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Angela Farmer, Editor
Mississippi State University

Tom Hisiro, SRCEA President
Marshall University

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Scaling of Educational Leadership Candidates' Commitment to National Standards: The ELCBS Scale

Dorothy C. Rea
Florida Gulf Coast University
Cecil F. Carter
Florida Gulf Coast University
Christopher M. Parfitt
Florida Gulf Coast University
Judy R. Wilkerson
Florida Gulf Coast University
Thomas C. Valesky
Florida Gulf Coast University

Abstract

Colleges of education are faced with Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (2017) requirements to assess dispositions in addition to knowledge and skills. Preparation programs across the country are looking for ways to assess dispositions through valid and reliable measures. We describe the validation of a survey instrument to assess the dispositions of master's-degree candidates in Educational Leadership. We used the dispositions outlined in the Educational Leadership Policy Standards developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers. These standards provide a viable content domain from which to assess leaders' affective learning. The instrument described in this article, the Educational Leader Candidate Belief Scale (ELCBS), was developed for measuring educational candidates' leadership dispositions.

Keywords: dispositions, standards, CAEP, CCSSO, Rasch

Scaling Educational Leadership Candidates' Commitment to National Standards: The ELCBS Scale

In this article, we describe the validation process for an instrument, Educational Leadership Candidate Belief Scale (ELCBS), which was originally designed to assess the level of commitment to Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) dispositions of master's-level educational leadership candidates. Assessing dispositions is important for a number of reasons, the most vital of which is to ensure pre-service preparation programs are graduating future school leaders who possess dispositions necessary for success. In addition, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) requires institutions to assess candidate dispositions (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2017). We began the process of developing an assessment instrument, the ELCBS, by using the dispositions enumerated in the document developed as a companion piece to the 2008 National Educational Leadership Policy Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008a) titled *Performance Expectations and Indicators for Education Leaders* (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008b).

Dispositions Defined

To assess dispositions effectively, one needs to define the construct. Katz (1993) defined dispositions as patterns of behavior, exhibited frequently and intentionally in the absence of coercion, representing a habit of mind. Later, Perkins (1995) defined dispositions as the proclivities that lead us in one direction rather than another within the range of freedom possessed. Then in 2001, Ritchhart viewed dispositions as a collection of cognitive tendencies that capture one's patterns of thinking, addressing the gap between abilities and actions.

Damon (2007) warned that for certification-related assessment, dispositions "must be based on clearly defined principles rather than the fuzzy intuitions of whoever happens to be in charge of the process at any one time" (p. 368). Dottin (2009) concluded that educators are just beginning to grapple with the definition. He further stated, "Dispositions, therefore, concern not only what professional educators can do (ability), but also what they are actually likely to do (actions)" (p. 85). The plethora of definitions, then, is of concern. In our work with dispositions and in working with our students, we have adopted the definition used by Wilkerson and Lang (2007): dispositions are attitudes, values, and beliefs that influence the use of knowledge and skills. We prefer this definition for two reasons: it encompasses other authors' definitions and it focuses on the observable behaviors, which can be evidence of dispositions.

Disposition Assessments

In an exploratory, qualitative study, Lindahl (2009) examined if and how dispositions were taught and assessed in principal preparation programs. All respondents who were interviewed considered that dispositions were a key element of principal preparation. In almost all cases the dispositions identified in national standards were used. He concluded that if dispositions were to be addressed in educational leadership programs, a valid and reliable instrument should be developed. However, he qualified this conclusion with cautionary questions about the reliability of assessment practices:

1. Is it possible to develop an effective process for assessing dispositions, or are there some idiosyncratic elements that might not conform well to even a well-thought-out process?
2. What levels of expectations ("dispositional tolerance") should be set and what levels define a passing score? Who determines this, and how?
3. How can evaluators prevent their personal biases in favor or against specific dispositions from entering into their subjective judgment of candidates?
4. Are dispositions synergistic in nature, where the whole is greater than a sum of the parts?

Currently at most institutions, the assessment of dispositions is largely dependent on the use of Likert scales of self-reported beliefs less closely linked to the standards than instruments that measure cognitive abilities. Examples of instruments measuring cognitive abilities are reported by Richardson and Onwuegbuzie (2003); Brown, King, and Herron (2008); and Schulte, Edwards, and Edick (2008). Scale development is typically based on locally developed construct definitions such as those identified above, rather than the standards directly. These studies also rely on classical statistical procedures, including descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and chi square tests.

