four basic types outlined by the NCES, we assigned charter school districts to the relevant major category.

For this study, we used a phenomenological approach (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2016), which captures lived experiences through relevant and extensive written reflections to determine experiences with a particular phenomenon under investigation. A phenomenological approach was adopted for this study as it enabled the exploration of the

participants' reflections related to PD. We investigated the responses of each participant related to the research question and then looked across all responses for similarities and differences.

Participants

The participants of this study included 40 school leaders at the elementary school level in the state of Texas. The participants were from campuses with traditionally underrepresented students, including emergent bilingual students. Table 1 presents the demographic information of participating school leaders in the present research. Out of 44 principals, a total of 40 participated in the VMC Questionnaire. As displayed in Table 1, 12.5% of the participants (n = 5) were younger than 35; 32.5% (n = 13) of the participants were 35-44 years old; 42.5% (n = 17) were 45-54 years old, and 12.5% of the participants (n = 5) were older than 55. Approximately, forty-eight percent (n = 19) of the participants were White, followed by Hispanic (22.5%, n = 9), Black/African American (20%, n = 8), Asian (7.5%, n = 3) and others (3%, n = 1). Concerning their experience of being an administrator, 15% of participants (n = 6) had below one year of experience, 15% of them have worked as an administrator for 1-2 years (n = 6). As displayed in Table 1, 27.5% of participants (n = 11) reported that they have worked as an administrator for 3-5 years, 25% of them (n = 10) claimed their administrator experience as 6-10 years, and 17.5% of them had above 11 years (n = 7) of experience as an administrator. Detailed information of the participants demographic variables is given in Table 1.

Table 1
School Leaders' Demographic Information

Variables	Categories	N	Percentage (%)
Age	25-34	5	12.5%
	35-44	13	32.5%
	45-54	17	42.5%
	55+	5	12.5%
Ethnicity	White	19	47.5%
	Black or African American	8	20.0%
	Asian	3	7.5%
	Hispanic	9	22.5%
	Other	1	2.5%
Administrator Experience	< 1 year	6	15.0%

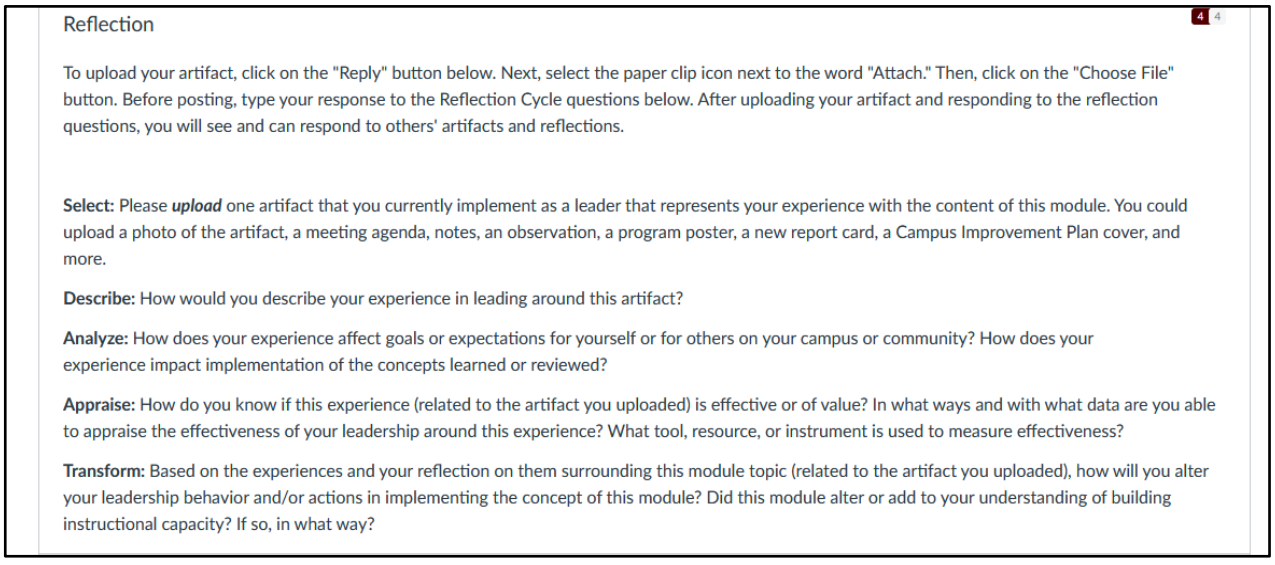
1-2 years	6	15.0%
3-5 years	11	27.5%
6-10 years	10	25.0%
11+ years	7	17.5%

Instrument

To document the school leaders' reflections, we used the Reflection Cycle as an instrument to collect and analyze the data. We allowed for individuality regarding participants' written reflections in course modules related to PD. Although we did not specify the length, the participants' reflections were consistent, with an average length of one page. Each participant was required to use module (topic) as an artifact and write their reflections addressing PD using the Reflection Cycle. The practicing school leaders applied the five steps of the Reflection Cycle to write their experiences while using insights gained from the PD. The data from the written reflections (See Figure 2) in the Reflection Cycle were analyzed via an inductive data driven qualitative analysis.

Figure 2

Written Reflection Questions Prompt



Intervention and Data Collection Procedure

The participants used the online platform, Canvas, to improve implementation of instructional strategies for school leaders via online, *work at your own pace* modules. PD certificates for online courses are provided as continuing PD (CPE) for participants' professional evaluation and improvement. In PD modules, there is a reflection that is based on the Author's (2001) Reflection Cycle, which should lead to pedagogical transformation.

The participants took part in scheduled four PD course modules on a weekly basis. The PD modules included the L.E.A.D.E.R. model which included Leading Questions, Engagement (an engaging video, story, visual), Applied Research, Discussion related to research, Example(s) of applications of the topic, and Reflection (using the Reflection Cycle). As noted previously, the L.E.A.D.E.R. model in PD is applied to all course modules. Those are as follows:

1. The *Leading Question* helped the participating school leaders focus on the topic with a deep, probing question.
2. The *Engagement* gave the participants an example or a visual representation of the topic.
3. The *Applied Research* provided research-based evidence that supported the topic. Without the applied research in a VPLC, the discussion is not enriched.
4. The *Discussion* section consisted of thoughtful, insightful questions that built on the leading question(s) and research section of the VPLC.
5. The *Example* section gave participants a concrete example they could take away to improve their instructional leadership practice.
6. The final step in the VPLC was *Reflection with the ultimate action being Transformation*.

For these four PD modules, the focus was on building instructional leadership capacity to influence the teaching of emergent bilingual students. These course modules included instructional leadership-related topics such as: (a) leading and learning in professional learning communities (PLC), (b) monitoring curriculum, (c) improving instruction, and (d) using data to make instructional decisions. Each module took between 45-60 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, we reviewed and coded verbatim written quotations from participants' responses and reflections via the Strauss and Corbin (1990) constant comparative method. We first worked through open coding, then axial coding, and finally selective coding within predetermined codes noted as attribute codes by Miles et al. (2014). The predetermined codes were aligned to the four course modules that participants took part in.

The recurring themes were selected through comparison within and between each individual participant's responses. The researchers continued to explore the emerging themes until they observed no change in the data. We triangulated the data by reviewing it independently and then coming together to arrive at a consensus about the themes. The data were triangulated to identify points of convergence and divergence (Creswell & Clark, 2017) via each investigator. To increase the rigor of the video analysis and document the rationale behind emerging categories, the entire research team determined to conduct another round of review.

They again independently coded the selected participants' response, and then they shared their coding schemes for cross-comparisons among the coders.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

For establishing trustworthiness and credibility, we adopted three strategies: (a) low inference descriptors, (b) member checking, and (c) investigator triangulation (Johnson, 1997). We used low inference descriptors to collect verbatims (i.e., direct quotations) from participants' reflections. Member checking was accomplished by having the participants validate that the information was consistent with their responses. A summary of the findings was shared with the participants to review. We adopted investigator triangulation (i.e., four researchers) in collecting and interpreting the data to enrich trustworthiness through individual coding, and we coded the reflections independently. After completing the coding independently, two of the researchers reviewed the emerging themes until they reached an agreement, and two others of the researchers reviewed and clarified the themes along with low inference descriptors.

Findings

We addressed in what ways the practicing school leaders develop their instructional leadership practices using the Reflection Cycle in PD. The participants shared their leadership experiences related to PD. They used the Reflection Cycle to discuss their own thoughts and areas of improvement. Three major themes were found that exemplify how the school leaders develop their instructional leadership practices via a structured reflection process for each. Table 2 depicts the three themes and thematic descriptors underlying participants' reflections.

Table 2

School Leaders' Development of Their Instructional Leadership Practices Using the Reflection Cycle

Themes	Sub-themes	Thematic descriptors

Learning in PLC	Opportunities to reflect on leadership practices	Collaborative partnership Communication with leadership teams Experiences of peers
Monitoring instructional leadership	Curriculum management practices	Implementation of the curriculum Assessing teaching practices Probe the cause of instructional challenges
Transforming instructional leadership	Direction to refine instruction for teachers of EBs	Instructional capacity building for teachers Modeling reflective practices for teachers Goal setting Applying the gained knowledge/skills
	Transformative instructional leadership practices for helping teachers	

The excerpts below were taken from the practicing school leaders' reflections.

Theme 1: Learning in Professional Learning Communities

Opportunities to Reflect on Leadership Practices

Under this theme, the practicing school leaders indicated that the discussion and reflection inspired them to reflect on their instructional leadership practices. The participants indicated a positive impact of leading and learning in a PLC (a module topic) for leaders regarding awareness, reflection, and transformation of their practices. The participants' responses related to their future practices as to how they would tailor their instructional leadership practices to teachers of EBs. A school leader stated:

> *This [PD- Leading and Learning in PLCs] module added to my understanding of building instructional capacity through making a clearer designation between general PD and PLC learning experiences. I will try my best to make sure that the things we cover are truly matching the needs of those we serve during the learning sessions*.

Echoing the same ideas, another participant added:

> *This experience affects goals for the leaders in that they are expected to share their learning from PD with others. This experience impacts their process of implementation in that it allows them to share and practice their learning in PD.*

Additional importance to professional learning was the encouragement of the incorporation of new knowledge bases. The practicing school leaders believed that participation in the PD was valuable, and they reported certain practices they learned were not practices on their current campus. The school leaders' goals were to reflect and transfer what they learned to improve teachers' instruction on their campus. A school leader reflected:

> *This module was very useful to convince our district leadership team to focus more on professional learning rather than PD. I would like to continue using the VPLC L.E.A.D.E.R. model that we started implementing this year that was uploaded in the module. Our district has schools in three different cities, and it is not cost effective to get together regularly. Therefore, we started using the VPLC model similar to this program that we are in. We noticed that our teachers have great practices that they are sharing with each other.*

Similarly, a school leader noted:

> *I know in my district we have a lot of professional development and not as many professional learning opportunities. We have spent a lot of time teaching the masses on things that the district administration thinks the teachers need to know if they sit and get sessions. These are not all bad, however, there is little connection between those training sessions and the impact on student learning. This was better than what we have received previously.*

The participants indicated that the most important takeaway from the PD on Leading and Learning on PLC is to reflect how school leaders can use the course module to help them improve their teachers' instructional practices for EBs. They indicated they learned differences between general PD and PLCs.

