TCWSE

JOURNAL OF TEXAS WOMEN SCHOOL EXECUTIVES

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1

DREAM IT.
BELIEVE IT.
CLAIM IT.
BE IT.

The Journal of Texas Women School Executives (JTWSE) is an official publication of the Texas Council of Women School Executives (TCWSE). The purpose of JTWSE is to provide a forum to promote the development of women school executives through scholarly research and practice, as well as recognize the professional knowledge and wisdom of practicing and aspiring women school executives, higher education faculty, and other significant partners in education. Since leadership is both art and science, JTWSE solicits creative works that promote the journal purpose. The journal solicits original submissions in three categories to recognize the diversity of talents and skills of women school executives (see Categories of Articles).

Because of a commitment to leadership development and scholarly school women executives, Texas Council of School Women School Executives previously published an annual monograph until 2008. In January 2011, President Lu Anna Stephens and the Executive Board, commissioned Dr. Genie Linn and Ms. Karen Saunders to serve as coeditors to design and launch a new professional publication for TCWSE to be published in an electronic format with the first publication to be unveiled at the Annual Conference in January 2012.

JTWSE is a double-blind, peer-reviewed, open access e-journal publishing original scholarly research and creative works. The JTWSE, although originated by Texas women school executives, it serves as a national scholarly journal. For membership information: https://tcwse.org/membership/. At present, all editorial, Board, and reviewer services are provided without cost to JTWSE or its members by volunteer scholars and practitioners.

TCWSE

From the President

What TCWSE Means to me… What a ride we have been on since March 2020! Times have definitely been challenging, eye-opening; yet, inspiring and motivational. TCWSE has been a constant in my life and has contributed greatly to me staying the course and being inspired in such a difficult time. This organization is so much more than just growing women leaders. TCWSE is a true support group made of amazingly strong, innovative women who are there for me whenever needed. Many of these women I have laughed with, cried with, collaborated with, took advise from, been inspired by, and of course CHERISH!

It is necessary to have people in our lives who can pick us up, be brutally honest, and pull us along. We also need those we can learn and grow from; ultimately being able to grow others. No matter what entity we work for or position we hold, we are all leaders and have been called for these stations in life. TCWSE allows us to come together from different backgrounds with different thoughts and gifts and share those to grow our organization as a whole. Through the growth of TCWSE, we can reach more women and truly make an everlasting impact. This organization allows our strengths to shine causing everyone around us to see our true care for members and our desire to see them succeed. When we all succeed, our organizations and the people in them succeed. We should always surround ourselves with successful, influential stars connected to our profession so that we can *become* our best selves. TCWSE allows me to do that because the women of TCWSE are those SUCCESSFUL people.

I encourage all members, whether it's the first or thirty-first year of membership to get more involved and intentionally reach out to mentor and support other women in leadership, or those aspiring to lead. In growing others, we grow ourselves. When we become better and admit that growth is a daily occurrence, we become unstoppable and more understanding and giving. So, let's make 2022 about sharing our best, growing ourselves and others, and service!

Thank you for allowing me to be your President!

Excited about what is to come,

Shelly Slaughter
TCWSE 2021 President
Superintendent, Cumby ISD

From the Executive Editors

We are a united community of professional educational executives who promote equity and quality in leadership through renewal, mentoring, and career advancement support.

We have dreams behind these smiles, dreams that must become.
Awaken them now, speak them aloud, that's where their life comes from.
We dream. We believe. We claim. We become the dream we see
Inside, the dream is forming, growing, waiting, sprouting, then…unleashed finally.

Dear author's and conference attendees,

What is your dream and where do you long to be? There are many different pathways to take and many choices to make. Look ahead and what do you see? Decisions. Risks. Courage. Resilience. Disruptions of the norm. That's you, and in time, your dreams do come true.

Texas Council of Women School Executives offers this professional journal and writing opportunity to increase the reading audience of the featured authors in addition to offering research and perspectives that impact the educational arena. In this edition, you will find a unique style of pathways to an end goal, moving from the beginning formation of a dream to announcing its reality. Authors reveal the struggles, disappointments and end successes of making a dream come true. These individuals were dreaming of becoming at early ages; thus, the importance of positive and knowledgeable educators in the classrooms who understand how the brain works because difficulties in reading, thinking, and speaking can hinder student progress. Low self-esteem from classroom struggles keep individuals from seeing that dreams are possible. With that in mind, we open the journal focused on the student because the student with the struggle represents many of the members of TCWSE. The members of TCWSE shape ALL the lives of those who dream and desire to become what they have visualized.

The focus for success still lives. Keep dreaming. Work on becoming. Celebrate when the dream comes alive. The pathways may be different but the work in getting to the end result is waiting on bold, courageous leaders as yourself.

In the spirit of becoming,

Sharon Ross, Ed.D. & Jennifer S. Jones Ed.D.
Executive Editors

Categories of Articles
Research

is the hallmark of educational professionalism and scholarship. The following articles reflect the scholarship of women school executives from universities and school districts. While university professors research issues that are vital to women as leaders and support women educators, district and campus authors share applied research from their experiences in the field. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines research as a detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover new information or reach a new understanding. May you read with clear vision and understand a new journey requires a fresh faith and a fresh fight to:

- Creatively collaborate with the intent to connect communities, universities, colleges and schools that prepare all students for success
- Intentionally operate as a culturally relevant, data-driven leader
- Collaboratively redesign programs that inspire and propel students beyond their wildest dreams and imagination
- Unapologetically owning a passion and love for the journey and the work required to sustain success
- Continuously advocating for all children
- Consistently providing communication of the organizations vision and work related, including successes along the way

Scholarly research builds leadership capacity and strengthens our voices.

Professional and Scholarly Perspectives

offers research both scholarly positions and professional understandings. The contributors represent the diversity of TCWSE members who are university professors, district administrators, and aspiring administrators. It is critical to include and consider perspectives that offer a view to education from inside hearts and minds of our various levels of leadership. It is with pride that we accept and cherish each life role as more evidence of our amazing capacity for leadership.

Creative Works

Picture this…

We are always inspired and amazed at the creativity of women school executives. To recognize diversity of talents and skills, JTWSE also solicits creative works that promote the journal purpose. Creative works include poetry and artwork.

We are leaders. We are learners. We are women.

Call for Journal Submissions
THEME: TCWSE-Making History! Writing HERstory!
Submission for 2023 Conference Deadline for Submission: August 30, 2022

The Journal of Texas Women School Executives (JTWSE) is a national double-blind peer reviewed, open access e-journal publishing original scholarly research and creative works. JTWSE is an official publication of the Texas Council of Women School Executives.

Submissions should address the following topics:

- Overcoming burnout in educational leadership
- Women leaders empowering others (leadership styles necessary for empowerment
- Policies, historical events surrounding the history of women in school leadership
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion in women leadership
- Programs promoting retention of women in leadership (university/school districts,)

This journal will accept proposals that are related to the topics and theme as listed. In claiming one's destiny and exploring the next chapter of career pathways, dreams, and life after the current position, how will the story (HERstory) unfold? What documented/undocumented historical events, laws, or policies can the researcher share that caused the growth of women in school district leadership? How do women in leadership empower others? In research, is there a particular leadership style seen in women leaders who empower other women? How do employees of women in leadership view their leaders when referencing empowerment and support. Finally, burnout will occur. What factors cause burnout among women in educational leadership and what research-based advice is written to aid in overcoming the phenomenon?

To address the topics described, we welcome single-study investigations, research addressing teaching and learning, educational leadership, policy and finance, school law, and other professional and scholarly perspectives. To recognize the diversity of talents and skills, JTWSE also solicits professional and scholarly perspectives as well as creative works that promote the journal purpose. Creative works include poetry and artwork.

Submitting Manuscripts/Submissions to JTWSE Manuscripts and submissions should be sent to: jen.s.jones@aol.com

Subject line: JTWSE: Conference 2023 Issue

Each submission is reviewed by the editors and evaluated as appropriate for review and then sent to reviewers for double-blind peer review. Editorial decisions will be made typically within four to six weeks after receipt.

Manuscripts should follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association 7th Edition. The typical article submission is equivalent to 5 to 15 pages single-spaced. If selected, you may be asked to revise and re-submit. It is the responsibility of the author to adhere to deadlines provided at that time. Please be sure to carefully read all guidelines and prepare accordingly prior to submission.

Document Preparation

Your manuscript/submission should consist of the following:

- Cover Sheet – Title and information of authorship, name of author(s), current position, contact info, and brief bio for author(s) (no more than 100 words); email address, postal address, phone number.
- Include a statement confirming that the submission has not been published, is not under review for publication and will not be submitted elsewhere while being considered for approval with JTWSE. In cases in which the research involves human subjects, confirm that the IRB (Institutional Review Board) has exempt the study from any further review or that it has approved the investigation.
- Abstract – Place on a separate sheet. The title should be placed at the top of the page. The text following should be no longer than 200 words and should summarize the purpose, methodology and findings briefly.
- The body of the paper
- Charts, tables and/or figures
- List of References in American Psychological Association 7th Edition format
- Use 12-point Times New Roman font
- One-inch margins

Prospective authors may view copies of past submissions and themes of the JTWSE at tcwse.org

Questions regarding the JTWSE may be directed to Co-Editors.

Dr. Sharon Ross
Tarleton State University
College of Education, Ed. Leadership
Assistant Professor/Coordinator
sdross@tarleton.edu

Dr. Jennifer S. Jones
Education Service Center Region 7
Deputy Director
jen.s.jones@aol.com

Contents

In this Issue

Rough and rocky trails. Crooked pathways. Winding curves. Up the hill and back down again. Through tunnels. In the valleys. Over mountains. Perseverance and determination are essential in planning to succeed and working to make a dream become a reality. Authors from various educational organizations are represented in this issue.

Research

Using Brain Imaging Studies to Support Behavioral Interventions for Students with Dyslexia by Dr. Rebecca Putman and Dr. Heather Labansat. Some students struggle to read; thus, their dreams may seem out of reach. Putman and Labansat provide research to help educators better understand the reading brain and how patterns from neuroscientific research can provide support for behavioral dyslexia interventions.

Women Superintendent's Perspectives, Leading During Challenging Times by Dr. Kathryn Washington, Dr. Kelly Brown, Dr. Janice Taylor, and Dr. Sharon Ross. On the heels of social, economic, and health pandemics that plagued our nation and ultimately school systems, Washington, Brown, Taylor, and Ross explored and provide insight into the nuanced thoughts, beliefs and perceptions of relationships, resilience, and equity from current female superintendents.

Female Rural School Leaders' Perceptions of Educational Leadership Preparation Practices by Dr. Summer Pannell, Dr. Julian Sergi McBrayer, Dr. Kristen Dickens, Dr. Carrie Skelton, and Katherine Fallom. Learning by doing, creating purposeful pedagogy, and the inclusion of community-focused approaches are themes found to be essential to effective school leadership preparation practices. These author's share valuable research that revealed the need to improve current preparation programs. In Mississippi's traditionally underserved rural areas, there is a need to equip aspiring principals with the knowledge and skills to lead for equity and to continue having a pipeline of effective school leaders.

Analysis of Factors Influencing Student Program Selection for a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership Introduction by Dr. Melissa Arrambide, Dr. Teresa J. Farler, and Dr. Pam Winn. This research explored the factors affecting student program selection through the lens of a functionalist practitioner. Functionalism adopts the notion that social institutions as collective means to meet individual and social needs; therefore, program administrators may be better able to develop programs to meet individual needs.

Professional Perspectives

Women & Equity: The "Visibly Invisible" School and Workplace Issues of Women and Girls by Dr. Danita Bailey-Samples, and Dr. Christian Stevenson Winn. A professional perspective that focuses on confronting issues that disproportionately affect women and girls in one of the most common environments, our workplaces and schools. Recommendations for these spaces are presented for the reader's consideration to address these issues.

Navigating Pathways: We Dream It, We Believe It, We Claim It – From the Principalship to the Professoriate by Dr. Stephanie Atchley, Dr. Jennifer Bailey, Dr. Teresa Farler, Dr. Forrest Kaiser, Dr. Juanita Reyes, and Dr. Ron Rhone. This team of professors compiled essays that examine the lived experiences of the six assistant professors and their journey from the principalship to the professoriate. While each professor has taken a different path to the professoriate, there are commonalities in each of their stories. Regardless of the path taken, one person's story gives hope to another.

The Path Reveals Itself by Dr. Dalane E. Bouillion. Bouillion shares her pathway with a message intended to broaden opportunities and share alternatives to a traditional career path. From associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction to educational planner, and presently the first chief development officer with VLK Architects. The pathway was far from the traditional pathway.

Walking in Your Purpose: When Dreams Become Reality by Daberechi Okafor. Understanding that obstacles and trials are unavoidable is part of the message in this professional perspective. The author shares that even our obstacles can become the very tools that accelerate and drive us further towards manifesting our dreams.

A Purpose has Unlimited Power by Dr. Sharon Deloach. Sharing the passion of cultivating purpose, this author shares how her drive was born from her grandmothers love of reading and enthusiasm in selling World Book Encyclopedias. The experiences encountered helped Deloach understand the value of determination in reaching her goals and making dreams a reality.

Consciously Moving from Surviving to Thriving by Dr. Lacey Rainey. Clearly administrators need to sharpen their skills to meet the increasingly differentiated needs of teachers and students. This article provides concrete and sequential recommendations for educational leaders to move their organizations forward.

Using the 5 Anchors of Impact in Unpredictable Times by Dr. Laura Trujillo-Jenks and Dr. Rebecca R. Fredrickson. The 5 Anchors of Impact are tools that can be applied to any situation in order for educators to understand the situation. With the challenges COVID-1919 presented, educators need a tool that "anchors" incidents so they can be analyzed and addressed.

Creative Works

The Work that Awaits by Tracy Shea. This poem is a self-talk contribution that reminds us to rest and energize because there is work to do TODAY!

A Space to Dream Big by Dr. Amy Sharp. Dr. Sharp's free verse poem takes us inside the land of dreaming big with all members of Texas Council of Women School Executives. Inside the land of dreaming, you're invited to close your eyes and reflect as you get "in that space."

Reading is the key that opens doors to many good things in life. Reading shaped my dreams, and more reading helped me make my dreams come true" (R. Ginsberg, letter to Michelle Threefoot, 2017). Ginsburg obviously understood the power of reading to help dreams come true, but for some children who struggle to read, their dreams may seem out of reach. Are administrators and teachers well trained and provided extensive professional development to meet the needs of students who struggle but have dreams. Dreams deferred? Not when educators are professionally equipped to utilize necessary knowledge and skills to improve instructional delivery for all students.

Using Brain Imaging Studies to Support Behavioral Interventions for Students with Dyslexia

Dr. Rebecca Putman, Tarleton State University
Dr. Heather Labansat, Tarleton State University

Abstract

For many years, researchers have attempted to translate the science of reading into practical guidelines for educators; however, attempts to create a robust connection between research and practice in literacy education have largely failed. There is a renewed interest in the science of reading and in translating research into guidance for teachers and educational administrators. Neuroscientists have investigated whether the brain activation patterns of those with dyslexia can be normalized through behavioral interventions. Overall, the findings have suggested that intense behavioral interventions can contribute to a more normalized pattern of brain activation in those with dyslexia during reading tasks. Given the challenges of translating the science of reading into practical applications in educational settings, this article describes a science-to-practice translation of patterns and common characteristics of effective behavioral interventions for dyslexia as suggested by brain imaging studies. Results suggest that there are common characteristics of effective interventions for those with dyslexia based on brain activation patterns; however, there are notable variations in the length of treatment and in the treatment for older students with dyslexia.

Introduction

In 2017, a young girl dressed up as United States Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, for "Superhero Day" at her school. Her mom posted a photo on social media, and it went viral. Shortly after, the young girl received a personal letter from Justice Ginsburg that included this wisdom: "Reading is the key that opens doors to many good things in life. Reading shaped my dreams, and more reading helped me make my dreams come true" (R. Ginsberg, letter to Michelle Threefoot, 2017). Ginsburg obviously understood the power of reading to help dreams come true, but for some children who struggle to read, their dreams may seem out of reach. To help *all* students realize their dreams, especially those with dyslexia, educators must first understand reading from a cognitive perspective. This purpose of this article is to help educators better understand the reading brain and how patterns from neuroscientific research can provide support for behavioral dyslexia interventions.

Reading Research Quarterly, a leading research journal on literacy, recently published to special issues on the science of reading (SOR) that featured articles by some of the most influential reading researchers. The goal of these special issues was to focus on the *science* (International Literacy Association [ILA], 2020). Generally, "SOR [is] an approach that prioritizes basic science and experimental work" (ILA, 2020, p. 3). Up to this point, there has been little consensus on an exact definition of what constitutes the SOR. The ILA (2020) defines SOR as "a corpus of objective investigation and accumulation of reliable evidence about how humans learn to read and how reading should be taught" (p.3). While a working definition is helpful, there still remains a lot of ambiguity surrounding how to apply this evidence meaningfully in educational settings. With a renewed emphasis the science of reading, there have been attempts by policy makers and educational stakeholders to legislate the application and use of this evidence in the classroom through required trainings, various curricula, and new guidelines (Seidenberg et al., 2020). Many educators find the evidence relevant to their daily practices, but as Seidenberg et al. (2020) note,

"…although reading science is highly relevant to learning in the classroom setting, it does not yet speak to what to teach when, how, and for whom at a level that is useful for teachers" (p. S121).

For many years, researchers have attempted to translate the science of reading into practical guidelines for educators (Compton-Lilly et al., 2020; Kim, 2008; Solari et al., 2020); however, attempts to create a robust connection between research and practice in literacy education have largely failed (Seidenberg, 2017). Scientific research on reading often focuses on complex theory and systematic data and does not translate the results into practical suggestions or direct guidance for the classroom (Gabreli, 2016; Seidenberg et al., 2020). There are various reasons why education has not embraced the science, with the biggest one being a disconnect between the cultures of science and education (Seidenberg et al, 2020). There are profound differences in the philosophy and epistemology between the two, as education and science define knowledge and approach problems very differently (Petscher et al., 2020; Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). For example, the focus for neuroscientists is on the where and what of neural applications during reading, while the focus for educators is on the who, when, and how of reading instruction. Because of these complexities, the field of literacy "has fallen short in communicating what is known about the SOR to educational stakeholders" (Solari et al., 2020, p. S348). Given the challenges of translating the science of reading into practical applications in the classroom and the renewed interest in the science of reading, the purpose of this article is to describe a science-to-practice translation of patterns and common characteristics of effective behavioral interventions for dyslexia as suggested by brain imaging studies.

Research on Reading

Traditionally, research on reading relies on observational techniques and most measures are behavioral (Gabreli, 2016). There is an extensive research base on reading; however, as Seidenberg et al. (2020) point out, "the evidence now also includes data collected using specialized instruments (e.g. eye tracking, electroencephalography, neuroimaging)" (p. S124), which means that the research on reading now goes beyond observation and intuition.

Technology is revolutionizing the way that researchers and educators understand the process of reading. Scientists now have the tools to measure, analyze, and view the brain during reading tasks. As a result, we have begun to construct an understanding of the *reading brain* and what it means for education (American Psychological Association [APA], 2014; Dehaene, 2010; Wolf, 2007). Not only does this technology allow us to observe and understand the active brain processes that occur in a typically developing reader, it also allows us to identify what happens when something goes wrong in the reading brain, with many researchers focusing on the brains of individuals with reading disabilities.

Brain Plasticity

To better understand these scientific studies and how they can help guide decisions regarding dyslexia interventions, it is necessary to review one of the precepts of neurology: the human brain is plastic. Plasticity of the brain, or neuroplasticity, is the lifelong ability of the brain to reorganize or grow neural pathways based on new experiences (Dehaene, 2010; Seidenberg, 2017; Wolf, 2007). Furthermore, researchers have found that effective instruction can change the anatomy of the brain and brain activation patterns during reading (APA, 2014; Dehaene, 2010; Shaywitz, 2020; Wolf, 2007). We also know there are at least three important neural regions utilized for

reading, all located in the left hemisphere of the brain: (a) anterior system in the left inferior frontal gyrus, (b) left parietal-temporal lobe; and (c) left occipital-temporal region (Dehaene, 2010; Wolf, 2007).

Dyslexia and the Brain

Definitions of dyslexia vary, but most researchers agree that dyslexia is a neurobiological-based learning disorder that results from a disruption within the language system in the brain that causes phonological deficits (Dehaene, 2010; Hulme & Snowling, 2015; International Dyslexia Association [IDA], 2008; Shaywitz et al., 2004, 2006b; Vellutino et al., 2004; Wolf, 2007). These deficits occur despite adequate and effective reading instruction, intelligence, and motivation (Eckert, 2004; IDA, 2008; Shaywitz et al., 2006b; Temple et al., 2000). Determining an exact prevalence rate for dyslexia is difficult because of the varied definitions; however, some estimates suggest that approximately 5%-10% of the population has dyslexia (Dehaene, 2010; Shaywitz, 2020; Siegel, 2006; Wagner et al., 2020). There are marked differences between the brains of dyslexic readers and those without dyslexia. One distinction is that there are documented differences in the *anatomy* of dyslexic brains versus the brains of typical readers (Berninger & Richards, 2002; Dehaene, 2010; Eckert, 2004; Richards et al., 2006a; Wolf, 2007). Research suggests that errors in neural migration, early in gestation, can result in disordered layers, displaced neural elements, and/or excessive folding in the brains of those with dyslexia (Berninger & Richards, 2002).

While specific research findings on the dyslexic reading brain vary, researchers have found one area of universal agreement: dyslexic brains show atypical brain activation patterns during reading compared to typical readers (Dehaene, 2010; Eckert, 2004; Gabrieli, 2009; Richlan et al., 2011; Shaywitz, 2020; Wolf, 2007). In the dyslexic brain, there is normally a disruption in the left posterior hemisphere brain systems, specifically in the occipital-temporal and the parietal-temporal regions (Shaywitz et al., 2004, 2006a; Simos et al., 2006, 2007; Temple et al., 2003). At the same time, there is usually compensatory engagement of the right hemisphere during reading. The poorer the reader, the greater the activation in the right occipital-temporal region (Chyl et al., 2021; Nugiel et al., 2018; Shaywitz, et al., 2004, 2006a; Simos et al., 2006, 2007; Temple et al., 2003).

Based on these findings, many researchers have conducted studies in which they investigate whether brain activation patterns of those with dyslexia can be influenced through behavioral interventions (e.g. Richards et al., 2006a). Overall, their findings have shown that those with dyslexia demonstrate an increased activation in the left hemisphere,-which mimics the activation patterns of typical readers. These changes in the brain often lead to improved reading behaviors.

Translational Research

While there are numerous scientific studies that have measured changes in brain activation patterns in those with dyslexia after behavioral interventions, there are few, if any, articles that have attempted to synthesize these findings and translate them into broad behavioral recommendations for dyslexia interventions. Previously, educators and administrators have relied on the findings from behavioral studies (e.g. Alexander & Slinger-Constant, 2004); however, the impact of brain research on the behavioral models for dyslexia requires further study. The idea of translational research has been around for several decades and has been widely used in the health sciences; however, its application in the field of reading research is relatively new (Solari et al., 2020). Gabrieli (2016) notes, translational research "may be especially pertinent for the many children

with brain differences that make educational progress difficult in the standard curriculum (e.g. dyslexia)" (p.614).

Others have argued that a collaboration between neuroscience and education is incompatible and a "bridge too far" (Bowers, 2016; Bruer, 1997). There are many layers between basic science findings and their application, especially with neuroscience (Solari, 2020). In addition, neuroscience does not measure or include institutional, professional, curricular, political, economic, or societal influences that have a profound impact on educational practice (Thomas, 2019). On the other hand, many others have suggested that the potential for the two disciplines to inform one another is profound (Hruby & Goswami, 2011; Seidenberg et al., 2020; Solari et al., 2020; Varma et al., 2008; Vellutino et al., 2004). As Hruby and Goswami (2011) state, "As these areas of research have expanded, attempts to relate insights from the neurosciences to education have been numerous…[and] integrating findings from neuroscience research with other research perspectives on literacy offers exciting opportunities for education" (pp.156-157).

Current Review

Using findings from several scientific imaging studies on interventions for dyslexia, this review attempted to identify patterns or common characteristics of effective behavioral interventions for translation into classroom practices. Specifically, these questions guided this synthesis:
1. What specific behavioral instructional method(s) or program(s) were most effective at influencing dyslexic brain activation during reading?
2. What was the most efficient and effective length of intervention?
3. For what ages were the interventions most effective?
4. Was treatment for older dyslexic readers different than treatment for younger readers?

Method

To begin the review and help guide the related searches, two independent researchers searched a wide range of medical, scientific, and psychological databases for articles to include in the analysis. For the studies to qualify, they had to meet the following criteria: (a) be experimental or quasi-experimental, (b) identify the study participants as having dyslexia, (c) include an intervention or treatment, (d) conduct brain imaging before and after treatment, and (e) describe changes in brain activation patterns as measured during reading tasks before and after intervention. Studies conducted in languages other than English were excluded because of the semi-transparent orthography of the English language. The search results were limited to studies that were published between 2000 and 2020. A total of 15 studies met the established criteria (see Table 1).

Interestingly, all of the studies that qualified were conducted within an eight-year period, between 2000 and 2008. Several, more recent, studies were also identified; however, these studies referenced a more general term of *reading difficulties* and did not specifically mention dyslexia as a characteristic of their study participants. One explanation of the change in terminology can be attributed to changes in theoretical thinking around the definition of dyslexia and its causes, which has led to a broader operationalization of dyslexia (Elliot, 2020). In an attempt to maintain our focus on dyslexia, the authors excluded the articles that used the term *reading difficulties* to describe their participants.

Once the studies were identified, the authors inspected the study interventions and utilized a thematic qualitative data analysis technique to identify patterns and characteristics. Nowell et al. (2017) describe thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (p. 2). All of the studies in Table 1 reported more typical brain activation patterns in those with dyslexia after intervention. These changes included decreased activation of the right hemisphere ventral cortex and increased activation of the left hemisphere brain regions typically associated with reading, particularly the temporoparietal regions. In addition to increased left hemisphere activation, a few of the studies also found compensatory engagement in the right hemisphere fusiform gyrus in those with dyslexia (Eden et al. 2004; Shaywitz, et al., 2004; Simos et al., 2007). Changes in brain activation patterns in all of the studies were measured while participants engaged in phoneme-grapheme tasks (including decoding pseudowords and real words) or in phonological awareness tasks such as rhyming or sound deletion.[1]

Table 1

Study Features

	Sample		Main Intervention Elements		
Study	N	Ages	Duration	Setting	Instruction/Materials
Richards et al. (2000)	8	10-13	3 weeks (2 hours a day, 30 hours total)	small group	First hour of each session focused on phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, morpheme strategies for Anglo Saxon, Latin, and Greek words, guided oral reading, writing, and comprehension activities, all in context of reading/science workshop. The second hour of each session was devoted to hands-on science activities.
Temple et al. (2000)	8	adults	5 weeks (100 minutes a day, average of 33 days)	computer-based	[a]*Fast ForWord* computer program, which focuses on rapid auditory processing and oral language skills, including phoneme discrimination and sentence comprehension
Richards et al. (2002)	10	ages 9-12	3 weeks (2 hours a day, 28 hours total)	groups of 10	Phonological awareness only (4 participants) OR morphological awareness embedded into an intervention that included alphabetic principle, decoding, fluency, and comprehension (6 participants).
Sarkari et al. (2002)	8	ages 8-16	8 weeks (80 hours total)	one-on-one	[b]Phono-Graphix (6 participants) an intensive phonics program & [c]Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing multi-senSoRy sound awareness, articulatory awareness, and auditory/visual/senSoRimotor stimulation
Simos et al. (2002)	8	ages 7-17	8 weeks (80 hours total)	reading clinic	[b]Phono-Graphix (6 participants) an intensive phonics program or [c]Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing (2 participants) multi-senSoRy sound

---

[1] See Barquero et al., 2014 for a list of specific tasks

Study	Sample			Main Intervention Elements	
	N	Ages	Duration	Setting	Instruction/Materials
					awareness, articulatory awareness, and auditory/visual/senSoRimotor stimulation
Aylward et al. (2003)	10	ages 9-12	3 weeks (2 hours a day, 28 hours total)	groups of 10	Same as Richards et al. (2002)
Eden et al. (2004)	19	adults	8 weeks (3 hours a day, average of 112.5 hours total)	small group	Intensive phonologically-based instruction based on Lindamood-Bell learning processes, multi-senSoRy sound awareness, articulatory awareness, and auditory/visual/senSoRimotor stimulation
Shaywitz et al. (2004)	37	ages 6-9	8 months (50 minutes a day, average of 105 hours)	one-on-one	Explicit phonological awareness and alphabetic principle, syllable awareness, independent reading practice, and fluency and comprehension support through text-based reading
Richards et al. (2006a)	10	4th, 5th, and 6th graders	2 weeks (2 hours a day for 14 consecutive weekdays, 28 hours)	small group	Linguistic awareness (phonological awareness OR morphological awareness), alphabetic principle, fluency, and reading comprehension.
Richards et al. (2006b)	18	Mean age approximately 10-11 years old	3 weeks (14 2-hour sessions, 28 hours)	small group	First hour of treatment was either orthographic or morphological spelling treatment. The second hour of treatment was on explicit instruction in alphabetic principle (10 minutes) and composition (50 minutes).
Richards et al. (2007)	20	Grades 4-6	2 weeks (3 8-hour sessions, 24 hours)	small group	Phonological treatment within the context of high-interest science content material (11 participants) OR a nonphonolgical treatment that focused on oral language and content with virtual reality activities (9 participants)
Gaab et al. (2007)	22	Mean age 10.5	8 weeks (100 minutes a day, 5 days a week, 67 hours)	computer-based	Fast ForWord computer program
Simos et al. (2007)	15	ages 7-9	16 weeks (2 hours a day for first 8 weeks, 1 hour a day for next 8 weeks)	unknown	Two stage intervention: 8 weeks on phonological decoding skills, *Phono-Graphix* and 8 weeks on rapid word recognition, [d]*Read Naturally*
Odegard et al. (2008)	12	ages 10-14	2 academic years (90 minutes a	small group	[e]*Take Flight: A Comprehensive Intervention for Students with Dyslexia* which includes phonemic awareness,

	Sample			Main Intervention Elements	
Study	N	Ages	Duration	Setting	Instruction/Materials
			day for 4 days a week)		phonological awareness, articulation, morphology, vocabulary, fluency, spelling and reading comprehension in isolation and in context of real reading activities.
Richards & Berninger (2008)	18	mean age approximately 10-11 years old	3 weeks (14 2-hour sessions)	small group	First hour of treatment was either orthographic or morphological spelling treatment. The second hour of treatment was explicit instruction in the alphabetic principle (10 minutes) and composition (50 minutes).

[a] Berninger, V., Nagy, W., Carlisle, J., Thomson, J., Hoffer, D., Abbot, S., et al. (2003). Effective treatment for children with dyslexia in grades 4-6: Behavioral and brain evidence. In B. Foorman (Ed.), *Preventing and remediating reading difficulties: Bringing science to scale* (pp.381-417). Timonium, MD: York Press.

[b] See McGuiness, C., McGuiness, D., & McGuiness, G. (1996). Phono-Graphix: A new method for remediating reading difficulties. *Annals of Dyslexia, 46*, 73-96.