Research Questions

The gap in the literature of leader dispositions assessment research is twofold. First, there is limited attention to building a scale that systematically samples from the content domain needed for accountability and accreditation (i.e., national standards). Second, the measurement process is largely reliant on statistics that fail to address the assumptions for their use and/or do not lead to research designs that take advantage of pairing dispositions results with interval level achievement scores. The questions explored here are:

1. Does the Educational Candidates Leadership Belief Scale (ELCBS) provide a valid and reliable measurement of master's-level educational leadership students' commitment to national standards?
2. Do students who have had specific training in dispositions for educational leaders outperform students who have not been trained in these dispositions?

Methodology

In the ELCBS, the educational leadership candidates choose whether they agree or disagree on each of 53 statements, which we created. There are eight to 10 items on the ELCBS per each Performance Expectation (PE). Each statement was classified based on our expectation of how difficult the statement would be to answer correctly, with the goal of ensuring variability in responses. This is important because without variability in responses there is no measurement, only confirmation. We also associated each item in the instrument to the affective taxonomy by Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) as adapted to educational leadership (Wilkerson & Lang, 2011). This adapted taxonomy includes the following steps to internalization of an attitude, value, or belief: *Unaware; Receiving; Responding; Valuing; Organization;* and *Characterizing*. Each successive step in the taxonomy increases internalization of the attitude, value, or belief. Through the application of the taxonomy to the instrument, we recognize that there are levels of internalization of attitudes, values, beliefs and through internalization, an individual accepts or conforms to that attitude, value, or belief, resulting in direct behavior.

Existing measures, such as the one proposed by Brown, King, and Herron (2008), showing virtually no variability, are less likely to explain differences in performance. To avoid having no variability of responses in which respondents simply agreed to all items without much thought, we developed items so there was a mix of dichotomous responses of "agree" and "disagree." In other words, we worded the items so respondents must think carefully about each item before answering "agree" or "disagree."

After administering the ELCBS to a sample of undergraduates and graduate students described below, we then tested the scale using the Rasch model of item-response theory. The actual item scores were used to redefine the theory related to the construct of attitude toward the Standards. This definition of the construct can then be used to determine decisions about program design.

Instrument and Measurement Method

Thurstone (1928) defined attitudes to include a person's inclinations, feelings, prejudice, bias, preconceived notions, ideas, fears, threats, and convictions about any topic. Both Likert and Thurstone scales are comprised of statements to which respondents agree or disagree, but the Thurstone's technique requires a dichotomous decision (agree/disagree only), while Likert provides for a rating scale, typically five-points, from strongly agree to strongly disagree with a neutral midpoint. Roberts, Laughlin, and Wedel (1999) examined the relationship between Likert and Thurstone agreement scaling, recommending the Thurstone scale when extreme positions (e.g., high/low levels of commitment) are of interest:

> …the Likert procedure may falter for individuals who hold extreme attitudinal positions when responses result from some type of ideal point process. This is because the Likert procedure is functionally a cumulative model of the response process, and as such, it is not always compatible with responses from an ideal point process. In contrast, the Thurstone procedure is functionally an unfolding model, and thus, it does correspond to the situation in which responses follow from an ideal point process. Due to this correspondence, the Thurstone procedure does not suffer from the degraded validity exhibited with the Likert method when individuals with extreme attitudes are measured. (pp. 229-230)

The Rasch (1960) model is the simplest form of item-response theory, calling for careful delineation of the construct during the design stage (Wilson, 2005). Conceptually, the idea behind the Rasch model is simple. The ability (or, in this case, commitment) of individuals and the difficulty of items influence each other conjointly. The Rasch (1960) model places them on the same interval scale, so predictions about one from the other can be made. Rasch established the mathematical relationship between a person's ability (or commitment) and the difficulty of an item, demonstrating that the probability of providing a correct response was related to the ability (or commitment) of the respondent.

Item response theory and the family of Rasch models permit ordinal level data, including dichotomous and rating scale items, to be converted to an interval scale. This allows more appropriate use of common statistics, providing advantages over a simple raw score (count) of correct responses. With a purposive sample and a skewed distribution, inferential statistics are

not appropriate. Rasch modeling is sample independent and requires neither a large sample nor a normal distribution (Bond & Fox, 2007). Rasch allows the user to create an interval level scale that can then be used for associational or intervention research designs in subsequent studies. Validity and reliability statistics can also be reported (Linacre, 2003). Rasch is extensively used by most modern test publishers, such as Pearson, in the development of major high-stakes tests.