Theme 2: Monitoring Instructional Leadership

Curriculum Management Practices

To build instructional leadership capacity, we worked with the school leaders, via two PD modules (Improving Instruction and Monitoring Curriculum and Instruction), to monitor their practices and help them determine what avenues might help them improve instruction for teachers of EBs while reflecting on their own practice. A school leader commented:

> *I monitor the lesson plan, and I use benchmarks to see if student progress was made. We are making great progress and teachers are taking ownership of teaching.*

The practicing school leaders worked together on issues related to teaching and learning to improve curriculum and instruction on their campuses. Through individual and shared reflections, participants referred to some common instructional practices that teachers used in their classrooms. These included but were not limited to: (a) guided lesson plan, (b) common assessment analysis, and (c) 5E model (i.e., Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate) along with explicit instruction. While some of the participants were familiar with these concepts, re-reading the research (in the ***A***pplied Research step in the L.E.***A***.D.E.R. format) gave them time to reflect and remember how to implement these practices. A principal shared context for a lesson plan format for teaching EBs:

Before I arrived, a lesson plan format did not exist. Everyone did their own thing which is fine in some schools. But at my school because we have 100% EBs, we needed a structure that was similar in instruction in each class. Our ultimate goals were to be student-centered and to increase language development.

Shared reflective practices reminded the participants what to include in their lesson plans. They shared in the written reflections that they used the lesson plan at the beginning of the school academic year to guide teachers and their leadership teams when planning and monitoring. The participants came to the agreement on how to monitor and evaluate effective instructional practices as they engaged in the two related PD modules. Two school leaders reflected as follows:

With assessment, we can see where the students are. We can also see their growth and what areas they need improvement on. Through monitoring, we can help teachers focus on improving their instructional delivery.

Self and regular evaluation of the implemented program is a must to see the outcomes and take necessary actions towards the ultimate goals. We have to fix the weak areas and continue emphasizing the strength areas by appreciating the individuals and teams involved in the monitoring process.

The school leaders shared best practices in every module with each other while reflecting on analyzing and monitoring effective instructional strategies employed by the school as well as areas wherein teachers of EBs could improve their instruction. One of the participants reflected as follows:

This module helped to pinpoint how I can identify which teachers need more help and support in analyzing data and monitoring the effectiveness of their own instruction. It helped me to transform my practice by asking more probing questions to ensure teachers are capable of accurately analyzing their curriculum and instruction.

Similarly, another school leader commented:

I will go through explicit instruction strategies with my team and teachers to be able to cover EB students' needs. Administrative team supervising all teachers' performance and goals for each test to see improvement. Each teacher knows their students' scores and their needs. So, they have different strategies for EBs. If we are not going to monitor student performance closely, we cannot address their needs and we cannot find the correct solution.

Based on participants' written reflections, the school leaders tended to better ensure their instructional leadership practices to monitor curriculum and instruction implementation. Specifically, they seemed to learn that by asking probing questions of their teachers and engaging them in effective data analysis, the teachers and their teams could improve not only instruction, but also the curriculum for EBs. Also present in most of the participants' reflections, the participants were encouraged in the development of school-wide lesson plan formats that were geared toward enhancing student learning.

Theme 3: Transforming Instructional Leadership

Direction to Refine Instruction for Teachers of EBs

Based on the data, the participants wrote their reflections related to their PD module (Improving Instruction) learning and reflected on effective instruction employed by teachers. A school leader reflected that they assisted teachers of EBs, they were able to engage the teachers in discussions as follows:

> *One thing that I found effective when sharing the PD learning about inclusion and implementation of the English language proficiency standards in all subject areas, was that all teachers began to share their experiences with EBs and the different ways they would benefit if they were able to make better connections with the content.*

The participant went on further and added:

> *Based on the experiences and my reflection on them surrounding this module I will try to better ensure teacher knowledge and implementation on the elements. This added to my understanding of building instructional capacity in that it confirmed my current knowledge and reminded me of some key points.*

With a focus on building instructional capacity, the participants regarded the discussion and reflection activities within the PD as a tool that provided opportunities to reflect and support for improved instruction for teachers of EBs. Along the same lines, another participant reflected on the benefits of the reflection in PD as a tool to refine their instructional leadership and transform their practices. She commented as follows:

> *Using this module in planning helps us move toward better instructional planning and deliver the instruction to the student to make it impactful.*

Another participant reflected as follows:

> *Writing reflections added to my understanding of building instructional capacity through making a clearer designation between PD and learning experiences. I will try my best to make sure that the things we cover are truly matching the needs of those we serve during the learning sessions.*

With a focus on building instructional leadership capacity, PD modules using reflection activities provided opportunities for school leaders to develop their instructional leadership practices and consider effective strategies for teachers of EBs.

Transformative Instructional Leadership Practices for Helping Teachers

Reflections included in the PD module (Using Data to Make Instructional Decision) established a positive, personal, and individualized approach to influence and transform school leaders' practices. Without transformation of practice based on the new learning, there is little to no improved practice. Through reflection, aspiring school principals were able to better understand their own learning and leading objectives and seek additional experience while being engaged in PD to set their leadership goals. The participants' reflections evidenced more attention to involving the leadership team in solutions and in planning for the future. Planning for implementation revealed the importance of what actions to take and what evidence to use to determine the success of future actions. A principal, for example, asserted as follows:

> *I will continue empowering teachers to design their teaching based on data around the success of students and transforming the way instruction is implemented.*

Another principal noted:

Teachers feel empowered and have a sense of ownership, because they are responsible for identifying essential content to cover in a unit and develop the unit tests to assess it. The teachers have the support of deans and principal in their assessments.

A school leader commented further:

The student data presented in this module leads to teacher reflection and action plans for EBs. This may lead to needing additional language support, and language the teacher uses.

Another participant went on further and added:

After going through this module, I feel like we are on the right track when looking at student data. It is important to start with the end in mind and plan with a backwards design. Allow the student data to help inform instruction if it is reliable and valid. This was to help teachers to focus on what they want students to learn, how will we know if they learned it, and what will we do if they mastered it or need help.

The participants felt the Reflection Cycle within PD was a structured process which allowed the practicing school leaders to consider altering their practices around data usage and to develop and leverage their skills related to data-based instructional decisions as they help teachers to advance their awareness of EB's needs.

A school leader reflected as follows:

I absolutely enjoy completing the reflection after each module because I can really note what I have retained and how I could either enhance the current practices or introduce the new knowledge to colleagues and teachers. As the last module noted, data is vital to student success, and it is vital that we use it.

Another school leader noted a transformation based on their learning:

This will change my approach to be more intentional and purposeful in the implementation and evaluation of the data process on my campus. Ensuring that it is done with fidelity with periodic follow ups that will evaluate the need for adjustments.

Overall, evidence indicated that school leaders were able to transform their thoughts related to their actions using the Reflection Cycle within PD. The discussion and reflection activities enabled the participants to review not only their goals, but also what they believed related to the provision of support for their teachers' instructional capacities.

Discussion

In this study, we examined how the practicing school leaders develop their instructional leadership practices using the Reflection Cycle included in PD. We found three major themes related to the PD course modules which reflected the ways school leaders developed their instructional practices by (a) learning in PLC, (b) monitoring their practices, and (c) transforming their instructional leadership. We found that the Reflection Cycle was an effective tool which provided a structured process to inspire the school leaders to reflect on their own leadership practice. This allowed the school leaders to reflect on what they have learned related to PD and how they have used it to transform themselves and their campuses. We found that instructional modules and activities used in PD modules were applicable to various school settings and provided meaningful practices for school leaders.

The Reflection Cycle as a capacity-building tool was also deemed an an impactful tool that provided encouragement, reflection, and support to inspire the school leaders to reflect on their own leadership practice. As Lehrer (2013) and Bleach (2014) noted, the practicing school leaders became able to recognize their own leadership strengths and areas to grow through critical reflections and professional dialogues. We also found that school leaders are able to reflect on their actions, and based on their involvement in PD, they are inspired to engage in transformative leadership actions. In line with previous studies (Aas & Blom, 2018; Lumpkin, 2016; Margolis & Huggins, 2012), school leaders modeled reflection and inquiry while working with other leaders to foster empowerment and ownership of their own practices. In another study, Colmer (2017) indicated that the school leaders were empowered to lead and offer more support to their teachers of EBs through collaborative agency.

The use of reflections for improving the participants' leadership capacity in leading instruction, as evidenced earlier (Day et al., 2016; Hallinger, 2003) offers a new avenue for leadership development. For continuous professional learning, reflective practice was beneficial to school leaders with opportunities to reflect and identify strategies to constantly improve their practices (Martinez, 2015; Patterson, 2015). According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), instructional leadership practices are strengthened when practicing school leaders reflect, question routines, and support each other's professional learning. Using information reflected during the PD sessions impacted the participants' instructional practices which led to restructuring their thoughts around instructional leadership practices. In this study, we found that structured reflections using the Reflection Cycle in PD provided insights and support for inspired and transformative leadership actions.

Implications and Suggestions

This study took place during the closings of many schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when most leaders were struggling virtually to lead and learn in instruction. However, in this study, participants continued their learning and made their online platform a way to connect and increase essential knowledge. The PD modules included an overarching focus on (a) making reflection a priority and (b) inspiring school leaders to reflect on their own leadership practices. Significantly, the Reflection Cycle assisted the school leaders to consider transforming their future actions in the areas of leading instruction.

Key findings, highlighted in the current research, offer practical guidance for school leaders to refine their instructional leadership practices. The use of the Reflection Cycle with the PD modules, along with discussions helped school leaders during a time of isolation (with COVID-19); therefore, the use of such PD with their teachers and their school leadership teams in a face-to-face venue has potential to have even more engagement and discussion for reflection and improvement in instruction.

While our research-evidence-based PD modules have been linked to improvement in instructional leadership, identifying what practicing and aspiring school leaders learn from professional learning requires further investigation. Yet, conditions to sustain an effective PD require further research. We should also identify to what degree principals receiving the Reflection Cycle as a structure for their self-reflection possess attributes of reflective leaders. More research is undoubtedly needed to find strategic reflection that positively impacts

culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy on high-needs campuses. Future research is suggested to explore funds and resources that can adequately address support and expertise from a variety of organizations and partners in building individual leadership capacity for school transformation efforts, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence through effective and strategic reflection. As school leaders learn more about their own ways of leading high-needs schools via targeted, meaningful, and continuous PD, they can reflect on their experiences and expertise to develop their instructional leadership practices that can improve teachers' pedagogy for EBs.

Acknowledgments

The research described in this article is supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant (Project XXX; Author, 2017). We thank our project PIs, grant project coordinators, graduate assistants, school leaders, schools, and district officials who made this research possible.

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Teacher Psychological Capital and Leadership Responsibility for Developing Staff in the Great Resignation

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The purpose of this article was to review literature on teacher psychological capital (PsyCap) and leadership responsibility for developing staff. A related purpose involved investigating the phenomenon of second-career teachers (SCTs) with direct relevance for school administration. The research question guiding this analysis was, What does the research convey about teacher PsyCap in relation to the role of leaders and career switchers in particular? Peer-reviewed research from 2012 to 2023 and in international contexts was analyzed, totaling 89 articles and 5 books. In light of the teacher attrition crisis worsened by the so-called Great Resignation during the pandemic, career switcher numbers rose. Building leaders' support for maintaining a healthy environment and retaining a quality workforce can be bolstered with knowledge of teacher PsyCap and its relationship to satisfaction and happiness. Advancing education as a focus of study in positive psychology, the authors studied teachers' and leaders' conceptions of PsyCap, satisfaction, and happiness from a solution-generating approach. The role of leadership in investing in teacher psychology relative to hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO) is highlighted. Leaders' awareness of these qualities and how to foster them in order to both influence and manage positive attitudes and behaviors at work warrant deliberation on behalf of all staff, including SCTs. This topic in research and within schools deserves more attention.