[c] Lindamood, P.C., & Lindamood, P.D. (1998). *The Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing Program for Reading, Spelling and Speech (LiPS).* Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

[d] Ihnot, C., Mastoff, J., Gavin, J., & Hendrickson, L. (2001). *Read naturally.* St. Paul, MN: Read Naturally.

[e] Avrit, K., Allen, C., Carlsen, K., Gross, M., Pierce, D., & Rumsey, M. (2006). *Take flight: A comprehensive intervention for students with dyslexia.* Dallas: Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children.

Results

Characteristics of Interventions

Based on the reviewed studies, a variety of interventions with different features and intensity levels appear to positively impact the brain activation patterns of those with dyslexia when reading. All of the reviewed studies implemented intensive one-on-one or small group interventions, including computer programs, that integrated many of the foundational components of reading. These components included phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, word recognition, morphological analysis, fluency, and comprehension. Effectiveness of the interventions in the reviewed studies was determined by statistically significant changes in brain activation while reading after intervention. In general, interventions that were the most effective at normalizing the brain activation patterns and in improving reading behaviors had these four features:

- an intensive, daily, structured intervention with one-on-one or small group instruction;
- a phonologically-based intervention that focused on the alphabetic principle and orthographic mapping of the sounds in the brain;
- an emphasis on morphological analysis and word parts; and
- practice using skills in isolation and within the context of real reading.

A fifth possible feature is additional fluency instruction. Many of the brain imaging studies on dyslexia did not address or specifically measure fluency in their research; however, some studies

(Denton et al., 2006; Odegard et al., 2008; Shaywitz et al., 2004) suggest that fluency instruction is an important component of interventions with readers who are dyslexic. More research is needed to determine if fluency instruction has an effect on the brain activation patterns of those with dyslexia.

Length of Intervention

Based on the review, the optimal length of the intervention varies. Significant changes to the brain, including lateralization to the left hemisphere during reading was accomplished in as little as two weeks; however, a majority of the studies found significant changes with intensive interventions around eight weeks (Simos et al., 2002, 2007; Temple et al., 2003). Overall time spent in intervention varied from 28 hours (Aylward et al., 2003; Richards et al, 2002, 2006) to more than 333 hours (Odegard et al., 2008).

Effectiveness of Intervention

The treatments appear to be most effective for younger dyslexic students, those less than 12-years-old. Studies have consistently found that early interventions that emphasize phonological awareness and the alphabetic principle result in changes in the brain (Shaywitz et al., 2004; Simos et al., 2002, 2004). These findings underscore the need for early identification and intervention of dyslexic children.

Treatment for Older Students with Dyslexia

Three of the reviewed studies (Aylward et al., 2003; Richards et al., 2002; Richards, et al., 2006) found that treatment for students with dyslexia in upper elementary is more effective if it emphasizes the coordination of phonological, morphological, and orthographic processes. By combining these three-word forms, older students with dyslexia are better able to map longer and more complex word forms by learning about how sounds, word parts, and letters work together to form words and their meanings (Richards et al., 2006).

Brain Based **Intervention/Translational Research**

A related question guiding this study is whether the behavioral interventions being used to treat dyslexia are *brain-based*. Without brain imaging in the classroom, it is impossible to know if brain activation patterns are changing or normalizing because of an intervention; however, educators can assess and observe behavioral changes and make assumptions based on these assessments as to whether or not an intervention is *brain-based* or based on the science of reading. If a dyslexia intervention produces long-lasting, observable, and measurable changes in reading behaviors, these changes are indicators that the intervention is changing the brains of those with dyslexia. Significant improvement in phonological awareness, phonics knowledge, decoding ability, word reading, and fluency can all indicate changes in brain activation patterns.

Discussion

Translational research has the potential to shorten the gap between empirical research and classroom practice. As Seidenberg et al. (2020) point out, "We know more about the science of reading than about the science of teaching based on the science of reading" (p. S121). By creating common terminologies and an interpretation of findings through translational research, we can encourage the application of the SOR in classrooms so that all readers are successful.

This review suggests that there are common characteristics of effective behavioral interventions for readers with dyslexia as measured by brain imaging; however, there are notable variations in the length of treatment and in the treatment for older readers with dyslexia. The patterns and characteristics of behavioral interventions for individuals with dyslexia align closely with the corpus of knowledge associated with SOR, including an emphasis on small group instruction, instruction in phonological awareness and the alphabetic principle, and the application of skills in isolation and in context (Petcher et al., 2020). Because classroom teachers and dyslexia specialists utilize a variety of curriculums and programs in diverse settings, a reasonable use of the patterns presented in this article would be as touchstones against which educators and administrators could evaluate the characteristics of the intervention programs they are currently using in their classrooms and schools.

Given the reviewed studies, computer-based programs, commercially-designed programs, and teacher-designed programs, can all be effective at changing brain activation patterns and in improving some reading skills related to decoding. In the future, individual brain imaging could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of dyslexia interventions or to predict which children will have the greatest response to specific treatment methods based on individual brain activation patterns. Because the specific causes and brain activation patterns differ among those with dyslexia, the effects of dyslexia interventions may also differ. Studies suggest that accurate classification of students with dyslexia through behavioral and neuropsychological assessments could help plan appropriate interventions for students with dyslexia based on their individual profiles (Chyl et al., 2021; Eckert, 2004; Lorusso et al., 2011; Nugiel et al., 2019). Additional research is also needed to determine how to help students who are inadequate responders to intensive intervention, since 2% to 6% of children fail to respond to interventions that include all of the necessary components (Odegard et al., 2008).

Beyond the patterns noted, a somewhat surprising outcome of this review is the fact that most of the relevant studies were conducted during the early 2000s. The large gap between research and classroom practice has been well-documented; however, it is still alarming that it takes so long for scientific findings to influence practice. It is a complex process to translate scientific findings, and there are very few mechanisms for sharing results among scientists and teachers (Solari et al., 2020; Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). Allington (2013) suggested that it can take as long as "50 years for research findings to influence daily classroom practices" (p.520). Given this statistic, it is not unreasonable to translate 10- to 20-year old research into practical guidelines for the classroom; however, translational research has the potential to reduce this gap.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this review on interventions. Most of the studies reviewed assume that dyslexia is a result of phonological processing deficits and do not address any potential rapid naming deficits. In addition, most of the studies had small sample sizes, limiting generalizability of the results. Also, many of these studies had a limited definition of reading, only addressing

behavioral changes in terms of word reading. Any improvement in word reading does not necessarily translate into improved comprehension or fluency. One more word of caution is that changes in brain activation patterns do not always translate into behavioral reading changes, and none of the research has confirmed that brain changes from interventions are permanent.

An additional consideration is the evolving understanding of dyslexia, reading disabilities, and their related causes. The term *dyslexia* has been used somewhat inconsistently across scientific, clinical and educational contexts, which has precipitated the need for a more equitable and reliable operational definition (Elliot, 2020). This lack of consistency further confounds the process of translational research. The goal of translational research is to shorten the gap between research and practice, and this process can be complicated and delayed by inconsistent use of terms like *dyslexia.* Despite the variations in the use of the terms *dyslexia* and *reading difficulties*, it is worth noting that the patterns in interventions in more recent studies that defined participants as having *reading difficulties* mirrored the results of the older studies that included participants with *dyslexia* (e.g. Barquero, et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2011). Despite these limitations, the scientific research has a lot to offer education in terms of informing educators on which interventions are more likely to normalize brain activation patterns for readers who are dyslexic. Beyond dyslexia, translational research also has the potential to close the gap between the publication of scientific research on literacy and the application of the findings in the classroom by providing practical guidance that is useful for teachers and administrators.

References

Alexander, A.W., & Slinger-Constant, A.M. (2004). Current status of treatments for dyslexia: Critical review. *Journal of Child Neurology, 19*, 744-758. doi: 10.1177/08830738040190100401

Allington, R. (2013). What really matters when working with struggling readers. *The Reading Teacher, 66,* 520-530.

American Psychological Association (2014). *See brain. See brain read....* Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/research/action/reading.aspx

Avrit, K., Allen, C., Carlsen, K., Gross, M., Pierce, D., & Rumsey, M. (2006). *Take flight: A comprehensive intervention for students with dyslexia.* Dallas: Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children.

Aylward, E.H., Richards, T.L., Berninger, V.W., Nagy, W.E., Field, K.M., Grimme, A.C., Richards, A.L., Thomson, J.B., & Cramer, S.C. (2003). Instructional treatment associated with changes in brain activation in children with dyslexia. *Neurology, 61*, 212-219. doi: 10.1212/01.WNL.0000068363.05974.64

Barquero, L.A., Davis, N., & Cutting, L.E. (2014). Neuroimaging of reading intervention: A systematic review and activation likelihood estimate meta-analysis. *PLoS One 9* (1). doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0083668

Berninger, V., Nagy, W., Carlisle, J., Thomson, J., Hoffer, D., Abbot, S., et al. (2003). Effective treatment for children with dyslexia in grades 4-6: Behavioral and brain evidence. In B. Foorman (Ed.), *Preventing and remediating reading difficulties: Bringing science to scale* (pp. 381-417). Timonium, MD: York Press.

Berninger, V.W., & Richards, T.L. (2002). *Brain literacy for educators and psychologists.* Academic Press: New York.

Bowers, J. S. (2016). The practical and principled problems with educational neuroscience. *Psychological Review, 123*, 600 – 612. http://dx.doi .org/10.1037/rev0000025

Bruer, J.T. (1997). Education and the brain: A bridge too far. *Educational Researcher, 26,* 4–16. doi: 10.3102/0013189X026008004

Chyl, K., Fraga-Gonzalez, G., Brem, S., & Jednorog, K. (2021). Brain dynamics of (a)typical reading development—a review of longitudinal studies. *NPJ Science of Learning, 6*(1), 4. doi: 10.1038/s41539-020-00081-5.

Compton-Lilly, C.F. Mitra, A., Guay, M., & Spence, L.K. (2020). A confluence of complexity: Intersections among reading theory, neuroscience, and observations of young readers. *Reading Research Quarterly, 55,* S185-S195.

Davis, N., Barquero, L., Compton, D.L., Fuchs, L.S., Fuchs, D., Gore, J., C., (2011). Functional correlates of children's responsiveness to intervention. *Development of Neuropsychology, 36,* 288-301. doi:10.1080/87565641.2010.549875

Dehaene, S. (2010). *Reading in the brain: The new science of how we read.* Penguin.

Denton, C.A., Fletcher, J.M., Anthony, J.L., & Franci, D.J. (2006). An evaluation of intensive intervention for students with persistent reading difficulties. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 29*, 447-466.

Eden, G., Jones, K., Cappell, K., Gareau, L., Wood, F., Zeffiro,T., Dietz, W.A.E., Agnew, J.A., & Flowers, D.L. (2004). Neural changes following remediation in adult developmental dyslexia. *Neuron, 44,* 411-422. doi: 10.1016/j.neuron.2004.10.019

Eckert, M. (2004). Neuroanatomical markers for dyslexia: A review of dyslexia structural imaging studies. *Neuroscientist, 10*, 362-371.

Elliot, J.G. (2020). It's time to be scientific about dyslexia. *Reading Research Quarterly, 55*(S1), S61-S75.

Gaab, N., Gabriele, J.D.E., Deutschb, G.K., Tallal, P. & Temple E. (2007). Neural correlates of rapid auditory processing are disrupted in children with developmental dyslexia and ameliorated with training: An fMRI study. *Restorative Neurology and Neuroscience, 25,* 295-310.

Gabrieli, J.D.E. (2016). The promise of educational neuroscience: Comment on Bowers (2016). *Psychological Review, 123,* 613-619.

Ginsburg, R. (2017). *Ruth Bader Ginsburg to Michelle Threefoot, 2017* [Letter].

Hruby, G.G., & Goswami, U. (2011). Neuroscience and reading: A review for reading education researchers. *Reading Research Quarterly, 46,* 156-172.

Hulme, C., & Snowling, M.J. (2015). Learning to read: What we know and what we need to understand better. *Child Development Perspectives, 7,* 1-5.

Ihnot, C., Mastoff, J., Gavin, J., & Hendrickson, L. (2001). *Read naturally.* Read Naturally.

International Dyslexia Association (2021, February 16). *Just the facts*. Retrieved from http://www.interdys.org/ewebeditpro5/upload/Definition.pdf

International Literacy Association. (2020). The science of reading: Supports, critiques, and questions: An executive summary of the Reading Research Quarterly special issue.

Kim, J.S. (2008). Research and the reading wars. In F.M. Hess (Ed.), *When research matters: How scholarship influences education policy* (pp. 89– 111). Harvard Education Press.

Lindamood, P.C., & Lindamood, P.D. (1998). *The Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing Program for Reading, Spelling and Speech (LiPS).* Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Lorusso, M.L., Facoetti, A., & Bakker, D.J. (2011). Neuropsychological treatment of dyslexia: Does type of treatment matter? *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 44*, 136-149.

McGuiness, C., McGuiness, D., & McGuiness, G. (1996). Phono-Graphix: A new method for remediating reading difficulties. *Annals of Dyslexia, 46*, 73-96.

Nowell, L.S. Norris, J.M., White, D.E., & Moules, N.J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16,* 1-13.

Nugiel, T., Roe, M.A., Taylor, W.P., Cirino, P.T., Vaughn, S.R., Fletcher, J.M., Juranke, J., & Church, J.A. (2019). Brain activity in struggling readers before intervention relates to future reading gains. *Cortex: A Journal Devoted to the Study of the Nervous System and Behavior, 111,* 286–302. doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2018.11.009

Odegard, T.N., Ring, J., Smith, S., Biggan, J., & Black, J. (2008). Differentiating the neural response to intervention in children with developmental dyslexia. *Annals of Dyslexia, 58,* 1-14. doi: 10.1007/s11881-008-0014-5

Petscher, Y., Cabell, S.Q., Catts, H.W., Compton, D.L., Foorman, B.R., Hart, S.A., Lonigan, C.J., Phillips, B.M., Schatschneider, C., Steacy, L.M., Terry, N.P., & Wagner, R.K. (2020). How the science of reading informs 21-century education. *Reading Research Quarterly, 55,* S267-S282.

Richards, T.L., Aylward, E.H., Berninger, V.W., Field, K.M., Grimme, A.C., Richards, A.L., & Nagy, W. (2006a). Individual fMRI activation in orthographic mapping and morpheme mapping after orthographic or morphological spelling treatment in child dyslexics. *Journal of Neurolinguistics, 19,* 56-86.

Richards, T.L., Aylward, E.H., Field, K.M., Grimme, A.C., Raskind, W., Richards, A.L., Nagy, W., Eckert, M., Leonard, C., Abbott, R.D., & Berninger, V.W. (2006b). Converging evidence for triple word form theory in children with dyslexia. *Developmental Neuropsychology, 30,* 547-589.

Richards, T.L., & Berninger, V.W. (2008). Abnormal FMIR connectivity in children with dyslexia during a phoneme task: Before but not after treatment. *Journal of Neurolinguistics, 21,* 294-304. doi: 10.1016/j.jneuroling.2007.07.002

Richards, T.L., Berninger, V.W., Aylward, E.H., Richards, A.L., Thomson, J.B., Nagy, W.E., Carlisle, J.F., Dager, S.R., & Abbott, R.D. (2002). Reproducibility of proton MR spectroscopic imaging (PEPSI): Comparison of dyslexic and normal-reading children and effects of treatment on brain lactate levels during language tasks. *American Journal of Neuroradiology, 21,* 916-922.

Richards, T., Berninger, V., Winn, W., Stock, P., Wagner, R., Muse, A., Maravilla, K. (2007). Functional MRI activation in children with and without dyslexia during pseudoword aural repeat and visual decode: Before and after treatment. *Neuropsychology, 21,* 732-741. doi: 10.1037/0894-4105.21.6.732

Richards, T.L., Corina, D., Serafini, S., Steury, K., Echelard, D.R., Dager, S.R., Marro, K., Abbott, R.D., Maravilla, K.R., & Berninger, V.W. (2000). Effects of a phonologically-driven treatment for dyslexia on lactate levels as measured by proton MR spectroscopic imaging. *American Journal of Neuroradiology, 21*, 916-922.

Richlan, F., Kronbichler, M., and Wimmer, H. (2011). Meta-analyzing brain dysfunctions in dyslexic children and adults. *Neuroimage* 56, 1735–1742. doi: 10.1016/j.neuroimage.2011.02.040

Sarkari, S., Panagiotis, P.G., Fletcher, J.M., Castillo, E.M., Breier, J.I., & Papanicolaou, A.C. (2002). Contributions of magnetic source imaging to the understanding of dyslexia. *Seminars in Pediatric Neurology, 9,* 229-238.

Seidenberg, M. (2017). *Language at the speed of sight: How we read, wy so many can't, and what can be done about it.* Basic Books.

Seindenberg, M.S., Cooper Borkenhagen, M., & Kearns, D.M. (2020). Lost in translation? Challenges in connecting reading science and educational practice. *Reading Research Quarterly, 55,* S119-S130.

Shaywitz, B.A., Lyon, G.R., & Shaywitz, S.E. (2006a). The role of functional magnetic resonance imaging in understanding reading and dyslexia. *Developmental Neuropsychology, 30*, 613-632.

Shaywitz, S., Mody, M., & Shaywitz, B. (2006b). Neural mechanisms in dyslexia. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 15, 278–281.

Shaywitz, B.A., Shaywitz, S.E., Blachman, B.A., Pugh, K.R., Fulbright, R.K., Skudlarski, P., Mencl, W.E., Constable, R. T., Holahan, J.M., Marchione, K.E., Fletcher, J.M., Lyon, G.R., & Gore, J.C. (2004). Development of left occipitotemporal systems for skilled reading in children after a phonologically-based intervention. *Biological Psychiatry, 55*, 926-933.

Shaywitz, S. (2020). *Overcoming dyslexia* (2nd ed.). Vintage.

Siegel, L.S. (2006). Perspectives on dyslexia. *Paediatrics & Child Health, 11,* 581-587.

Simos, P.G., Fletcher, J.M., Bergman, E., Breier, J.I., Foorman, B.R., Castillo, E.M., Davis, R.N., Fitzgerald, M., & Papanicolaou, A.C. (2002). Dyslexia-specific brain activation profile becomes normal following successful remedial training. *Neurology, 58,* 1203-1213. doi: 10.1212/WNL.58.8.1203

Simos, P.G., Fletcher, J.M., Denton, C., Sarkari, S., Billingsley-Marshall, R., & Papanicolaou, A.C. (2006). Magnetic source imaging studies of dyslexia interventions. *Developmental Neuropsychology*, 30, 591-611. doi: 10.1207/s15326942dn3001_4

Simos, P.G., Fletcher, J.M., Sarkari, S., Billingsley, R.L., Denton, C., & Papanicolaou, A.C. (2007). Altering the brain circuits for reading through intervention: A magnetic source imaging study. *Neuropsychology, 21*, 485-496. doi: 10.1037/0894-4105.21.4.485

Solari, E.J., Terry, N.P., Gaab, N., Hogan, T.P., Nelson, N.J., Pentimonti, J.M., Petscher, Y., & Sayko, S. (2020). Translational science: A road map for the science of reading. *Reading Research Quarterly, 55,* S347-S360.

Temple, E., Deutcsch, G.K., Poldrack, R.A., Miller, S., Tallal, P., Merzenich, M.M, & Gabriele, J.D.E. (2003). Neural deficits in children with dyslexia ameliorated by behavioral remediation: Evidence from fMRI. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA, 100,* 2860-2865. doi: 10.1073/pnas.0030098100

Temple, E., Poldrack, R.A., Protopapas, A., Nagarajan, S., Saltz, T., Tallal, P., Merzenich, M.M., & Gabriele, J.D.E. (2000). Disruption of the neural response to rapid acoustic stimuli in dyslexia: Evidence from functional MRI. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA, 97,* 13907 - 13912.

Vanderlinde, R., & van Braak, J. (2010). The gap between educational research and practice: View of teachers, school leaders, intermediaries and researchers. *British Educational Research Journal, 36.* 299-316.

Varma, S., McCandliss, B., & Schwartz, D.L. (2008). Scientific and pragmatic challenges for bridging education and neuroscience. *Educational Researcher, 37,* 140-152.

Vellutino, F.R., Fletcher, J.M., Snowling, M.J., & Scanlon, D.M. (2004). Specific reading disability (dyslexia): What have we learned in the past four decades? *Journal of Child Psychology Psychiatry, 45,* 2-40.

Wagner, R.K., Zirps, F.A., Edwards, A.A., Wood, S.G., Joyner, R.E., Becker, B.J., Guangyun, L., & Beal, B. (2020). The prevalence of dyslexia: A new approach to its estimation. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 53*(5), 354-365. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219420920377

Wolf, M. (2007). *Proust and the squid.* New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Providing quality instruction for all students so dreams are not deferred requires transformational leadership. The call is on for change agents with who are skilled in leading, even in unprecedented times. According to research, the most powerful position in public schools is that of school superintendent, and it is a position dominated by men (Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004). During the coronavirus pandemic, schools have been impacted in a way that no one could have possibly imagined. To keep the dreams alive, educators had to continue leading and teaching in spite of the barriers created by the pandemic. Upon what would superintendents base their decisions to address the challenges? How could superintendents endure the adverse situations they were facing? What could sustain them during this time?

Women Superintendent's Perspectives Leading During Challenging Times

Dr. Kathryn Washington, Lamar University
Dr. Kelly Brown, Lamar University
Dr. Janice Taylor, Prairie View A&M
Dr. Sharon Ross, Tarleton State University

Introduction

During the coronavirus pandemic, schools have been impacted in a way that no one could have possibly imagined. Educational leaders had to navigate how to respond to meet the needs of stakeholders not only amidst a global pandemic, but also an economic crisis and social unrest. Despite these multiple 'crises' leaders were charged with opening up their school district and providing a high-quality curriculum. Much of this task fell on the superintendent as they balanced the needs of their workers, families in the community, and student's academic needs.

Even though Superintendents confront and address diverse challenges daily, the pandemic brought unprecedented and significant challenges to superintendents in which they had no similar experience. Current superintendents had never gone thru a pandemic - a pandemic that impacted all aspects of their organization - from how children would receive the required technology to continue learning in a virtual setting to how teachers would become trained to keep students academically engaged to how all stakeholders would be impacted personally - physically, financially, socially, and emotionally. The undeniable exposure of systemic inequities, civil unrest, and social injustices throughout the nation, added another dimension to their decision making. Upon what would superintendents base their decisions to address the challenges? How could superintendents endure the adverse situations they were facing? What could sustain them during this time?

Female Superintendents

According to research, the most powerful position in public schools is that of school superintendent, and it is a position dominated by men (Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004). In 2011, 24.1% of school systems throughout the United States were led by a female superintendent (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). Data from 2014 - 2018 at the Texas Education Agency indicated that the majority of certified superintendents were female, with the exception of the 2017 - 18 academic year (Texas Education Agency, 2019). However, only 19% or less than one in five school districts in Texas are led by a female (Texas Association of School Boards, n.d.). The number of females employed as superintendents in Texas remains low when compared to the number of employed male superintendents.

Female superintendents wear many hats, and some hats, perhaps, male superintendents do not traditionally or commonly wear, as often. They must meet the demands and challenges of their chosen profession, while also fulfilling family responsibilities such as mother, wife, childcare provider, cook, housekeeper, car pooler, soccer mom, nurturer, etc. - just to name a few. Female superintendents must be able to navigate the myriad of challenges and demands of the superintendency that require the knowledge and skills to lead a school district efficiently and effectively. They must demonstrate the competencies and prowess to strategically maneuver the political landscape, communicate a shared vision, work in a collaborative manner with their school board, establish and implement a culture of high expectations, and build consensus with all

stakeholders - students, staff, parents, and community. How do female superintendents successfully meet the expectations and requirements of their position? To achieve all that must be accomplished in both their personal and professional lives requires them to be able to endure the challenges associated with all related aspects of their roles.

The purpose of this research was to explore and provide insight into the nuanced thoughts, beliefs and perceptions of relationships, resilience, and equity from current female superintendents on the heels of social, economic, and health pandemics that plagued our nation and ultimately school systems. The following research questions guided this research:

- How did female superintendents perceive gender as a factor that impacts relationships with stakeholders during challenging times?
- How do female superintendents endure the challenges of their position?
- How did female superintendents address equity issues during the 2020-2021 school year?

Literature Review

Relationships in Leadership

Building and sustaining relationships with all stakeholders will be the key for superintendents to lead the organizations forward during these times of crisis. In *The Leadership Challenge* (Kouzes & Posner, 1987) the authors are quoted saying, "When leadership is a relationship founded on trust and confidence, people take risks, make changes, keep organizations and movements alive (p.19)."

The ability of leaders to build relationships amongst staff has various effects on the organization. It improves trust and adds to the staff's perception of the leaders' effectiveness. There are two types of behavioral roles leaders can adopt (Stogdill, 1950), task-oriented leadership and relationship-oriented leadership. More specifically, task-oriented leadership is when the leader focuses on clear constructs regarding the role of workers and how goals are to be achieved. Whereas, relationship-oriented leaders can focus on the well-being of workers and demonstrate concern and respect, appreciation and support for their workers (Bass, 1990). The relationship-oriented leaders believe this approach will yield results toward stated goals and achievements. The research shows that consideration towards workers, as well as, creating opportunities for groups to attain goals are necessary components of effective leadership (Tabernero, et.al., 2009).

With the current crisis at hand, leadership will define how various organizations navigate and address problems as bridges instead of barriers. It will be vital that superintendents work to build relationships, because trust, support, motivation and personal development (Yilmaz, 2019) will be vital in the months to come. Despite this current crisis, leadership has always been a vital part of the success of the organization. Success will now look like innovation, creativity and flexibility, but only if framed around relationships with leadership and the community.

Resilience in Education

Multiple definitions of the word resilience exist; however, pursuant to this study and deemed most relevant to its purpose, four definitions of resilience were applied. Walsh (2006) defined resilience as one's capacity to become strengthened and more resourceful when faced with adversity and responding to challenges. Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000) referred to resilience as positively

adapting within the context of significant adversity. Further, the ability to be successful in spite of exposure to high risks while overcoming adversity, was defined as resilience by Fraser, Richman, and Galinsky (1999). Finally, Bernard (1991) defined resilience as having a set of qualities that allows one to adapt successfully during the course of development, even in the presence of high-risk factors. For the purpose of this study on women superintendents in Texas, a combination of the definitions described above was used to define resilience and will therefore be applied. Thus, resilience is having a set of qualities that allows one to adapt successfully when faced with adversity and responding to challenges.

Polidore (2004) developed a theory on resilience from a qualitative study that she conducted with three African American female teachers in a school district in the rural South. Polidore sought to understand how the teachers continued their careers in teaching despite subjugation to adverse experiences. From the study conducted by Polidore, which used both a developmental and ecological perspective, eight themes of resilience emerged. The themes of resilience, also referred to as qualities, were the following: religion, flexible locus of control, an individual's ability to view adverse situations positively or optimistic bias, autonomy, commitment, change, positive relationships, and education viewed as important. Taylor (2009) also conducted a qualitative study using Polidore's resilience theory as one of the constructs or frameworks when she studied the teaching experiences of four African American female teachers before, during, and after the desegregation of schools in a rural community in the South. Taylor's study resulted in the emergence of an additional or ninth theme of resilience - efficacy.

Equity in School Systems

The role of the superintendency holds the most administrative authority, power, and influence in a district. The ability to be resilient in the face of challenges and build relationships with all stakeholders are skills that are important to success. In addition, the role of the superintendent also requires them to ensure that opportunities for every student and family are available equitably (Garza, 2008). Specifically, in times of crisis, the needs of students and families should be paramount. It was incumbent for educational leaders to adapt to a new reality and various rapidly changing elements (CHIȘ-MANOLACHE, 2020).

Generally, the practices and pedagogies of the school will be focused on the students that are middle class and advantaged (Lason-Billings, 2014). The success, however, of any transformative school system is what happens when those students that have been marginalized by society begin to realize success. Schools are "important places to start, sustain, and advance such practices in order for local communities to assert their own destinies… (Goldfarb & Grineberg, 2002, p. 161; Goldfarb, 1998). Transformational leadership in support of positive changes has to be a priority for superintendents. As Fuller (2002) argued, it is not about innovation, but selective innovation to garner a commitment with the community to support change.

Methodology

A qualitative phenomenological approach was selected for this study. Creswell (2015) noted qualitative research is ideal when the researcher's aim is to explore a situation and develop a detailed understanding of the central phenomenon. The present study was designed to explore how female superintendents in Texas navigated their roles through challenging times of the 2020-2021 school year. The information gained by this exploration highlights how superintendents addressed

acute issues that arose during the pandemic. The three research questions that guided this study were:

- How did female superintendents perceive gender as a factor that impacts relationships with stakeholders during challenging times?
- How do female superintendents endure the challenges of their position?
- How did female superintendents address equity issues during the 2020-2021 school year?

A convenience sample of 11 female superintendents participated in this qualitative study, where a phenomenological approach was used. Each of the female superintendents are members of the Texas Council for Women School Executives. Nine superintendents were from rural school districts, and two superintendents represented suburban school districts. A focus group interview was conducted with five female superintendents from rural school districts. Six superintendents, which included two superintendents from suburban school districts, provided written responses to the interview questions. The focus group was conducted in person during the Texas Council for Women School Executives annual meeting. The qualitative data were analyzed to identify themes in each superintendent's responses to the interview questions and to establish patterns.

Findings

Research question one was: How did female superintendents perceive gender as a factor that impacts relationships with stakeholders during challenging times? The researcher used a shared definition of relationships to ensure the respondents answers are grounded in a common understanding. The respondents responded to the questions with the understanding that educational relationships mean positive connections between students, adults, peers and community in the school organization that foster positive social interaction and establish a nurturing environment of trust and support. Based on the results from research question one, three overarching themes emerged: Nurturing, Caring and Transparent.

Theme 1: Nurturing and Caring

Society and culture have put extra pressure on women to behave according to expectations, and as a result, women suppress or enhance certain qualities, based on what they perceive is desirable or accepted (ROHEI, 2019). This is the basis of what is called relational competence which is the ability to balance two sides of being a leader: caring and challenging. When speaking with the women superintendents about how they perceived their gender impacted their relationships with stakeholders during these challenging times, nurturing and caring was an overarching theme they used interchangeably.
One respondent said,

> I was told that I came across as nurturing and caring...It made a difference on how it was perceived from the community because I did care…It came across as nurturing which was a benefit in handling the different pieces to COVID-19.

Another went on to say,
> There was also a certain level of expectation that you sound caring and nurturing because you're a woman. I found myself telling myself that, so I don't forget it. I can't be just a matter of fact, you have to sound like you care...sometimes you just want to get the information out there...my communication director would say I didn't smile enough...it was

interesting that I think you're expected to display those emotions because you're a female...be careful if you're not..motherly.

In addition, other respondents felt the same way.

We needed to come across as nurturing. Being brave and bold, trying to give bad news with pep and happiness...you've got to turn that bad news around...It's all in your tone and inflection...so yes I think being a female actually helped in this case. I think being able to connect and be rational...to empathize and give hope, but here's how we're going to get through it together...being a woman was an asset for sure.

Theme 2: Transparency

They all felt like having the ability to be transparent led to a stronger relationship with stakeholders. As one superintendent stated, "being very transparent was important. I didn't hide anything… Everyone knew that I was going to tell them what was going on and how it was going to be handled...they understood what I said, I meant."