Sample

Four groups of students were assessed. One group was composed of master's-level educational leadership candidates (n = 77), for whom the instrument was designed (please refer to research question number 1). A second group was composed of doctoral level students (n = 25). In addition, there were two groups of undergraduate students: one group was composed of sophomores enrolled in an instructional technology class (n = 24) and one group of seniors enrolled in an undergraduate measurement course (n=48). The four groups completed the instrument to allow for comparisons across three levels of university experience. The total sample size was 174, as shown in Table 3.

Data Analysis Statistical Results on ELCBS

Descriptive statistics are provided in Table 1. Note that these results include both raw scores for persons and scaled scores for both persons and items. In Rasch measurement, the extent to which items and people fit the mathematical model are reported for outfit and infit, which differ based on the extent to which outliers are incorporated. The expected mean square fit statistic is 1.0 with a standardized z value of zero. For ELCBS, the fit statistics are provided in Table 2. Note that both items and persons fit the model well, meaning that scores were mathematically predictable based on the relative difficulty of each item and the relative commitment level of each individual.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for ELCBS

Statistic	Person Raw Scores	Rasch Person Measure (Commitment)	Rasch Item Measure (Difficulty)
Mean	30.4	60.97	50.00
Standard Deviation	5.4	7.87	13.69
Maximum	44.0	96.58	84.51
Minimum	7.0	44.32	22.67

Table 2
Fit Statistics for ELCBS

Statistic	Infit		Outfit	
	Mean Square	Standardized Z	Mean Square	Standardized Z
Persons	1.0	.0	.99	.0
Items	.99	.0	.99	.1

Figure 1 provides the variable map from the Rasch model, showing the relationship between items and people on the same vertical scale. Note that the person distribution on the left side of the map varies from about 45 to 75 correctly answered items, and scores are skewed toward the higher end of the scale. As research continues with this instrument and students from lower levels of experience are added to the scale, we expect the distribution will be more normal. The right side of the map displays item difficulty with easy items at the bottom and harder items at the top. This side of the map shows there are still items at the bottom right that are too easy for these students. The spread of items on the right indicates that there is good coverage of the construct however, supporting construct validity of the instrument.