Keywords: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO); school leaders; second-career teacher (SCT); teacher attrition; teacher psychological capital (PsyCap)

The purpose of this article was to review literature on teacher psychological capital (PsyCap) and leadership responsibility for developing staff. A related purpose involved investigating the phenomenon of second-career teachers (SCTs) with direct relevance for school administration. Due to the teacher attrition crisis compounded by the so-called Great Resignation during the pandemic, career switcher numbers have risen. A Teaching and Learning International Survey found that 24 out of 34 countries rely on SCTs—teachers with at least 2 years of career experience outside education (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020). A startling fact reported by a 2022 survey of the National Education Association is that 55% of teacher respondents planned to quit by spring 2023. This surpasses the pre-pandemic average rate (8%), which was over 16% for Title I schools. As it turned out, in April 2023, teacher attrition in the US peaked since the beginning of COVID-19, with 59,000 teachers and staff resigning, many to pursue other jobs (Statista Research Department, 2023). Professionals most likely to quit due to job dissatisfaction, low pay, hostile workplace, no opportunity to advance, and inflexible remote-work policy include teachers (Parker & Menasce, 2022). K–12 teachers with a history of changing jobs or elevated job stress are more likely to leave (Joo et al., 2015).

We contend that school leaders can elevate their support of teachers with a working understanding of PsyCap on-the-job, given its strong relationship to satisfaction and happiness for employees (Zhao et al., 2022). However, the support of leaders in principalship positions cannot be assumed. Education is suffering from a teacher shortage in many regions and most subject areas. Consequently, while the demand remains high for strong leaders who can transform schools, the turnover rate across US districts of 15 to 30% is 21% in high-poverty schools (Buckman & Sloan, 2022). The research question guiding this review was, What does the research convey about teacher PsyCap in relation to the role of leaders and career switchers in particular?

Literature Search Methods

Peer-reviewed research from 2012 to 2023 and in international contexts was targeted, and relevant works were located from our university library's databases (EBSCOhost, ERIC, etc.) and Google Scholar. Older groundbreaking studies were included, particularly from Luthans' body of research on PsyCap and the workplace (Luthans et al., 2006, 2007; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Public documents (e.g., policy reports from states and school divisions) were included in the search process. Search terms with the greatest yield were *leadership style* and *support* (65,303) and *PsyCap* and *teacher* (5,499). *SCT* (294) and *teacher happiness*, *attrition/retention*, and *job satisfaction* (265) also produced hits. Pairing *teacher PsyCap* with *administration/leadership* returned only 13 items. Two researchers reviewed 89 articles and 5 books, then collaboratively analyzed the results. We also cocreated the graphic display (Figure 1). As confirmed by us, the sources selected for analysis adequately responded to one or more aspects of the research question concerning SCTs, PsyCap, and leadership. Both the qualitative and quantitative studies represented in this review also had to be current and provide evidence. Other criteria (discipline/field, country, etc.) reflecting the sources were open ended. All articles met the quality criteria.

Codes (PsyCap = psychological capital, etc.) were generated from the research question, search terms, and literature results. Coding processes followed established qualitative

procedures and addressed our question. Sources were searched for particular words, and the frequency count and the context/meaning were recorded. In this manner, articles and documents with the highest relevance to this review were identified and coded by both researchers, which centered on Luthans' landmark works. Additional studies of consequence to this particular review included Baig et al. (2021), Balcerzyk (2021), Çobanoğlu and Bozbayindir (2019), Dicke et al. (2020), Helms-Lorenz and Maulana (2016), Hughes (2016), Larkin et al. (2018), and Ruitenburg and Tigchelaar (2021). Highlighted in the analysis were those works focused on leadership support and style in the influence of principals on teachers' satisfaction, performance, and retention, which included Baig et al. (2021) and Helms-Lorenz and Maulana (2016), among others. The literature review by Ruitenburg and Tigchelaar (2021) was spotlighted for giving credibility to the career switcher phenomenon in the context of school-based induction.

Results were organized in a data summary matrix that logged author/year, purpose/goals, methods/data sources, themes/findings, and implications. In this table, color coding was used to track methods, findings, and implications. Categorically aggregating the data produced findings and led to implications. Sources were also cross-referenced with the research question.

The limitations of this review are that methodological ideas are not explored in detail, notably applicable surveys, interview protocols, and other tools reported in research reporting evidence-based results. Further, the role of leadership in creating the conditions for PsyCap to flourish within schools—and influence teachers' positive qualities to enhance their satisfaction, happiness, well-being, and performance—is an emergent idea in research. Also, the results may only apply to specific contexts and are not generalizable. The discussion of literature follows.

Discussion-Based Findings

Psychological Constructs and Leadership

A theory of human development, *PsyCap* refers to positively oriented individual psychological capacities and strengths that can be developed, measured, and managed to tackle difficult problems and improve performance at work (Luthans et al., 2006, 2007). While strongly linked to happiness, well-being, and satisfaction, PsyCap is distinct from these terms. As found by Kun and Gadanecz's (2022) survey of 297 Hungarian teachers, "workplace well-being and happiness correlated with inner psychological resources, hope and optimism in particular" (p. 185). Findings like these explain why the terms seem interchangeable in some research.

We contend that organizations will want to mindfully inspire PsyCap's use in leadership and that administrators can improve their overall culture by supporting its development. Beginning teachers (in the first 3 years of teaching), who are more inclined to resign (Ruitenburg & Tigchelaar, 2021), can especially benefit. Cultivating leaders' sensibility for the human dimension of their work is underexplored in research despite hiring trends favoring SCTs, meaning that administrative teams will need to understand the unique needs of this beginning teacher group if they are to promote newcomer satisfaction and retention.

Commonly, though, education is not a focus of studies in positive psychology. Consequently, teachers' and leaders' conceptions of PsyCap, satisfaction, and happiness are seldom studied (Hughes, 2016)—especially from a solution-generating approach on promoting

satisfaction, happiness, and well-being—even though employees in education are highly susceptible to burnout and stress (Kun & Gadanecz, 2022). Thus, psychological profiles of teachers are limited, and more so for SCTs and what affects their PsyCap, such as the role of leadership in investing in teacher psychology relative to hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO). Leaders' awareness of these qualities and how to foster them in keeping with their responsibility for both influencing and managing positive emotions, attitudes, and behaviors in the workplace warrant deliberation on behalf of all staff, including SCTs. The expectation of leaders to support, develop, and retain staff is codified in such policy as the Code of Virginia (2000) for public school divisions. It specifies a direct need for principals to support employee improvement and self-appraisal and document efforts. Discovering psychological constructs like HERO and PsyCap and research-informed, action-oriented strategies for not only encouraging but also measuring satisfaction and happiness can deepen leadership influence (Hughes, 2016).

This paper contributes to literature in educational leadership on teacher PsyCap and an increasingly utilized but poorly understood segment of the teaching force—career switchers—as associated with school administration. Our motivation as an educational leadership professor and a middle school administrator was to use a psychological lens to offer a fresh perspective on old issues—teacher selection, retention, and induction. As such, we link the career-changer phenomenon with the role of leaders in influencing PsyCap to elevate understanding of this group of beginning teachers so they can be developed and retained. After noticing an increase in the hiring of SCTs in the school divisions within our US region, we began researching this trend. We also recognize that developing the PsyCap of all staff needs to be a goal beyond this specific newcomer group.

Even though the literature is robust in the coverage of leadership styles, emotional regulation, attrition, and happiness, the PsyCap of career switchers and their perceptions of work-based PsyCap at school remain only superficially tapped. Those studies that do consider PsyCap (Baeten & Meeus, 2016), teacher self-appraisal and intentions (Troesch & Bauer, 2020), and induction programs tend to overlook SCTs (Ruitenburg & Tigchelaar, 2021). Thus, few studies examine the SCT trend. Moreover, little is known about the relevance for administrators.

HERO Defined

HERO is a "positive motivational state" involving goal setting and planning (Snyder et al., 1991), and (*self)-efficacy* is believing in one's ability to produce desired results by working hard on challenging tasks (Bandura et al., 1999). *Resilience* describes the capacity to recover from adversity to achieve success, as well as the role of supportive, caring cultures for developing resilience. Schools with high expectations, clear goals, collaboration, and meaningful participation of staff in decision-making influence teacher resilience and retention (Mullen et al., 2021). *Optimism* implies a hopeful and confident attitude—even in the face of uncontrollable forces and setbacks—and tendency to anticipate positive outcomes (Seligman, 1998).

Conceptual Framework

PsyCap is rooted in psychology and Seligman's (2023) pioneering of positive psychology in 1998 that called for study of personal happiness. As Luthans et al. (2006) proposed, PsyCap is "an

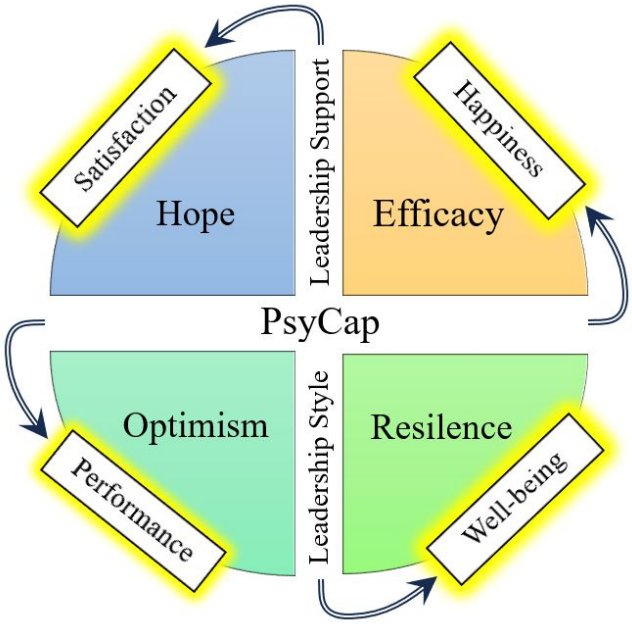
individual's positive psychological state of development" (p. 3). HERO, an integration of four qualities, comprises one's PsyCap profile or orientation. As also hypothesized, PsyCap can be developed and measured; for example, measures of hope can predict performances related to goals, activities, and coping strategies (Avey et al., 2011; Joo et al., 2015; Snyder et al., 1991; Luthans et al., 2006; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Distinguished from human and social capital, PsyCap concerns who one is and who one is becoming, which directly connects development to professional identity (Luthans et al., 2006; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

A person's PsyCap is subject to change, as per longitudinal studies (Avey et al., 2011; Joo et al., 2015). Not only can the qualities develop over time, but they can also be affected by personal and external agency and environmental influences—namely, leadership style and support, collegial collaboration, and workplace conditions (Ruitenburg & Tigchelaar, 2021). Importantly, the development of positive PsyCap can raise positivity levels, alleviate negativity, and boost well-being (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Conversely, negative PsyCap shows up as absenteeism, cynicism, intentions to quit, and lower job satisfaction (Moon, 2019). Given that PsyCap is developed and enhanced in supportive collegial settings (Ruitenburg & Tigchelaar, 2021), one characteristic is its malleability and opportunity for change, which calls upon employers to guide staff's professional development (PD) and contributions.

A graphic representation (Figure 1) emerged from our analysis of PsyCap theory in studies and the HERO framework. These twin constructs in positive psychology are reflected as human and organizational resource/development theories (Luthans et al., 2006, 2007; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). To this idea clustering we added leadership support and style, in recognition of the importance of administrators as an external, mediating force that influences SCTs' adaptation to the school environment, and capacity to contribute and succeed on the job.

Figure 1

Leadership Influences on Teacher PsyCap and HERO Framework



Teacher Trends and Leader Conundrums

Teacher attrition is more prevalent in education today than in the past 2 decades (Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022). Turnover affects school culture and community and student outcomes—it also puts a strain on veteran teachers to mentor inexperienced staff (Baeten & Meeus, 2016). Understanding how to better support teachers, including unconventional staff like SCTs, can prevent discontinuities within schools and negative consequences. A specific problem concerns the challenge for principals and divisional leaders in not only retaining but also proactively supporting teachers. The suggestion from our reading of literature is to apply theory from psychology and educational leadership to influence staff agency for achieving school goals.