Another acknowledged how being transparent is a balancing act. She stated how "hard it was and then to give people hope…but being a female was an asset." An example of this balancing act, one superintendent shared,

I had been out of the classroom for over 18 years and had to use devices to conduct… Zoom and Google meetings were tough...but putting myself in the same situation" as faculty and staff we're going to learn together. This came across as nurturing, but at the same time having the expectation of being brave and bold to not come across as being weak.... with the ability to separate our personal lives was tough."

Research question two was: How do female superintendents endure the challenges of their position? The researcher used a shared definition of resilience to ensure the respondents answers are grounded in a common understanding. The respondents responded to the questions with the understanding that resilience means having a set of qualities that allows one to adapt successfully when faced with adversity and responding to challenges. All nine resilience themes emerged from the analysis of data. Verbatim quotes are provided to support the recurring themes of resilience and to also provide a deeper meaning and understanding of the responses that resonated throughout the responses from the female superintendents.

Theme 1: Religion

Our faith is part of our foundation from the time we are young children and become old enough to be taught the importance of believing in a higher power. As we mature in life, our foundation becomes even more solid. Our faith becomes our stronghold and what we **lean on** most in times of adversity. As one respondent stated when asked to *describe specific characteristics or qualities that help her to remain in the superintendent position*, "I have confidence in a higher power."

Theme 2: Flexible Locus of Control

The COVID-19-19 pandemic and numerous other issues forced superintendents to exercise locus of control, specifically internal locus of control, which is when one must find the motivation within

or become self-motivated to confront and address the issues at hand. When asked the question *what are the best ways to successfully navigate adversity and respond to challenges,* one respondent stated the following, "As a brand-new superintendent, I went through a financial crisis. That was a game changer for me. It taught me so much, and it made me resilient. When you lose 20% of your staff, everything else is okay."

Theme 3: Individual's Ability to View Adverse Situations Positively or "Optimistic Bias"

Remaining hopeful for positive outcomes, even when the challenges seem insurmountable, must become an adopted mindset for superintendents. When asked to *reflect on her upbringing and describe personal or professional experiences that prepared her to become strengthened and resourceful,* one respondent described how she used her personal circumstances and dedication to bring hope to others. "I grew up poor. My father was in prison, and my mom had never had a job. I developed a work ethic and knew I wanted to help others learn that anything is possible!"

Theme 4: Autonomy

Having the ability to self-govern and to make decisions that are in the best interest of the school community in which one serves is one of the hallmarks of effective leadership. The COVID-19-19 pandemic tested the autonomy of superintendents. When asked *what, if anything, surprised you about the ability to adapt when faced with adversity and/or challenging times and how you are perceived by your stakeholders,* one respondent stated, "we stepped up and faced the issues head on." Another stated,

> Never more in my career have I ever reached out more to parents, to ask what they wanted and then make decisions that were reflective of that - for parents and staff, separately. Moving forward pushing that out...painting a picture of where we are, the data, the decisions we are making, why we are making those decisions, and why we are changing if it does not work,"

was stated by one of the respondents about the self-directed actions taken during the pandemic.

Theme 5: Commitment

A high level of commitment is required to meet the needs of all stakeholders and to facilitate positive learning outcomes desired for students. The following was the response provided by one respondent when asked to *describe a specific characteristic or quality female leaders must possess to be successful in their superintendent position.*

> I was focused and taking care of people. I was making sure the adults were taken care of so they can take care of the children. It's helpful for us to take care of the people. If we take care of our staff, then we entrust them with the care of the kids, which is why we are here.

Theme 6: Change

As the definition of this resilience quality implies, the ability to adapt to change and the ability to change is probably the most important resilience quality that helps one to withstand the most demanding and difficult circumstances. This resilience quality builds mental toughness, determination, strength, grit, and tenacity within an individual. When asked to *reflect and describe*

her upbringing, personal and professional experiences that prepared them to become strengthened and resourceful in their role as superintendent, the following responses were provided by two different respondents.

> My mother died when I was 15. I had to learn to be strong, persevere, suck it up, and deal with it. We love, we grieve, life moves on." "Each experience strengthened me and grew my toolbox from which to draw to use in new situations. Six different districts, bilingual educators, urban areas of Houston, San Antonio, Austin, and the coast. Principal positions at all three levels (elementary, middle, and high), seven different superintendents to work with - all taught me things I draw from.

Theme 7: Positive Relationships

Being surrounded by people who love you unconditionally, respect, and support you, contributes to one's overall sense of well-being, self-esteem, and makes it easier to fulfill one's purpose. Any leadership position can feel lonely at times; however, during the COVID-19-19 pandemic, it was of paramount importance that superintendents had people they could rely on to listen and offer guidance, when needed.

> Relationships were vital to me this past year. They provided the support and shoulders I needed. You cannot lead successfully without positive relationships. You pour into others to fill the bucket of trust so when things happen, there's still enough trust left to move forward as a district.

Theme 8: Education Viewed as Important

From a very young age, many parents instill the value of education in their children, especially those parents who were denied access to an education or those whose educational opportunities were sacrificed in order to help their parents provide for the family. Two participants in this study did not forget the lessons taught to them by parents who advocated for their children and worked tirelessly so that they could have a better and more secure life by obtaining an education.

> My father wanted nothing more than to get an education. Poverty and the need to work made it impossible. He's made his life's goal to ensure his children and grandchildren receive a higher education. I dedicate my work to him. He is my strength.

> My mother passed away in January. My mother did not graduate high school. She was born in Mexico and married my dad and came to live in this country. She always pushed education on us, and she wanted her daughters to go to school. She wanted us all to become teachers because she thought that was a safe job. She would attend parent conferences. She did not know English but she was there. She advocated for us.

Theme 9: Efficacy

When asked to *describe specific characteristics or qualities female leaders must possess to be successful in the superintendent position*, one respondent said it best when she said,

> One word that my husband used to describe me was unflappable. Given a crisis, you stand firm and you follow through. You become this......nothing shakes you. This year, from the

very beginning, from the moment you began receiving text messages, we are going to close, and we start doing this, this, this, and this, you switch modes, this is not a drill, this is real life, and you took off on this. Now, I am unflappable.

Research question three was: How did female superintendents perceive equity issues during the 2020-2021? The researcher used a shared definition of equity to ensure the respondents answers are grounded in a common understanding. The respondents responded to the questions with the understanding that educational equity means ensuring just outcomes for each student, raising marginalized voices, and challenging the imbalance of power and privilege.
Based on the results from research question three, one overarching theme emerged: community outreach.

Theme 1: Community Outreach

The superintendents in the study understood that the schools were not a closed system. During the pandemic this knowledge became important on how they were able to view equity against the backdrop of the pandemic. When leading and managing during a crisis the leader must be smart, able to adapt, and innovate to keep the learning process and school systems focused on student success (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). The superintendents inherently knew that when the school building was closed, it would have to be a joint effort with school personnel, parents, and other community members to support education and learning while at home. In fact, community schools can further a democratic education and support learners, families and the broader community (Scott et.al., 2020). Therefore, they relied heavily on communication, relationships and the resilience of the community to scaffold student success when the traditional school systems were not available.

In addition, the dismantling of traditional school systems also brought to light equity issues that may have been known but may not have been a priority pre-pandemic. The respondents mentioned issues around access and opportunity for extracurricular activities, dual credit classes, technology, food service, etc. Each of the equity-based concerns had to be addressed with innovative thinking and school-community partnerships to support children. By being malleable enough to utilize community resources, leaders were able to take a collaborative approach to leadership that is most effective during a crisis (Marshall et.al, 2020).

Each of the respondents addressed or alluded to the community in two different ways. First, they addressed community outreach to support equitable access and opportunities for all students for success beyond graduation. One participant mentioned the cost of extracurricular activities that may be a hindrance to all students fully participating in all that a public education provides. Another respondent said,

> And it came down for us to equity, to access educational opportunities for dual credit honors courses and things like that. So, when you look, we had certain demographics that weren't participating in that because of the cost of dual credit courses. So, we went to community organizations, got scholarships, made those available.

In addition, the respondents mentioned how the school had to play a new and expanded role within the community to continue to support learning. One participant discussed how COVID-19 has uncovered the inequity in the district.

> I would say, I mean this whole year with the pandemic, I mean, it's just been unveiling of ways that we're, there's not equity in our district. And so, I mean, from basic to food, to Wi-Fi, to technology, to support at home during COVID-19 there's been a lot that has been building.

When current school systems are inadequate to support students during a crisis like COVID-19, it is incumbent that school and district leadership find ways to meet the needs of the community. The role of the superintendent should include "a more expansive sense of care and responsibility for the communities and regions" where they serve (Chrislip & O'Malley, 2013, p. 11). Amongst the superintendents there was a sense that their leadership style must innovate and adapt to meet the current health, economic, and social issues at play in communities. One respondent stated:

> COVID-19 brought to light a lot of things that it falls through the cracks when, when they're in the building and when they're not in the building. And then finding ways to reach out to them virtually was difficult.

The superintendents in the study knew that in a time of crisis, they still held an ethical responsibility to equitably offer a quality education to all students (Yukl & Mashud, 2010). Based on the responses, the superintendents were able to see clearly how the school systems are beneficial and inadequate to meet the needs of students and families in the community. During times of crisis, they had to lean on a type of adaptive leadership that rests on the relationship and resilience of the community to mobilize and address challenges to excel (Heifert et.al, 2009).

Conclusion

The impact of this study has definite implications on future leaders and their responses to pandemics and economic crises at all levels. School leaders, board of trustees, and communities can take lessons learned from the findings of the study to develop systems designed to proactively address those unearthed inequities exposed while trying to offer solutions to continued education in all grade levels, including colleges and universities, during the shutdown. The powerhouse women in this study continue to lead during an extraordinary time-demanding, unprecedented, and critical era in history. The most intriguing significance of this research is the power to share the rural school superintendent's experiences to inform the broader community of the findings. In reference to relational competence and the balance of leadership during COVID-1919's onset, these women leaders were found to be nurturing and caring while balancing work, self-care, family, and community responsibilities. Leaders in all types of districts, whether rural, suburban, or urban, can learn from being nurturing and caring, an acceptable characteristic from community members. As Yilmaz (2019) suggested, building relationships and support will be vital as leaders navigate lingering effects from COVID-1919 and the variants and find ways to provide program sustainability from lessons learned.

Another area of balancing for the superintendents was understanding the need to be transparent in operations and communications. These superintendents expressed the need to ensure total transparency which embodied the definition of inclusion for all which gave people hope and kept them from wondering about what was or was not going on in the district. Godin (2008) wrote that "transparency really is your only option" (p.104).

This research further concluded the significance of having a solid foundation as leaders of organizations. In times of adversity, the "what" that one leans on must sustain their ability to overcome resistance and fear of the unknown to fuel the confidence to forge forward and provide hope. Seeing the hidden or ignored, but unearthed, and magnified inequities caused by the instructional needs stemming from the barriers of the pandemic caused a large amount of unrest externally as well as internally. How to best serve the communities and make decisions in the best interest of all stakeholders, children being first, required a high level of commitment from everyone. These leaders had to rely on their what, their faith, and their higher power for personal stamina to focus while informing others of the necessary changes.

With those changes, leaders will need to understand the importance of community outreach and communication from top-down, bottom-up, and all around, in all areas. In rural Texas, superintendents saw the need to ensure connectedness (providing Wi-Fi and tech tools) because not all families had those readily available; thus, the significance of accessibility, opportunity, funding, and investment. Another area of outreach occurred in the food service department in which schools saw the need to ensure meals were provided for all, highlighting again the need for continued conversations and decision-making in transportation, accessibility, funding, collaboration of resources, and future investments. Providing a framework for understanding and providing equity is essentially significant for other superintendents, but especially for rural superintendents with less resources than their colleagues in larger districts. Financially, school systems and lawmakers must invest in long term solutions for problems faced during the pandemic. Returning to the status quo is not an option.

Increased communication and educating learning communities on equity and lessons learned from the pandemic is another significant finding and must be intentional and inclusive. It would serve all superintendents, regardless of size and demographics, to increase communication with their entire learning communities and proactively answer questions regarding existing inequities and steps toward corrective measures. According to Title 19 Texas Administrative Code, Section 242.15, Standard F, Learner-Centered Communications and Community Relations, superintendents are charged with: promoting the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources. The superintendents included in the study were adaptive and responded as the standard mandates. They conducted parent and community surveys and further connected with their own district leaders as well as superintendent colleagues in other cities to garner feedback. To create systems where equity is the norm, lessons learned from the experiences of COVID-1919 must be lessons continuously implemented and shared with the greater educational community across the state and nation to ensure success for all.

As far back as 1918, Americans experienced an influenza induced pandemic for a year. Other pandemics have been named and placed on historical timelines. Lessons learned from the past pandemic outbreaks, from the one we experienced in 2020, and the effects currently lingering in the dark, must never be forgotten but shared for greater collaborative efforts and increased preparedness. From these participating superintendents a clear message rises to share with executive leaders and CEO's in every district, state, and nation. Consider the following as social emotional strength from the lessons learned, but faith, courage, and hope for the journey ahead:

> You already hold all the wisdom, strength, and confidence you need to accomplish whatever it is you want to do. What has held us back before is merely our collective inability to imagine what is possible for us to do. The talent and ability have always been

there. The generations of women before us...paved the way for real change...they went after the impossible. (Palmieri, 2018, p.174)

References

Bernard, B. (1991). Fostering resiliency in kids: Protective factors in the family, school and community. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Bass, B. M. (1990). *Bass & Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications* (3rd ed.). New York: Free Press.

CHIŞ-MANOLACHE, D. (2020). Leadership issues in times of global pandemic. Scientific Bulletin, 25(2), 75–80. https://doi-org.libproxy.lamar.edu/10.2478/bsaft-2020-0010

Chrislip, D. D., O'Malley, E. (2013). For the common good redefining civic leadership. KLC Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2015). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. Pearson Education.

Fraser, M. W., Richman, J. M., & Galinsky, M. J. (1999). Risk, protection, and resilience: Toward a conceptual framework for social work practice. Social Work Research, 23(3), 129-208.

Fullan, M. (2002, May). The Change Leader. Educational Leadership, 59(8), 16–21.

Garza, E. (2008). Autoethnography of a First-Time Superintendent: Challenges to Leadership for Social Justice. *Journal of Latinos & Education*, *7*(2), 163–176. https://doi-org.libproxy.lamar.edu/10.1080/15348430701828749

Godin, S. (2008). Tribes: We need you to lead us. Penguin Group.

Goldfarb, K. P., Grinberg, J. (2002). Leadership for social justice: Authentic participation in the case of a community center in Caracas, Venezuela. Journal of School Leadership, 12(2), 157–173. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460201200204

Goldfarb, K. (1998). Creating sanctuaries for Latino immigrant families: A case for the schools. Journal for a Just and Caring Education, 4(4), 454–466.

Heifetz, Ronald A., Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow. The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World. Harvard Business Press, 2009.

Kouzes, J. and Posner, B. (1987). *The leadership challenge,* 3d ed. (John Wiley & Sons, 2006), p. 19.

Kowalski, T.J., McCord, R.S., Petersen, G.J. Young, I.P., & Ellerson, N. M. (2011). American school superintendent; 2010 decennial study. Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the Remix. Harvard Educational Review, 84(1), 74–84. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.p2rj131485484751

Luthar, S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. Child Development, 71(3), 543-62. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ611889) Retrieved September 3, 2007, from ERIC database.

Marshall, J., Roache, D., & Moody-Marshall, R. (2020). Crisis leadership: A critical examination of educational leadership in higher education in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic. International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM)), 48(3), 30–37.

Palmieri, J. (2018). Dear madam president: An open letter to the women who will run the world. Grand Central Publishing.

Polidore, E. (2004). The teaching experiences of Lucille Bradley, Maudester Hicks, and Algeno McPherson before, during, and after desegregation in the rural south: A theoretical model of adult resilience among three African American female educators (Doctoral dissertation, Sam Houston State University, 2004). Dissertation Abstracts International, 65, (08), 2924A.

ROHEI (2019, October 7). Are women leaders more nurturing? Retrieved from https://www.rohei.com/resources/are-women-leaders-more-nurturing

Sharp, W. L., Malone, B. G., Walter, J. K., & Supley, M. L. (2004). A three-state study of female superintendents. Educational Research Quarterly, 27(3), 22–37.

Taylor, J. L. (2009). The teaching experiences of African American women before, during, and after desegregation in the rural South: A narrative inquiry through the lens of resilience and Black feminist theory, Sam Houston State University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2009. 3362001.

Scott, D., Sharma, R., Goodwyll, F., Johnson, J., and Putman, P. (2020) Building on strengths to address challenges: An asset-based approach to planning and implementing a community partnership school. Journal of Higher Education Outreach & Engagement, 24(2), 69-80.

Stogdill, R. M. (1950). Leadership, membership and organization. *Psychological Bulletin, 47*, 1-14.

Tabernero, C., Chambel, M. J., Curral, L., & Arana, J. M. (2009). The role of task-oriented versus relationship-oriented leadership on normative contract and group performance. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal, 37*(10), 1391–1404. https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2009.37.10.1391

Texas Association of School Boards (n.d.). *This is why there are fewer female superintendents*. Retrieved from https://www.tasb.org/members/enhance-district/why-there-are-fewer-female-superintendents/

Texas Education Agency (2019). *Certified superintendents demographic by preparation route 2014 - 2018*. https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/educator-data/historical-data-teacher-studies

Texas Education Agency (2016). Chapter 242 Superintendent Certificate. Retrieved from https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/fi

Walsh, F. (2006). Strengthening family resilience (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

Yilmaz, F. (2019). Organizational support and the role of organizational trust in employee empowerment. *International Journal of Eurasia Social Sciences/Uluslararasi Avrasya Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 10*(37), 968–980.

Yukl, G., & Mahsud, R. (2010). Why flexible and adaptive leadership is essential. Consulting Psychology Journal Practice and Research, 62(2), 81-93.

How prepared are the campus leaders and how are principal preparation programs working with districts and leaders to ensure readiness? Past research has shown that educational leadership preparation programs have failed to adequately change their practices to align with the modern principal role. In this research, Mississippi female rural school principals' perceptions of leadership preparedness was examined. Researchers and practitioners should collaborate to improve principal preparation. Improved principal preparation programs improve the knowledge and skills for those aspiring to lead campuses. After all, retention of highly trained and skilled principals leads to highly motivated students equipped with the right tools to make dreams come true.

Female Rural School Leaders' Perceptions of Educational Leadership Preparation Practices

Dr. Summer Pannell, Stephen F. Austin State University
Dr. Juliann Sergi McBrayer, Georgia Southern University
Dr. Kristen Dickens, Georgia Southern University
Dr. Carrie Skelton, Marshall County School District
Katherine Fallon, Georgia Southern University

Abstract

Phenomenological analysis was used to explore Mississippi rural female school leaders' perceptions of effective school leadership preparation practices. Three overarching themes were found: *learning by doing, purposeful pedagogy*, and *community-focused approach needed*. The findings revealed that school leaders need increased experiential learning opportunities, increased practical assignments, and increased cultural awareness and diversity training in their preparation programs. Principal preparation programs should work with school districts to provide purposeful, collaborative, and sustainable professional learning to prepare competent school leaders. Further research includes recruiting more rural school principals to share their perceptions with principal preparation program providers in an effort to advance aspiring principal training. Implications for practice include equipping aspiring principals with the knowledge and skills to lead for equity to continue to have a pipeline of effective school leaders to serve in Mississippi's traditionally underserved rural areas.

Keywords: rural school leadership, educational leadership preparation, school leadership, principal preparation, female leadership

Researchers in the field of education have declared the quality of leadership provided by school and district leaders is highly dependent upon the quality of their leadership preparation experiences (Oliver et al., 2018; Pannell et al., 2015). Pannell and McBrayer (2020) contended that because of the school leader's direct and indirect influence over every aspect of the schoolhouse, leaders can be the single most impactful factor in school success. Since their inception, educational leadership programs have been charged with preparing principals to effectively lead schools, and these programs need to continually assess and revise their curricular and pedagogical practices in an attempt to meet the demands of the shifting role and balancing both instructional leadership and managerial tasks (Jackson, 2021; McBrayer et. al, 2018). However, despite their efforts, a vast body of research spanning nearly two decades indicates that educational leadership preparation programs have failed to adequately change their practices to align with the modern principal role thus creating a "leadership gap" in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for effective school leadership (Pannell & McBrayer, 2020).

Similarly, Young et al. (2017) noted that program practices and support have not changed to adequately meet the mounting demands of principals although programs have developed a variety of assessment models to measure quality. Most current assessment models include some measure of knowledge, skill, and disposition attainments, attributes of vision, and outcome assessments of candidates as well as program sustainability, research-based content, curriculum coherence, project-based learning, authentic feedback, reflective practice, and supervised clinical practice (Knoeppel & Logan, 2011). Teachers are the number one factor impacting positive student

outcomes and with the high cost of teacher attrition, principals need to prioritize strategies to attract, retain, and grow effective teachers, and university-district partnerships could assist with these initiatives by training principals who are ready for 21st century classrooms.

Review of the Literature

The Leadership Gap

School leadership was once a vaguely defined profession requiring little to no training; however, as the role of the principal shifted over the past several decades from merely a building manager to the complex role of today's principal, formal educational leadership preparation programs became a necessity. Pannell and McBrayer (2020) recognized this shift in the role as an evolution from the *keeper of the keys* to one of the integral *keys to student success*. The authors noted the responsibility shift from a building manager to the highly complex role responsible for a multitude of areas including curriculum planning and supervision, financial management, federal, state, and local compliance, reform agent, and most notably, instructional leader.

Knoeppel and Logan (2011) noted the development of standards for school leaders was a major force in shifting the role from management to learner-centered instructional leadership and contended these Interstate School Leaders Licensure Standards (ISLLC) were grounded in vision-centered leadership. According to Knoeppel and Logan (2011), vision-centered leadership implies that the principal reflects on what to do and how to do it as well as plans the direction and focus for school improvement and makes informed decisions about how to get there. Since their inception in 1996, these principal standards have been revised and updated in response to the changing role of the principal. The most recent revision of the standards saw a name change from the ISLLC Standards to the Professional Standards for School Leaders (PSEL). The PSEL standards are the version principal preparation programs currently use to guide their curriculum and practices. The PSEL are considered model professional standards that delineates expectations to practitioners, supporting institutions, professional associations, policy makers, and the public about the work, qualities, and values of effective educational school leaders.

Differentiated Principal Preparation Practices

A vast body of research has established the need for reform in school leader preparation contending that educational leadership preparation programs are failing to provide the necessary skills to apply the theoretical knowledge gained through their coursework to real-life situations in a variety of school settings (Butler, 2008; Duncan et al., 2011; Fleck, 2008; Hernandez et al., 2012; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Lashway, 1999; Levine, 2005; Lynch, 2012; Miller, 2013; Reed & Kinsler, 2010; Zubnzycki, 2013). This, in turn, makes this *leadership gap* especially evident in novice principals. Pannell and McBrayer (2020) asserted that two decades of research noted "nearly two-thirds of principals believe that traditional graduate leadership programs are out of touch with today's realities" (p. 97). Furthermore, Oliver et al. (2018) pointed out the need to include aspiring principals' perceptions in the educational leadership reform conversation, and in a recent study, the authors found that aspiring principals' perceptions closely aligned with the perceptions of experts in the field.

Additionally, Oliver et al., (2018) contended that although principal preparation programs extensively use traditional instructional strategies, such as lectures, in their programs, many programs are beginning to realize the need to shift to pedagogical practices rooted in adult learning

theories to more effectively prepare aspiring school leaders. Scholars identify such effective practices as activities that promote reflection and those that allow candidates to apply theory to practice. Effective tools that can promote reflection include self-assessments, journals, and portfolios (Diehl & Gordon, 2016; Jenson et al., 2015). In addition to reflective activities, scholars tout practical application and field-based activities such as action research (Glickman et al., 2018), learning walks (Gordon et al., 2016), and community embedded activities (Guajardo & Garcia, 2016) as effective methods to bridge the theory to practice gap. Furthermore, researchers emphasize the importance of an effective school-based mentor during leadership preparation (Gordon et al., 2016; Pannell & McBrayer, 2020). Additionally, technology has begun to play a key role in the innovation of principal preparation programs by providing multiple ways to deliver instruction and virtual environments for practical activities (Dieker et al., 2016; LaFrance & Beck, 2014; Oliver et al., 2018).

It is not only scholars and educational leadership faculty who support these changes in principal preparation pedagogy. In a recent study of educational leadership graduate students' perceptions of effective teaching practices, Oliver et al. (2018) found that class lecture was the least effective instructional strategy in preparing aspiring principals. Study results determined that students, much like field experts, saw more value in activities that allowed for practice in the field and connecting learning with experiences. Aspiring principals most value opportunities to perform leadership activities in a school setting, engage in reflective activities, and discussions and relative to discussions, students most valued opportunities to discuss how to apply theory to practice around personal experiences related to the topic of study (Oliver et al., 2018).

Community Context of the School Leader Role

Principals work in a social context thus scholars are beginning to focus more attention on the social and community contexts of the school leader role (Green, 2018; Pannell & McBrayer, 2020). Many of the responsibilities that fall under the umbrella of principal duties require the leader to interact with a variety of stakeholder groups. This social aspect of the job requires principals to be effective in at least three parts of Epstein's six-part framework for school, parent, and family partnerships: effective communicators, decision-makers, and collaborators, and each of these require principals to know and be able to relate to the communities they serve. Schools and communities traditionally collaborate through partnership models including business, university, and service-learning partnerships as well as outreach from the school to the community. O'Connor and Daniello (2019) noted the need to operationalize the definition of *school-community partnership* due to the complexity and ambiguity of the term as it is often used in a variety of ways. The authors emphasized the *school-community* link to be resources within the community that could be harnessed to improve, both, academic and non-academic outcomes of students and described a *partnership* as individual or the collective sum of interactions and relationships between school and community partners. Green (2018) contended traditional approaches to school-community partnerships should be improved because communities can be helpful or harmful to a school, based on the degree to which they support the school's mission.

Effective district and school leaders are able to cultivate and foster community with external partners as well as within their buildings to engage and retain high-quality teachers. According to Knoeppel and Logan (2011), the ISLLC Standards promoted close working relationships between principal preparation programs and school communities. The PSEL Standards continue to emphasize the importance of this partnership. Additionally, in a study grounded in the redesign of

principal preparation programs, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) identified the university-district partnership as the most critical component of effective school leader preparation (Pannell et al., 2015). Pannell et al. (2015) noted this partnership would allow districts to identify candidates with the potential to become the type of leaders needed for their school communities and allow universities to gain access to quality candidates. Further, the partnership would allow the opportunity for mentors and university faculty to design high-quality, relevant assignments and fieldwork. School districts and universities alike could potentially reduce underutilized resources and produce high-quality leaders ready to serve the unique needs of the school community when engaging in a true university-district partnership. Further, principals could have a greater positive impact on student outcomes when they foster a professional community inside their building. Sanchez et al. (2019) argued leadership impact on student learning largely occurs because sound leadership strengthens professional community, and high-quality leaders are able to develop strong school cultures that support student learning and teacher retention.

A vast body of research exists on teacher attrition, largely focusing on reasons why teachers indicated they change schools or leave the profession as well as the negative impacts teacher attrition has on the school community. Among the reasons cited for teacher attrition, a low sense of belonging, lack of efficacy, and limited opportunities for professional development rank among the top contributing factors to teacher turnover (Elyashiv, 2019). The researcher further noted teacher attrition negatively affects school routine and management, harms efforts to maintain a solid organizational culture, and costs states over one billion dollars annually. Teacher retention could be especially critical in traditionally hard-to-staff rural and high-poverty schools and in a recent study, Taylor and West (2020) found that at the national average of percent free and reduced-price lunch (FRL), approximately one in six teachers move schools or leave the profession in adjacent academic years, and the odds of this type of attrition happening increased by approximately 0.8% for each 1% increase in FRL. Given the impact of teachers on student outcomes and the high cost of teacher attrition, principals should make every effort to build and foster professional community to attract, retain, and grow effective teachers, and university-district partnerships could assist with these efforts by producing principals who are ready to lead based on the unique characteristics of the school community.

Rural School Context

According to Ankeny et al. (2019), nearly 50% of all school districts in the United States are classified as rural, and one-third of all the nation's public schools are located in rural areas. Despite these numbers, research on rural school leadership is vastly disproportionate compared to their urban counterparts. This can be troubling since Thier & Beach (2019) contended research is only useful when it accounts for schools' contextual variables, and city/urban accounting occurred more than three times as often as rural accounting. Policymakers are not receiving adequate research to make sound decisions to meet the needs of rural schools. The authors further noted the findings from general studies of school and district leadership are unlikely to align automatically with the realities of rural schools. Rural schools often present complexities such as residents who demonstrate deep connections to place, creating a magnified importance on trust and relationships. Additionally, unlike their urban and suburban counterparts, rural school leaders often have overlapping roles and are less likely to have advanced degrees (Thier & Beach, 2019).

According to Alenizi (2020), rural schools had the most difficult time of all school locales in recruiting school administrators, and one implication of the lack of research in rural settings is that

rural principals are generally not prepared for their position in a rural setting (Tremont & Templeton, 2019). According to the authors, the typical path to the principalship for male in rural schools was by holding an assistant principal position, in addition to coaching and teaching while the typical path for females was largely based on family support, graduate education, communication and interpersonal skills, mentoring, and networking. Regardless of their gender, rural principals face similar challenges including difficulty attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, a lack of financial resources, limited access to advanced technologies, rising English language learning students, and overall lower student achievement scores. These struggles can lead to high turnover rates among rural school principals; however, Alenizi (2020) noted that among all school leaders, females are 15% less likely to be classified as having a high risk of turnover, and thus more likely to remain in their position than male principals. For this reason, the perspective of female school leaders on effective principal preparation is a critical addition to the literature.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological investigative approach to evaluate Mississippi female rural school principals' perceptions of leadership preparedness to better understand the effectiveness of their higher education degree programs in preparing them for their work as school leaders. The primary research question was: What are female rural school leaders' perceptions of effective leadership preparation? The two secondary research questions were: (1) What are female rural school leaders' perceptions of their educational leadership preparation, including influential program factors, and (2) How can researchers and practitioners collaborate to improve principal preparation?

Participants and Procedures

Participants included six school leaders, in accordance with the national study's protocol requiring a focus group with five and eight participants. Initially, there were seven participants, however, one dropped out prior to the focus group. Participants were four females who were currently serving as school principals in their districts and two former female principals who had recently been promoted to district office administration roles in the same district. The years of experience as school leaders ranged from one to 15, with a mean of 5.5 years of experience. Five participants identified as Euro-American and one as African-American. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and represented one rural school district in Mississippi (Table 1). Participants were informed prior to engaging in this study of its purpose within a national study context utilizing focus groups to analyze principal preparation within a nationwide scope.