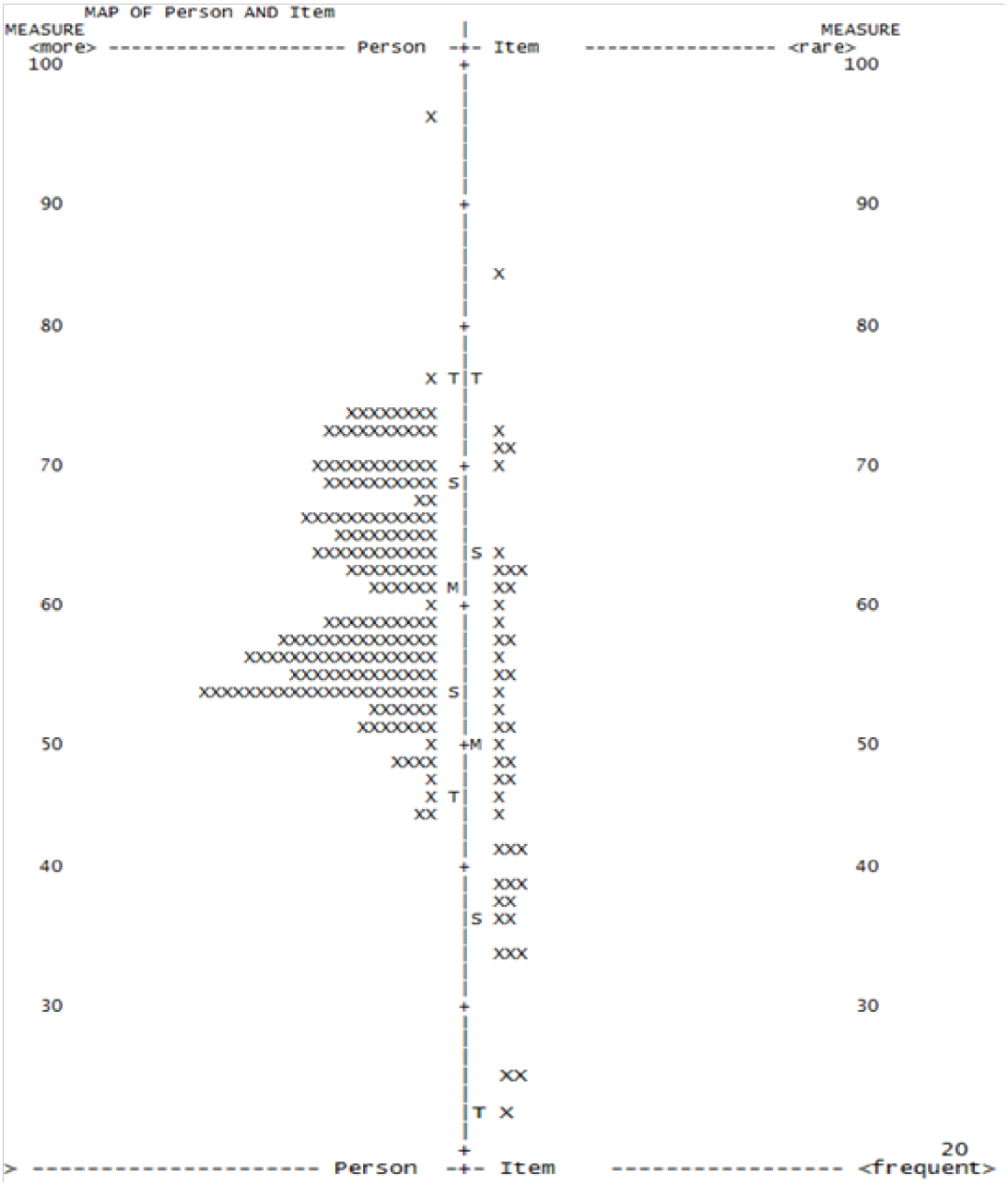

Figure 1. ELCBS variable map

In Figure 2, the item measures (in measure order from most difficult at the top to least difficult items at the bottom) are provided for each item on the instrument except the eight which were dropped from the analysis—these eight items were not functioning well from a mathematical perspective in that their point biserial correlations were negative. Two items remaining in the ELCBS have a negative point biserial, but they were left in the scale since they tapped important traits and did not have a noticeable difference in overall scores. The expected range of .5 to 1.5 for infit and outfit statistics (Linacre, 2003) held for each item. Although there were two items with a negative point biserial correlation, each of the remaining items is functioning well.

Reliability and separation statistics are acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha (KR-20) estimated at .72. The person reliability of .70 indicates satisfactory separation of about one and a half levels (separation = 1.61). Item reliability and separation are excellent at .97 and 6.07. The higher separation index for items shows that there is more variability in the scores, including a larger standard deviation. The lower index for persons indicates that the population is relatively homogeneous.