Besides understanding that resolving the teacher shortage likely depends on career changers (Ruitenburg & Tigchelaar, 2021), leaders must rise to the occasion of helping SCTs succeed. Creating a collegial culture in which career switchers can thrive, such as by sharing their expertise and becoming pedagogically attuned, is recommended. As confirmed by Ruitenburg and Tigchelaar's (2021) review of SCTs' induction in secondary schools, leadership and collegiality influence their (perceived) retention. While educating and employing SCTs is a widely practiced solution to the teacher shortage, the career switcher's characteristics may not be familiar to some school leaders or even uniquely difficult for them to comprehend if their own certification followed traditional pathways.

In contrast with the first-year teacher who is still developing as a professional, the career switcher is assertive and "strongly motivated" to share expertise and equipped with such "transferable skills" as communication. Also, they possess practical knowledge and use real-world applications in classrooms, hold strong beliefs about the value of teaching and education, and are independent. As Ruitenburg and Tigchelaar also described (2021), SCTs' learning curve encompasses cultural and pedagogical adaptation. We think that administrators would want to know this kind of information to avoid misinterpreting self-reliance (among other distinguishing attributes of SCTs) as somehow above the need for direct and indirect support and targeted induction in and beyond the classroom.

Teacher resignation is a grave matter. As indicated by the National Science Teaching Association's 2014 survey, 47% of exiting science teachers reported feeling dissatisfied with their school's culture or leadership (as cited in Wang et al., 2020). In the face of teacher turnover, many US states have issued emergency hiring authorizations of unlicensed teachers, resulting in the shift of more professionals to teaching (Baeten & Meeus, 2016). It is not enough to attract quality teachers to schools, particularly low-resourced, high-needs sites, but to develop and retain them. Teachers stay longer if they are satisfied at work and with their relationships (Mullen et al., 2021; Larkin et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2020; Zee & Koomen, 2016). The calling for leaders is to effect such change by understanding what is at stake.

Leadership Support and Style

We next summarize several distinct but overlapping leadership styles—transformational, authentic, and shared. These paradigms are being spotlighted because each plays a substantial role in implementing a shared vision, modeling transparency, and building trust with staff, as well

as propelling positive organizational change (Balcerzyk, 2021). Moreover, all three leadership styles have the potential to enhance teacher PsyCap, address staff needs, and increase employee satisfaction (Balcerzyk, 2021; Helms-Lorenz & Maulana, 2016). (Due to space restrictions, participative leadership, servant leadership, distributed leadership, and other important conceptions of leadership style are not covered.) After that, we connect leadership style with beginning teachers and, more specifically, positive teacher PsyCap.

Transformational leadership style. Future-minded, transformational leaders find new solutions to problems and foster a school culture of ownership, autonomy, accountability, and creativity; also, this leadership approach motivates teachers to contribute to the school's success (Baig et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). The tone is set by principals and other change agents through authenticity and a strong sense of culture—they identify trends and help staff embrace change. Avoiding micromanaging, leaders trust employees to exercise authority in their assigned duties (Wang et al., 2020). After surveying educators from 32 countries, Dicke et al. (2020) found that job satisfaction can be explained by the effects of principals' transformational leadership styles, as confirmed by numerous studies (e.g., Baig et al., 2021). Teacher needs—identified through a literature review conducted by the National School Boards Association (NSBA, 2022)—include wanting to belong to a culture characterized by strong relationships and a cohesive staff, as well participating in important decisions.

Authentic leadership style. Authentic leaders emphasize human beings and ethics. They further their school's success in ways that are consistent with values and engender trust and motivation in employees (Balcerzyk, 2021; Helms-Lorenz & Maulana, 2016; Moon, 2019). Qualities of authentic leadership that contribute to workplace happiness include self-awareness, transparency, consistency, commitment, passion, risk-taking, and responsiveness, as well as making difficult decisions and openly and honestly resolving conflict (Balcerzyk, 2021; Çobanoğlu & Bozbayindir, 2019; Dicke et al., 2020). Employees' self-assessment, transparency, and trust are also key to their improvement and job satisfaction (Moon, 2019). Stretched thin with duties, administrators' needs are outnumbered by everyone else's. Having staff input and self-evaluations or reflections can incentivize buy-in. Any value or goal of a school community should be present throughout the building and reflected by all members (Baig et al., 2021). Teacher needs include having their duties and challenges acknowledged and accomplishments recognized, and having staff-designated childcare provided by the district (NSBA, 2022).

Shared leadership style. Shared leadership models foster a feeling of control and job satisfaction in employees. To create a healthy environment, teachers work together from planning to application, and school resources are distributed fairly (Çobanoğlu & Bozbayindir, 2019). Knowing that shared organizational resources predict positive psychology for teachers, administrators are transparent and fair in their resource allocation—transparency attracts positive responses from staff (Wang et al., 2020). Shared, authentic cultures tend to increase positive emotions and engagement from teachers; effective administrators support teacher involvement with policy decision-making and a friendly atmosphere (Burić & Macuka, 2018). Being given sufficient collaboration and planning time, and helping make key decisions in the school, are foremost among teacher needs that have been acknowledged (NSBA, 2022).

Beginning Teachers and Leadership Style

Beginning teachers value building leaders who offer clear direction and guidance but do not micromanage or suppress them. Administrator accessibility and support are considered essential for newcomer success, in addition to structure with flexibility and being treated as a skilled professional (Wang et al., 2020). Principals who cultivate such environments and distribute resources to aid PD and learning convey that they value teachers and want to keep them. Responding to the demands of a situation afford a greater sense of happiness for novice teachers (Balcerzyk, 2021). Including newcomers in decision-making as necessary, working collaboratively with staff on shared outcomes, and broadening teacher leadership ability help them experience positive PsyCap, boosting its potentialities (Helms-Lorenz & Maulana, 2016).

Leadership Styles and PsyCap

In cultures of shared responsibility for school operations, teachers report high levels of positive PsyCap (Büyükşahin Çevik, 2017; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Administrators who demonstrate shared leadership cooperate with their faculties in developing school programs and initiatives, appropriately granting responsibility to staff, and fairly distributing opportunities for leadership. In professions with lower turnover, leaders provide support, resources, and leadership opportunities and encourage autonomy (Balcerzyk, 2021). Environments influence employee happiness, which is to say that satisfaction with one's job cannot be viewed in isolation (Larkin et al., 2018). In the state policy realm, North Carolina license renewal requires that principals earn credits in "teacher effectiveness, evaluation, support programs, leadership, empowerment, and retention" (State Board of Education, 2023). We propose that such policies tacitly recognize the importance of leaders in fostering teacher PsyCap to ensure staff effectiveness and retention.

Effects of Leadership Style

Leadership style is more important than student characteristics in predicting teacher happiness (Dicke et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Trust and belief in a leader greatly affect job satisfaction. In any occupation, employees try to be more useful to the organization once given appropriate or desirable leadership roles. In leadership roles, teachers may feel more fulfilled and inclined to believe that their opinions are valued (Çobanoğlu & Bozbayindir, 2019). When employees are included in decision-making that improves their workplace, they experience more success and greater satisfaction (Dicke et al., 2020; Larkin et al., 2018). As such, teachers' productivity rises—they are less likely to consider resigning when they like their work, benefit from a culture of leadership support, and are efficacious as contributors (Balcerzyk, 2021). As found, job satisfaction and perceived equity (concerning duties and decision-making) within the organization have a significant predictive effect on teacher turnover (Larkin et al., 2018).

Perceived Support and PsyCap

Administrative structure is an important part of school culture and contributes to the well-being of staff. Support from an administration team impacts the happiness of staff; when teachers feel supported, they report higher happiness scores (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Administrative style, belief in management, and genuine employee relationships are factors that benefit a school's

climate. Frequently, teachers do not think that administrators will help them with a problem. Their frustration is ignited by this perceived lack of administrative support, in addition to student misbehavior and disciplinary issues (Wang et al., 2020). To enhance teachers' PsyCap, principals need to ensure that their faculties trust that they will be supportive regardless of the circumstances or problem (Raj et al., 2019).

Choosing to support teachers, helping with requests, and encouraging development are within an administrative team's purview. Consistency in expectations is also within a leader's control: Enforcing expectations for student and faculty behaviors sets a precedent for acceptable conduct within the building (Dicke et al., 2020). Clear expectations of duties and an understanding of tasks produce greater buy-in and job satisfaction. Consistency in consequences, rewards, and recognition is essential, but for staff to be effective as instructors, and to exhibit professionalism and manage student conduct, they must receive support from leaders and believe it is available (Ansley et al., 2019; Raj et al., 2019).

Personal lives also play a part in job satisfaction. Professionals feeling content in their jobs and emotionally supported report higher PsyCap scores in life. Personal tendencies, relationships, and experiences factor into how satisfied one is with life (Büyükşahin Çevik, 2017). Although teachers who are married to nonteachers seem happier at work (İhtiyaroğlu, 2018), not all studies have proven conclusive about outside factors. This implies that personal and work life may exist as separate states of happiness (PsyCap). However, job satisfaction and personality characteristics have been connected (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

When lacking control in their job or their life, teachers report low happiness (Mertoğlu, 2018). Unwanted duties, executive decisions made without their input, student stress and emotional needs, and children's family hardship all undermine their sense of control. Just as autonomy over instruction and curriculum (such as pacing of lesson plans) furthers work satisfaction (Battersby & Verdi, 2015), decisions in this domain of work and programs without teachers' participation erodes their feeling of independence. Higher efficacy reflects a sense of control over events (Burić & Macuka, 2018), which leaders can promote even when decisions are made outside the building, such as by explaining the reasoning behind new district policies.

Implementable Strategies for Leaders

Learning communities and PsyCap. Learning communities improve efficacy, a factor of positive psychology at work (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). Active learning communities decrease staff isolation, increase responsibility, and promote understanding, as well as nurture job satisfaction, commitment, and PsyCap (Helms-Lorenz & Maulana, 2016). Fostering desirable work situations through team building supports teacher confidence and skills development in cross-curricular instruction, student success, and school improvement (Ansley et al., 2019). Cultures of collaboration improve productivity and morale and reduce burnout, conflict, and competition among staff while engendering a cooperative, self-motivated body that contributes to collective goals (Brown et al., 2018). Growth and leadership opportunities, along with targeted PD, are shepherded by effective leaders to encourage teachers to collaborate, communicate, and continue learning (Çobanoğlu & Bozbayindir, 2019; Moore & Carter-Hicks, 2014).

Mindfulness and PsyCap. Workplace mindfulness is known to improve happiness levels, reduce unwanted feelings, and increase performance (Hanh & Weare, 2017). Practicing

mindfulness in a school-wide setting can encourage gratitude, which may be reflected as employee happiness (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). As Hanh and Weare (2017) found, staff who practiced mindfulness and gratitude regularly reported low stress at work. Similarly, the happiness scores of teachers with high self-esteem were greater than their peers with low self-confidence (Büyükşahin Çevik, 2017). Self-efficacy and stress causes are predictors of teacher stress responses. Counselors and psychologists are needed to help staff improve their self-efficacy and identify sources of stress and solutions. Optimistic teachers instill hope (İhtiyaroğlu, 2018), so they potentially enliven HERO in schools. Learning communities, restorative practices, PD, and training promote mindfulness in staff (Helms-Lorenz & Maulana, 2016).

Creating conditions for PsyCap. After interviewing 12 teachers from different elementary schools, Hughes (2016) identified a need for administrators to encourage health and well-being among faculties and children. The teachers described happy schools as having counseling support, social activities, and so forth, and classrooms with an energetic tone of pedagogy and activities not burdened by scheduling and other conflicts. Aware or prepared leaders tap into PsyCap for promoting positive environments and outlooks, including a sense of community (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021).