Participants

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Race	Years of Leadership Experience	Current Leadership Role
Amy	Female	Euro-American	1	Elementary Principal
Sharon	Female	Euro-American	15	District Administrator
Claire	Female	Euro-American	8	District Administrator

Theresa	Female	African-American	1		Elementary Principal
Erin	Female	Euro-American	5		Middle Principal
Hannah	Female	Euro-American	3		Middle Principal

Prior to data collection, researchers obtained permission to conduct this study from the university's Institutional Review Board. The current study was a component of a nation-wide study endorsed by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), a consortium of higher education institutions committed to advancing the preparation and practice of educational leaders for the benefit of schools and children, on the preparedness of school leaders in their education programs. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. The names of available subjects were gathered from the assistant superintendent of the rural district selected as the setting for this study. Before the initiation of the focus group, participants received verbal and written informed consent that outlined the purpose of the study, participation criteria, significance of the study, possible psychological risks, and confidentiality. Participants were afforded the opportunity to withdraw their participation from the study at any point. Additionally, participants were informed of the nature of the interviews, where these were recorded and transcribed for research purposes.

Setting

The setting for this study was a high-needs, rural district in north Mississippi. The district includes ten schools: three elementary schools, three middle schools, three high schools, and one K-8 school campus. The district serves 3,189 students including 1,422 elementary students, 797 middle school students, 851 high school students, and 119 students on the K-8 campus. The student body demographic makeup is 47% Black, 36% White, and 16% Hispanic. One hundred percent of students in the district qualify for free or reduced lunch. The district employs 198 teachers with 64.2% identified as experienced teachers and 7.9% identified as provisional teachers.

Data Collection

Prior to the beginning of the semi-structured group interview, demographic information for each participant was obtained. The video-recorded focus group lasted approximately two hours and was conducted via Zoom, due to COVID-19-19 restrictions on in-person meetings. Given this study was part of a larger national study, the implementation of focus groups to collect data was previously determined as appropriate. Focus groups are commonly utilized to encourage participants to directly answer and discuss responses to interview questions with fellow participants being interviewed (Khuwaja et al., 2019). To ensure consistency across the data collection for all participants, an interview protocol was used. This protocol involved a primary researcher facilitating the interview and two secondary researchers taking observational notes about participants' responses and their interactive discussion with other participants. Participants will initially respond to demographic questions gathering their name, current school leadership position, and school district. Following these questions, participants were asked 11 questions designed to grasp a comprehensive understanding of their experiences in their leadership preparation programs with regard to three overarching categories: a) educational leadership program preparation, b) leadership preparation and diversity competency, and c) ways educational leadership programs can improve their preparation of school leaders.

Data Analysis

This study used Husserl's descriptive approach for phenomenological inquiry and analysis for transcription and analysis of the focus group recordings (Gill, 2014). Husserl's primary goal with phenomenological research was to comprehensively understand individuals' experiences which entails researchers halting any influential biases on the topic at hand (Gill, 2014). The primary researcher structured this study to attend to Husserl's four identified levels of analysis: (1) identify the experienced phenomenon by individual participants, (2) identify common themes across participant responses, (3) consider individual themes, and (4) evaluate how individual themes relate to overarching themes of the majority of the participants' experiences. During the focus groups, the primary researcher read a predetermined transcript multiple times and coded specific words and phrases that relayed into overarching themes. Following the identification of the overall themes, themes were shared with a thematic and external peer auditor, who was trained in qualitative phenomenological inquiry and analysis, and consultation further evidenced the validity of themes noted. Finally, two research meetings were held with all researchers to evaluate the thematic development and rationale that led to the distinguishing of three overarching themes.

Triangulation to address potential discrepancies and difficulties with trustworthiness must be completed for efficacious qualitative research, and thus, three methods were used in the current study, including external auditor, peer review, and keeping an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail was maintained by the primary researcher which included field notes, transcripts, thematic rationale, and a summary of the findings. Furthermore, a phenomenology-trained qualitative researcher performed the requirements of an external researcher. The appointed external auditor received access to the audit trail, researcher journal, original interview transcripts, coded transcripts, and rationale for identifying emergent themes. Additionally, regular conversations regarding data collection and the analytic process were maintained by the external auditor and primary researcher. Next, following the focus groups, two post-focus group research meetings were utilized to initiate a peer review where the primary researcher was able to present initial data analysis and rationale for thematic development. All researchers involved in the process conversed on interpretations of the overarching themes before finalizing the results.

Findings

The following overarching themes emerged from the data analysis and were used to answer the primary and two secondary research questions (Table 2). The three overarching themes were *learning by doing, purposeful pedagogy*, and a *community-focused approach needed*.

Table 2

Overarching Themes

Theme 1	Learning by Doing
Theme 2	Purposeful Pedagogy
Theme 3	Community-Focused Approach Needed

Theme 1: Learning by Doing

The overarching theme of *learning by doing* resulted from the interpretation of the data generated by the first secondary research question used to explore how rural principals perceived their educational leadership preparation, including influential program factors. This theme was significant for all participants, specifically the factors that impacted student learning and development.

All participants were impacted by the type of classroom experiences they had, including the cohort model and in-class discussions. Participants reported learning best when provided hands-on opportunities in class or during school placements (e.g., internships). Claire spoke of her appreciation of adapting quickly into her leadership role; however, she noted more hands-on experiences could have benefited her further, "I was fortunate in that I was able to get into that role immediately, but I think hands-on is definitely the most important way to learn". Thresa supported this appreciation for hands-on learning which benefited her progress into a leadership role, stated, "The biggest part of mine that really helped was actually going in and putting my hand on budgets, attending the actual board meetings, going in, doing the observations alongside my administrator." Conversely, Sharon reported feeling very poorly prepared for her new role by stating:

> I think the principal I had at the time that I worked under gave me a handful of tasks that he didn't really wanna do and so there wasn't a whole lot of hands-on experience for me. Now I did see some things that I knew exactly how not to handle. In that regard, that was very good, but I immediately felt ill-prepared, I think, because of the lack of hands-on experience that I received.

Participants emphasized the value of having practical tasks versus busy work from professors or supervisors. Specifically, Amy discussed her experience with the type of work she was expected to complete, "Those were just quick 15-minute things and oftentimes it became a lot of busywork, not necessarily application or the hands-on approach." Furthermore, Hannah extended the notion of a need for hands-on approaches to learning in combination with fruitful discussion with peers, "I think the hands-on components were very important, but also being able to go back to your cohort and discuss things and break things down is what I most remember."

Theme 2: Purposeful Pedagogy

The overarching theme of *purposeful pedagogy* resulted from the interpretation of the data generated by the first secondary research question used to explore how rural principals perceived their educational leadership preparation, including influential program factors. Application-based assignments were extremely impactful to participants. Specifically, Amy noted the process of uncovering problems within case studies as beneficial to understanding how to respond appropriately in potential real-life difficulties, "With that, it was all about case studies and how you respond to that. As far as that goes, that was probably the most beneficial because you actually saw the application of the whole process and how you apply that to those scenarios." Comparatively, Claire expanded upon this idea of the benefits of example cases with the inclusion of peer discussions to understand others' action plans and perceptions, "They would give us these scenarios and then we would decide how to handle that as the building administrator. I got some of that as we started having discussions about the ways people handle them differently." Clear expectations and connection to real-life experiences of school leaders was paramount to their preparation. Thresa discussed the impact of this: "Having my administrator walk me through our actual policies, even though I was still teaching, that allowed me to open my lens up." Moreover, another participant found richness in the comparison across her preparation, allowing her to

develop her own sense of identity within the process and incorporate ideas into who she will strive to be as a school leader. Hannah shared:

> For me, it was definitely the internship process and I think also the fact that I got to do it one, at a school with a leader that I thought was quite poor, and then the second at a school where I thought the leader was quite strong. Having those two experiences back-to-back and being in two very different school cultures back-to-back really allowed me to do a lot of reflecting and thinking on what I would need to do were I to become a principal.

Theme 3: Community-Focused Approach Needed

The overarching theme of *community-focused approach needed* resulted from the interpretation of the first secondary research question used to explore how rural principals perceived their educational leadership preparation, including influential program factors. Participants discussed the importance of having a community-focused approach in the educational leadership classroom. Hannah noted the need for training within the various types of schooling in different communities by stating, "It's funny 'cause they make you do these community projects and they make you perfunctorily talk about how you have to really understand your community, but they don't even take the time to differentiate between some broad categories of types of schools that exist." Additionally, Claire re-emphasized this need, stating "Exposure to different circumstances would probably be good in a prep program." Sharon took this idea of community-focused approaches one step further in noting a need for physical assistance and approaches to learning and integrating within the community. She reasoned a need to go into these schools, stating "I think maybe even talking about some of those things—I really like what Miss Hannah said about very—maybe going into places where the case studies actually come from a very diverse set of situations, different types of schools and then—but they're real." Furthermore, many participants discussed the lack of conversation and assignments geared toward social justice and multicultural competency in the school community. Hannah specifically discussed the lack of structured educational material to spark conversations regarding social justice issues; however, she elaborated how her peers found a way to combat this issue,

> I don't think that they had much of a focus on social justice issues in a formal way. Fortunately, I think because of the cohort I was in, there were people in our cohort committed to social justice who pushed that issue, who could turn conversations that weren't probably intended to be about social justice into a conversation about that.

Although Sharon noted a slightly different experience in her scheduled courses, she still emphasized this point of a need for more formal preparation into culturally diverse and competent training, "I remember that I had a cultural diversity course at some point through my education, but there wasn't much as far as formal preparation for those type things, no. Most of that's all been hands-on cultural learning in the environments we're in."

Overall, the three overarching themes generated from participant responses answered the primary research question exploring the perceptions of rural school principals. Overarching themes one through three addressed the first secondary research question. Participants contributed valuable recommendations that are further addressed in the discussion of the findings.

Discussion

Three overarching themes were established including learning by doing, purposeful pedagogy, and community-focused approach needed. Information presented by the participants regarding these identified themes attended to the primary and two secondary research questions addressed in this study. Participants noted the importance of application-based assignments and hands-on activities as effective principal preparation techniques. They felt they benefitted more from practical tasks than from busy work assignments they were sometimes assigned. Case studies appeared to be an effective format for connecting assignments to real-life experiences for the participants. Perhaps the biggest benefit for the participants was the class discussions around the knowledge and skills gained in these types of activities.

The importance of a community-focused approach was a common thread amongst all the participants. One participant mentioned the discrepancy in the message her program presented to candidates and the focus of the coursework and assignment, specifically noting the program talked about the necessity to lead different school environments but the lack of exposure to differentiated circumstances. Another participant touted the need for candidate assistance in relating to varying types of communities to be ready to lead in diverse school settings. Further, all participants expressed a lack of training on cultural awareness and social justice in their programs. They felt a stronger emphasis on cultural diversity and more exposure to different circumstances could have increased their cultural proficiency and helped develop them into more culturally competent leaders.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Since the participant sample for this study was limited to six female principals in one rural district in north Mississippi, it is recommended that future research be conducted to gather perception data for other groups of principals. The researchers suggest exploration of principal perceptions in other areas of the state to include a broader perspective of Mississippi principals' perceptions including differing regions, ethnicities, socio-economic statuses, genders, and school settings. Further recommendations include conducting similar focus groups with current educational leadership faculty to identify gaps in the alignment of faculty and practitioner philosophies of effective educational leadership preparation to better prepare knowledgeable, skillful, and culturally competent school leaders. Additionally, the researchers have collected data from like regions, for example Georgia, and on deck, Texas, thus, the triangulation of findings is planned for future research to identify themes as a needs assessment to determine the direction of leadership preparation programs.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

Implications for practice include equipping aspiring principals with the knowledge and skills to lead for equity to continue to have a pipeline of effective school leaders to serve in Mississippi's traditionally underserved rural areas, and a specific focus should be on recruiting rural school leaders. Understanding the experiences aspiring principals endure during their preparation programs is vital to the improvement of principal preparation training, which needs to stay focused on bridging theory with practical application in real world settings. Principal preparation programs must focus on ensuring school leaders will be competent in the field by being equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to lead the charge of acting in the role of instructional school

leader. The findings noted that preparation programs need to center around learning by doing and purposeful pedagogy as well a community-focused approach is needed, again emphasizing this practical approach. Thus, university principal preparation programs must partner with school districts to provide purposeful, collaborative, and sustainable professional learning needed to continue with a pipeline of high-quality school leaders effectively prepared to lead in our 21st century schools.

References

Alenizi, A.S. (2020). Risk of turnover among U.S. principals based on personal and school characteristics. *Journal of Research in Education, 29*(1), 1–19.

Ankeny, R., Marichal, N., & Coady, M. (2019). Emerging teacher-leaders for English learners: A professional development model in rural Florida. *School Leadership Review, 14*(2).

Butler, K. (2008). Principal preparation programs. *District Administration, 44*(10), 66–70.

Diehl, J.N. & Gordon, S.P. (2016). School administrators' use of collaborative autobiographies as a vehicle for reflection on accountability pressures. *Reflective Practice, 17*(4), 495–506. DOI: 10.1080/14623943.2016.1178632

Dieker, L.A., Straub, C.L., Hughes, C.E., Hynes, M.C., & Hardin, S. (2014). Learning from the virtual students. *Educational Leadership, 71*(8), 54–58.

Duncan, H., Range, B., & Scherz, S. (2011). From professional preparation to on-the-job development: What do beginning principals need? *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 6*(3). Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ974249.pdf

Elyashiv, R. A. (2019). School and district leaders talk about teacher attrition. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching, 8*(3), 160–170. DOI: 10.5430/jct.v8n3p160

Fleck, F. (2008). The balanced principal: Joining theory and practical knowledge. *Education Digest, 73*(5), 27-31. Retrieved from http://0-0b35-4525-bc3c-41afa992ba17%40sessionmgr4005&hid=4202

Gill, M.J. (2014). The possibility of phenomenology for organizational research. *Organizational Research Methods, 17*(2), 118–137.

Glickman, C.D., Gordon, S. P. & Ross-Gordon, J. M. (2018). *Supervision and instructional leadership: A developmental approach*. Pearson.

Gordon, S.P, Oliver, J., & Solis, R. (2016). Successful innovations in Educational Leadership Preparation. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 11*(2), 51–70.

Green, T. L. (2018). School as community, community as school: Examining principal leadership for urban school reform and community development. *Education and Urban Society, 50*(2), 111–135.

Guajardo, M., & Garcia, S. (2016). Educational leadership for community development. *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal, 29*, 64–74.

Hernandez, R., Roberts, M., & Menchaca, V. (2012). Redesigning a principal preparation program: A continuous improvement model. *International Journal of Educational Leadership, 7*(3). Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ997446.pdf

Hess, F., & Kelly, A. (2007). Learning to lead: What gets taught in principal preparation programs. *The Teachers College Record, 109*(1), 244–274.

Jackson, T., McBrayer, J.S., Pannell, S.S., Cleveland, R., Miller, S., & *Fallon, K. (2021). The effects of school tasks on principals and assistant principals' leadership self-efficacy. *School Leadership Review, 16*(1), 1-39.

Jensen, B., Hunter, A., Lambert, T., & Clark, A. (2015). Aspiring principal preparation. Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

Khuwaja, H.M.A., Karmaliani, R., McFarlane, J., & Jewkes, R. (2019). Use of activity-oriented questions in qualitative focus group discussions to explore youth violence in Sindh, Pakistan. *Nursing Practice Today, 6*(4), 162–166.

Knoeppel, R. & Logan, J. P. (2011). Linking theory with practice: A longitudinal analysis of student portfolios in principal preparation. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 14*(3), 337–349.

LaFrance, J. A. & Beck, D. (2014). Mapping the terrain: Educational leadership field experiences in K-12 virtual schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 50*(1), 160–189.

Lashway, L. (1999). Preparing school leaders. *Research Roundup, 15*(5). Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED440468.pdf

Levine, A. (2005). A race to the bottom: The nation's school leadership programs are not producing the educational administrators we need. National CrossTalk, 13(3). Retrieved from http://www.highereducation.org/crosstalk/ct0305/voices0305-levine.shtml

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage.

Lynch, J. M. (2012). Responsibilities of today's principal: Implications for principal preparation programs and principal certification policies. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 31*(2), 40–47. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1147762

McBrayer, J.S., Jackson, T., Pannell, S.S., Sorgen, C., Gutierrez, A., & Melton, T. (2018). Balance of instructional and managerial tasks as it relates to school leaders' self-efficacy. *Journal of School Leadership, 28*(5), 596-617.

Miller, W. (2013). Better principal training is key to school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan, 98*(4), 80. Retrieved from http://0-eds.a.ebscohost.com.umiss.lib.olemiss.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=47&sid=f759ce88-0b35-4525-bc3c-41afa992ba17%40sessionmgr4005&hid=4202

O'Connor, M. T. & Daniello, F. (2019). From implication to naming: Reconceptualizing school-community partnership literature using a framework nested in social justice. *School Community Journal, 29*(1), 297–316.

Oliver, J., Gordon, S. P., & Oliver, M. L. (2018). Examining the value aspiring principals place on various instructional strategies in principal preparation. *International Journal of Policy and Educational Leadership, 13*(3). DOI: 10.22230/ijepl.2018v13n3a735

Pannell, S. & McBrayer, J.S. (2020). An examination of the impact of educational leadership field experience structure on instructional leadership preparedness. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 15*(1).

Pannell, S., Peltier-Glaze, B., Haynes, I., Davis, D., & Skelton, C. (2015). Evaluating the effectiveness of traditional and alternative principal preparation programs. *Journal of Organizational and Educational Leadership, 1*(2).

Reed, C. J., & Kensler, L. A. W. (2010). Creating a new system for principal preparation: Reflections on efforts to transcend tradition and create new cultures. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 5*(12.10), 568-582. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ913603.pdf

Sanchez, J. E., Burnham, M. M., & Zaki, S. (2019). The dynamic transformation of a principal preparation program: A university-district collaborative. International *Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 14*(1), 1–12.

Taylor, J. A. & West, B. (2020). Estimating teacher attrition for impact study design. *Educational Researcher, 49*(1), 68–70. DOI: 10.312/0013189X19880550

Thier, M. & Beach, P. (2019). Stories we don't tell: Research's limited accounting of rural schools. *School Leadership Review, 14*(2).

Tremont, J.W. & Templeton, N.R. (2019). Principals as instructional leaders: An embedded descriptive case study of one rural school's effort to improve student outcomes through reading plus. *School Leadership Review, 14*(2).

Young, M. D., Winn, K. M., & Reedy, M. A. (2017). The Every Student Succeeds Act: Strengthening the focus on educational leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 53*(5), 705–726. DOI: 10.1177/0013161X17735871

Zubnzycki, J. (2013). Principal development goes back to school. *Education Week, 32*(21), 4–6. Retrieved from http://0-eds.a.ebscohost.com.umiss.lib.olemiss.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=24&sid=f759ce88-0b35-4525-bc3c-41afa992ba17%40sessionmgr4005&hid=420

Graduate students have a dream. They desire to lead teams, departments, and campuses. Financial loss due to the COVID-1919 pandemic created a problem for students and caused a decline in enrollment for some universities. Institutions must continue to seek ways to offset financial loss. The narrative inquiry design in this study allowed the researchers to gain insight into students' experiences as they researched universities of which they desired to attend. Read further to see how some institutions are working to effectively recruit as a means of increasing and retaining enrollment.

Analysis of Factors Influencing Student Program Selection for a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership

Dr. Melissa Arrambide, Texas A & M University Commerce
Dr. Teresa Farler, Texas A & M University Commerce
Dr. Pam Winn, Retired Professor, Texas A & M University Commerce

Abstract

Institutions of higher education continue to seek ways to offset financial loss resulting from government cutbacks as well as loss of funds and enrollment due to the COVID-1919 pandemic. In this quest to increase enrollment, it is worth examining factors that influence student choice in selecting a graduate school. There is limited literature on this topic specific to graduate students at the master's level of education. However, several factors that do arise when examining graduate students' enrollment considerations include financial consideration, existing student debt, gender, life role, generation, and university policies and practices (Kranzow, 2019).

It is becoming increasing important for institutions to determine what is working well in graduate recruitment efforts. Further, determining effective marketing strategies can guide universities and academic departments in program development. As graduate programs seek to increase and retain enrollment, it is imperative to have a clear understanding of prospective students' considerations as they relate to the selection of a graduate program (Kranzow, 2019). This research study explored the perceptions of graduate students enrolled in an online program at a regional university that is part of a larger university system.

Introduction

With the trend of decreasing enrollments, higher tuition, and reduced state funding, public institutions of higher education are pushing for an increase in enrollment. Prior to COVID-19-19, many institutions of higher education were setting robust enrollment growth targets of 10% or more (Okahana & Zhou, 2019). However, the impact of COVID-19-19 on post-secondary enrollment yielded a 2.5% decrease in fall 2020, with undergraduate enrollment dropping by 3.6%. Surprisingly, graduate enrollment grew 3.6% in fall 2020 (National Student Clearinghouse, 2020). The increase in graduate enrollment could be attributed to the data noting jobs requiring applicants to hold a master's or doctoral degree upon entry that are projected to rise by 9 to 13.7% between 2018 and 2028 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

State spending on public colleges and universities remains remarkably below historic levels a decade past the Great Recession. In 2017, long before the impacts of COVID-19-19, state funding for public two-year and four-year colleges was almost 9 billion dollars below the 2008 level (adjusting for inflation) of the Great Recession (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2017). As higher education continues to see reduced funding from the state, institutions are seeking to increase enrollment to help offset lost funding and with undergraduate enrollment declining, more pressure is being placed on graduate programs to increase enrollment to help offset the numbers. In addition, the recent impact of COVID-19-19 on state revenues may impact funding for higher education leading to an even greater push for enrollment in universities. For example, due to COVID-19-19, Texas is projected to have a deficit of one billion dollars for the state's budget for

the next two years. This does not include an existing 5% cut to state agency budgets (Ferman, 2021).

As institutions of higher education seek to continually increase enrollment, one area to examine is the factors that influence student choice in selecting a graduate school. The existing literature on this topic is sparse and mainly focuses on doctoral students. However, several factors arise when examining graduate students' enrollment considerations including financial consideration, existing student debt, gender, life role, generation, and university policies and practices (Kranzow, 2019). Financial considerations such as degree cost and financial support consistently emerge as a key concern (Winn et al., 2014) and can even lead to a student choosing an institution of lesser quality for more affordability (Lei & Chuang, 2010; Ramirez, 2013).

To support the needed growth in graduate programs, identifying what is working well in both graduate recruitment and programs can help shape effective marketing strategies and guide universities and academic departments in program development. Institutions serve a larger number of graduate students, and it is important to understand prospective students' considerations as they relate to the selection of a graduate program (Kranzow, 2019). The research explored the perceptions of graduate students enrolled in an online program at a regional university that is part of a larger system.

Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

The research explores the factors affecting student program selection through the lens of a functionalist practitioner. The functionalist perspective explains "social institutions as collective means to meet individual and social needs" (Libretexts, 2020). Functionalism adopts the notion in which one assumes if research can determine the working parts (educational leadership programs) of a larger system (institutions of higher education), then program administrators may be better able to develop programs to meet individual student needs.

Marketing Strategies in Higher Education

Driven by a need to increase enrollment, institutions of higher education are seeking effective marketing strategies to help meet their enrollment goals. Many universities hire marketing professionals or have in-house marketing departments and are allocating more attention to marketing than in previous years (Hanover Research, 2014). Effective marketing strategies for universities include a clearly delineated marketing strategy for the university which contains long-term goals, marketing activities, and the methods and means used to obtain the goals (Bialon, 2015). In addition, brand marketing is an effective marketing strategy in higher education that is characterized by choice, decreased differentiation, and increased complexity can overwhelm and confuse prospective students (Walsh & Mitchell, 2010). It creates a pathway for higher education institutions to create a unique position within the market and differentiate themselves (Rutter et al., 2017). The process of differentiating themselves in the market can travel different paths. Rutter et al. (2017) noted four traits universities use to differentiate themselves: sophistication (degree specialization, connections to industry, prestigious projects), ruggedness (longevity of the institution or educational rigor), excitement (stimulation, location, etc.), and competence (outstanding graduates, notable faculty, etc.).

Many institutions of higher education have invested in marketing firms or marketing departments; however, many institutions such as the regional university in this study do not have access to marketing for the growth of specific programs. The marketing resources focus on the university as a whole but do not provide resources at the academic department level. Thus, each college and/or department must fend for themselves to reach the growth goals established by the institution. Without marketing support or funds, academic departments are left to their own devices to develop some recruiting practice or plan. The popularity and low cost of social media have led it to become the most viable recruitment platform for these colleges/departments.

The design and nature of social media have impacted the way higher education institutions build relationships with their stakeholders (Clark et al., 2017) and it has modernized communication processes internally and externally within the higher education institution and has allowed institutions to engage with a wider range of stakeholders (Rutter et al., 2016). Social media presence is an essential component for institutions of higher education as a means to increase visibility and to access new and existing stakeholders (Shields, 2016). Universities must have a rich social media presence in their marketing process (Sandvig, 2016) and specifically, Facebook is essential for viability, student retention, building trust, and student recruitment (Peruta & Helm, 2018). Hanover Research (2014) noted the largest area of innovation and growth in higher education marketing, branding, and recruitment is in social media. There is still some doubt that institutions are using technology to their full potential. One of the most important tools for online/social marketing is an effective website that is intuitive with streamlined feature elements and layouts, navigation bars, engaging visuals, and prominent "call to action" buttons that encourage students to apply (Hanover Research, 2014).

Interestingly, in terms of recruitment, students ranked social media tools lower than traditional tools such as informational brochures (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011) unless the social media engaged students in the dialog and two-way communication (Rutter et al., 2016). The most common two-way communication tools utilized in higher education marketing are Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The robustness of a university's Facebook community positively correlates with trust, engagement, and an individual's ability to identify and connect with the university community in the real world (Nevzat et al., 2016). Attention to detail in the timing and content of the Facebook post can have a significant return on marketing investments (Peruta & Shields, 2018). Twitter is another pathway for departments to engage in a two-way conversation; however, establishing a presence on Twitter demands resources and time and should be evaluated to guide engagement efforts (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011).

Online Learning

Advances in technology, as well as the availability of technology, have created the opportunity for students to learn anytime and from anywhere. Over 6.7 million college and graduate students have enrolled in one or more online courses (Allen & Seaman, 2013). This was an increase of over a half-million students from the previous year. The ability to reach students who are geographically isolated or limited in their ability to attend school full time is a driving reason for institutions to create online degree programs (Billingsley & Scheuermann, 2014). While online programs provide students both flexibility and convenience, some students may feel less connected to the institution (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). This can potentially lead to students exiting prior to completing the program.

Successful online instruction requires quality course design and avenues for interaction among course participants (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2012). In addition, online programs must connect the student to the faculty and the resources at the institution. Course design should include multiple methods of content exploration and transmission of learning activities (Liu et al., 2010). Most courses include both synchronous and asynchronous learning activities and multiple forms of technology to appeal to different learning styles. According to Balkin et al. (2005), online course content should be "presented in formats that include compressed videos, video lectures, website viewing, and multiple communication methods" (p. 364). Online courses are designed so students move through the learning in a course based on their needs. There is no stigma for additional time to learn concepts. Instructors are available to provide individualized instruction as needed for students.

As instruction moves online, students lose access to questions and exchanges among peers in the course. Instructors lose access to nonverbal clues from students and the opportunity to embed unexpected but relevant learning. As instructors design courses, careful consideration needs to be given as to how students will interact with their peers as the course content is presented (Parker, 2013). Expectations as to how the students will interact with the content as well as with peers should be communicated as part of the course requirements. During the course, the instructor maintains ongoing communication with learners and assesses their understanding of the content to ensure students are meeting course expectations.

In addition to creating interaction among learners in an online environment, instructors must spark students' curiosity to learn and apply knowledge and skills of the content (Fayer, 2014). Online learning offers many avenues for students to explore areas of interest while engaging in course content and provides for personalized instruction based on student needs. While direct instruction can be provided through online media, videos, and synchronous sessions, instructors can adjust the course timeline and content to meet the needs of learners (Arghode et al., 2018). According to Lehamn and Conceicao (2010), creating online courses which are relevant and have real-world application are more likely to attract and retain students.

The convenience and availability of online courses have provided colleges and universities with opportunities to increase their enrollment (Cavanaugh, 2019). Online learning allows students to access educational programs nationally or internationally without in-person travel to those institutions. In 2016, 3% of the 1.4 million students enrolled in post-secondary institutions participated in one or more online courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). With the increase in demand for online courses, colleges and universities see online degree programs as a key strategy for meeting the demands of students.

With the ability to access online courses at any time, students can work part-time or full-time and still engage in higher education via online learning. Flexibility of time and place and the ability to learn in their own environment were found to be key factors for students selecting online courses (Serhan, 2010). While online instruction provides for self-pacing and learner independence, it requires personal responsibility. The most significant drawback of online learning was lack of motivation and the inability of students to manage their time during a course (Yang et al., 2017).

An additional challenge for online programs is the inability of students to complete programs within a set timeline. Layne et al. (2013) found with the increased availability of online programs, "students are more academically diverse and have varied educational backgrounds as they enter

graduate programs". Most of the students enrolled in online graduate programs are working adults who balance various responsibilities. These responsibilities include personal, family, and work duties which had a strong impact on the student's ability to complete online course work in a timely manner (Brown et al., 2020). The struggle to balance graduate courses and life responsibilities puts the student at risk of dropping out of courses or the program.

One critical factor for completion of online courses is the quality of the instructors and the coursework (Yang et al., 2017). In a study of students participating in an online Master's in Educational Technology program, 90% of students ranked satisfaction with the course, the program, and the learning outcomes as one of the most important attributes of an online graduate program (Yang et al., 2017). This was the second highest ranking for a program attribute in the study. The quality of an online course includes the instructional components as well as the communication from the instructor. The type of feedback received from the instructor as well as the frequency of the feedback were key. The feedback provided by the instructor helps students learn and develop confidence in the course material (Bunn, 2004). However, some students found online instruction isolating which contributed a lack of self-direction and self-discipline in completing the courses. This led to a lack of motivation on the part of the student and to increasing dropout rates (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003).

The need for institutional support is also crucial for students to complete online courses (Kim & Frick, 2011). Students must be able to resolve technical issues in a timely, efficient manner in order to prevent disruption in learning. Effective technical support allows students more time to focus on the academic portion of the course rather than spending time resolving a technical issue.

Online education is complex and comprised of more than providing a series of courses. The resources and support provided to students must be as important as the quality of instruction (Pullan, 2009). In addition to the support provided by the instructor, institutional support for online students includes program and course information, technical help, advising, and accessibility to campus resources.

Online academic advising provides the student with information needed for program completion. Academic advising additionally provides an avenue for making a meaningful connection between the student and the institution (Morris & Miller, 2007). The interaction between students and faculty through online advising bridges the students with the campus. Through academic advising, the faculty advisor and student examine degree options and program requirements including internships or specialized projects. In addition, academic advisors assist students with selecting courses and accessing available resources such as libraries or tutoring services. Through these connections, advisors develop relationships that are critical to student success and retention.

Generally, students interested in a college or university schedule a campus tour and receive first-hand the information regarding the institution and degree programs. Conversely, students enrolling in a virtual program usually do not have access to the physical campus or do not consider a campus visit critical. However, according to Brown et al. (2020), students' initial contact with an educational institution and the enrollment support offered often have a lasting impact on their perceptions of services offered at the institution. Therefore, it is critical for institutions to offer quality enrollment services virtually for prospective students. This would include virtual tours of the campus, online applications, and the capability for admission documents to be submitted online.

During the admissions process, online students need access to degree programs, admission criteria, transcript evaluations and the application process without physically accessing the institution. Ideally, the institution should provide access to enrollment specialists beyond typical business hours and on weekends. Access to financial aid information and financial aid staff were key to retaining online students beyond the first semester (Netanda et al., 2019). These services can be provided via a virtual conference between the student and a financial aid staff member. In addition, information regarding financial aid, forms, and deadlines can be posted on the institutional website for easy access by online or in-person students. Post-enrollment support is a key factor in student satisfaction and retention (Brown et al., 2020). Providing students with course information, course sequencing, and academic support services builds a connection to the institution. Connecting students with their institution early in the online program proved to be a strong strategy for promoting student success (Heyman, 2010).

Understanding the degree program requirements during the enrollment process is key to the student successfully entering the program. However, students need more than general information once they have enrolled and are committed to a degree program. Berry (2018) stated that the main purpose of an orientation is to educate students regarding the expectations of a particular academic program. In addition, the orientation should provide students with information describing the institution's resources and academic support services. Students also benefit from information that explores the expectations for graduate level students at an institution. Foremost, students must understand the specific degree requirements which include the required courses, academic requirements, timelines, and any specialized program components such as a thesis, comprehensive exams, or an internship.

Students must also understand the academic requirements and the timelines in which the degree must be completed. In most cases, students will be expected to interact with other students during the courses. A common misconception among students is that online courses only require a student to log in and work one time per week (Bozarth et al., 2004). In reality, the demand and frequency of students working in an online course is determined by the instructor and the complexity of the course. Students need to be able to conduct quality research and create written documents that demonstrate an understanding of the discipline. As part of the orientation, instructors generally communicate the expectation for self-discipline and time management that is needed to successfully complete the program.

Orientations for online programs often include the use of the learning management system and options for troubleshooting technical problems (Berry, 2018). Students can experience the specific tools in the learning management system as well as interact with others in a virtual setting. Additionally, students can practice using discussion and chat features as well as software tools to create and submit assignments. Students are provided the minimum technology requirements for the learning management system, the courses within the system, and the resources for technology assistance. During the online orientation, students also become familiar with institutional supports such as academic advising, libraries and research tools, and career counseling (Brown et al., 2020).

A well-planned online orientation can clarify expectations for the program and eliminate misconceptions students may have. Some students sign up for online courses because they perceive these courses may be easier than face-to-face courses. However, in most cases, online courses are more challenging than traditional face-to-face courses (Johnston et al., 2005). Clear and detailed

program expectations combined with ongoing institutional support provide students with the information and tools for success in completing an online program.

Through the development and advancement of online learning, institutions of higher education institutions have addressed the increased demand for online programs. However, student retention and completion of online programs continues to be a chief concern for educational institutions.

Methods

Qualitative methods were used for data gathering and analysis in this research study. Qualitative research is widely adopted in social sciences and educational settings when the researcher is seeking to gather information by asking questions (Creswell, 2014). This qualitative study was conducted using narrative inquiry methods via the distribution of a questionnaire. The narrative inquiry design allowed the researchers to gain insight into students' experiences as they actively sought graduate program participation (Creswell, 2014). The purpose of the study was to examine factors considered by graduate students when selecting a university in which to pursue their Master's Degree in Educational Administration. Data is reported through use of descriptive statistics.

Research Questions
1. What are the motivational factors influencing student choice to pursue a graduate degree in education?
2. What are the program design factors that influence student choice in selecting a graduate program?

Data Collection and Analyses

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data gathered via the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information regarding factors impacting student selection of their Educational Leadership Program. Some branching logic was used within the questionnaire as some participant responses dictated how students proceeded through the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics presented in this study include frequencies, percentages, and averages of the aggregate data.

Participants

The questionnaire was distributed to approximately 171 graduate level students enrolled at a regional university with a response rate of 24%. Students were enrolled in the Master's Program in Educational Leadership. Students were given the opportunity to opt out of survey participation with no associated risk. The study did not restrict participation based on gender, race, ethnicity, or age. Participation was limited to the existing enrolled graduate students within the department of study during the spring 2020 or summer 2020 semesters. Specifically, student recruitment and participation constituted as follows: N = 171 total enrollment with 41 voluntary participants. The data collected for this study included the following demographic breakdown by age range: Total Responses (N): 41 Master's-level students.

Figure 1
Age Range of Participants with Percentages of Representation

9.76% 9.76%

14.63%

21.95%

21.95%

21.95%

■ 20-25 ■ 26-30 ■ 31-35 ■ 36-40 ■ 41-45 ■ 46-50 ■ 51-55 ■ over 56
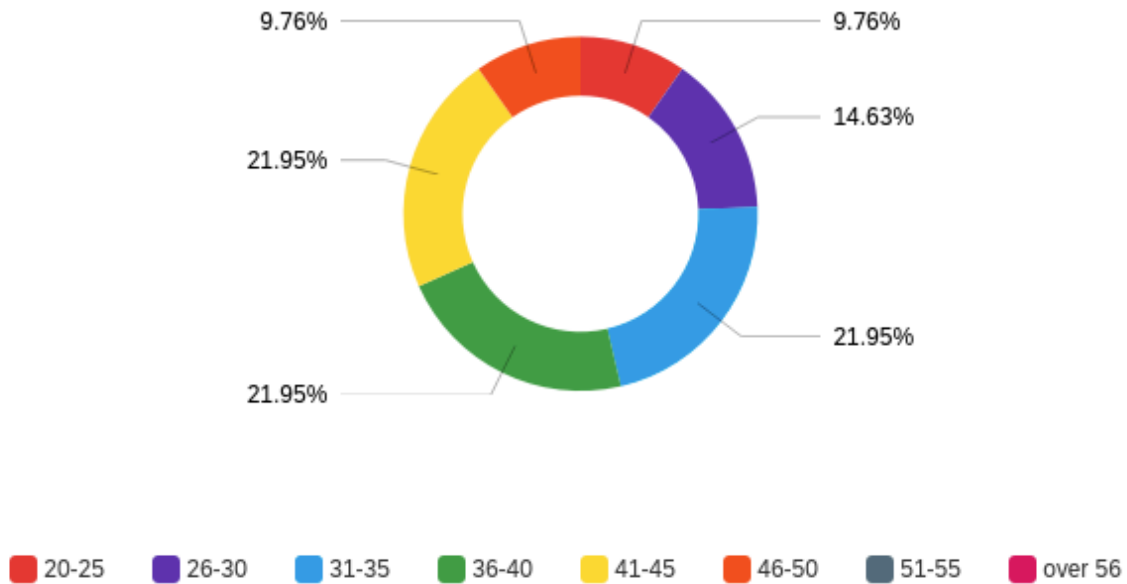
There was an equal distribution of age range between the ages of 31-35, 36-40, and 41-55.

Distance from Home to Campus

Students (N = 41) were asked to identify distance in miles from home to campus. Figure 2 represents the distribution in the students' distances:

Figure 2
Driving Distance for Students from Home to Campus
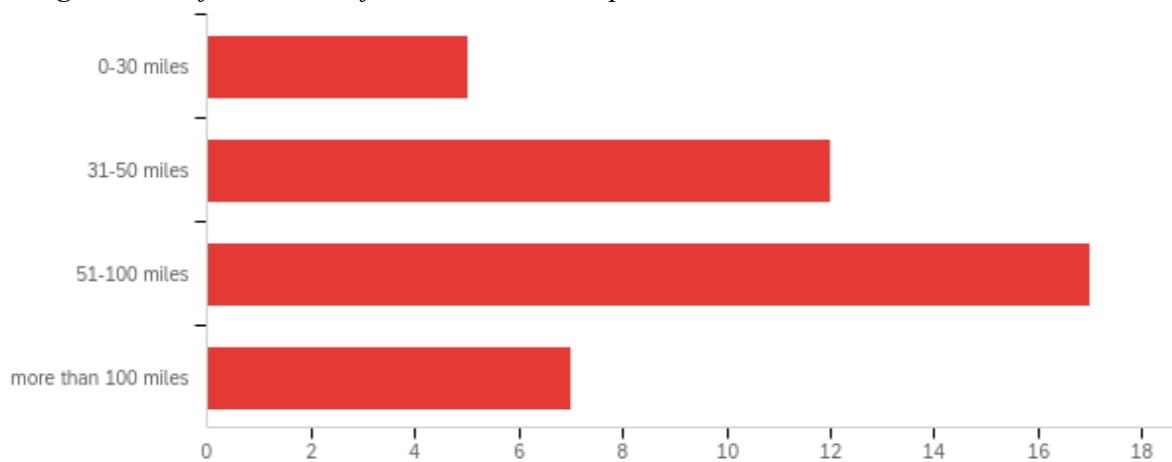
The greatest percentage of student reside between 51-100 miles from campus. The lowest percentage of students reside between 0-30 miles from the school. The distribution of results indicates that most student reside at least 30 miles from home to campus.

Motivation for Attending Graduate School

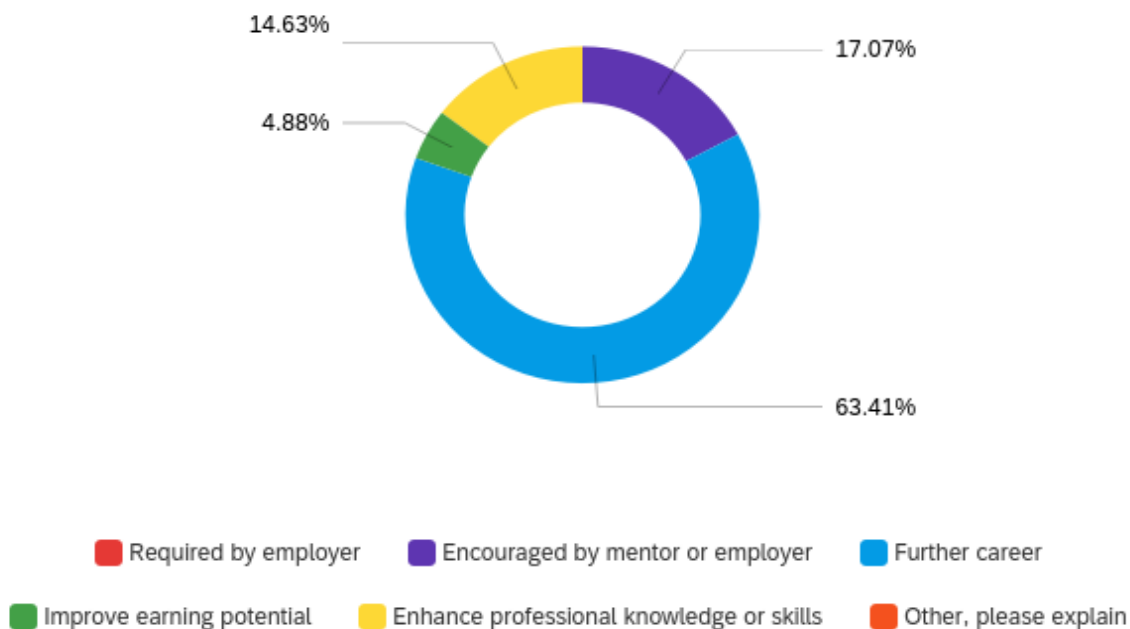Students (N = 41) were asked to select the primary motivation for attending graduate school. Factors included in the questionnaire for selection: required by employer, encouraged by mentor/employer, further career, improve earning potential, enhance professional knowledge/skills, and other. The top three factors identified by participants as the primary motivation for attending graduate school were: further career (63.41%), encouraged by mentor/employer (17.07%), and enhance professional knowledge/skills (14.63%). The least identified motivating factor of participants as their motivation to attend graduate school was required by employer (0%) followed by improve earning potential (4.88%).

Figure 3
Primary Motivation for Attending Graduate School

Factors Influencing Choice

Students (N = 41) were asked to select factors influencing their choice to attend the regional institution of study. Factors included in the questionnaire for selection: tuition costs, online course delivery, reputation, future career opportunities, recommendation from family/friends, convenience, recommendations from employer, attended previously/alum, program requirements, financial aid/scholarships, timeline for program compilation and other. Between the 41 students, 108 total responses were selected. The top five factors identified by participants as influencing their decision to select the institution of study, were: online delivery (20.37%), timeline for program completion (16.67%), convenience (13.89%), tuition cost (12.96%), and attended previously/alum (12.04%). The least identified factor by participants as influencing their decision to select the institution of study was size of institution (0%) followed by financial aid/scholarships (.93%). Figure 4 depicts the results as follows:

Figure 4

Factors Influencing Choice of Institution
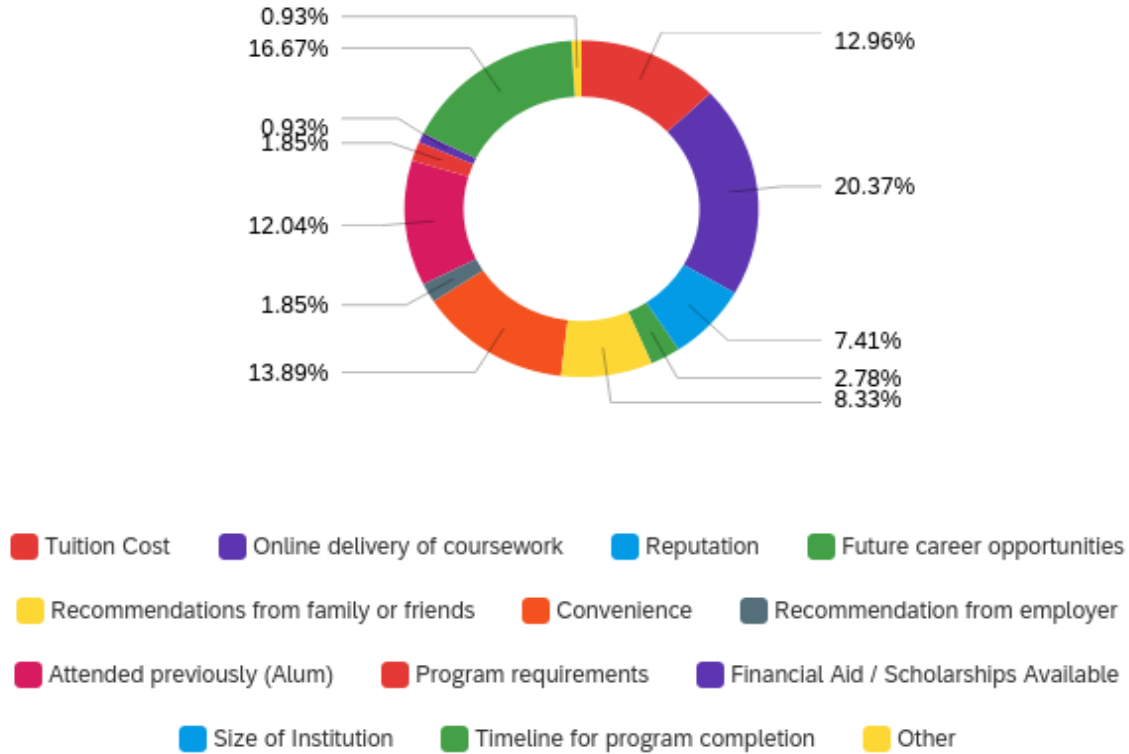
Aspects of Reputation

Students were then asked to elaborate further on the aspects of reputation that affected their decision to attend the institution of study. Selection choices included: reputation of faculty, reputation of university, reputation of program, online delivery, completion rate, one-year completion option, and other. Figure 5 depicts the distribution of results.

Figure 5

Aspects of Reputation
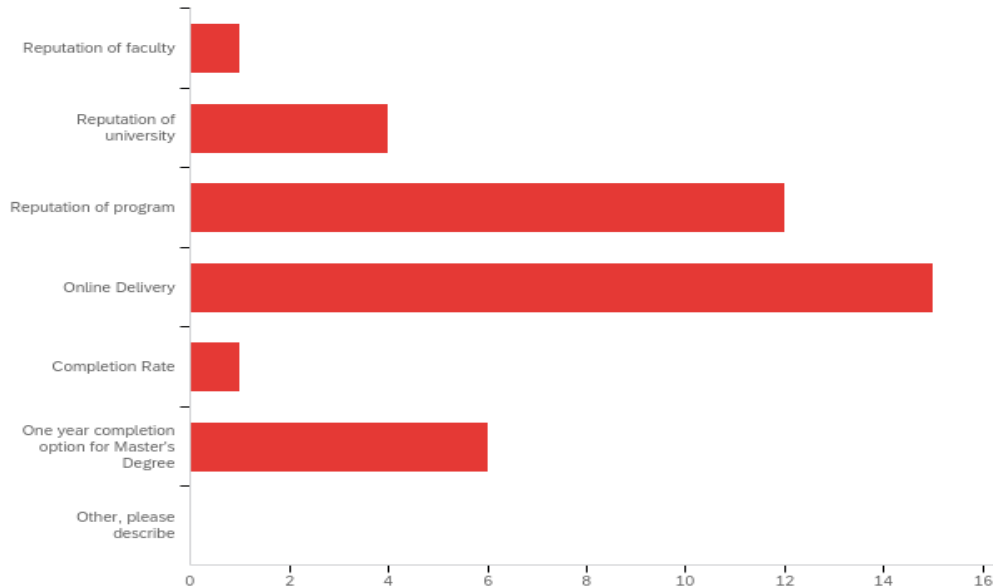
Reputation of online program delivery received the highest percentage of responses (38.46%) and overall reputation of program received the second highest percentage of responses (30.77%). Reputation of faculty and completion rate both received the lowest percentage of responses at 2.6%.

Aspects of Convenience

Students were then asked to elaborate further on the aspects of convenience that affected their decision to attend the institution of study. Selection choices included: location close to work, location close to home, attended previously, course scheduling, online course delivery, 7-week course delivery, 1 year completion for Master's Degree, and other. Figure 6 depicts the distribution of results.

Figure 6
Aspects of Convenience
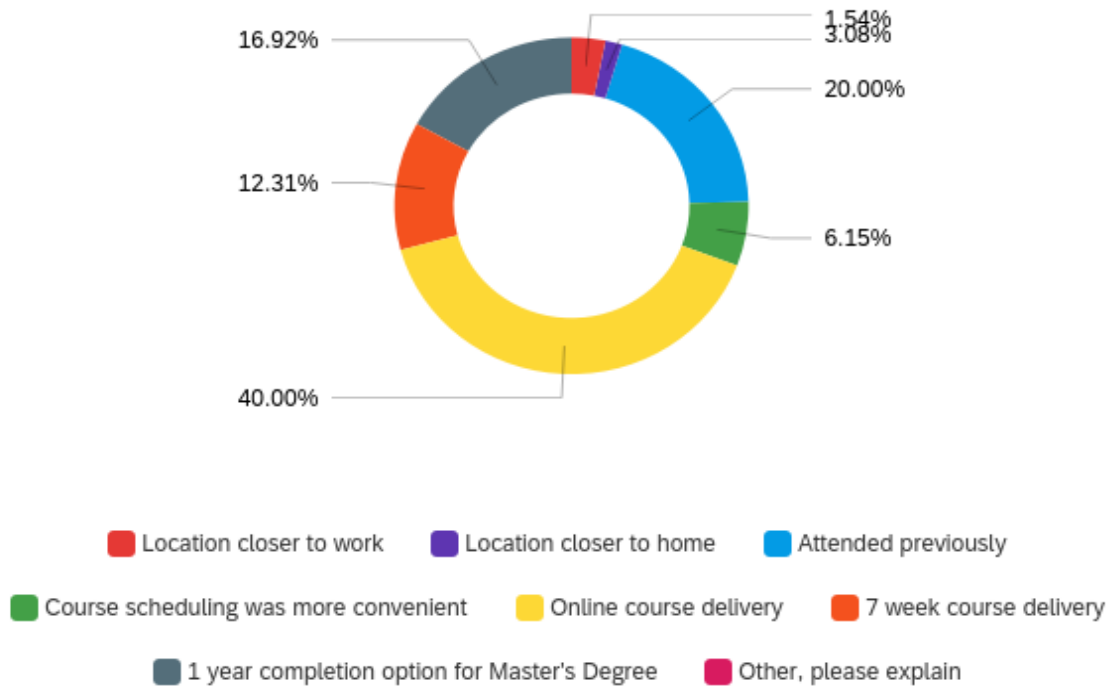
Online course delivery received the highest percentage of responses (40%), followed by attended previously at (20%). Closely behind attended previously was a 1 year completion option at 16.92%. The least selected options were location closer to work (1.54%) and location closer to home (3.08%), indicating that the physical location had little to no bearing on the perceived convenience of the program.

Marketing Factors

Students (N = 41) were asked to identify the forum, including social media formats, in which they first learned about the program at the institution of study. Selection choices included: family/friend/colleague, internet search, Facebook, Twitter, billboard, newspaper/magazine/journal ad, radio commercial, community college contact, university representative and other. The top two choices selected were family/friend/colleague (48.94%), and internet search (34.04%), with Twitter feed, billboard, newspaper/magazine/journal ad, and radio commercial not being selected at all. Figure 7 below represents the distribution:

Figure 7

Marketing Factors
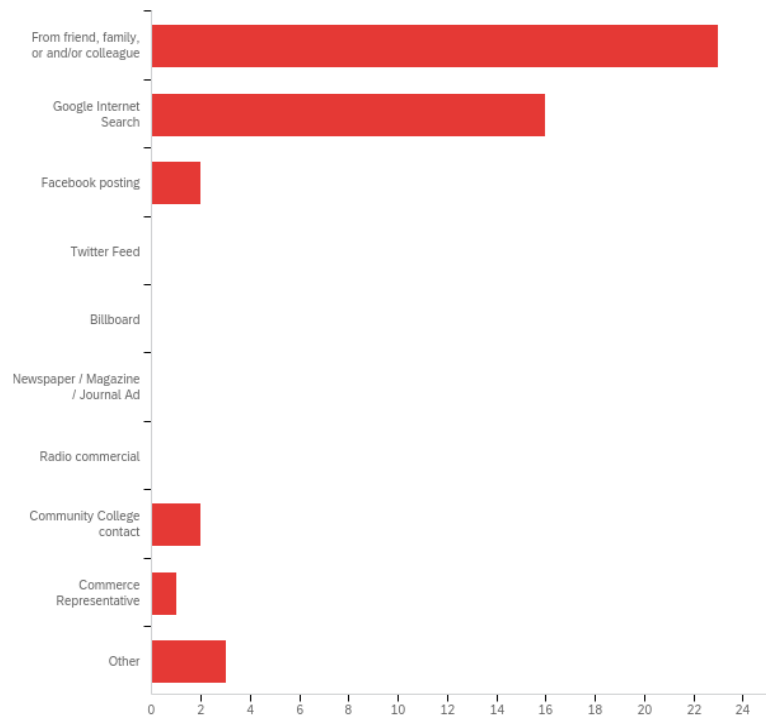
Effective Recruiting Practices

Students (N = 38) were asked to identify factors they consider most effective practices for recruiting graduate students in Education to attend a particular program, as reported in Figure 8. Selection choices included: advertising in education related journals, advertising in popular print sources, online advertising, advertising via social media, contact from university representative, face to face information session, online information sessions, and other. Figure 8 depicts the distribution of results as follows:

Figure 8
Students' Reported Effective Recruiting Practices
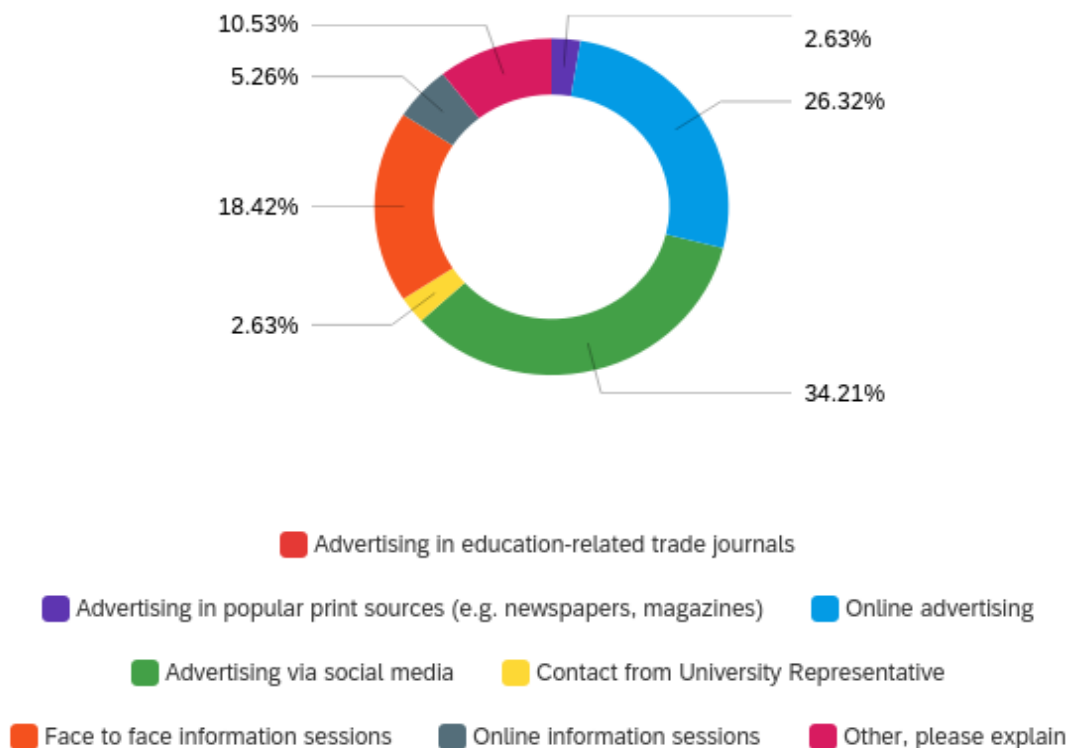
Students indicated advertising (34.21%) via social media as the most effective means of recruitment practices followed by online advertising (26.32%). The least effective method was identified as advertising in education related journals, having zero responses.

Program Recommendations

Lastly, students were given the opportunity to provide specific program recommendations through an open-ended question. Specific suggestions were as follows:

- There should be an advisor assigned to each student. The advisor can function as a contact point for questions/concerns about the program. It would also help online students develop a more personal connection to a person who represents the campus.
- Nothing. I believe the program is incredibly helpful and informational.
- More communication between teachers and students. The classes that I learned the most in had accompanying videos and Zoom meetings where questions could be asked over assignment expectations.
- D2L needs to be revamped to become more user friendly. I am a technology person and struggled to find all the things and complete all the things. It does the university zero favors.
- I would recommend for principal practicum students to not work full time.
- I would like more communication about how the program is structured.

- Alignment with other course sections for more opportunities to collaborate/discuss with other peers
- More video lecture/instruction some students have learning difficulties and it would help support various learning styles.
- Upfront information regarding principal certification tests. In addition, a required time each week to discuss questions and concerns for the assignments or principal tests.
- Have online options that is not 7 weeks for each class
- Nothing. Every question I have ever had was answered very thoroughly and gave me great information when I had questions.
-

Conclusions

While the participants of this particular study all attended the same university, and are not necessarily representative of all graduate students, the information does offer beneficial insight to program leaders and professors of Educational Leadership departments at large. The research questions guiding this study offer valuable insight into the recruitment and development of graduate level programs in Educational Leadership. In sum, the findings of this study indicate that students are seeking advanced degrees to further their careers. Location did not appear to be a prominent contributing factor. Online course delivery was a factor across several domains and appears to be an important factor for students selecting a program. The open-ended responses offered noteworthy information. While students clearly want and value online course delivery, the open responses indicate students are still wanting to feel a personal connection to their professors. Interestingly, one participant indicated the desire to have required meeting times even in an online format. In terms of recruitment, it is clear that word of mouth and internet advertisement are more valuable than specific university recruitment efforts.

References

Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2013). *Changing course: Ten years of tracking online education in the United States*. Sloan Consortium. PO Box 1238, Newburyport, MA 01950. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED541571.pdf

Arghode, V., Brieger, E., & Wang, J. (2017). Adult learning theories: Implications for online instruction. *Journal of Training and Development*, *41*(7), 593-609. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-02-2017-0014

Balkin, R. S., Buckner, D., Swartz, J., & Rao, S. (2005). Issues in classroom management in an interactive distance education course. *International Journal of Instructional Media, 32*(4), 363-372. Retrieved from https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA141093003&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=00921815&p=AONE&sw=w&userGroupName=pub_gap

Berry, S. (2018). Building community in an online graduate program: Exploring the role of an in-person orientation. *The Qualitative Report, 23*(7), 73-87.

Bialon, L. (2015). Creating marketing strategies for higher education institutions. *MINIB*, *4*(18), 129-146. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.14611/minib.18.04.2015.13

Billingsley, G. M., & Scheuermann, B. M. (2014). Using virtual technology to enhance field experiences for pre-service special education teachers. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, *37*(3), 255-272. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406414530413

Bozarth, J., Chapman, D. D., & LaMonica, L. (2004). Preparing for distance learning: Designing an online student orientation course. *Journal of Educational Technology and Society*, *7*(1). 87-106. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/jeductechsoci.7.1.87

Brown, V. S., Stringle, J., & Toussaint, M. (2020). A statewide study of perceptions of directors on the availability of online student support services at postsecondary institutions. *Online Learning, 24*(4), 167-181. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1277631.pdf

Bunn, J. (2004). Student persistence in a LIS distance education program. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, *35*(3), 253-269. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/00048623.2004.10755275

Cavanaugh, J. K. (2019). Are online courses cannibalizing students from existing courses? *Online Learning*, *9*(3), 3-8. Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d770/36fa5cd0ab1a5ee69d3557f005d73a7352f8.pdf

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2017). A lost decade in higher education funding state cuts have driven up tuition and reduced quality. Retrieved from https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/83618/TuitionReducedQuality.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Clark, M., Fine, M. B., & Scheuer, C. L. (2017). Relationship quality in higher education marketing: The role of social media engagement. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, *27*(1), 40–58. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2016.1269036

Constantinides, E., & Zinck Stagno, M. C. (2011). Potential of the social media as instruments of higher education marketing: A segmentation study. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, *21*(1), 7–24. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2011.573593

Crawford-Ferre, H., & Wiest, L, (2012). Effective online instruction in higher education. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, *13*(1), 12-13. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263620466_Effective_Online_Instruction_in_Higher_Education

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Fayer, L. (2014). A multi-case study of student perceptions of online course design elements and success. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *8*(1). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2014.080113

Ferman, M. (2021, January 11). Recession cuts how much lawmakers can spend with the next state budget, but decrease isn't as bad as feared. *Texas Tribune.* Retrieved from https://www.texastribune.org/2021/01/11/texas-legislature-state-budget/

Hanover Research (2014). Trends in higher education marketing, recruitment, and technology. Retrieved from https://www.hanoverresearch.com/media/Trends-in-Higher-Education-Marketing-Recruitment-and-Tech

Heyman, E. (2010). Overcoming student retention issues in higher education online programs. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, *13*(4). Retrieved from https://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/winter134/heyman134.html

Johnston, J., Killion, J., & Oomen, J. (2005). Student satisfaction in the virtual classroom. *The Internet Journal of Allied Health Sciences and Practice*, *3*(2), 1-7. Retrieved from

https://doi.org/10.46743/1540-580X/2005.1071

Kim, K. J., & Frick, T. W. (2011). Changes in student motivation during online learning. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, *44*(1), 1–23. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.2190%2FEC.44.1.a

Kranzow, J. (2019). Graduate enrollment considerations: informing practice and research. *College and University*, *94*(3).