Because conditions that nurture PsyCap are associated with satisfaction, retention, and sustainable cultures, proactive administrative teams consult research-based evidence and recommended practices to decide which strategies to implement or refine. Reading literature on teacher profiles and differences; thoughtfully exploring the PsyCap of staff, including leaders and evaluators; and applying recommended strategies (such as those noted herein) can support teachers and foster their PsyCap.

Using research-based instruments that allow for self-appraisal, PsyCap can be measured in relation to satisfaction, happiness, and performance. (While unknown, there may be value in these instruments as a part of teacher selection and placement, not just for retention.) Per workplace studies, employees rated highly on their PsyCap were higher performing and stayed in the job longer (Luthans et al., 2006; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Luthans et al.'s (2007) Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24), a 24-question Likert scale, contains established measures from research on HERO and restricts an individual's PsyCap to work. PCQ-24's reliability and validity have been confirmed through extensive assessment of different professional groups. Survey takers indicate how they think about themselves on items like (a) feeling confident about goal-setting, (b) being able to come up with different possibilities for handling a tricky problem, (c) having the ability to move on from a setback, and (d) expecting the best when things are unclear. To clarify, we are not consultants involved with the PCQ-24 or any tool referenced here.

Implications for Practice

While the study of PsyCap is becoming popular in educational psychology, we are not aware of any evidence that educational leadership and policy studies programs explore PsyCap relative to administration. Where the psychology of leadership in such programs exists as a topic, students learn about applying knowledge to solve practical leadership problems in schools.

Another implication for practice concerns a type of beginning teacher, the SCT. In order to appeal to career switchers, leaders' own readiness, roles, and responsibilities could be freshly considered to ensure their effectiveness. Along these lines, induction for the career switcher and

commensurate developmental experiences may need to be improved (Ruitenburg & Tigchelaar, 2021). Nurturing these newcomers' capacity for adapting and contributing to school cultures requires recognition of SCTs' (unique) attributes and development of their PsyCap. Because good induction programs appear to boost teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Helms-Lorenz & Maulana, 2016; Ruitenburg & Tigchelaar, 2021), associated outcomes rely on principals' leadership style and support, including their ability to influence PsyCap and four qualities—HERO (Luthans et al., 2006, 2007). Utilizing research-based strategies directed at career switchers' psychology is advised, and, by way of implication, these also promote empowering and fair practices within schools.

Of further note, principals who reflect on their own PsyCap and cultivate teacher PsyCap are considering the sustainability of their school even as they hire teachers with emergency/provisional licenses to fill vacancies and without the formal training to lead a class, or who are teaching out of field (Richman & Crain, 2022). A related point is that the results reported herein can be used as a part of the teacher selection process and the development of interview questions for applicants. A further strategy involves using the information to place teachers on grade level teams or collaboration teams.

Responding to the problem of teacher turnover, induction and mentoring programs have become more commonplace. Because district personnel are typically involved in school-based teacher induction and provide oversight for programs that are formal, principals are not solely responsible for socializing teachers into the profession. An implication in this regard, then, involves how best to activate a web of stakeholders in the school, district, and profession to cultivate the learning and induction of new teachers.

A key stakeholder in teacher induction is the school district itself. Some have carried out division-wide programming that sponsors support, accessibility, and collaboration as main components of formal induction—with equity as an emergent feature (for case examples, see Mullen & Fallen, 2022; Mullen et al., 2022). Human resource personnel and others coordinating curriculum and instruction, PD, and so forth from a district typically oversee new teacher mentoring. Recommendations or implications to include district personnel from the literature emphasize that the role of divisions is indispensable to a school's capacity to effectively induct and retain beginning teachers. District personnel are typically charged with supervisory responsibilities relative to a formal structured program of support that is comprehensive and job-embedded, and that offers participating schools clear guidelines and targeted resources (Mullen & Fallen, 2022; Mullen et al., 2022; Ruitenburg & Tigchelaar, 2021). Specifically, district-level personnel may also assist the principal with their own PD as mentoring leaders. Through supervision or via PD, principals may receive guidance on best practices and structural processes: implementing district policy; adapting mentoring rubrics; selecting and matching mentors with mentees; training and supporting mentors; involving other staff in the support of teacher development (instructional coach, counselor, etc.); planning activities (orientation, etc.); developing networks (teacher cohorts, etc.); and evaluating the program, with an eye to improvement (Mullen & Fallen, 2022; Mullen et al., 2022).

It is expected that evidence-based, research-supported practices will be closely followed by all involved. High-quality induction programs offer needs-based PD, access to new teacher networks, and standards-based assessments of beginning teachers as well as the program itself. Effective districts and schools appropriately address what is known about teacher needs,

including those specific to career changers, and how best to address them. In our post-COVID world, teacher needs include PD in distance and online learning; access to devices, the Internet, and technical support; opportunities for reducing stress and having mental health services available to staff; being included in major decisions and being asked for their feedback; receiving training on the unique and special needs of students, and more (NSBA, 2022).

Future Research Recommendations

There are numerous possible directions for future research that are evident from the literature reviewed. Educational investigations are needed that shed light on leadership, equity, policy, and practice relative to PsyCap, satisfaction, and happiness. PsyCap from the perspective of teachers and leaders would highlight their important role in school communities, especially in underserved, high-need areas, and positive impacts on student outcomes and culture. Moreover, comparisons of PsyCap in different schools and societies could produce organizational insight.

Another pathway is for mindfulness to be studied in relation to PsyCap in that "leadership-focused mindfulness practices" promote reflection and compassion, according to Partin's (2022) literature review (p. 10). Such practice also improves principals' relationships with teachers and their willingness to take on demanding tasks, participate in PD, and contribute in other ways to the organization. Further, an increase in "principal mindfulness" has been shown to generate a more positive climate for organizations, such as by regulating behaviors and emotions in difficult situations and promoting decisions that are based on equity and justice. It might be that mindful leaders who cultivate "mindfulness practices" and techniques (involving teachers in decision-making and being open about decisions to be made, etc.) are better positioned to develop others' psychological capacities and inner resources. The possibility, then, is that a principal's mindfulness can assist teachers and other stakeholders in developing their PsyCap and HERO capabilities, both individually and collectively.

Concluding Points

Importantly, the new knowledge our article offers is the linking of PsyCap and leadership to beginning teachers and their satisfaction and retention. This review of literature on SCTs and school leadership sheds light on the opportunity to retain career switchers as a solution to teacher attrition. Based on hiring trends, as proposed, teacher PsyCap is fertile ground for cultivating shared positive thinking in organizations that enables SCTs to adapt to teaching and workplace culture. The hope is that our discussion will raise awareness about these dynamics, and help with supporting and retaining the (unconventional) newcomer so schools can thrive. Principals will want a working knowledge of PsyCap and ways to promote satisfaction and happiness in their organization. Investing in HERO may be what leaders are already doing, at least to some degree, but having access to this model for learning about PsyCap and shaping as well as managing positive emotions can benefit all staff, including students and their families. Given the record-breaking quitting of teachers, this topic in research and within schools deserves more attention.

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Teacher Perceptions of Characteristics of an Effective Instructional Leader

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This basic qualitative research study examined teacher perceptions of characteristics of effective instructional leadership. The purpose of the study was to determine what instructional leadership styles teachers identified as having the most impact on improving their own instructional skills. Previous research on instructional leadership has shown a gap in the teacher's perspective on the leadership styles they find most effective in helping them to learn. Eleven teachers with five or more years' experience working under at least three different principals participated in a semi structured interview research design. This qualitative study explored teacher perceptions of the leadership qualities of their principal. The results showed that effective instructional leaders are principals who possess strong characteristics of both transformational and situational leadership.

Keywords: leadership styles, instructional leadership, teacher's perspectives

The purpose of this study was on teacher perceptions of the characteristics of an effective instructional leader. The study may lead to a better understanding between teachers and principals, and identify what teachers are looking for in a principal. This research study may also help teachers to understand the current roles of principals, which could lead to greater understanding and better relationships that foster collaboration to improve school outcomes and school climate. Teachers' perceptions of a principal's ability to be an instructional leader require that the principal possesses leadership skills that highlight their ability to lead change (Grissom et al., 2021). Baptiste (2018) found a direct correlation between principal leadership styles and work performance of teachers.

Research Questions

This qualitative study explored teacher perceptions of the leadership qualities of their principal. The study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of how principals adjust their leadership to meet individual teachers' instructional needs?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions of how principals lead teachers to improve their instructional skills?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of principal leadership styles on teachers' motivation to grow as effective instructors?

Theoretical Foundations

The study utilized the theoretical frameworks of transformational theory (Farnsworth, n.d.) and situational leadership theory (Ghazzawi et al., 2019), According to Farnsworth (n.d.), transformational leadership is the ability to influence others to achieve a common goal. As an instructional leader, a principal works to create change in a building to improve student performance (Shaked, 2018). Imran et al. (2016) described transformational leadership as inspiring others to find new solutions. Duncan (2020) linked leadership influence to organizational climate. Leaders are looked upon to transform the atmosphere to achieve the work that needs to be done. School principals need to develop positive relationships with staff to create an environment of trust and willingness to change.

Situational leadership is defined as merging a directive with a supportive leadership style (Ghazzawi et al., 2019). This style requires leaders to discover the abilities of their followers in order to determine how much support each employee needs. School leaders should be fully aware of the abilities and needs of all their employees. Situational leadership involves developing relationships with individuals to create an approach for presenting information, delegating work, and providing feedback on success (Asana, 2021).

Review of Literature

Grissom and Loeb (2011) elaborated that by stressing that the effectiveness of the school leader was more important to the success of the school. Whitaker (1997) stated that part of being an effective instructional leader requires creating the environment that supports teaching and

learning through all aspects of a school building functions. Effective instructional leaders are needed to motivate teachers to improve their teaching and learning. It is not an easy task to encourage teachers to move away from the status quo. Therefore, it is important for principals to create an environment that is safe and encourages a learning environment of collaboration and cooperation amongst all parties involved (Alimuddin, 2010).

Transformational leadership was first introduced in 1978 by Burns. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership is a process in which "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation" (p. 24). Baptiste (2019) added that transformational leadership is the ability to influence the behaviors of employees in order to affect productivity. The effectiveness of the school in carrying out the mission of change requires the school principal to be an effective leader (Bafadal et al., 2019). This in turn affects teachers' commitment, self-efficacy, and attitudes towards their job. The characteristics of a transformational leader include being able to motivate others to change, having highly effective communication styles, and the ability to influence others to change their way of thinking (Anderson & Sun, 2017).

In 1969 Hershey and Blanchard introduced the life-cycle behavior model. Later, this model transformed into situational leadership. This style requires leaders to change their management style based on the ability of employees and their knowledge base about a given task. The benefits of this style include considering both the individual and environmental needs (Walls, 2019). The person leading can be flexible. Instead of using a single approach for all, the leader makes modifications to suit the individual. Situational leadership focuses on how the followers perceive the behaviors of their leaders (Ruslan et al., 2020). Based on the need, the situational leader uses coaching, directing, delegating, or supporting to work with an individual at their level of need (Blanchard, 2008). Instructional leadership requires principals to work with teachers of various grade levels and years of experience. Unlike transformational leadership that is more structured, situational leadership approaches each situation with flexibility and levels of support for each individual teacher (Walls, 2019). Teachers need to learn and grow just as much as their students do to keep up with the latest best practices. Principals use situational leadership to meet teachers where they are by creating a supportive environment based on the basic needs of everyone (Ruslan et al., 2020).

Research Methodology

This study was carried out utilizing qualitative research design. Qualitative research is used to gain in-depth knowledge in a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Using this design, the study explored behaviors and beliefs through in-depth interviews. According to Bhandari (2020), qualitative research involves collecting nonnumerical data, often by using "what" or "how" questions. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research focuses on the participants' personal perspectives and their own subjective views. This research design was chosen because it is useful in examining how people think about experiences and what meaning they create for them (Merriam, 2009). The study employed purposeful sampling because it sought to understand a central problem requiring rich details.

The purposeful sampling size for this study was 11 teachers in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Creswell (2013) suggested collecting extensive details from a few individuals;

therefore, the researcher recruited from one local school district for ease of accessibility and known high principal turnover. A local school district with six elementary buildings was selected by the researcher. The district was a suburban school district 90 minutes from New York City in which most families commuted to work every day. The criterion of working under at least three principals was established to gather teacher perceptions of several leadership styles. Once potential participants responded, the researcher provided informed consent forms to be signed for participation in individual interviews.

The first form of data was collected through unstructured interviews. Using an unstructured approach allowed the researcher to deviate from the original script as needed to ask follow-up questions or request clarification. Since it is very important that the questions being asked to encourage the participant to share as much as possible about their experiences, the researcher designed the interview questions based on the study phenomenon to ensure that participants reported experiences that aligned with the research questions.

One-on-one interviews consisting of semi structured questions were the form of data collection for this study. Interviews were conducted via Zoom meetings. This format allowed the researcher to record the interview and collect a transcript of the interview. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and provided to the participant for member checking.

Eleven participants were interviewed using eight unstructured questions. Each question was aligned with one of three research questions. Before any interviews took place, participants signed a consent form that contained detailed information about the study. Each interview lasted approximately one (1) hour and was conducted via Zoom. This provided the researcher with both a transcript and a recording of the interview. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of participants in the presented data. Transcriptions from the interviews were sent to each participant to be checked for accuracy.

Once transcripts were checked by participants the coding process began. Through reading the interview transcripts numerous times, common statements and key words were identified to create an initial list of 21 different codes. These codes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Coding Table

Code	Meaning
B	Boundaries
CS	Consistency
V	Vision
TM	Teamwork
ID	Individuality
CL	Climate
CN	Confidence
D	Dictates
IK	Instructional knowledge
OD	Open door
CM	Communication
L	Listener
M	Motivated

Code	Meaning
FD	Feedback
S	Supportive
T	Trust
P	Professionalism
MD	Modeling
TF	Teacher first
SL	Shared leadership
C	Collaboration

The coded data was then examined for emerging patterns based on common statements or key phrases. Key themes and subthemes were developed to help identify important information that was used to create an outline of participant statements.

Participant's Demographics

Table 2 lists the teachers' years of experience, the number of principals they worked under, and how many districts they worked in.

Table 1
Participants

	Years of Experience	Number of Principals Worked Under	Number of Districts Taught In
Mary	34	11	4
Tina	23	3	1
Linda	15	3	1
Beth	25	8	2
Carol	27	14	4
Sue	30	6	2
Ann	14	4	1
Nancy	34	8	1
Wendy	19	6	1
Ellen	30	11	1
Kate	22	8	4

Results

Embedded in the three research questions were three themes and eight subthemes that emerged from the data analysis from the participant transcripts. The first theme was *leadership characteristics.* Having a clear vision, leadership styles, and professionalism were the subthemes under leadership characteristics. The second theme was based on *instructional growth*, with motivation and feedback as the subthemes. The last theme was *building community*; climate and culture, support, and teamwork were the corresponding subthemes.

RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions of how principals adjust their leadership to meet individual teachers' instructional needs?

Participants identified many different leadership styles that led them to feel successful in having their instructional needs met. It is important for teachers to feel that they are being treated as individuals, and the feedback, support, and resources provided by the principal are based on the personal needs of each teacher. This matches a situational leadership approach. Teachers also noted that their instructional needs were met when the principal's leadership style represented both situational and transformational leadership characteristics.

Theme 1: Leadership Characteristics

Teachers look for a leader who is firm with a clear set of nonnegotiable expectations. Tina said:

> The leadership style needs to be warm and welcoming and understanding and firm. You know, a nonnegotiable drive for improvement and effective skills in a classroom to ensure every student grows.

Subtheme 1.1: Clear Vision

Teachers want to know their principals' vision and expectations. They want a principal who models clear expectations for all. Teachers expressed the need for a principal to clearly communicate exactly what they want and to follow through with ideas and initiatives.

Ellen believes her ability to improve instruction is affected by the principal having realistic expectations. What occurs in the classroom changes daily, if not minute to minute. A principal who is respectful of these challenges is one who still remembers what it is like to be in the classroom.

Subtheme 1.2: Leadership Styles

The teachers were very confident about which leadership styles supported them and helped them to grow. Leaders need to be confident, creative, and consistent. Principals recognizing and adjusting to the differences between teachers and their needs was very important.

Two teachers reported struggling with the concept of the principal as an instructional leader. Ellen feels that she is the instructional leader because she is the one in the classroom every day, leading instruction. After clarifying how and why a principal is an instructional leader,

Ellen stated, “I would see the instructional leader as someone who leads the instruction of the teachers in our building and brings in new ideas.”

Subtheme 1.3: Professionalism

Professionalism in some form was discussed by each of the 11 teachers. They stressed the need for boundaries and consistency regarding what is expected of teachers. When discussing professionalism, participants always linked it to a negative experience.

Having boundaries is a large part of being professional. Carol feels that the more modern principals today want to try to be friends with their staff. She had a principal who wanted to be “girlfriends” with everyone. Carol claims to be “old school,” and prefers a boss “who is over me.” Carol wants a leader who sets the boundaries by being nonjudgmental and disregarding public opinion. She wants an independent thinker who is not influenced by everybody. She stated, “It’s not a popularity contest.”

RQ2: What are teachers’ perceptions of how principals lead teachers to improve their instructional skills?

The participants’ responses mentioned very specific principal actions that had both positive and negative effects on teachers’ ability to improve instruction. Feedback considered not constructive and/or negative in nature hinders teachers’ ability to grow. On the other hand, honest feedback from the principal (including what needs to be improved and how to improve) has the greatest impact on teachers. It is also important for teachers to feel confident that their instructional leaders believe in them by giving them time to improve, model what they want, and recognize their efforts. Many situations that teachers experienced negatively affected their ability to improve their instructional skills. Teachers do not respond well to someone who lacks the experience or credibility to lead them. Someone with little or no teaching experience who rises to a position of authority does not have the skills or background knowledge to truly understand what it is like to be a teacher. Principals who lack clearly defined professional boundaries are also a deterrent to teachers’ growth. Several teachers described how principals who want to be friends with the staff lack the ability to be objective. This creates strife and division amongst the staff.

Theme 2: Instructional Growth

A pattern quickly emerged among all participants about what they need to grow instructionally. Teachers expressed the need to be able to trust the principal. Principals must have an open-door policy and must be available when needed. Teachers also expressed a desire to feel that principals in turn trusted them to do their job and do what was best for students.

Subtheme 2.1: Feedback

Teachers found feedback to be both powerful and important. Whether it is positive or negative, teachers rely on having feedback to grow as a professional.

Feedback was mentioned as a strong need for eight of the participants. Constructive criticism is welcome, and teachers feel that guidance and support help to make them better teachers. Teachers want a principal who uses evaluations the way they are supposed to be used. Linda has experienced evaluations in which the principal did not have any feedback to give. The principal felt that everyone was learning so everything must be great. Ellen says she has had past principals who used the evaluations to "attack me personally and say how much they don't like me."

Subtheme 2.2: Motivation

Teachers identified feeling motivated when they are being heard, feeling like part of the team, and a principal who has a collaborative approach. Motivation had connections to leadership styles and feelings that a principal believed in the teachers' abilities.

Carol described how a principal who motivated her was one who encouraged her all the time. She felt she could easily talk to him without judgment. He gave great personal and professional advice. Ann shared a story about a motivating experience she had with a principal. She does not like public speaking but felt it was something she needed to overcome. She felt confident when a leader encouraged her to try. The push was all she needed to feel tremendous pride afterwards.

RQ3: What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of principal leadership styles on teachers' motivation to grow as effective instructors?

All participants stressed the importance of having a positive climate and culture in a building, and pointed to the principal as the defining factor for creating either a negative or a positive climate and culture.

Theme 3: Building Community

Relationships formed by creating a positive working environment allow teachers to want to work alongside their principal. Half of the teachers maintained that they could still be effective if the culture of the building was negative, but it would be difficult. A principal who dictates was listed by several teachers as a top contributor to negative climate and culture. All 11 teachers worked with at least one principal at a school where they perceived the learning environment to be negative.

Subtheme 3.1: Support

Teachers shared a lot about the need for their principal to be available and visible. Teachers want a principal who is supportive and responsive to what they need in school and understands what goes on in their personal lives as well. Beth, Ellen, and Wendy want a principal who is supportive, and recognizes what it takes to be a teacher and to be their "cheerleader." Wendy talked about how hard and taxing it is to be a teacher. Principals need to recognize how much "we have on our plates. We really want to feel supported."

Subtheme 3.2: Teamwork

Teamwork and collaboration constitute a large part of teacher morale, motivation, and how they feel about the principal's instructional leadership. Leadership styles are heavily embedded within this theme.

Collaboration was a common theme among several teachers when they discussed motivation and personal instructional growth. Both Nancy and Mary expect an effective leader to demonstrate teamwork by creating an environment of give and take. Nancy felt that open dialogue helps to see the other's perspective and creates better mutual understanding. Beth expects the leader to collaborate with the staff in order to meet goals.

Part of teamwork is the ability to bring teachers to a common ground. Ann feels there is a range of teaching perspectives and it's hard to get everybody on the same page. Ellen and Ann pointed out that having a principal who brings new ideas and resources helps teachers to improve their instructional skills.

Conclusion

This basic qualitative research study on teachers' perceptions of characteristics of effective instructional leaders provided insights into what is needed for teachers to feel confident that their principal could improve their school through teaching and learning.

An interesting finding of this study was the lack of true understanding of the role of the principal as instructional leader. Teachers responded in terms of what leadership styles they prefer, how climate and culture motivates them, and the importance of being part of the dialogue for improvement. However, teachers did not share how the principal provides the training and professional development for improvement in instruction. In general, the principal was seen as the person who creates the environment in which teachers can be effective. These findings provide a layout for more discussions amongst teachers and principals to continue finding ways for all stakeholders to be effective.

The instructional leadership framework used in this study aligned very well with the three research questions and the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. Effective instructional leaders are principals who possess strong characteristics of both transformational and situational leadership.

Implications for Practice

Among participants in this study, the years of teaching experience along with the number of principals with whom teachers have worked created a clear picture of what teachers want in an effective instructional leader. This study creates an opportunity for open dialogue amongst teachers and principals. Leadership styles, motivation, and climate and culture are all important to creating a shared vision within schools.

Aspects of both transformational leadership and situational leadership were identified in this study. A principal's approach to how they lead is highly influential in teacher growth and effectiveness. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership is a process in which

"leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation" (p. 24). "Helping each other" is a key phrase. The study revealed the need for collaboration and teamwork for teachers to feel motivated to grow and try new approaches.

Situational leadership characteristics were also identified in this study. According to Ghazzawi et al. (2019), situational leadership is defined as merging both a directive and a supportive leadership style. This style requires leaders to discover the abilities of their followers to determine how much support each employee needs. Situational leadership behaviors are needed for teachers to feel confident that they are receiving the support they need personally to grow. It is important to recognize that all teachers need different levels of support, and that this support should be given in the form of feedback and how the principal communicates.

This study may be helpful for examining current trends in teacher retention and the lack of students choosing the teaching career path. Teachers in this study expressed the need to feel recognized for the hard work that goes on in the classroom and contended that they are not prepared for the current expectations placed upon them. One teacher even observed that she did not sign up for the current demands placed upon her. The results of this study need to be examined to determine if college teacher training programs are preparing future teachers for the real work that occurs in schools.