Layne, M., Boston, W. E., & Ice, P. (2013). A longitudinal study of online learners: Shoppers, swirlers, stoppers, and succeeders as a function of demographic characteristics. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, *16*(2), 1–12. Retrieved from https://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/summer162/layne_boston_ice162.html

Lehamn, R. M., & Conceicao, S. C. O. (2010). *Creating a sense of presence in online teaching: How to "be there" for distance learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lei, S. A. & Chuang. N. (2010). Demographic factors influencing selection of an ideal graduate institution: A literature review with recommendations for implementation. *College Student Journal*, *44*(1), 84–96.

Libretexts. (2020, December 15). *The functionalist perspective.* Retrieved from

https://socialsci.libretexts.org/@go/page/7901

Liu, X., Liu, S., Lee, S., & Magjuka, R. J. (2010). Cultural differences in online learning: International student perceptions. *Educational Technology and Society*, *13*(3), 177-188. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/jeductechsoci.13.3.177

Ludwig-Hardman, S. & Dunlap, J. C. (2003). Learner support services for online students: scaffolding for success. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, *4*(1), 1-15. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v4i1.131

Morris, A., & Miller, M. (2007). Advising practices of undergraduate online students in private higher education. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, *10*(4). Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/winter104/morris104.html

National Student Clearinghouse (2021, February 3). Fall 2020 enrollment (As of Oct 22). Retrieved February 3, 2021, from https://nscresearchcenter.org/stay-informed/

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2021, February 4). Term enrollment estimates fall 2020. Retrieved from https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Fall_2020.pdf

Netanda, R. S., Memabolo, J., & Themane, M. (2019). Do or die: Student support interventions for the survival of distance education institutions in a competitive higher education system. *Studies in Higher Education*. *44*(2), 397-414. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1378632

Nevzat, R., Amca, Y., Tanova, C., & Amca, H. (2016). Role of social media community in strengthening trust and loyalty for a university. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *65*, 550–559. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.09.018

Okahana, H., & Zhou, E. (October 2019). Select insights from NAGAP/CGS survey of graduate enrollment management professionals. Washington, D.C.: Council of Graduate Schools. Retrieved from https://cgsnet.org/cgs-research-brief-select-insights-nagapcgs-survey-graduate-enrollment-management-professionals

Parker, R. E., (2013). *Redesigning courses for online delivery: Design, interaction, media and evaluation*. Emerald Group Publishing.

Peruta, A., & Helm, C. (2018). University Facebook pages: Engaging the alumni community in the digital era. *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, *7*(1). Retrieved from https://www.thejsms.org/index.php/JSMS/article/view/222/156

Peruta, A., & Shields, A.B. (2018). Marketing your university on social media: a content analysis of Facebook post types and formats. *The Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, *28*(2). 175-191. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2018.1442896

Pullan, M. C. (2009). Student support services for millennial undergraduates. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems, 38*(2), 235-351.

Ramirez, E. (2013). Examining Latinos/as' graduate school choice process: An intersectionality perspective. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 12*(1), 23–36.

Rutter, R., Roper, S., & Lettice, F. (2016). Social media interaction, the university brand and recruitment performance. *Journal of Business Research*, *69*(8), 3096–3104. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.01.025

Rutter, R., Lettuce, F., Jadeau, J. (2017). Brand personality in higher education: anthropomorphized university marketing communications. *Journal of Marketing in Higher Education, 27*(1), 19-39. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2016.1213346

Sandvig, J. C. (2016). The role of social media in college recruiting. *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, *12*(1), 23-34. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1504/IJWBC.2016.074273

Shields, R. (2016). Following the leader? Network models of "world-class" universities on Twitter. *Higher Education*, *71*(2), 253–268. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9900-z

Serhan, D. (2010). Online learning: Through their eyes. *International Journal of Instructional Media, 37*(1), 19–25. Retrieved from https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=pub_gap&id=GALE|A273358539&v=2.1&it=r&sid=googleScholar&asid=6db2ac71

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2019). Table 5.2 Employment, wages, and projected change in employment by typical entry-level education (Employment in thousands). Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/education-summary.htm.

U.S. Department of Education. (2018). National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2016, Fall enrollment component, Table 3. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018002.pdf

Walsh, G., & Mitchell, V.-W. (2010). The effect of consumer confusion proneness on word of mouth, trust, and customer satisfaction. *European Journal of Marketing*, *44*(6), 838–859. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561011032739

Winn, P., Leach, L. F., Erwin, S., & Benedict, L. (2014). Factors that influence student selection of educational leadership master's programs at regional universities. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research*, *4*(1). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.5929/2014.4.1.4

Yang, D., Baldwin, S., & Snelson, C. (2017). Persistence factors revealed: Students' reflections on completing a fully online program. *Distance Education*, *38*(1), 23-36. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2017.1299561

Professional Perspectives

In 1850, Sarah Roberts, a five-year old African American girl, felt that it was not fair to be forced to walk past five all-white public schools in Boston to attend a Negro school. Her father attempted to enroll her in the all-white schools that were close to their home, but she was denied admission. Sarah and her father unsuccessfully challenged the fairness of this law in court. Although the challenge was unsuccessful, it laid the foundation for the Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954.

Sarah had a dream to attend school closer to home. Thank you for dreaming, Sarah, because we now have neighborhood schools in many districts.

Women & Equity: "The Visibly Invisible" School and Workplace Issues of Women and Girls

Dr. Danita Bailey-Samples, Texas Southern University
Dr. Christian Stevenson Winn, Spring Independent School District

Abstract

This article will engage readers in exploring the historical disparities that have disproportionately affected Black women for centuries and continue to permeate the workplace and society as a whole. Additionally, readers will further understand the inequities in educational policies, practices, and programs that exist in our schools and limit student success, particularly that of Black girls. The authors will also prompt readers to reflect on their personal biases, and their impact on one's perspective and professional practice. This article cites related research and promotes research-based recommendations for policy and practice.

Introduction

This article began as a conference seminar presentation, which we were planning to facilitate, in a virtual setting. Upon seeing the call for submissions and viewing our work essential to "living the dream," our minds became fixated with publishing this work to extend our reach and broaden the messaging about issues that confront other women and girls who look like us. While the topic is not new, by any means, our aim is to surface and confront issues that disproportionately affect women and girls in one of the most common environments in which we exist on a daily basis our workplaces and schools.

To fully uncover the issues, history cannot be ignored. We seek to examine the past and the ills rooted within those years to make meaningful connections and sharpen perspectives. Similarly, this work serves as a conversation-starter, which we hope causes the reader to pause, reflect, and brace oneself to face the honest truth about past experiences, and personal biases and prejudices against those who are like us, as well as toward those who are different. Lastly, recommendations for

workplace and school-based programs and practices are presented for the reader's consideration to address these issues facing women and girls.

Historical Background

There are multiple factors that have contributed to the gaps that exist between minority groups and the larger society. This is especially true for African Americans. The practices and beliefs that existed about slaves and Black women during slavery left an indelible imprint on the soul of our nation. In spite of efforts to prevent slaves from becoming educated, slave women found ways to gain an education and to teach their families and their children. The history of Black women in the United States demonstrates how they have survived in this country since 1619 in spite of the inequities that continue to exist.

Although many would dispute this claim, there is evidence today that the experiences of African American women in the workplace reveal persistent, ongoing discrimination and racism. Black women face discrimination for both their race and gender. As early as 1850 there are recorded examples of Black women fighting for what they perceived to be their constitutional rights. In 1850, Sarah Roberts, a five-year old African American girl, felt that it was not fair to be forced to walk past five all-white public schools in Boston to attend a Negro school. Her father attempted to enroll her in the all-white schools that were close to their home, but she was denied admission. Sarah and her father unsuccessfully challenged the fairness of this law in court. Although the challenge was unsuccessful, it laid the foundation for the Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954. Rosa Parks refused to sit in the whites-only section of the public bus, precipitating the 1955-56 Montgomery bus boycott. As Fannie Lou Hamer claimed after enduring beatings in jail, which left her with kidney damage and a permanent limp, "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired." This became the mantra of many Black women.

In comparison to women of other ethnic groups, Black women have always had the highest levels of labor market participation, regardless of age, marital status or how many children they may have had (Banks, 2019). In 1880, 35.4% of married Black women and 7.3% of married white women were in the labor force. While 73.3% of single Black women were in the labor force, a mere 23.8% of single white women were in the labor force at that same time (Banks, 2019). This was due to societal expectations of Black women and even more so discrimination against Black men, resulting in them being paid lower wages and requiring Black women to become financial contributors to their families. Negative representations of Black women also reinforced these discriminatory practices. Discriminatory public policies reinforced the view of Black women as workers rather than as mothers. Today, about 80% of Black mothers are breadwinners in their families.

Bias and Discrimination

Black women also experience discriminatory practices and unfair biases as young girls. Black girls are often labeled as being too loud, too assertive, aggressive, ghetto, smart-mouthed and defiant (Lockhart, 2019). Many professionals describe them as delinquent and hypersexualize their physical appearance. This form of racial bias and prejudice, known as adultification, results

in children being treated as more mature and or older than they actually are. This treatment is disproportionately applied to Black girls.

The historical roots of slavery may contribute to this practice. The negative stereotypes that were previously mentioned, along with racism and poverty, also contribute to this practice. "Adults think Black girls as young as five years old need less protection and nurturing than their white peers," according to Rebecca Epstein, who leads the initiative on Gender, Justice & Opportunity at Georgetown Law's Center on Poverty and Inequality (2015). "Our new research elevates the voices of Black women and girls themselves, who told us that they are routinely affected by this form of discrimination."

In schools when girls misbehave, their behavior is often described as deliberate and calculated rather than a child making mistakes. Black girls are often punished for having an "attitude". Moreover, when Black girls express strong or contrary views, adults often view them as challenging authority or assume a girl's character is just plain "bad." This bias plays a role in the increasing use of discipline against Black girls in schools by law enforcement and in interactions with authority figures, even though they are no more likely to misbehave than white girls.

Disproportionate Inequities in Schools

It is common to find school discipline policies across the country with racial and gender biases embedded within them that result in consequences that have more to do with who commits the offense than the offense itself, if any (Patrick, 2020). In low socio-economic communities, the disparities are even more pronounced. Black girls endure the highest level of scrutiny in rule violations that are unique to them such as hair or dress codes. According to Chakara (2017), school discipline policies often neglect to address the impact these practices have on them. Further, Black girls are six times more likely to be suspended from school than their white counterparts and they are subjected to law enforcement in school at higher rates as well (Chakara, 2017). Black girls constitute 54% of female preschoolers who have received more than one out-of- school suspension, giving the impression that at an early age that Black girls are more disruptive than their white female peers (Chakara, 2017). These trends are damaging to the growth and development of Black girls in schools and lead to inequitable practices that can derail their academic success.

The Obama administration recognized the impact of these practices and the importance of developing policies to support safe and supportive school environments. Under this administration, schools were encouraged to review their disciplinary practices and implement revisions to ensure that discriminatory practices were not occurring. Continued removal of these barriers requires policy changes and strategies that target race- and gender-based biases (Patrick,

2020).

Disproportionate Inequities in the Workplace

In their report, *The State of Black Women in Corporate America*, the Lean In Foundation and McKinsey & Company (2020), Black women experience the worst treatment in the workplace of all groups, including women in general and women of color. This report discloses alarming findings that highlight barriers Black women face throughout their corporate careers along with providing a roadmap of remedies companies can enact to ensure fair treatment of all employees. These barriers most commonly include wage and salary gaps, limited advancement opportunities, and race-based discrimination on the job.

Unequal Pay

For decades women have earned more degrees (bachelors, masters and doctoral) than men, but continue to earn less pay than their male counterparts. Women earn 49 cents to every $1 men earn and many women are impacted by having to take time off to care for children and other family members (Wilson, 2021). According to Barroso and Brown there has been very little change in the gender pay gap over the last 15 years. "In 2020, women earned 84% of what men earned," according to a Pew Research Center analysis (Barroso & Brown, 2021). There are many reasons for this phenomenon. Women often experience a fear of discussing money or asking to be paid what they are worth. Women are much less likely to negotiate pay than men. Women struggle with asking for more money and generally feel that they will be viewed as being greedy. Gender discrimination still exists in the workplace and contributes to the discrepancy in wages experienced by women. Consequently, women tend to accept the salaries they are offered more often than men. In fact, nearly 70% of women accept the salary they are offered while 52% of men do the same (Wilson, 2019). For black women, annual earnings have consistently been lower than that of white women. The annual earnings of black women is about 21% lower than that of white women. (Banks, 2021).

Race-Based Discrimination

Regardless of racial identity, women of all races face discrimination in the workplace. Moreover, race does play an important role in how women are treated and compensated in the workplace. Black women face discrimination based on their race and gender, consequently facing unique stressors based on the effects of multiple forms of discrimination.

According to the research study conducted by the Lean In Foundation and McKinsey & Company (2020), discrimination specifically looks and feels like having their competence and qualifications questioned. In fact, Black women are nearly three times more likely than white women to receive "compliments" regarding their ability to clearly verbally articulate their ideas or other surprising comments about other professional competencies. These small, subtle comments, known as microaggressions, are often difficult to identify. Nonetheless, Black women face these insulting racist expressions of discrimination on a day-to-day basis. Some examples of these microaggressions, include but are not limited to assuming that all Black women have the same life experiences, asking about hair changes or changing hairstyles, assuming one Black woman is the "spokesperson" for all Black women, constantly feeling the need to debunk myths of being an "angry Black woman", and making the assumption that the Black woman in a work group is the least educated and senior while assuming the white person has earned the most seniority (Barratt,

2020; Lean In Foundation and McKinsey & Company, 2020). These acts are often performed by men and women in the workplace, making it difficult for Black women to accomplish their tasks and feel safe in the work environment. How then can a dream be more than a dream when task completion was made difficult?

Limited Advancement Opportunities

Why do the statistics on Black women in middle management and senior-level positions pale in comparison to those of white women and men? The short answer: The opportunities are few and far between. More specifically, Black women tend to receive less support from their manager, with only 22% expressing that their manager guides them along their career path, compared with 31% of white women and 33% of white men (Lean In Foundation and McKinsey & Company, 2020). The lack of mentoring and advocacy are also advancement inhibitors. When asked, only 38% of Black women stated that they have access to an influential mentor compared to 70% of white men who responded to the same question. This is related to the fact that women make up less than 5% of top-ranking positions such as chief executive officer, resulting in the perception that advancement is unattainable due to the lack of Black female role models. The idea that representation matters is extremely relevant in these circumstances.

Where Do We Go from Here? Next Steps for Schools and Workplaces

Like many issues we discover in education and society, we are left to stare in the mirror, exhale a deep sigh, and ask, "So what do I do now?" That is admittedly a logical first response after reading disturbing data such as those presented in this article. Nevertheless, all elephants can be eaten, one bite at a time. To that end, we have developed a collection of key actions any one of us can take to reverse the hugely-negative and disparaging experiences too many Black girls and women endure in school and in the workplace, respectively.

Key Actions:

Disrupt the status quo. Commit to changing and actually do the work to challenge the status quo in ways that will remove barriers that have traditionally limited the progress and upward mobility of Black women and girls.

Dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. Examine discipline data regularly and compare these trends with policies and practices. Develop race-conscious policies that explicitly address race at the core and provide access, opportunity, and support to the students who are most disproportionately affected.

Challenge microaggressions when they are spoken or implied. Simply stated, making racist statements to anyone, at any time, for any reason is unacceptable and should not be tolerated.

Create and make multiple visible pathways to leadership for Black women. Address the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions and develop a trajectory for attainment at various ranks in your organization.

Prioritize a racially-healthy culture and climate by requiring the ongoing examination of your organization's racial and gender-equity gaps. Training and development in culturally-responsive practices for all members of the organization is a meaningful starting point.

The issues presented here are alarming and the awareness of the phenomenon keeps some administrators and researchers up at night. Inequities in the school and workplace make dreams seem far from becoming a reality. Finding solutions and putting resolving actions in place are urgent matters for leaders who are difference makers. There are opportunities for every one of us to be involved in this work with a lens that is focused sharply on equity for all, especially those who experience continued marginalization and discrimination. Committing to this work yields an intentionally inclusive and progressive environment for all women and girls.

References

Banks, N., (2019). Black women's labor market history reveals deep-seated race and gender discrimination. Retrieved from https://www.epi.org/blog/black-womens-labor-market-history-reveals-deep-seated-race-and-gender-discrimination/

Barroso, A., & Brown, A. (2021). Gender pay gap in U.S. held steady in 2020. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/25/gender-pay-gap-facts/

Chakara, M. (2017). From preschool to prison: The criminalization of Black girls. Retrieved from https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2017/12/08/443972/preschool-prison-criminalization-black-girls/

Council of Chief State School Officers (2019). States leading: Promising practices advancing the equity commitments 2019. Retrieved from https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/States%20Leading%20for%20Equity%202019%20Print%2004041919FINAL.pdf

Francis, D. V., de Oliveira, A. C. M., & Dimmitt, C. (2019). Do school counselors exhibit bias in recommending students for advanced coursework? *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy, 19*(4), 1-17.

Green, E. L., Walker, M., & Shapiro, E. (2020). A battle for the souls of Black girls. *The New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/01/us/politics/black-girls-school-discipline.html

Jones, T., & Nichols, A. H. (2020). Hard truths: Why only race-conscious policies can fix racism in higher education. Retrieved from https://edtrustmain.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/ uploads/2014/09/14161442/Hard-Truths-Why-Only-Race-Conscious-Policies-Can-Fix-Racism-i n-Higher-Education-January-2020.pdf

Khadaroo, S. T. (2014). 'Discipline reform' is in Obama program to help young men: What's that mean? *The Christian Science Monitor.* Retrieved from *https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2014/0228/Discipline-reform-is-in-Obama-program-to-help-young-men.-What-s-that-mean*

Morris, M. W. (2012). Race, gender and the school-to-prison pipeline: Expanding our discussion to include Black girls. Retrieved from http://schottfoundation.org/resources/race-gender-and-school-prison-pipeline-expanding-our-discussion-include-black-girls

Patrick, K., Onyeka-Crawford, A., & Duchesneau, N. (2020). "and they cared": How to create better, safer learning environments for girls of color. Retrieved from https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/And-they-cared_How-to-create-better-safer-learn ing-environments-for-girls-of-color_Aug-2020.pdf

Portland Public Schools (2019). PPS racial equity and social justice lens,

https://www.pps.net/Page/2305

Roscher, L. (2020). Radio host Dan McNeil fired for 'degrading and humiliating' tweet about ESPN's Maria Taylor. Retrieved from https://www.yahoo.com/now/radio-host-dan-mc-neil-fired-for-degrading-and-humiliating-tweetabout-maria-taylor-204512520.html

Lean In. (2020). The state of Black women in corporate America. Retrieved from https://media.sgff.io/sgff_r1eHetbDYb/2020-08-13/1597343917539/Lean_In_-_State_of_Black_Women_in_Corporate_America_Report_1.pdf

Wilson, Julie (2021). 5 top issues fueling gender inequality in the workplace. As You Sow. Retrieved from https://www.asyousow.org

Resources

Bailey-Samples, D., & Winn, C. S. (2021). 7 practices equity-focused educators must do now. Manuscript in preparation for publication.

NAACP Legal Defense Fund & The National Women's Law Center (2014). Unlocking opportunity for African-American Girls: A call to action for educational equity. Retrieved from https://nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/unlocking_opportunity_for_african_american_girls_final.pdf

Stop Criminalizing and Excluding Black, Latina, and Native Girls in Schools. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WIZYsV6pwA

David Muir's Person of the Week. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1MCo6QMbhU

Barriers may exist in many organizations but the resilient continue to dream and navigate their pathways. Pathways to the professoriate are not without barriers, but one must seek to eradicate factors that block or stop the dream. Embedded in one of the pathways is a wise reminder for those working on the dream: Be who you needed when you were younger. This article is a compilation of shared experiences in which the authors describe their pathways from the principalship to the professoriate. May it serve to direct the actions and thought of those seeking to move into higher education.

Navigating Pathways: We Dream It, We Believe It, We Claim It – From the Principalship to the Professoriate

Dr. Stephanie Atchley, Tarleton State University
Dr. Jennifer Bailey, University of Texas at Arlington
Dr. Teresa J. Farler, Texas A&M Commerce
Dr. Forrest Kaiser, University of Texas at Tyler
Dr. Juanita Reyes, Tarleton State University
Dr. Ron Rhone, Tarleton State University

Abstract

This collection of essays examines the lived experiences of six assistant professors and their journey from the principalship to the professoriate. While each professor has taken a different path to the professoriate, there are commonalities in each of their stories. Utilizing five questions from Lindholm (2004), these professors share how they have overcome barriers and offer advice to those exploring a career in higher education.

Key Words: professoriate, principalship, career pathways, mentor

Introduction

In her article, Pathways to the Professoriate: The Role of Self, Others, and Environment in Shaping Academic Career Aspirations, Jennifer Lindholm, (2004) examined five questions that shaped the decisions of different individuals to pursue their pathways to higher education. Today, the questions remain relevant as we continue to strengthen inclusion and diversity among faculty in higher education. One person's story gives hope to another. If we can dream it, then we can achieve it.

Pathways to the professoriate are not without barriers. Johnson, Boss, Mwangi & Garcia (2018) noted that connections students make with one another and mentors in the field during graduate study play an integral part to their initial pursuit of the professoriate. When graduate students experience negative messages about their ability from their graduate professors, they struggle to progress and complete a doctoral degree program (Williams, Burnett, Carroll & Harris, 2016). Johnson, Robinson, Staples & Doud (2016) emphasized the importance of building a network of support including peers, early career faculty, and mentors within higher education who show support for their career goals. Likewise, Williams et al. (2016) found stronger retention rates when students were able to manage expectations of the doctoral program, demonstrate self-advocacy when help was needed, and identify and connect with a mentor. Graduate students who were successful in making these connections during the doctoral program are more likely to engage in these types of practices as faculty members. Fries-Britt and Turner-Kelly's (2005) examination of the relationship formed between graduate students and early career faculty members demonstrates the significance placed on creating a community to survive and maintain status in a higher education environment.

This article examines the lived experiences of six assistant professors and their pathway from principalship to the professoriate. Each participant addressed five questions adapted from Lindholm (2004):

1. What pathway did you take to get to higher education?
2. What life experiences made you decide to pursue a career in higher education as a professor?
3. Describe the mentorships you had who were influential in your decision to pursue higher education.
4. What barriers did you face, if any, in pursuing this career choice? Further describe how you overcame the barriers.
5. What advice would you give to first year professors or those seeking to explore a career in higher education?

Great Minds

Stephanie Atchey, EdD, is an Assistant Professor at Tarleton State University. Her research interests include educational leadership, special education and accessibility.

My journey to the professoriate started over 20 years ago. Each role I served in public education has provided experience that I now share with my graduate students. I did not see my career leading to higher education. I found my job as a classroom teacher and principal highly rewarding and one I truly loved. However, after 18 years in the public school system I felt the need to push myself to better serve my staff and students. It was at this point I decided to pursue a doctorate.

In my current role, as an assistant professor teaching in an educational leadership program, I am thankful to have walked in many shoes. One of the most valuable experiences I had is that of a struggling student. These struggles gave me the desire to become a teacher and later a campus administrator. I spent six years as a classroom teacher, five years as an ARD coordinator, eight years as a campus administrator and two years as a special education director. While serving as a campus principal, my superintendent encouraged me to pursue a doctorate. These experiences gave me the confidence and tools I needed to be successful in a doctoral program.

Mentors have played a key role throughout my career. I have had the opportunity to work for effective and influential leaders as a teacher and administrator. My path to leadership began with Denise Dugger in Aledo ISD. I served as an assistant principal under her leadership for four years. Denise was a strategic and critical thinker. Lynn McKinney served as the assistant superintendent in AISD during my time there. She was the first woman I experienced seeing in that role. She was a phenomenal speaker. Twenty years later I can still remember her convocation speeches. After seven years in Aledo ISD my husband and I took a leap of faith and moved to my hometown in Stephenville, Texas. I enjoyed eleven amazing years in Stephenville ISD and had the opportunity to work at Hook Elementary. Kathy Hampton was the principal at Hook. She created a campus culture that was second to none. She is a true example of a servant leader and has a gift for recognizing strengths in others. Kathy gave me the confidence and support I needed to take on the challenge of campus principal. Dr. Matt Underwood was influential in my decision to pursue a doctorate. He served as superintendent of SISD during my time as a campus principal. He brought transformational change to the district that benefitted students, staff members and the community. Each of these individuals had a positive impact on my growth as an educational leader and my decision to pursue the professoriate.

I will close with a few words of advice for those considering a career in higher education. Establish a research agenda early. This will set you on a path to success. Also, strive to maintain balance. While I felt very comfortable navigating my job requirements in K-12 education, higher education posed new challenges such as balancing teaching, research and service. Finally, I encourage you to advocate for peer relationships and senior faculty mentorships. These components have allowed me to thrive in a higher education environment.

"Stay away from those people who try to disparage your ambitions. Small minds will always do that, but great minds will give you a feeling that you can become great too." — Mark Twain

With Gratitude,
Stephanie Atchley
Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Technology

Better is Possible

Jennifer Bailey, EdD, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at Arlington. Her research is grounded in school improvement with a focus on organizational change and responsive leadership. As a former turnaround school principal, she is passionate about preparing future leaders to advance their school communities.

As a first-generation college student, I struggled with the wide range of issues so many of us face. One in particular was the pressure from my family in pursuing something *important*, and, as I was reminded repeatedly, "to not waste my intelligence." To them, this meant a *distinguished* career, like a medical doctor, attorney, or engineer. However, I secretly yearned to be a teacher. You see, school had been my sanctuary for as long as I could remember. I worked hard at school for the praise and sense of belonging, but more importantly, to help keep peace at home. My family dynamic was challenging with emotional and verbal abuse, but since I excelled at school, no one ever saw beyond the masked smile and eagerness I wore like a cloak each day. That is, until I reached Mrs. Wilson's classroom in the tenth grade, and it was as if she knew me from the inside out. I discovered myself in Mrs. Wilson's classroom, and I often look back at those moments in Algebra II not remembering what math I learned, but I know that she *saved* me. There are defining moments in our lives that place us on a path of where we are meant to go. It is up to us if we choose to trust through the uncertainty. That experience, that clarity, and that connection placed me on a path to not only walk with purpose but to find the courage to walk the journey alone and follow my heart to become an educator.

There is a social media post frequently shared that resonates with me every time I see it: *Be who you needed when you were younger*. Mrs. Wilson lit that torch for me so many years ago, which was what I carried as a young teacher, steadily watching my high school students' faces beyond the surface for how I could strengthen and grow them beyond the academic content. However, reflectively and reflexively, my personal growth was stagnating, and I made a commitment to pursue my graduate work during this time. Through my doctoral work, my professors added fuel to my torch that ignited a deeper passion for me to reach a broader influence and I moved into P-12 leadership for nine years, ultimately serving as an elementary principal. Here, the torch took on new meaning because as a principal, your charge is to not be the torch bearer, but a flame attendant for the many torches in classrooms across the building. I may have encouraged one to ignite, yet it was my responsibility to ensure that flame stayed lit.

If anyone would ask me today, I would readily tell you being a principal is the best job in the world. It is also the hardest job. The sacrifices to your personal time and your family are significant; the stress is incomparable; and, you must have emotional resilience to carry the weight of the responsibilities. However, the moment you see a struggling teacher excited about a successful lesson, high five a student for overcoming an obstacle, or hear the excitement in that parent's voice for the first positive phone call home, those things melt away.

Mrs. Wilson handed me that torch so long ago because she saw an outwardly successful teenager who was hurting on the inside. She is the reason that I made it through my undergraduate. She is the reason that I became a teacher. She is the reason that I got my doctorate. She is the reason I became a principal. She is the reason I have walked this path that has now moved me beyond those campus walls from the best job in the world to now being the one who prepares those for that seat. My duty as flame attendant has widened even broader, and that is a position that I am honored to have. School principals play a significant role in promoting positive student outcomes, second only to highly effective classroom teachers (Branch, et al., 2013; Mendels & Mitgang, 2013). We must look at our roles beyond the surface of qualification and instead toward holistic preparation to be those torch igniters, bearers, and flame attendants for future campus leaders.

Moving from the principalship to the professoriate is an exciting time, yet it can also be an uncertain time. But, we must trust in the path that is set before us. I knew when I received my doctorate many years ago that I would eventually go to higher education, although I was uncertain when. One of my doctoral professors shared very wise words with us in my first classes: "it is not *if* you turn your keys in; it's *when*." I knew when it was the time to transition, and while there is the reality of missing the daily influence on the campus, there is a newfound impact in the preparation and the research. A key thing to reflect on is that you are moving from *doing* to *advancing*. In making the transition, explore ways that you can engage in advancing the field: speak at conferences, submit a thought piece or scholarly article, or extend your dissertation work for publication opportunities. Finally, a key difference in higher education from the principalship is mentors. At the campus level, we often have *holy grail* type mentors that know the answer to most questions we may have. Begin building your network of higher education mentors who can support your growth in specific and individualized areas, like publication, conference proposals, grant writing, course development and so on. Remember that you need flame attendants for your torch as well. Surround yourself with those.

"Better is possible. It does not take genius. It takes diligence. It takes moral clarity. It takes ingenuity. And above all, it takes a willingness to try." -Atul Gawande

Jennifer Bailey
Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Create Your Path

Teresa J. Farler, EdD, is an Assistant Professor at Texas A&M University-Commerce. Her research focuses on leadership development, superintendent leadership, and school board governance. Inspiring others and creating a curiosity for learning drives her work within the instructional setting in the preparation of future campus and district leaders.

As I reflect upon my journey to the professoriate, the desire to be a learner as well as a teacher is evident in each stage. I was the first in my family to earn a four-year degree and landed my first teaching position at the young age of twenty-one. With the help of my mentor, I continued to learn how master teachers create experiences that challenge and inspire learners. In my efforts to become a better teacher, I entered a master's degree program and received a Master of Arts in English. With the help of a key mentor, I earned a second master's degree (Principalship/Mid-management) and eventually a Doctorate in Educational Administration.

No matter the position in my career, I was always interested in learning and encouraging others to maximize their learning. My curiosity for learning combined with my nature to be a risk-taker provided many opportunities. Early in my career, I moved to Texas. While being raised in the Midwest, I craved experiences and adventure. This move afforded many new experiences that challenged me and eventually led me to earn my doctorate degree. With that credential, I became an adjunct professor in a principal preparation program. This was the pivotal point for me. After teaching several courses, I knew that the opportunity to prepare and inspire future leaders was powerful. I could envision how a practitioner's viewpoint would add to the development of future leaders.

After many years as a leader (teacher, principal, assistant superintendent, and Superintendent), I joined the faculty at the university where I earned my doctorate. The transition from practitioner to instructor was challenging. While the instructional aspect has been a natural transition, navigating the landscape of higher education has been challenging. With the help of mentors and fellow faculty members, the transition to the professorship continues. The new role allows greater flexibility but carries greater responsibilities. As a faculty member, I conduct research with fellow faculty and disseminate information with the hope that it will enrich practicing educational leaders. In coaching doctoral students through their dissertation process, I am responsible for nurturing researchers through a difficult task. However, much of my current role includes teaching and developing new leaders at the district and campus levels. And, in that role my love of learning and encouraging others has come full circle.