This study targeted the perspectives of teachers who have been in the classroom more than five years. The average number of years of service was 26. The teachers described positive experiences they had with leaders, but the negative stories they shared might offer a true picture of why schools are losing educators at an alarming rate. The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in previous research on instructional leadership from the teacher's perspective about the leadership styles they find most effective in helping them learn. Cansoy (2019) showed that teachers' overall job satisfaction and their involvement in decision making are closely related. Teachers expressed their need to feel heard and respected by being included in the decision-making process through collaboration with their principal. In a 2016 study by Callahan, teachers listed several reasons they were dissatisfied with working conditions. Lack of administrative support and decreased autonomy in the classroom were listed, both of which teachers reported in this study. The results of this study may help school districts and principals to adapt current practices to improve school climate, encourage greater collaboration, and improve school outcomes.

Recommendations for Future Research

A recommendation for a future study would be to replicate this study using different school populations. School districts of a larger size or in different parts of the country could provide different teacher perspectives. Diverse student populations and different socioeconomic classifications may provide different insights into the effectiveness of instructional leaders. Replicating this study with first-year teachers may also provide a different perspective that could lead to the creation of a different approach not only to teacher training, but also to principal leadership training. Another recommendation would be to replicate this study with both principals and teachers and include a focus group.

This study could be expanded to look at individuals who have left the teaching profession early. Current trends show a huge decline in individuals entering the teacher workforce and

leaving within a few years. Examining the reasons individuals leave the profession and how these relate to teachers' expectations of instructional leaders may provide insight.

Current trends also show a huge discrepancy among people of color entering the teaching profession. Replicating this study with current teachers of color may provide a different perspective about why teaching is not being chosen as a career by this and other targeted demographics.

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University and School Districts Working Collaboratively to Develop a Grow Your Own Partnership

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The purpose of this article is to present a review of the literature and describe an initial process evaluation for the development and implementation of a Grow Your Own (GYO) partnership for training teachers. The United States (U.S.) is experiencing a severe teacher shortage and Arizona ranks first in terms of turnover rate of teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The lack of qualified teachers for open positions is a crucial issue impacting school effectiveness that school and district leaders are facing. In 2022, Northern Arizona University (NAU) created a GYO partnership, developed in part from similar GYO programs forming across the U.S. Specific elements leading to the initial success of the program are discussed and include offering a tuition-free option for students to complete a teacher certification program and flexible course offerings to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Based on an extensive literature review and reflection of the development and implementation of the GYO program, findings indicate a need to focus on recruitment strategies, develop strong partnerships with local school districts, and collaborate on funding distribution and sources.

Keywords: collaborate, diverse candidates, educational barriers, funding, grow your own, needs assessment, partnership, teacher certification, teacher preparation, recruitment, retention, state scholarship programs

Note:
The authors disclose receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Franke Family [foundation gift].

The United States (U.S.) is experiencing a severe teacher shortage with decreased enrollment in teacher preparation programs, high attrition rate among employed teachers, and a growing K-12 student population as significant factors impacting this critical demand. Since 2019-2020, the number of students leaving college with an education degree continues to decrease, down 19% since 2000-2001 (Schaeffer, 2022), while the K-12 student population is on an upward trend (Berry & Shields, 2017; Simon, 2021). The profession is also seeing significant growth in the number of teaching positions. In 1987-1988, there were roughly 2.5 million teachers, whereas by 2017-2018, there were just over 4 million teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2021). The lack of qualified teachers for open positions impacts school effectiveness and the work of school and district leaders as they seek strategies and initiatives to address this crucial issue.

The purpose of this article is to present a review of the literature conducted to gain a better understanding of what is known about Grow Your Own (GYO) strategies and the use of this approach in training future teachers. The purpose is also to describe an initial process evaluation for the development and implementation of a GYO partnership between a university and multiple school districts. The aim of the GYO partnership is to improve school effectiveness through development of sustained pipelines of diverse candidates interested in pursuing a teacher certification program as well as having the opportunity to be employed by one of the partner school districts. The guiding questions for this work included:

- What are effective approaches to developing a GYO partnership between a university and school districts?
- What recruitment strategies are effective for developing local, sustainable pipelines of prospective students for partner school districts?
- What specific needs of prospective students, including racially and ethnically diverse individuals, should be addressed to support admission and retention?

Literature Review

Based on data reported through 2018, approximately 30% of beginning teachers leave the profession within 3 years (Ingersoll et al., 2022), and recent reports indicate the COVID-19 pandemic has made teacher working conditions even more challenging (Pressley, 2021; Rosenberg & Anderson, 2021). Specifically, hard to staff schools with minimal resources struggle to fill positions, and high poverty and high minority schools, often disproportionately staffed by teachers of color, experience the highest rates of attrition (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016). Geographic location is another factor; rural, urban, and tribal communities are hit the hardest and often resort to hiring individuals without standard teacher certifications (Bouie, 2022; De Avila & Hobbs, 2017).

Like other states, Arizona is experiencing a severe teacher shortage and ranks first in the U.S. in terms of turnover rate of teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Based on U.S. Teacher Follow-up Survey and Arizona Department of Education data, Arizona's annual public school teacher attrition rate is over 22% for beginning teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2022). For the 2022-2023 school year, 26.6% of the Arizona teacher positions remained unfilled in September, and an additional 41.7% of these "vacancies were filled by teachers who do not meet the state's standard certification requirements" (Arizona School Personnel Administrators

Association, 2022, p. 2). Further, of the Arizona teachers that discontinued their employment, 65.2% held a standard teacher certificate.

Grow Your Own (GYO) programs are being developed across the U.S. as one strategy to address the severe teacher shortage (Boswell, 2015; Jessen et al., 2020; Torres, 2023). GYO is a strategy for developing a pipeline of new, certified teachers for school districts with staffing challenges (Simon, 2021). The expanding body of literature indicates the value of recruiting prospective teacher candidates from school districts' paraprofessional staff and community members (Fallona & Johnson, 2019; Simicou et al., 2021). Partnerships are typically established between districts, and a university, college or other organization offering teacher certification programs. Another approach approved by the Arizona State Board of Education allows school districts to develop internal training opportunities that lead to teacher certification (Arizona Administrative Code, 2023).

GYO programs strive to meet the needs of prospective students by providing convenient class times and holding classes in local, easy to access locations. GYO programs also offer academic, financial, and social support (e.g., counseling and learning communities) to the students enrolled in the program (Motamedi et al., 2017). The GYO strategy is proving to be a means to attract candidates from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Perona et al., 2015). However, there are challenges to implementing this strategy especially in relation to recruiting and retaining qualified students for the duration of the teacher preparation program. Simon (2021) discusses the need for research regarding the development and implementation of GYO models that incorporate different teaching modalities, support systems, and learning opportunities to address the needs of the individuals who are prospective students for GYOs.

Procedures

As noted in the introduction, the literature review was conducted to gain a better understanding of what is known about GYO strategies for training future teachers. A librarian was consulted to determine which databases should be searched and the keywords to use for the search (see Table 1). The five databases that were searched included EBSCO host, ProQuest, Sage Journals, Science Direct, and Scopus. Additionally, eligibility criteria listed in Table 2 were applied when conducting the search.

Table 1

Literature Review Search Terms

Keywords
● Retention ● Teacher shortages ● Diversify ● Diversity ● Grow Your Own ● Underprivileged schools ● Teacher candidates ● Teachers of color ● Minority teachers ● Underserved communities ● Minority students ● Students of color

Table 2

Eligibility Criteria for Literature Review Search

Eligibility Criteria	Description
Year of Publication	Publications issued in 2005 or later were eligible. This 17-year period was chosen based on the first implementation of a GYO program in Illinois in 2005.
Type of Publications	To conduct this literature review related to teacher preparation GYO partnerships, the research team included journal articles, reports, instructional resources, book chapters, and/or dissertations that were published in English.
Study Sample	The publications had to involve PK-12 schools or school districts.
Topics	The publication had to examine the following: teacher preparation GYO partnerships in relation to the teacher shortage, attracting ethnically and racially diverse candidates, and/or retention of graduates from GYO teacher preparation programs.

In addition to conducting the database search, the research team also reviewed references in the publications located for additional sources. Through these procedures, 24 publications were identified through the database search and 13 through the references from the database search publications. A summary is presented in the Literature Review section.

An initial process evaluation for the development and implementation of a GYO partnership between a university and multiple school districts was also conducted. Steps for conducting the process evaluation were adapted from *Types of Evaluation* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). The results of a process evaluation "strengthen your ability to report on your program and use information to improve future activities" (p. 1). Process evaluation can be implemented at the start of a program as well as throughout the implementation of the program. The results can illustrate "how well the program is working" and "the extent to which the program is being implemented as designed" (p. 2). It provides a mechanism for documenting features that are working as well as program changes that are needed.

The four basic stages of action research, planning, acting (or implementing), observing, and reflecting were utilized as the procedures for the process evaluation (Dickens & Watkins, 1999). The action research process is iterative, and this approach was utilized throughout the development and implementation of the GYO partnership. Changes were made based on input from stakeholders, and observations and reflections made by university faculty and staff directing and supporting the initiative. The documented program changes as well as documentation that were developed through the planning and implementation process were analyzed. The results of the analysis of the initial implementation of the GYO are described in the Reflections section.

Program Participants

In 2022, Northern Arizona University (NAU) in conjunction with partner school districts in the Phoenix West Valley, began development of a new GYO partnership. A variety of circumstances led NAU to seek out school districts to form a new GYO partnership including:

- requests from school districts facing severe teacher shortage that are interested in directing efforts and funding towards innovative strategies for recruitment, preparation, and retention of new teachers;
- school districts' consideration of Arizona State Board of Education approval for school districts to form training programs that lead to state certification;
- funding to support efforts to develop and study the development of GYO partnerships; and
- with state approval for community colleges to offer bachelor's teacher certification programs, NAU sought out new opportunities to attract prospective students and support school districts in addressing the significant number of teacher vacancies.

The initiative began with two neighboring school districts, (i.e., Tolleson Elementary School District and Littleton Elementary School District) and within the first year grew to a partnership that includes six area school districts (i.e., Buckeye, Pendergast, and Union Elementary School Districts, and Saddle Mountain Unified School Districts). The student enrollment of these districts varies. The following enrollments are estimates based on Arizona Department of Education data from the 2021-2022 school year. One school district serves 1,700 students, two serve 2,800 students, two serve 5,600 students, and one serves 8,000 students. These districts are identified as high need and/or hard to staff school districts. They serve a student population that is racially and ethnically diverse, ranging from 65% to 96% students of

color, with 57% to 82% identifying as Hispanic and Latino/a. The following section describes reflections from the initial development and implementation of forming a GYO.

Reflections

Reflections from GYO Initiative

Work to develop the GYO partnership began in Spring 2022 and the first cohort of students started in January 2023. The initial school district was identified by one of NAU College of Education's centers. The process of forming the partnership was accelerated based on the relationship that existed between NAU's established center and the school district. Another school district near the first partner school district simultaneously was considering ways to establish a GYO program and reached out to explore possible external opportunities before pursuing the development of an internal program.

NAU College of Education has extensive experience delivering nationally accredited, state approved programs at state-wide sites through transfer pathways from community colleges. The plan was to offer undergraduate junior and senior level coursework locally, in-person. However, as recruitment efforts progressed, the partners recognized the prospective undergraduate students needed options for completing general studies and teacher preparation prerequisite coursework also. Lessons learned to date regarding constructing a mutually beneficial GYO partnership, recruiting strategies, and supporting access and alleviating education barriers for students are discussed next.

Co-Construction of Partnership, Vision, and Outcomes

Co-construction of a mutually beneficial partnership that meets the needs of school districts and aligns with NAU program requirements and policies remains a significant focus. School district leadership, including the Superintendent, Human Resources (HR) Director, and other district personnel, need to be active contributors to the development of the GYO initiative. Outlining the vision and outcomes for the partnership is critical. NAU West Valley GYO Steering Committee (2022) partners articulated the following vision:

- Seek ways to tap into local residents to help address the significant teacher shortage the school districts are facing; school district employees are invested in staying in the community and may not have been able to go away for college to complete a degree.
- Recognize that prospective students do not want to or are not able to take on debt to complete a degree program leading to teacher certification and provide a tuition and fee free opportunity to complete the degree program.
- Offer the opportunity to pursue a degree leading to teacher certification locally so school district HR departments can develop career track opportunities for employees hired into entry level or non-certified positions to earn credentials for certified teaching positions.

Creating local access to higher education degree programs provides a long-term solution for addressing the critical teacher shortage within school districts. It also supports the economic development of individuals within the GYO communities, many who are racially and ethnically

diverse. Leadership discussed the steady employment opportunities for certified teachers within their school districts (NAU West Valley GYO Steering Committee, 2022). Certified teaching positions provide higher salaries than non-certified staff positions and offer individuals pathways to other advanced education and career opportunities.

School district leadership knows their hiring needs, the staff who may be interested and well suited for pursuing a teacher certification degree program, and potential supports that should be addressed to help retain students in the degree program. Other aspects that should be determined in conjunction with partners include which degree programs (e.g., undergraduate and/or graduate as well as certification areas) are most needed and should be offered; when classes should be scheduled, especially in relation to available childcare; and strategies for communicating with and recruiting prospective students.

Recruitment Strategies and Implications

The goal is to create a sustainable pipeline of prospective students who meet university and program entry requirements. Outreach to prospective students along the continuum from high school graduates to individuals with a completed Associate degree or higher is needed. All partners must be committed to implementing systematic recruitment strategies aligned to term start dates.

Outreach and Marketing Strategies. Since the start of the initiative, NAU and the partner school districts have worked consistently and collaboratively to identify outreach and marketing strategies to inform staff, parents, and community members of this local opportunity to pursue a degree leading to teacher certification. A variety of strategies have been tried including:

- Host virtual information sessions (see https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1olDuWKxP3ECbFcFeqhaRuSjDFkJWqwoT7o06MnyJ180/edit#slide=id.p1).
- Contribute articles to school district newsletters emailed to families and community members.
- Submit press releases from NAU and partner school districts to local media outlets.
- Table at school district staff events.
- Coordinate specific recruitment events that included NAU Enrollment Management staff and Academic Advisors to work with prospective students on admission applications and evaluation of transcripts.
- Ask for principals' help in identifying staff who demonstrate interest and potential for becoming effective teachers and host information sessions at school sites.
- Create announcements for digital marquees maintained by the school districts.
- Develop video messages from school district leadership (see https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i3evRZ4npNv780oWubwOlJMdhbGbiUni/view) delivered through email campaigns to non-certified staff members and other individuals expressing an interest in the program.
- Promote GYO program as a career track for existing and new hires employed in non-certified positions such as paraprofessionals to progress towards a certified teaching position.

Enrollment and Attrition. Recruiting more candidates than needed to meet enrollment minimums is important to maintain the health of the program. Based on findings reported in the literature, programs can experience enrollment losses of approximately 50% (Perona et al., 2015). One method is inviting multiple school districts in a specific region to join the partnership. NAU projected approximately five to six school districts are needed to develop a sustained pipeline of new students. To provide a size comparison, the partner school districts in total serve approximately 26,600 K-12 students.

Additionally, establishing relationships with high school districts who are offering or could offer Educators Rising programming (e.g., classes, sponsor a student club) to introduce middle and/or high school students to the education profession can be a useful recruitment strategy. GYO partners can provide educational experiences regarding the teaching profession for students involved in the Educators Rising program. These programs also offer an opportunity for school districts to promote non-certified positions to students and upcoming graduates as well as opportunities to pursue teacher certification programs through established GYO partnerships.

Highlight Financial Support

NAU has the privilege of offering the Arizona Teachers Academy (ATA; see https://arizonateachersacademy.com/), a state scholarship program covering tuition and fees for students pursuing eligible teacher certification degree programs. School district leadership recommended and helped create marketing materials focused on the availability of this state scholarship program and the benefit it provides. Leveraging and promoting national (e.g., TEACH Grant), state, university, and/or school district support for tuition, fees, or other educational expenses is key. Providing information about financial support for childcare for enrolled students was also requested by prospective students (e.g., https://in.nau.edu/dean-of-students/higher-education-child-care-project/).

The ATA Scholarship was not previously available for NAU transfer students while they were completing their prerequisite coursework at a community college. The GYO model, offering students a pathway to start with NAU right away and complete all four years of the degree program, opened the ATA Scholarship to these students. The funding awarded for the initiative is offering additional financial support to cover the costs of books, computers, transportation, housing, etc. Although financial aid is not typically awarded to students enrolled part-time, the ATA Scholarship program allows for part-time enrollment and the guidelines for the additional scholarship being awarded were also developed to allow students to qualify even if enrolled part-time.

Increasing Access through Eliminating Barriers

Multiple Pathways Needed. We are finding that prospective undergraduate students need to be met wherever they are in terms of completed prerequisite coursework. Some students need the option to complete a few more courses whereas others need to complete the entire first two years.

By creating the option for students to complete the first two years of coursework through NAU rather than a community college, GYO students can take one, four-unit English course rather

than two, three-unit courses, reducing the time needed for completing courses. NAU also launched the delivery of online synchronous sections for the two required Principles of Mathematics courses for Elementary Education majors. Similar courses at community colleges require a higher-level prerequisite Math course than NAU's course. By offering options to take all prerequisite coursework for NAU's undergraduate Elementary and Special and Elementary degree programs, GYO students are meeting the same requirements, rather than completing more courses or higher-level courses, as students enrolled at NAU's main campus in Flagstaff.

Part-time Enrollment Options Pursued. NAU's published degree program progression plans presume full-time enrollment as does the schedule of course offerings. Enrollment for students meeting NAU admission requirements and joining the West Valley Pathways to Teaching cohort ranged from part-time to full-time. Using summer course offerings and other courses consistently available online or synchronously online, academic advising staff are working to meet the enrollment needs of each student.

Discussion

In a nation where school districts lack a healthy pool of qualified applicants to hire for open teaching positions, it is essential that we envision and explore equitable solutions to address this monumental crisis. Initiatives aimed at establishing programs that prepare great teachers and create a more racially diverse workforce is critical to ensuring a quality education for every child (Center for American Progress, 2021). Taking shortcuts, reducing training requirements, and creating weak teacher preparation programs are not the way to solve teacher attrition and shortages (Center for American Progress, 2021). To meet this crisis head-on, it is important to implement evidence-based programs that are known to help in the long-term. GYO programs are one such alternative for hard to staff school districts. By recruiting and training individuals to become certified teachers, GYO partnerships have been shown to address many of the challenges facing the teaching profession including attracting racially and ethnically diverse individuals who represent the students they teach. GYO programs can also address teacher shortages experienced by hard to staff school districts in urban, rural, and tribal communities as well as certain specialty areas (e.g., STEM, special education) that are chronically understaffed.

The NAU West Valley GYO program offers a viable, long-term solution for the partner school districts which are facing critical shortages. Through envisioning a program co-constructed with district leadership, it is possible to create a flexible program that brings high-quality academic programs to students who might not otherwise have chosen a path to earn a college degree. The program also is an excellent example of valuing and nurturing "intersectional ethnoracial diversity" (Gist, 2022, p. 53). There is much research that points to the fact that teachers of color are better prepared to teach students of color as compared to white teachers because they can better understand their pupils' backgrounds, experiences, and culturally unique aspects of their lives (Bouie, 2022; Villegas et al., 2012). Students who work with teachers who have these complex sets of identities benefit because it signals that these aspects of diversity that the teachers bring with them are valued and promoted. Students also taught by teachers that mirror their own backgrounds often experience improved achievement test scores, high school graduation rates and a desire to seek a four-year degree (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

A key aspect to the success of GYO programs as illustrated in the NAU West Valley GYO

model is the ability to provide financial support to the students interested in pursuing this option. Our model is especially fortunate to have access to a state or university scholarship as well as support from a generous donor. Options available to help fund college expenses for students seeking teacher education programs including the federal TEACH Grant, PELL grants, and scholarships offered by the state, university/college, and private scholarship opportunities. It is critical to have support from the Financial Aid division of a university to provide prospective students with needed information as they navigate these waters which are murky at best to the savviest consumer. Another point of consideration is the ability to work closely with partners to design programs that align with school and district structures. Finally, having full university buy-in is a necessary ingredient if the program is to survive through initial stages necessary to build the pipeline as well as leadership changes.

Implications for Practice

GYO programs show promise as a strategy for preparing effective, certified teachers. These initiatives take leadership and dedicated staff time from the school district partner(s) and university or college to design, launch, and sustain. To get started, prospective affiliates can explore partnership opportunities with university, college, or other organizations with state approved and/or nationally accredited teacher certification programs. To determine appropriate degree program offerings as well as potential barriers and supports that may be needed, it is critical to learn more about the prospective students and their willingness to commit to pursuing a teacher certification program. To develop the initiative, it is critical to seek internal and/or external funding to support the work.

Explore options for developing a partnership with a university, college, or other organization with state approved and/or nationally accredited programs. GYO programs create opportunities for local residents to earn a college degree, an option that may have been previously out of reach. Approved and accredited programs offered by institutions of higher education or other organizations provide value and a vehicle for economic mobility to graduates. Conducting a needs assessment can help determine interest of staff, parents, and community members for a locally delivered teacher certification program. The purpose of the needs assessment will be to estimate the number of prospective students, ask about college credits completed or degrees already obtained to determine type of program(s) that are needed or would be most appropriate to offer, determine current employment of prospective students, request preferences for full-time vs. part-time pathways, inquire about childcare needs, and ask about preferred times, locations, and delivery formats for offering courses. It would be helpful to also ask about any barriers that would prevent the individual from pursuing a teacher certificate program. The results can support decisions regarding the number of school districts in the area/region needed to build and sustain a GYO program, the level of program(s) to offer (i.e., all four years of an undergraduate program, final two years of an undergraduate program, post-baccalaureate program, graduate level program, and/or other program leading to teacher certification), and the need for building flexible options for completing practicum experiences in conjunction with school positions as well as outside of typical school work hours. Through this needs assessment process, school district partners should also be prepared to share data on their greatest needs in terms of teaching positions. These data will aid discussion with institutions of

higher education or other possible partners to ensure a program provider is able to offer the programs leading the teacher certification that are most needed.

Seek grants or other sources of internal or external funding to support development of the GYO initiative. NAU and the school districts are developing a shared funding model for needed positions such as an on-site anchor faculty and program coordinator positions to support recruitment efforts, mentor students, teach classes, and coordinate other efforts to develop the GYO program and partnership. The generous foundation gift NAU received included funding for student scholarships, research efforts, marketing materials, and professional development materials and instruction. Leveraging the Arizona Teachers Academy state scholarship program that covers tuition and mandatory fees in exchange for a teaching service commitment at an Arizona public school has also been critical to the success of the initiative. Identifying state department of education scholarship opportunities, university or college scholarship options, or school district funds that can be used to cover tuition and fees will be critical information to provide to prospective students. This information will impact their decision process as they determine if they can commit to participating in the program and pursuing the requirements for teacher certification.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the initial observations and findings, we recommend the following areas for future research: (a) identifying effective, collaborative strategies to increase enrollment and retention of college students in GYO degree programs leading to teacher certification and (b) identifying strategies to support enrollment and retention of college students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Developing a GYO is a long-term strategy. It does not provide an automatic fix for the lack of certified teachers applying for open positions. The first steps in developing strong and sustainable pipelines for GYO programs is understanding who in the community might be attracted to pursuing a locally offered teacher certification degree program, how to connect with these prospective students, and what supports may be needed to assist with admission processes and retention in the program.

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