Entering higher education as an assistant professor offers new opportunities to influence future leaders. I continue to network throughout the university as well as the higher education community at large to learn more about this role. I value the journey others took before me and appreciate their willingness to encourage and nurture me as I travel a new path.

Enjoy the journey!

Teresa J. Farler
Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership

Overcoming Self

Forrest J. Kaiser (EdD, Texas A&M University at Commerce) is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at the University of Texas at Tyler. His research is focused on school improvement through leadership development and teacher efficacy. He is passionate about

growing a new generation of school leaders that will strive to meet the diverse needs of every student.

Prior to entering higher education, I considered professors as something of an intellectual elite. They were the smart ones, the scholars and philosophers who examined the world and could see details others could not. Reflecting on some remarkable former professors, I am now sure this portrayal was of my own making and founded in self-doubt. Instead of expounding knowledge, they asked great questions and inspired thinking beyond the answer. This represents solid teaching more than extraordinary intelligence.

My path into academia represents a coming home of sorts. After teaching then moving into administration, I found myself missing the moment of discovery where a student grasps a challenging concept for the first time. As a school principal, I had so many great opportunities to invest in others, but I found myself longing to return to the classroom. After completing my doctorate, a position opened in the master's program I graduated from. I built great relationships and grew significantly there as an educator so returning to teach represented an exciting opportunity.

I really enjoyed supporting the growth of future administrators in my time as principal. I felt that providing others with meaningful experiences and reflective discussion would keep me fresh and inspire continual learning. The thought of moving into higher education had been in background for years as one of my mentors had encouraged me to get my doctorate shortly after finishing my master's. It took over ten years serving as a school leader for that to become a reality. That said, I value what I learned through leading multiple schools and enjoy sharing those experiences with my students. An added benefit is having the time to research issues that school leaders face and provide practical support to schools. In some ways, moving to the professoriate has allowed me to focus on what I love.

Entering academia would have been impossible without the support of others. The same mentor who inspired me to continue my education continued to speak to me about entering higher education. Rather than 'if,' he asked 'when?' Similarly, colleagues who had already made the transition spoke to the ability to better support practitioners in the field through research, teaching, and service. The final push came from my superintendent who was highly intentional about developing leaders. It was his support that helped me overcome my reservations and feelings of inadequacy.

Initially, there were two obstacles that prevented me from seeking the professoriate. One was real, one was not. I was not the best student in my early schooling. Teachers at that time had little reservation in using some very cutting language in describing my efforts and abilities. These words kept with me even during my graduate education and career as school leader. I was hesitant to attempt my doctorate as I felt undeserving. With great support from my wife, colleagues, and friends, I was able to move beyond the voices from the past. The second barrier was more tangible. I had applied and interviewed for my position prior to the pandemic, but once it hit all hiring was frozen. My reflections at the time helped uncover how deeply interested I was in moving to higher education. After reconciling with myself to let the dream go, the position reopened and here I am.

The first-year transition from practitioner to professor was a challenging one. There are so many new processes, procedures, and lessons to learn when taking on a second career. Connecting with others within and outside the university was essential to understanding the position and cultivating my place in academia. Mentors have played a key role, but peer support has been vital. Finding others at a similar place on the path is heartening. I also have learned to embrace the abstract. The job of principal is clearly defined, but the professorship allows greater creativity and exploration. It is what one makes of it. Finally, I have become intentional with both time and focus. While my schedule was tight as a school leader, the professorship requires looking beyond the day to the possibilities and needs ahead. Most of all, I have come to appreciate myself as an academic and look forward to making meaningful, lasting contributions to the field.

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can." - Arthur Ashe

Be Well,
Forrest J. Kaiser
Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and School Improvement

Leadership Journey

Juanita M. Reyes is currently a Graduate faculty member for the Department of Educational Leadership and Technology at Tarleton State University. Her research agenda includes Leadership Development, Bilingual/ESL Education, Program Evaluation, Leadership & Policy Studies, and Educational Administration.

I have served as an educator for 28 years. Throughout my life experience, I have been positively impacted by so many outstanding elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educators who, along with my family upbringing, have influenced my personal and professional growth. These individuals have given me the support and the encouragement to establish my abilities as a leader and educator in the public-school sector. We all have people in our lives who have paved the way and believed in our ability to be successful; therefore, I am thankful for each and every one of those individuals as I try to be that motivator for others.

My mother passed away when I was 12-years-old, leaving behind five children and a father who worked very hard to keep his children together. His strong work ethic, determination, and ability to overcome adversity left a huge impression on me as the oldest child in the family. In addition, I had the loving memory of a mother who modeled courage, strength, and perseverance that lives within me and makes me who I am today. My childhood experience established my passion for learning, in order to make my parents proud and honor their many sacrifices.

After graduating Cleburne High School, I went to college and graduated from Tarleton State University and served as a classroom teacher for 8 years. My principal, Dr. Lynda Ballard, consistently believed in my efforts and encouraged me to pursue my principalship. I was provided with many opportunities to practice my leadership skills under her direction; therefore, it was not long before I was asked by Dr. Lylia King to serve as the assistant principal at her campus where I served for 5 years. These two women were among the many educators who modeled and expected high quality excellence and service for the children, parents, teachers, and community they served.

Their example of strong leadership and ongoing learning led me to pursue a doctorate in education, so that I could also remain current in the latest educational research-based trends as a way to give back to my school and community. After completing my doctorate courses, I was asked to serve as an elementary campus principal where I served for 7 years.

The principalship was the most rewarding experience of my career. I served as the campus principal alongside a group of equally dedicated teachers and staff members who wanted nothing but the best for their students. I owed it to them to make sure that I "lead by example" every day. We worked on a title one campus with a low socio-economic population, and our students did not take things for granted. They were grateful for the resources, high expectations, and nurturing we provided for their social, emotional, and academic well-being. Serving as a mentor for students solidified my goal of educating the whole child. Today, I see our former students working in the community, and I am glad to know that our efforts paid off because they are now taking care of us.

After defending my dissertation, I had a professor who planted a seed of possibility for a future in higher education. He asked me if I had ever thought of serving as an instructor at the university level. I gave it a quick thought for the moment, but after my daughter was born, the opportunity of working in higher education to model the love of learning became even more appealing. While I was working as a principal, I worked as an adjunct for a local private university for a couple of years, and then I was asked to serve as an adjunct for Tarleton State. Once again, the idea of serving as a mentor for professional educators and helping them pave their way to continued success was the affirmation I needed to pursue a career in higher education. Since then, I have been working at the university as an assistant professor for the leadership program for the past 8 years, and I can truly say the compensation of assisting someone to earn a higher degree in order to help others in their community, is a privilege.

Public education and higher education are very different; therefore, the advice I would convey to a first-year professor would be to establish a network of experienced colleagues who can provide some mentorship in the research process, and who can provide knowledge regarding the policies and procedures of the higher education institution. Secondly, I would advise the first-year professor to manage their time by designating a day for planning, writing, serving and teaching. It is important to establish a routine within the system, so one can stay on course. Lastly, I would advise the first-year professor to begin thinking about serving as a mentor for other new professors coming into the institution. Jack Welch once said, "Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others." Education gives us the opportunity to help others grow and be successful similarly to what others did for us in our time of personal and professional growth. When we help others in our profession, we are helping them become effective and productive leaders of our educational institutions which will benefit the entire society in the end.

Respectfully,
Juanita Reyes
Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Technology

Claim the Dream

Ron Rhone, (Ph.D., Texas Christian University) is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Technology at Tarleton State University. His research is focused on educational leadership, college readiness, and dual credit.

I can vividly remember overhearing a conversation my 6th grade teacher had with my mother. It was the first time I heard someone say I didn't have the skills or abilities to graduate high school. That was one of many conversations along my educational journey that still whispers doubt of my ability to be successful. If not careful, we can allow ourselves to be defined by others and allow the whispers of the past to set limits on our ability to achieve.

Many individuals in my life made a concerted effort to invest in my talents and exposed me to opportunities and experiences that inspired me to become a teacher. For the past 26 years I've served students and teachers as a math teacher, coach, coordinator of technology, and school administrator. The motivation behind each career advancement was my desire to increase my effectiveness and impact within my school community. To advance my skills set and expand my prospects for professional and personal growth I decided to pursue a terminal degree.

During my doctoral program one of my graduate professors, Dr. Erin Atwood, nominated me for an academic scholarship. The scholarship provided me two years of funding to attend professional academic conferences, with the condition that I would present my research during the second year. This opportunity exposed me to a new realm of possibilities and led to the discovery of a new pathway to impact the educational experiences for students, teachers, and educational leaders. The world of academia was something I never really considered, but through this scholarship opportunity a desire to pursue a career in higher education was born.

Members of my dissertation committee volunteered me to participate in a research poster session and recruited me for research projects. Working alongside my professors provided occasions for me to learn about the lifestyle and experiences of the professorship. Family and friends affirmed my quest to be a professor by pointing out qualities and characteristics they saw in me that were befitting of a professor. Each of these relationships revealed the professor within. Through their collective insights, words of affirmation, encouragement and mentorship the reality of being a professor became believable.

With a degree in hand and years of practitioner experience I had the qualification to be a professor, yet I had one last barrier to overcome. That barrier was me. I questioned my ability to thrive and survive in higher education. I wondered if I had the capacity to contribute to the collective efforts of expanding educational research.   I respect and honor the position of professor and wondered if I was worthy of such a title. Through prayer and the support of my mentoring relationships I was able to overcome my self-imposed barriers and claim, accept, and embrace the opportunity in higher education.

If you are considering a career in higher education, I encourage you to ponder these three pieces of advice. First, be intentional with building a community with academic professionals both inside and outside your discipline. Learn about the stresses, joys, and rhythms of the profession. Secondly, make an intentional effort to continue to engage in scholarly work. Support a current research endeavor, immerse yourself in scholarly reading, be an adjunct professor, and share your

research with others. This will allow you to begin to experience and embrace the rhythms of higher education. Lastly, don't allow others, including yourself, to derail the opportunity. Surround yourself with those mentoring relationships to strengthen your grip on your readiness for the professorship. Claim the dream you've nourished and work so hard to achieve.
Sincerely,

Dream it, Achieve it, Be it
Ronald Rhone
Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Technology

Conclusion

Lindholm (2004) stated, "the inherent complexity of career decision-making processes, coupled with the paucity of empirical research on academic career development makes it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about the interplay between individual and environmental factors in shaping academic career choice." From the point of view of these four faculty members, mentorships played a key role in their transition from principal to the professoriate. With this collection of essays we hope to inspire future leaders to Dream It, Believe It, and Claim It!

References

Fries-Britt, S., & Turner-Kelly, B. (2005). Retaining each other: Narratives of two African American Women in the Academy. The Urban Review, 37(3), 221–242.

Lindholm, J. (2004) Pathways to the Professoriate: The Role of Self, Others, and Environment in Shaping Academic Career Aspirations, The Journal of Higher Education, 75:6, 603-635, DOI: 10.1080/00221546.2004.11773579

Johnson, J.M., Boss, G., Mwangi, C.G. & Garcia, G.A. (2018). Resisting, rejecting, and redefining normative pathways to the professoriate: Faculty of Color in higher education. *The Urban Review*, *50*(4), 630 – 647. Retrieved from http://works.bepress.com/ginny-boss/1/

Johnson, J. M., Robinson, T. N., Staples, C. L., & Daoud, N. (2016). Preparing to lead: The socialization of Black women for faculty and administrative careers through graduate school. In B. L. H. Marina & S. Ross (Eds.), Beyond retention: Cultivating spaces of equity, justice, and fairness for women of color in U.S. higher education (pp. 103–124). New York: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Mendels, P., & Mitgang, L. D. (2013). Creating strong principals. *Educational Leadership, 70*(7), 22-29.

Williams, M., Burnett, T.,& Carroll, T. (2016). Mentoring, managing, and helping: A critical race analysis of socialization in doctoral education. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice.*

Be a chameleon and know how to evolve and change with new environments and new responsibilities. Never burn a bridge, as you may work with a variety of people you never thought you would see again. Know your strengths, as a new role may require you to perform tasks you have not considered. Understand that in life different pathways emerge but your pathway will reveal itself.

The Path Reveals Itself

Dr. Dalane E. Bouillion, Chief Development Officer, VLK Architects

Abstract

As women in leadership, it is important to hear the stories and pathways of others. This helps to broaden our opportunities and consider alternatives to a traditional career path. My career path began as an educator, and the path revealed to me presented an option that built on my educational experiences in leadership, but led me to an entirely different vocation. However, the intersection of those two professions magically intertwine to create a powerful result in the design of schools.

The Path Reveals Itself

I didn't initially realize until I was asked repeatedly, "How did you get your job?" that nearly my entire career in education was preparing me to do this work. What is it that I do? I serve as the Chief Development Officer at VLK Architects, a design firm providing comprehensive solutions primarily to Texas public schools. My primary role is to lead strategic groups, serving as a catalyst for inspiring firm-wide improvement. I lead our firm's educational planning approach where we intentionally use educational philosophy to inform our practice and facilitate meaningful dialogue with stakeholders, creating a foundation that serves as the common goal to steer the project's design. My daily conversations within the firm are based on the connections that I have with clients to bridge educational philosophy, ideologies, methodologies, and practice to that of the built environment. Simply, we want to learn from our clients using an educational lens to create shared vocabulary about teaching and learning before we design a school. It makes a difference! But how did I get here?

I began my career in Galena Park ISD as a second-grade teacher at Jacinto City Elementary School, a school that my firm was blessed with designing the replacement campus in 2020. After four years in the classroom, each year teaching a different elementary level, with a stint exploring multi-age groupings, acquiring a specialization in Reading Recovery, and completing my Master of Education degree, I was hired as the Assistant Principal at North Shore Elementary School. It was there that I became more than familiar with construction meetings, as my Principal wanted to expose me to as much as possible in preparation for the principalship one day. At the peak of construction, we had an elementary school enrollment of almost 1,100 and were only utilizing half of our existing building. The campus, festooned at the time with an educational village of portables, prompted calls from the neighborhood homeowner's association asserting that "trailers" were unacceptable. You get the idea; there was never a dull moment.

After three years as an assistant principal, I was appointed Principal of Purple Sage Elementary School. On my first day, I received a visit from the Facilities Department to inform me that we would be "under construction" very soon. I was excited because I felt I should be considered "a pro" after my construction meeting experiences. Rather than pass these responsibilities to my new Assistant Principal, I decided to take them on myself. I enjoyed the process, and felt empowered to make the decisions with the architects that would benefit students, support the learning

environment I was trying to create, and ease traffic for my community. Those were seven fabulous years.

While Principal, I earned my Doctor of Education degree, and was offered the opportunity to serve Spring ISD as the Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. My title grew over the nine years I was there, as I also became responsible for oversight of all campuses and their senior central office area supervisors. I learned much during my time as Interim Superintendent when my friend and leader, Dr. Ralph Draper, retired. He was the one who truly made facilities part of my role and responsibilities, stating that I "had an opinion" about the learning environment, that I was responsible for the direction of teaching and learning, and ensuring the alignment of my vision with the built environment was now part of my job. I was sincerely blessed to work closely with three different architecture firms, each allowing me to learn from them, and them from me. It was a reciprocal, and—at the time-- unusual relationship, as curriculum and instruction leaders had scarce-to-no input regarding learning environments.

That changed when VLK Architects offered me the position of Educational Planner in 2015. After 23 years in education, I was afforded the opportunity to use everything I knew about children, teaching, learning, and leadership as we approached design. It has been an amazing experience. We, as a firm, have found that having an educator on the team was an overlooked opportunity. I became the first VLK Architects Principal with no background in architecture. You can imagine my surprise! Recently, I was named the first Chief Development Officer. These decisions to make me a senior leader in the firm solidifies the conviction that educators should not only be part of the design process, but also help to lead the firm with daily decisions.

I have learned many things during my development as a leader. Be a chameleon and know how to evolve and change with new environments and new responsibilities. Never burn a bridge, as you may work with a variety of people you never thought you would see again. Know your strengths, as a new role may require you to perform tasks you have not considered. Answer "Yes, ma'am" or "Yes, sir" when asked if you know how to do something, and then figure it out. Never say never, as my role now in a different vocation was not what I saw for myself. The path will reveal itself to you. Listen to your mentors, who see things in you that you cannot see in yourself. Be able to laugh at yourself, as you will make mistakes. Own your mistakes, even if they are not yours, as good leaders take blame, not credit. Believe that most every disagreement can be solved with communication. Mostly, work hard, and play hard!

Never too young to dream dreams. Position yourself to work on the planning stages of making the dream come true. It is never too late to revisit the dream and start planning which pathways you must take to get to the mountain top of success.

Walking in Your Purpose: When Dreams Become Reality

Daberechi Okafor, M.Ed, Assistant Principal, Centerville Elementary-Garland ISD

Dream on fellow dreamers, continue to push forward and may your dreams become your reality!

A dream is a desire which has not yet been revealed. It is a deep longing that tugs at one's heart until it is seen, believed, and achieved. At the age of 13, I experienced such a phenomenon, the desire to create something greater than myself. I did not realize then that my experiences would lead me to the path I am on now, the path to creating a lasting impact in the lives of children. I did not know where this dream came from or what it meant; all I knew was that the dream had to be done. Over the past 20 years, I have journeyed through different phases of my life as I walk toward my purpose, leading me from desire to reality, and from dreaming to achieving.

Phase one: You are not too young to dream.

I sat in class working and listening to my 8th grade reading teacher. It came upon me suddenly as if God had whispered in my ear, "this is your destiny." At the moment, I knew that somehow, I would open a school in Nigeria to provide other students just like me with the opportunity to learn. That is still my dream. I did not understand the meaning of that dream, nor did I grasp the magnitude of the journey ahead.

Dreams are powerful if we believe and pursue them. Dreams are the "why" behind our actions and they give purpose to our mission. Conversely, if we lose sight of our dreams, we threaten to lose the very thing that ignited our passion. In their research, K. A. Down, L. Down, 2018, remind us that there is evidence "that having a strong belief that change is possible is a powerful driver of change". This study demonstrates the power of belief as a driving force to change; it is not based on age but on your desire to effect change.

Phase two: Obstacles are a part of the process

The years following my experience in my 8th-grade class were filled with obstacles that threatened to consume and engulf the fire that was ignited. While in High School, my father passed away unexpectedly, which caused me to question everything. I was unsure of who I was and my purpose in life; I became lost; however, I somehow prevailed. I entered college with the remnants of my dreams resonating in my heart, committing to myself and my father that I would not fail. Although I didn't realize it, my father became my why. After college, I married and had my first child, but soon after, my son became ill. We were told that he would never develop at the appropriate levels for his age and that he may not be as successful as his peers; this news hit my heart like a knife stabbing me every minute. Once again, I began to question my future and purpose as I allowed doubt and fear to manifest and consume me. However, I refused to give up on my son, and with prayer, hard work, and perseverance, my son not only met but surpassed his learning goals. This experience allowed me to see that all students can achieve success regardless of their background and development when provided with the resources, tools, and support they need. Born from the struggles my son experienced was the drive to become an educational advocate for all students.

Unfortunately, obstacles and trials are unavoidable, they strike when you least expect it, and they leave pain and hurt in its path. The question is not if obstacles will come, but when. Hence, we

must be prepared by changing our mindset towards addressing such hardships. We must not allow our obstacles to become our stumbling blocks. Instead, we must recognize the obstacles as the driving force that propels us toward our goals. Our obstacles can become accelerators and drive us closer to manifesting our dreams.

Phase three: To manifest your dreams, you must first believe.

"You are worthy of your dreams", I was reminded of this phrase by my husband as I grew in my role as a teacher and as an educational leader. As I started my career in education, I was faced with insecurities and self-doubt. Despite these negative factors, I excelled as a teacher while earning my master's degree and my Principal Certification. My hard work and passion for students reflected on my work, which caught the attention of those above me. I began to be placed in different spaces, opportunities, and roles that forced me out of the shadows and directly into the light. Rising again was a bit of apprehension as I questioned my ability to lead. It was then that I began to experience imposture syndrome, where one "ignore[s] and misattribute[s] evidence of their abilities, while readily accepting evidence in favor of their inadequacy" (Gadsby, 2020). My husband refused to allow me to settle for less and encouraged me to push harder and achieve greater. As he continued to do this, the self-doubt faded away as I began to see myself in the same light of excellence that others saw in me. I began to internalize and believe the dream that was always there my vision for student success, and my passion for making that dream a reality for all students.

When dealing with imposter syndrome, you feel that your earned success is not deserved. It creates feelings of being inauthentic and fear that others will discover your fraudulence. It is an experience that must be countered by replacing negative thinking with positive thoughts and self-affirmation. Thus, rather than allowing yourself to dwell on the belief that you have not earned your success, replace those thoughts with the truth by telling yourself, "I worked hard for my success; thus, I have earned my place and my position". This shift in thinking will allow you to experience greater self-confidence and a profound understanding of who we are becoming.

Phase four: Surround yourself with dreamers.

In May of 2020, I received a letter that I never imagined possible, a letter of acceptance into a doctoral program in Educational Leadership. Through the program, I was given the choice of different pathways: Higher Education Leadership, EC-12 Leadership, and Superintendency. I knew right away that the Superintendent path was meant for me as I sought to gain more significant insights to successfully lead and effect change to better support students at a larger scale. In addition, the superintendent courses aligned me with mentors and educational leaders who were following their dreams and creating new pathways for their students through mentoring and networking. These connections and mentorships have allowed me to understand the strength of community and the power of aligning oneself to fellow dreamers, those who are seeking to attain something greater.

According to research conducted by Mary Tolar on the role of mentorship in women leaders, individuals who participated "spoke of mentors providing opportunities and removing obstacles (i.e., door openers)." She also found that one participant felt that his/her mentors gave "form to [her] professional ambitions and advanced [her] development and understanding in ways that could not have happened otherwise" (Tolar, 2012). Tolar also found that those who failed to have a mentor experienced a feeling of loss and "reported a need or wish for supportive relationships and

structures" (Tolar, 2012). Thus, this study demonstrates the positive impact of surrounding yourself with fellow leaders who can serve as mentors and guides as you seek to achieve your dreams.

Phase five: Make your dream your reality.

I attended my first luncheon for the Texas Council of Women School Executives in October of 2021. I left feeling ignited, rejuvenated, and inspired. I knew that the dream that came to me 20 years prior was not simply a dream but my life mission. Lessons learned from the speakers at the luncheon gave me hope to begin working on my dream through the connections created with fellow women leaders who dared to dream and worked until their dreams became a reality. This experience reminded me of the verse in Jeremiah 29:11 that states, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." The dream that was placed in me is part of a bigger plan, a plan to prosper me and countless other students with no one to advocate for their success.

Conclusion

I share this story to highlight the power of a dream, deposited in me at just 13 years of age. This dream, has ignited a fire in me to help others by making a lasting impact to ensure the success of all students. As I continue to push forward to engage in this work, I do so with the understanding that the work I am doing ensures that all students, regardless of nationality and citizenship, are provided with a high-quality educational experience. Education should not be afforded only to those who can afford it but rather extended to all children of all nations.

As you persist towards your dreams, do not allow your obstacles to derail you. Instead, ascend higher than your obstacles by pushing past those insecurities. Propel forth towards your goals with great hungry and determination, for it may be your life's work calling for you to walk in it. Align yourself with fellow dreamers. Continue to fuel your dreams with great passion and tenacity, but put in the work it takes to make the dreams become reality.

References

Down, K.-A., & Down, L. (2018). Implementers' Perspectives on Creating Successful Education for Sustainable Development Projects. *Caribbean Quarterly*, *64*(1), 167–187.

Gadsby, S. (2021). Imposter Syndrome and Self-Deception. *AUSTRALASIAN JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY*. https://doi-org.zeus.tarleton.edu/10.1080/00048402.2021.1874445

Tolar, M. H. (2012). Mentoring Experiences of High-Achieving Women. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *14*(2), 172–187. Retrieved from https://doi-org.zeus.tarleton.edu/10.1177/1523422312436415

Define your purpose. There is power that fuels your purpose. This professional perspective shows the power of a role model, specifically, the power of a determined grandmother to teach her grandchildren the definition of survival, work and passion. Exposing her grandchildren to sales (from the World Book Encyclopedias) and entrepreneurship was her goal, and because of the goal, one grandchild is able to share how her dream unfolded.

A Purpose has Unlimited Power

Dr. Sharon D. Deloach, Marlin ISD

Cultivating Purpose

Mariam Anderson, American diplomat and one of the finest contraltos of her time said, "If you have a purpose in which you can believe, there's no end to the number of things you can accomplish." Nietzsche, German philosopher, said, "He who knows why to live can bear almost any how". In other words, if we have a sense of purpose, then we can endure all the challenges we face in getting to our goal. A purpose has unlimited power.
My purpose was cultivated while falling in love with a set of green and white books. This realized purpose morphed into the science of my life's work, passion, and motivation. Most of us determine what we think our purpose is by our associations, family, religion, education, what we do, and economic status. When asked who you are, most people respond with their name, native city, job, or positions in life. Educational Psychologists, Dr. Inez Beverly Presser, and Dr. Kenneth and Dr. Mamie Clark, a married team, each conducted research among children that revealed how adults are programmed from childhood. During the formative years of our lives, our brain is in a hypnotic trans-like state, such that we either absorb, record, and believe things that are impressed upon from the outside world.

From birth, the socialization process shapes our sense of self identity and we behave according to the rules of our family, religion, or ideology from our associations. We adopt the cultural, political, gender, and social norms thrust upon us. Greek Philosopher, Aristotle believes we have a TELOS, "A "purpose" or "an end toward which we are pointed". Aristotle said, "the best life is to understand what that self is and become it." Becoming what you desire, or dream, is so vital to unleashing your unlimited power. For that reason, your unlimited power internalized articulates your authenticity. People will make observations of you and turn those observations to opinion and their reality about you. Ursula Barnes, Xerox CEO and Chairman said, "The reason they knew who I was is because I told them". Your authenticity will tell your audiences who you are. Authenticity along with positive building is key to building relationships that foster success toward the dream. To be authentic, we must understand ourselves. If we do not understand ourselves, dream building is hard work. Beyond explanation, relevance, and motivation, a sense of purpose gives us meaning and an understanding to our lives. Living in your purpose is to passionately pursue what you believe in and support.

In attempts to comply with Brown vs. Board of Education, teachers' abilities to engage and connect with newly formed integrated classrooms were challenged. With years of experience as a teacher and school administrator, we still face these challenges. In the midst of it all was my beloved grandmother, Eula Mae White Jones, a fifty-year educator who today, would be deemed as a Master Teacher, guiding the helm of teaching and leading. My book, *An Answer to Disenfranchised Students*, addresses the historical content and research of these past and current experiences and is the fulfilled dream that lived on the inside of me.

How I got to the "Be it" stage of living the dream

As a child, I fell in love with a set of green and white books. I was introduced to these books while sitting under my late grandmother's breakfast table listening, as she and her like-minded educator

friends engaged in serious conversations pontificating strategies to assist new colleagues in teaching students of color. While they talked, we read. Yes, the infamous World Book Encyclopedias, Childcraft edition, and the Yearbooks. These educational products of yesteryear were an important resource for cross reference teaching and lesson planning. They were fully equipped with manipulatives to make teaching and learning relevant, and fun.

My late grandmother, was a full-time teacher in our schools by day, and an educational entrepreneur by evenings, and summer break. She continued her quest of teaching, and making extra money by selling world book encyclopedias. Now my dear Mamma Eula, was a very savvy *teacherprenuer,* as I would call her. She practiced teaching and learning methodology by way of blended, hybrid, project-based, cross-curricular, scaffolding, spiraling, reteach, chunking strategies, and conducted Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) well before it was deemed as theory. My grandmother had marketing skills, strategies, and resources well before there was an enterprise. She also had human strategic marketing resources.

My thirteen brothers and sisters, along with a host of cousins served as human strategic marketing resources, traveling mini *teacherprenuers* trained to assist with the selling of World Book Encyclopedias. I recall at the age of four being proficient in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and history because my grandmother made sure we learned the content in those green and white books from cover to cover. My purpose was being cultivated.

Each summer, my grandmother would load up the trunk with full sets of World Book Encyclopedias, Childcraft, Yearbooks, and the back seat with her human strategic marketing resources; me, my siblings, and cousins. Our travels were near and far to share educational opportunity with the world.

We visited communities in every corner of Texas and along the Brazos and Red Rivers, and through the New Mexico mountains. We spent time in every little town that would welcome our message. I recall class in session ... on steps at bus stops, church porches, laundry mats, country store benches, under the shade tree, reading and working out mathematical problems. My grandmother would encourage us to read, and read louder she would say, write legibly, and show your work as you work through the math problem.

We would attract a crowd, and the crowd were in awe of our skills. At the peak of the crowd, my grandmother would loudly declare, "these children are my grandchildren, aren't they smart, and if you would like for your grandchildren to read, write, and do well in school, then you should let me tell you how to obtain a set of these World Book Encyclopedias. We would sell out, and as a promise to our customers, we would return to the communities to help those who purchased understand how to use their books. My passion and purpose were being cultivated. People of all colors, creeds, nationalities, and religions would greet us and leave with hope. We were all happy, learning together.

I witnessed my grandmother, engage her passion, live her purpose, and proclaim her personal brand. Then and now, when my grandmother's name is spoken or read, people pay attention, they knew her, who she was, what to expect, what she stood for, and with anticipation greeted her with a purpose. Now that's unlimited power driven by a purpose.

Purpose in Action

My grandmother's teaching and leading influenced my purpose and unleashed my dreams and aspirations. My purpose, "To advocate, inspire, innovate strategic learning, particularly, utilizing teaching and leadership to serve the underrepresented, disenfranchised, and marginalized, adding value to all I meet, and all is better after we have met". Purpose in action requires:

        An emotion because people will react to your energy.
        A perception because people will know your value.
        A connection because people want to be a part of your circle.
        A moment because your presence will inspire.
        A memory because others will always remember what you said and did.

Have you connected with your purpose in life? If so, has it unleashed your unlimited powers? Cicely Tyson said, "Challenges makes you discover things about yourself that you never really knew." So, I challenge you to find your purpose, for it is the essential ingredient to restore hope, trust, and integrity into your life.

Bishop (2013) shared that successful leaders begin with processes which are influenced by purpose and unlimited power to lead organizational change. To help children reach their potential and understand their purpose, leaders must understand their personal purpose and exercise their unlimited power. Their unlimited power includes the guidance of classroom educators to motivate children in setting goals and understanding pathways leading to the success of materialized dreams.

References

Deloach, S. (2016) An answer to disenfranchised students: High school credit-recovery and acceleration programs increasing graduation rates for disenfranchised, disengaged, and at-risk students at nontraditional alternative high schools. Boca Raton, FL: Universal.

Bishop, W.H.(2013). Defining the authenticity in authentic leadership. *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership: 6*(1)7.

Waiting to get back to normal should not be the optimal mode of survival. With students and adults academically and emotionally struggling, the call has been made to lead forward so all in the learning community can thrive. The current status of working is our normal for the season in which we are living. This perspective outlines suggested action steps for next level learning!

Consciously Moving from Surviving to Thriving

Dr. Lacey Rainey, Area Superintendent, Denton ISD

Abstract

The pandemic drastically changed the environment of educational institutions. As teachers and students returned to classrooms, it became clear that leaders needed to hone their skills and practice to meet the increasingly differentiated needs of teachers and students. The reality is that leaders in education must consciously decide they are going to move their teams out of survival mode utilizing proactive measures. The article provides concrete and sequential recommendations for educational leaders to move their organizations forward.

Consciously Moving from Surviving to Thriving

"We can't wait to get back to normal" was the mantra that carried educators through the 2020-2021 school year. Educators were exhausted from the past nineteen months that had upended educational institutions and practices. However, as the 2021-2022 school year got underway, the bright outlook of "normal" quickly subsided. It is more apparent now, than ever before, that students are struggling, teachers are struggling, and leaders are struggling.

Merriam-Webster (2021) defines conscious as, "done or acting with critical awareness." So, one must ask, how can educators consciously continue to do the same things as in years past when the situation is calling for different leadership? The current reality is that leaders in education must consciously decide they are going to move their teams out of survival mode utilizing proactive measures. This article combines various strategies and resources to provide a step-by-step guide for educational leaders to move their teams forward so that students, teachers and leaders can thrive!

Step One: Define the Essentials

Years ago, a wise teacher once said that she could no longer keep all the plates spinning. She was tired of feeling like a failure due to her inability to keep up with the expectations set forth. Her statement came briefly before she made the decision to quit teaching in the middle of the year. Unfortunately, this teacher was one of the best on the campus; she was irreplaceable, and her departure left the campus scrambling to make quick decisions in the best interest of the former teacher's students. Fast forward to today, when teachers are still spinning the same number of plates, but now have the added pressure of educating students who have not had a traditional educational setting for two years. Not to mention simultaneously mitigating the pandemic concerns, a polarized political environment and unprecedent social and emotional concerns.

One of the best professional learning opportunities teachers engage in is defining their essential standards. Since the curriculum is a mile-wide and an inch-deep, teachers must define the exact standards that students must master to be successful in subsequent concepts. What if leaders headed the same advice? Imagine if leaders defined their essentials based on the direct, positive impact on students. Think of all the tasks leaders are asked to accomplish on a daily basis, many of

which have little to no impact on students. One could surmise that if leaders were able to define their essentials, a trickle-down effect would occur and teachers would be freed from some of the burdensome tasks they, too, face.

Educational leaders can apply the same three-part test developed by Doug Reeves (2002) to define the essentials. When determining the tasks and systems that are essential, leaders should ask the following questions: Does the task or system have endurance? Does the task or system have leverage? Does the task or system support student development to meet their next level of learning?

Suggested Action Steps

As a leadership team, write down each task and system on a separate sticky note. Categorize the sticky notes into two columns. In the first column, put all the sticky notes that contain a task or system that has a direct, positive impact on students. In the second column, put all the sticky notes that contain a tasks or system that has little to no impact on students.

Step Two: Prune

Dr. Henry Cloud (2010) describes pruning as the process to achieve proactive endings. Without pruning, organizations cannot reach their full potential. Dr. Cloud suggests pruning falls into three categories, which could be applied to educational practices. First, leaders should analyze practices that they engage in, but are not considered a defined essential. Even though these practices might provide some return on investment, they utilize resources without providing the organization the best potential outcomes.

Next, leaders should look at the practices that are in place but are not gaining traction. The organization has invested valuable time and resources, but obstacles continue to arise and ultimately, the impact on students is not meeting the intended goal. Finally, leaders should determine which practices are antiquated or fall into the category of "because we've always done it that way." These practices are not offering returns on the time and efforts invested so they should be discontinued as soon as possible. By pruning, or actively working to achieve proactive endings, the organization can clearly and proactively focus on the defined essentials.

Suggested Action Steps

Set aside the column of sticky notes that contain a task or system that has a direct, positive impact on students. Working collaboratively with the leadership team, divide the column of sticky notes that contain a task or system that has little to no impact on students. Divide these sticky notes into three sub-categories: tasks or systems that are beneficial and may move the organization forward; tasks or systems that may be beneficial but have not or are not yielding the desired results; and, tasks or systems that are not beneficial to the organization.

Step Three: Align

In the 1960s, a systems approach was introduced to management. The systems approach provided a view of management as an interconnected set of systems or sub-systems that are interrelated and interdependent (Chand, n.d.). Alignment in education most often simply refers to the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, but does not address the vast breadth of interrelated and interconnected systems. However, Chand (n.d.) suggests that in order for an organization to be successful, all systems must be aligned and function compatibly.

The systems approach can not only be applied to education, but it is also necessary for a systems approach to be implemented for educational organizations to move from surviving to thriving. When leaders are able to align all systems and sub-systems within the educational organization, stakeholders are able to discern how the interconnected and interdependent systems work toward the ultimate goal and desired outcomes for students. Teachers no longer envision the multiple plates they have to spin and now, simply envision spinning one plate that holds multiple serving pieces.

Schooling, Toth, and Marzano (2020) suggest there are many systems within an educational organization to be aligned. These systems most often include PLCs, professional development, mentoring, evaluation, strategic planning, professional coaching, induction, legislation, and local initiatives. The authors further state that to improve student outcomes, the alignment of systems should result in common language that is shared by everyone in the organization (Schooling, et al., 2020).

Suggested Action Steps

First, work with the column of sticky notes that contain a task or system that has a direct, positive impact on students. It is essential to analyze how these tasks and systems align to support students. By determining how tasks and systems are interrelated and interconnected, leaders gain insights on the functionality of the organization. Additionally, leaders are then able to communicate to all stakeholders the process utilized by the organization to obtain the goal and desired outcomes for students.

Next, work with the subdivided sticky notes. Determine if there are any tasks or systems in the category "beneficial and may move the organization forward" that need to be considered in the analysis set forth above. Ensure that all tasks and systems that are kept in place for the foreseeable future are included in the alignment to promote transparency and understanding from stakeholders.

Step Four: Monitor Progress

Gary Keller and Jay Papasan (2013) state, "Accountable people achieve results others only dream of" (p. 184). Leaders must frequently monitor the progress of the organization; if a system is misaligned, the leader must then be willing to look for solution and more so, be part of the

solution. Successful leaders seek reality so they can take responsibility and employ improved strategies to get positive outcomes (Keller & Papasan, 2013).

Progress monitoring is a familiar process in education. Teachers monitor student progress daily; administrators monitor teacher progress annually. However, time is scarce and as a result, systems and the alignment of systems are rarely progress monitored. Far too often, educators do not realize a system is not working until the end of the year when the desired results were not achieved. If educational leaders built in progress monitoring checks as a functioning system of the aligned organization, diagnostic data allows for system tweaks for better overall performance and goal-attainment.

Suggested Action Steps

Define metrics and progress monitoring intervals for each task and system included in the alignment. It is essential that progress monitoring is divided among the leadership team to ensure shared responsibility. An organization benefits from distributive leadership because distributive leadership helps sustain processes and progress monitoring. At a minimum, individuals must know the task or system they are responsible for and how it supports the organizational goal and desired outcomes. This allows the individual to take ownership and responsibility for achievement of their designated area and contribute to the overarching organizational goal (Mills, 2021).

Educational leaders must move past surviving and consciously chose to thrive, not only for themselves, but more importantly for their organizations and ultimately, their students. The "get back to normal" mindset should be eradicated and replaced with proactive decisions that propel educational organizations forward, despite the odds presented in the past nineteen months. By utilizing the steps outlined, educational leaders can implement the measures necessary to thrive!

References

Chand, S. (n.d.) *System approach to management: Definition, features and evaluation.* Your Article Library. Retrieved October 26, 2021 from **https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/management/system-approach-to-management-definition-features-and-evaluation/27897**

Cloud, H. (2010). *Necessary endings: The employees, businesses, and relationships that all of us have to give up in order to move forward.* Harper-Collins Publishers.

Conscious. 2021. In *Merriam-Webster.com.* Retrieved October 26, 2021, from **https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conscious**

Keller, G. W. & Papasan, J. (2013). *The one thing: The surprisingly simple truth behind extraordinary results.* Bard Press.

Mills, J. (2021). *Why you need more than school improvement goals: 5 critical strategies missing from most plans and how a systems approach increases ownership beyond the principal.* Learning Sciences International. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from **https://www.learningsciences.com/blog/school-improvement-plan-goals/**

Reeves, D. (2002). *The leader's guide to standards: A blueprint for educational equity and excellence.* John Wiley and Sons.

Schooling, P., Toth, M., & Marzano, R. (2020). *Creating an aligned system to develop great teachers within the federal race to the top initiative.* Learning Sciences International. **https://www.learningsciences.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Creating-an-Aligned-System.pdf**

All educators, and teachers especially, have been affected by the past year's challenges, and the many changes that have come to education are most likely going to stick. This means that a whole new paradigm of what education will look like including skills, ideals, and pedagogy that have not been taught in preparation courses or professional development will be the new expectation.

Using the 5 Anchors of Impact in Unpredictable Times

Dr. Laura Trujillo-Jenks, Interim Department Chair &
Teacher Education Professor, Texas Woman's University

Dr. Rebecca R. Fredrickson, Professor and University Coordinator
of First Year Experience & P-16 Initiatives,Texas Woman's University

Abstract

COVID-19-19 has brought many challenges to the collegiate and the K-12 educator. Teaching "online" has taken on a new perception and a new look. The 5 Anchors of Impact, which include Organization, Politics, Safety and Order, Traditions, and Teaching and Learningcan be used to help teachers navigate these challenging times and keep grounded with their teaching ~ regardless of their circumstances.

Keywords: 5 Anchors, teaching online, challenging times

The 5 Anchors of Impact are the right tools that can help educators understand how to navigate the challenges that may be thrown at them. Especially after the year of COVID-19-19 restrictions and the unpredictable weather, it is clear that the 5 Anchors can be used to guide educators on how to be successful during these uncertain times. All educators, and teachers especially, have been affected by the past year's challenges, and the many changes that have come to education are most likely going to stick. This means that a whole new paradigm of what education will look like including skills, ideals, and pedagogy that have not been taught in preparation courses or professional development will be the new expectation. Having the 5 Anchors as the foundation for moving forward with this new paradigm is imperative.

The 5 Anchors of Impact

The 5 Anchors of Impact are tools that can be applied to any situation in order for educators to understand the situation. Additionally, the Anchors provide an opportunity for educators to look at all sides of the situation and collect the data/information that surrounds the situation in order to make a data-driven decision, or critically think about a situation by focusingon the facts (Love, 2020). They are literal anchors that "anchor" an incident so that it can be dealt with in a professional and data-driven manner. The 5 Anchors include: Organization, Politics, Teaching and Learning, Traditions, and Safety and Order (Trujillo-Jenks & Fredrickson,2020a). As each Anchor is expounded upon, it should be noted that the examples are for both practicing teachers and pre-service teachers.

The Organization is the main system that also includes all other sub-systems. The Organization may be referred to by other synonyms, but for the purpose of this article, organization and system are interchangeable. The main system affects the sub-systems and the subsystems affect the main system. For this reason, it is imperative that the leader and teachers of the organization are familiar with each system within the organization and how each system functions. For example, within a campus, each grade level is a system. The office, cafeteria,

custodial engineers, and each elective and special population room is a system. How those systems interact and function together can be seen through a master schedule, a duty schedule, a tutoring schedule, and/or a meeting schedule. When a system is down or not functioning properly, then it will affect the rest of the organization, whether it be negative or positive. When both practicing teachers and pre-service teachers understand what is involved within an organization, it becomes easier to understand how each subsystem functions and affects the organization.

The second Anchor is **Politics**, which may be anything that could include support, recognition, promotions, games, ploys, manipulations, and/or threats that allow for certain outcomes to occur. Politics is a strange anchor because it can affect the organization in many ways. The effect may come from a single person or several persons within the organization, or it can come from an external source that could affect the organization. It is not uncommon that politics may creep into a seemingly non-political situation, such as how a teacher dresses, but it is necessary to be prepared for politics to be a reason for dissatisfaction within a school. One areathat has become a political hotbed are teacher mailboxes. If one teacher is allowed to place invitations to an event, like a Tupperware party, then all teachers should have the same opportunity to place items in teacher mailboxes regardless of the type of party. This could lead toa possible set of invitations to an X-rated party to be placed in teacher mailboxes, which could create a political storm.

External stakeholders also play a large role in the politics of education. Formal structural stakeholders, such as members of the school board, can implement policy that will impact the daily lives of administration, faculty, staff, and students. Other external stakeholders, although not in such a structured manner, can play a vital role in political aspects of an organization as well. These can include the parents, the Parent, Teachers, and Organizations (PTO) boards, philanthropists who donate money to the schools through special programs as well as internal programs (such as the arts, athletics, agriculture, etc.). When people/groups donate large sums of money to an organization, they often get a larger, informal, play in the political aspects of that environment.

Teaching and Learning is the third anchor and it focuses on the continuous cycle of teaching and learning occurring throughout the campus. Teaching can mean anything that involves someone telling/showing/illustrating information about something that helps another person understand. Learning is the understanding of information given about something that hasbeen told/shown/illustrated. It is also the focus on ensuring that all students, no matter their background or diverse learning needs, get individualized teaching and learning so that they may succeed (Knight-Manuel & Mercaino, 2019), and which is culturally relevant (Muñoz, 2019). Essentially, teaching and learning go hand in hand and may occur between any person(s) on a campus. In a classroom, a teacher teaches a subject and students learn what is being taught. A teacher learns from his students; what information is being understood and what information is being lost, and he may ask students to work with their peers in helping them understand a concept. Additionally, this is the teaching and learning cycle.

Another example of teaching and learning is during faculty meetings. Usually, some type of important information is being discussed and shared by a leader and everyone within the meeting is learning about this new information. After the information is learned, it may be taughtto other persons as needed. A great example of this is when a principal explains a new student code of conduct rule that will be implemented to all of the teachers. The new rule is shared, discussed, and learned, then it is taught to the students in each classroom. Again, the cycle of teaching and learning is

constantly occurring on a campus.

The fourth anchor is **Traditions**. Traditions are easy to see on a campus, because it is what is held as unique and sometimes sacred to individuals. Traditions may be written or unwritten, and they are usually the expectations that all must follow. A blatant example of Traditions is Friday Spirit Days, where students, teachers, and staff have the opportunity to wear spirit clothing to help boost excitement for an upcoming game. Other examples would be annual parties celebrating passing student test scores, ice-cream socials, Homecoming dress-up days, and even parent drop-off and pick-up procedures. The traditions of a campus help define what is important to those within that organization. The Traditions anchor is often the one that ismost quickly forgotten in times of strife or stress, such as COVID-19, however, these are the things that may hold the morale of campuses or organizations together. These are often the sacred events of the organizations, and the people and systems within the organizations can become lostwhen they are gone. A new example of this is graduation during COVID-19; for many schools, it was held virtually instead of in person.

The final Anchor involves **Safety and Order** and may be the most significant since the safety and order of an organization can either compromise or enhance an organization. Safety and order are the rules, the code of conduct that students and parents follow, the procedures that teachers follow, along with expectations set forth by the campus administration, the superintendent, and the school board. It involves all persons responsible for enforcing and abiding by these rules, which may include the school resource officer, the truant officer, the registrar, attendance clerk, custodians, and all educators.

Safety and order become apparent when a crisis occurs on a campus. For example, after a kindergarten group of students attend a field trip at the zoo and return back to school, a teacher may find that one of the children is missing. This may lead to a lockdown of the school building and a call to the police to search the zoo. Another example is when at a high school basketball game, parents become angry with the coach who refuses to play certain players. When the parents charge the coach and interrupt the game, the parents may be verbally reprimanded, thrown out of the building, or arrested. These actions are to keep safety and order within the gymso that the students who are playing the game and everyone else in the gym are not harmed.

An example of how all of these Anchors are visible during a challenge can be taken from our current situation with the discussion about whether or not schools should have students and teachers come back to school in full force or continue to allow parents and students to choose their preferred learning platform: face-to-face (F2F), fully online, or blended. Due to the COVID-19 year that we all have and are still going through, the *organization*, as a whole, has changed and each sub-system has changed. Additionally, each sub-system has developed strategies to help meet most decisions that will be made for future semesters, like how instruction will be deliveredand where students will be (F2F or online), but there may be a situation that arises that may find a sub-system unprepared.

Furthermore, because the organization has changed, the *traditions* have changed and howthings have always been done will change to meet the needs of the current state of education for each school. The *teaching and learning* also has changed and the expectations of the teachers have become more flexible, meaning that in person, fully online, and blended learning are all learning

platforms that teachers must become not only familiar with, but exceptional at in order for students to continue to make progress toward success. With different types of learning platforms, there will be new ways that *safety and order* must be ensured that students feel safe oncampus and online. There must be order to how things are done so that all persons on a campus are ultimately successful. This tremendous change in such a short period of time encourages *politics*, which may be positive or negative, but which will also change the organization, traditions, teaching and learning, and safety and order of the campus. The 5 Anchors of Impact can be seen in all that has happened in this COVID-19 era.

Challenges

With each crisis comes challenges, and educators have found challenges that they werenot prepared for this past year. Therefore, it was important to find out what specific challengesboth practicing and pre-service teachers faced as they learned how to be professionals in a newtype of educational environment. Several groups, including practicing teachers and administrators, pre-service teachers, and professors of certification programs were asked the following questions through an informal interview and focus group process to help understandand gauge how practitioners in the field were working and navigating the changes that have occurred since COVID-19 hit the school systems.
What challenges have you seen due to COVID-19 amongst your colleagues and students?

- Isolation: Many faculty members now feel that they have lost their sense of "team" and are working completely on their own in isolation.
- Internet access or the technology concerns: Many students and faculty do not have the bandwidth or even the internet access to complete assignments, have virtual meetings, create videos, or engage with others online.
- Communication with faculty members or other students: Students are missing the intellectual discourse that happens in a higher education setting. Discussion boards, jam boards, and virtual sessions, are just not able to duplicate the true discourse that happens in a classroom.
- No sense of urgency: Through COVID-19, faculty across the nation were told to be sensitiveto the needs of their students. This allowed a laissez-faire environment to emerge in manyclasses, often without the faculty welcoming it or wanting it, that lacked the sense of urgency to complete assignments, readings, or projects.
- Time management: Time management changed for faculty as well as for students. As people were not leaving their homes, they either had additional time on their hands, or had less, depending on their circumstances. If they had children at home, where they were having to do school for them as well as their own jobs, it became two full time jobs. If they were exclusively working from home, the impact on their time management when all education is done completely online. Not necessarily for the better or the worse, it just forced changes that people had not previously considered.
- Ability issues: Faculty were often faced with the limits of their own ability when asked to pivot their courses overnight into a fully online model. Faculty, who felt perfectly confident in their in person instructional pedagogies, had to quickly adapt and learn new pedagogical strategies to teach their courses. This became frustrating for many faculty and students alike.
- Missing the human interaction in class: Students and teachers are missing the opportunity to dialogue with one another in a personal space that is not in a virtual environment

How did COVID-19 impact practicing teachers?

- Teaching Kindergarten online: Keeping a kindergartener engaged in a virtual environment for an entire day is challenging ~ at best. However, teachers were expected to still deliver instruction to all students, via online environments, and keep their students focused and engaged.
- Teaching and having kids at home: Many teachers were working to teach their courses and students while still having their own children at home and needing assistance with their classes as well.
- Lack of technology: Teachers may have had access to technology, but if they had their own personal children at home needing computers for their classes as well, lack of household technology, and internet access/bandwidth, quickly became a problem for many teachers.

How did COVID-19 impact pre-service teachers?

- Lack of practice: At mid-semester, the student teachers had to leave the classroom. This was the point when many of them had just taken over their classes or had moved to their second placements. This left these student teachers with very little time to truly practice teaching before they were certified and graduated.
- Out of the loop: Many student teachers were almost completely cut off by their mentor teachers as they were forced to move into an online environment. This was due to multiple reasons including the mentor's lack of comfort with the online environment, their concern with turning their classes over with the level of uncertainty of the time, or even the school district's inability to move the student teachers into the learning management systems.
- Sudden success: Some student teachers had a completely different experience. As they were still in school, and some programs were working with emergent technologies and how to enhance their pedagogical skills using technology, some student teachers were in a good place to teach virtually. They served their students and their mentor teachers and brought new technologies to the classroom to assist in the move to a virtual environment.

What challenges do pre-service and novice teachers face in today's classrooms?

- Expected to do it all, on day 1: Novice teachers are expected to enter into the classroom as experts in the field. They are not. They are novice teachers and need that learning curve that has traditionally been available to first year teachers. Unfortunately, many first-year teachers are left to "fend for themselves" and are having to learn how to do it all on their own.
- Teaching virtually and in person ~ simultaneously: As many schools have moved to offering online instruction as well as in person instruction, teachers are being asked to teach in both methodologies at the same time. This is challenging for veteran teachers, much less, novice teachers.
- Lack of understanding: As many novice teachers had less student teaching experience, one of the areas that did not get addressed with some students was how to navigate the different systems within a school and the politics of schools. They usually have been exposed to teaching and learning within the first part of their student teaching experience, however several expressed concerns about not understanding the politics within the school or how all of the systems worked together.

What can university programs do to help prepare pre-service teachers to be prepared for their future classrooms?

- Address the 5 Anchors earlier: Many of the 5 Anchors of Impact are practical in nature (political, organizations, and traditions) and usually taught to students during their clinical experiences, these ideas could be addressed earlier in their education courses, they would at least have an understanding of the roles the 5 Anchors play in schools.

- Follow up with graduates: Few university programs have a follow-up program that follows students into their novice years of teaching. Graduates often do not realize, until it is too late, that they need continued support once they have entered into the classroom. Programs that follow-up with graduates can give students the chance to seek additional assistance, increase retention, and in turn, assist the programs with remaining more embedded in the schools.

- Online and in person pedagogical practices. Teacher education programs need to change the way they are operating and make sure that they are giving their students the skills and pedagogical knowledge to be successful in the classroom as well as in a virtual classroom. This will require a large commitment from teacher educators and programs to make these changes, but novice teachers need these skills to be successful in today's classrooms.

- Encourage students to enter the classroom sooner: School districts have long known that their best teachers come from within, thus the continued development of

  "Grow-Your-Own" programs for students, para-professionals, aids, and staff within a school. Teacher education programs may want to encourage their students to begin working within the schools as an aid, para-professional, staff member, or substitute teacher, to gain valuable experience and skills before even entering into the student teaching experience.

The answers are enlightening and may help Educational Preparation Programs (EPP) in developing relevant curriculum for their pre-service teachers and show a great starting point to use the 5 Anchors.

How Can the Anchors Be Used?

The 5 Anchors are a great tool to work through problem-based issues while also learningfrom them. They can be used in professional development, as a team building activity, and as a way to begin a faculty meeting discussion. The easiest way to use the 5 Anchors of Impact are to identify a problem/issue/concern/challenge on a campus, apply the 5 Anchors, and work through what elements of the problem/issue/concern/challenge are preventing the persons involved in moving forward. The following are two case studies that are examples of how teachers can use the 5 Anchors.

Case Study 1

The elementary principal of a school has informed all of the teachers on a campus that alllesson plans must be written for both F2F and online delivery beginning next semester. The principal gives each teacher a template of what the lesson plans should include and informs the teachers that optional professional development that will focus on instructional delivery, learning strategies, classroom management, meeting the needs of diverse learners, and pacing of a lesson

plan will be available each Tuesday and Thursday from 12-1. The persons who will be delivering the professional development will be the district level curriculum directors and coordinators, which numbers 7, and which will be traveling to give professional development on every single campus within the district. All 32 campuses will have at least one hour a week with at least one curriculum director or coordinator, with the elementary schools having the most professional development hours given.

Some teachers became angry and voiced their concerns about the professional development days being optional and scheduled during the time that the principal has given to allteams to have their Professional Learning Committee (PLC) meetings. One teacher asked if the professional development days and times could be moved for after school to better meet the needs of the teachers on the campus. The principal answered, "No", and explained that because of having only 7 persons readily available to give the professional development to 32 schools, the days and times given to the school were not discussed with him, nor was any principal given a choice on what days and times would better suit their teachers. Another teacher voiced that because each team would most likely NOT attend the professional development days due to the conflicting schedules with the PLC meetings, her team would create their own professional development that would be given before and after school for anyone who is interested in attending. Other teams jumped at the chance to develop their own professional development to help each other develop lesson plans that would need to be delivered both F2F and online.

At the monthly principal's meeting, many of the principals let the superintendent know that the professional development days that the curriculum and instruction director and coordinators had planned would not work for their campuses due to conflicting schedules, the superintendent stated that she would like the principals to make them work. She agreed that it wasn't the best solution, but that the seven C&I gurus were taking the time to learn new ways ofdealing with the evolving educational paradigm shift and we as a school district should show ourappreciation by having our teachers attend the professional development. When one principal spoke up and said that it was not in the best interest of her teachers to rearrange their schedule ofteam meetings and teaching to avoid hurting the feelings of the seven C&I gurus, the superintendent assertively stated that all teachers will be attending all professional development and that it is no longer optional. She added that each principal needed to inform their teachers that if they do not attend the professional development scheduled for their campus, they will bewritten up for insubordination.

Case Study 2

Jonathan, a pre-service teacher who is in his last semester, which is his student-teaching semester, is thrilled to be at an elementary school learning how to teach the little ones in Pre-K through 5th grade. He will have a second placement in middle school half-way through the semester, which he knows he will enjoy, but since he has never worked with small children, he is excited to learn how to teach them how to be active and healthy. As he meets the coach he will be working with, he becomes deflated and disappointed in what he may be learning this semester.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions that the elementary school has had to abide by, all elective teachers have had a truncated schedule that now includes helping the core teachers tutor and co-teach students in their home classrooms. Because all electives classes have had their class time decreased across the school district, the superintendent announced that he wanted all

principals to have all elective teachers work with core teachers in helping deliver instruction to online students. He asked that elective teachers who have more than one certification help in the area of their other certification, so that students, specifically learning online, have contact with a teacher who is ready to answer questions and help with learning. For example, the current PE coach has a degree in Kinesiology and a minor in Math, which means that she has been assigned to not only teach her PE classes but to also help the 5th grade teachers teach math to all of the online math classes. For those elective teachers who were only certified in their elective areas, each principal was to find a duty station for the teachers that they would be responsible for (i.e., hall duty, lunch duty, parent escort duty, etc.).

After Jonathan learned about this expectation, he quickly contacted his university supervisor and asked what he should do. According to the schedule that he received from his cooperative teacher, he may not be able to earn all of the student-teaching hours in his area of Kinesiology needed to meet the certification requirements of the state. He was worried that he would not be able to graduate at the end of the semester since his schedule would include him working with core teachers more so than working with the PE teacher. Jonathan was not going tolearn how to be a teacher at this elementary school; he was counting the days before he would beat the middle school.

Solving Each Case Study

As you read each case study, first identify the 5 Anchors of Impact, and then show how they are being defined. Once the Anchors have been identified and defined, discuss what eventstook place to cause the problem/issue/concern/challenge, so that you have an idea of how to avoid the problem/issue/concern/challenge in the future, if possible. Then, identify the events that have taken place after the problem/issue/concern/challenge has been presented and what plans of action have been decided on for implementation. Finally, ask and answer the following questions:

1. How does the overall problem/issue/concern/challenge affect the progress of all on the campus, specifically the students and the teachers?

2. If teachers are to be judged on their teaching performance according to the Texas-Teacher Evaluations and Support System (T-TESS), how will the problem/issue/concern/challenge affect that evaluation?

3. What can pre-service teachers do to become prepared to teach in schools and at districts

    that do not seemingly value elective teachers or their certifications?

As you answer the questions above, think about how you could use the 5 Anchors of Impact in the future.

Conclusion

The 5 Anchors of Impact is a timely resource that can be helpful to teachers who may need to understand, analyze, evaluate, and solve issues that creep up within their schools. Usingthe 5 Anchors as the foundation for understanding why certain events occur on a campus may help teachers see that they can make a difference and help improve their organization (Trujillo-Jenks & Fredrickson, 2020b). One way of understanding is to find the challenges

thatmay be preventing success on a campus and working through those challenges through case study discussions.

References

Love, S. (2020). Finding facts and planning are keys to good leadership. Retrieved from: https://www.nassp.org/publication/principal-leadership/volume-21-2020-2021/principal-leadership-october-2020/critical-thinking-during-COVID-19-october-2020/#:~:text=Crises%20such%20as%20the%20COVID-19,the%20situation%2C%20and%20make%20decisions.

Knight-Manuel, M.G., & Mercaino, J.E. (2019). *Classroom cultures: Equitable schooling forracially diverse youth*. New York: Teachers College Press

Muñoz, J. (2019). Culturally responsive teaching: A 50 state survey of teaching standards. Retrieved from: https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/culturally-responsive-teaching/

Trujillo-Jenks, L. & Fredrickson, R.R. (2020a). The *5 Anchors of Impact*: Teaching in challenging times. Retrieved from: https://www.facultyfocus.com/author/ff-lauratrujillo/

Trujillo-Jenks, L. & Fredrickson, R. R. (2020b). *The 5 Anchors of impact on the new teacher, principal, and superintendent using performance-based case studies.* Kendall-HuntPublishing.

CREATIVE WORKS

Based on daily self-talk, this poem encourages the reader to get energized and ready for the work ahead because there is work to do on a daily basis.

"The Work That Awaits"

Tracy Perez Shea, Director of Innovative Learning, Cleburne ISD

<u>**"The Work That Awaits"**</u>

There is work to do today.

Are you equipped? Are you present?

There is work to do today.

Are you engaged? Are you willing?

There is work to do today.

Are you excited? Are you prepared?

There is work to do today.

Are you energized? Are you amazed?

There is work to do today.

Are you rested? Are you eager?

There is work to do today.

You have been called. You have been gifted.

You are set to meet this day.

Stay focused. Be ready, for there is work to do today!

We conclude this volume with a free verse poem: A SPACE TO DREAM BIG! Close your eyes, imagine, and put voice and vision to the big dreams in your head. There are endless possibilities when dreaming big with the women of TCWSE. The author brings you to a space of
Envisioning,
Dreaming,
Breathing,
Thriving!

Free Verse Poem: A Space to Dream Big

By Dr. Amy Sharp, NBCT, Assistant Principal, Lake Travis ISD

I am in the land of dreaming big at TCSWE.
"What a happy land," I think.
                                        I pinch myself.
Yes, I am here. I have arrived.
                                        This is real.

You see, I envision myself doing these HUGE things, and
I put voice and vision to these big things here in *this s*pace.

Then, I am brought back down to earth.
But, that's how dreaming big works, right?
                                        This is real.

I envision it so clearly that I can actually feel it…
like a big goosebumps experience with a tear you choke back.
Only to snap out of it once you step back to your hotel room, get in
your car, and take that drive back to your real responsibility.

"Keep at the work, girl," you hear your inner voice say in
the #knowing and quiet of the everyday after space.
                              And, so, what do you do?
You reflect.
You breathe.
You work.
You strive.
You follow-up.
You connect.
You thrive.
You hope.
You dream.
You believe.
#myoneword
You serve.

Nothing I heard in *this* space said that I should wait and keep
those big ideas in my head.
                              "Know who you are…

Yes.
Be that.
For kids.
For educators. For
you…"

…this space says to us.

I saw the evidence in my life of His work and my faith (Thanks, Jill). So,
at this moment…

I smile.
I reflect.
I write.
I wonder. I
breathe.
I thank.
I serve..
I listen. I
know.
I connect.
I work.
I believe.

<div align="center">

I DREAM.

</div>

See you next year, TCWSE.
See you when I share my story… one year later.

See you in *the* space… I dream big with other women-again.