ENTRY NUMBER	TOTAL SCORE	TOTAL COUNT	MEASURE	MODEL S.E.	INFIT MNSQ	INFIT ZSTD	OUTFIT MNSQ	OUTFIT ZSTD	PT-MEASURE CORR.	PT-MEASURE EXP.	EXACT MATCH OBS%	EXACT MATCH EXP%	Item
10	20	186	84.51	2.46	.95	-.2	.94	-.1	.31	.25	89.8	89.5	10.1.children can learn
3	47	187	73.19	1.78	1.05	.5	1.13	1.0	.25	.32	76.5	75.7	03.1.resources & opps
8	50	184	71.96	1.75	1.14	1.7	1.23	1.9	.13	.33	70.1	74.1	08.1.vision & environ.
2	52	186	71.54	1.73	1.05	.6	1.10	.9	.26	.33	75.3	73.5	02.1.consensus
42	57	186	70.08	1.69	.85	-2.1	.79	-2.2	.52	.34	75.8	71.7	42.5.talk before reporting
44	79	185	64.07	1.59	.74	-5.3	.75	-4.0	.65	.34	85.4	66.3	44.5.reflection worth it
19	82	183	63.22	1.58	1.12	2.3	1.16	2.3	.19	.34	60.1	65.7	19.2.research/data help
41	84	185	62.83	1.57	.94	-1.2	.96	-.6	.41	.34	70.3	65.7	41.5.report bad princ.
16	88	186	62.14	1.57	1.04	.8	1.04	.7	.29	.34	62.9	65.3	16.2.stats lie
30	90	186	61.50	1.56	1.29	5.4	1.34	4.8	-.02	.34	45.2	65.2	30.4.sch pers know best
53	93	187	60.96	1.56	.90	-2.1	.89	-1.7	.46	.34	74.3	65.1	53.6.join civic orgs.
28	98	185	59.50	1.57	1.07	1.4	1.09	1.3	.25	.34	61.6	64.6	28.3.princ.help pers.
4	104	187	58.28	1.57	1.09	1.8	1.34	4.4	.19	.34	60.4	64.7	04.1.vision buy-in
15	105	183	57.41	1.59	.97	-.6	.95	-.6	.37	.33	66.1	64.7	15.2.degree sufficies
34	104	181	57.18	1.60	1.06	1.1	1.07	.9	.26	.33	62.4	64.7	34.4.princ. reach out
40	112	185	56.09	1.59	.88	-2.3	.83	-2.2	.48	.33	66.5	65.6	40.5.disc.beh.plan parents
36	116	186	55.07	1.60	1.10	1.7	1.15	1.7	.19	.32	64.5	66.3	36.4.princ. research comm.
11	119	185	54.22	1.62	1.07	1.2	1.09	1.0	.23	.32	65.4	67.1	11.2.workplace prep
7	121	185	53.65	1.63	1.00	-.1	1.00	.0	.32	.32	65.9	67.9	07.1.change & evidence
24	127	186	52.30	1.66	.91	-1.4	.83	-1.7	.43	.31	72.0	69.8	24.3.don't delegate
48	131	187	51.29	1.68	.94	-.9	.86	-1.2	.39	.30	72.2	71.2	48.6.gen.couns.expert
14	131	186	51.18	1.69	.90	-1.5	.81	-1.7	.44	.30	73.1	71.4	14.2.work alone
37	138	186	49.12	1.75	.90	-1.2	.82	-1.4	.42	.28	75.8	74.6	37.4.princ.relat.resources
49	138	186	48.96	1.75	.98	-.2	.92	-.5	.32	.29	73.1	74.7	49.6.circumvent law if nec.
17	139	185	48.54	1.78	.95	-.5	.96	-.2	.33	.28	77.8	75.4	17.2.data takes time
43	144	187	47.34	1.81	.84	-1.9	.67	-2.5	.51	.28	78.1	77.2	43.5.degree is all needed
26	145	186	46.86	1.84	1.07	.7	1.13	.9	.17	.27	77.4	78.1	26.3.parents write disc.
38	147	183	45.30	1.93	1.07	.7	1.13	.8	.15	.26	79.8	80.3	38.5.report uneth.tchr.
39	152	185	43.97	1.99	1.18	1.5	1.37	1.9	-.01	.25	82.2	82.2	39.5.hire relative
22	157	186	42.28	2.09	1.13	1.0	1.56	2.4	.00	.23	84.4	84.4	22.3.resources for need
23	157	186	42.28	2.09	.95	-.3	1.01	.1	.28	.23	84.4	84.4	23.3.pay high perf.more
46	159	187	41.66	2.11	.98	-.1	.86	-.6	.28	.23	85.0	85.0	46.6.equity not possible
21	162	185	39.54	2.29	.93	-.4	1.09	.5	.27	.21	87.6	87.6	21.3.teachers choose sch.
12	163	186	39.43	2.29	1.00	.0	1.01	.1	.20	.21	87.6	87.6	12.2.diversity a problem
32	164	186	38.73	2.33	.97	-.1	.99	.1	.24	.21	88.2	88.2	32.4.email parents
35	165	186	38.18	2.37	.96	-.2	.85	-.5	.27	.20	88.7	88.7	35.4.SACS need diversity
1	167	187	37.59	2.42	.96	-.2	.90	-.3	.26	.20	89.3	89.3	01.1.single data
5	168	187	36.99	2.48	1.05	.3	1.21	.8	.11	.20	89.8	89.8	05.1.vision & impr.plans
33	167	185	36.45	2.54	.99	.0	.98	.0	.20	.19	90.3	90.3	33.4.parents want control
27	168	183	34.60	2.74	1.02	.2	1.18	.7	.14	.18	91.8	91.8	27.3.low bid works
9	171	186	34.47	2.74	.97	-.1	.90	-.2	.22	.17	91.9	91.9	09.1.principal's vision
20	171	185	33.79	2.83	.95	-.2	.92	-.1	.23	.17	92.4	92.4	20.2.don't mainstream
13	180	186	24.55	4.18	.94	.0	.51	-1.0	.25	.11	96.8	96.8	13.2.sameness helps
25	180	186	24.55	4.18	.95	.0	.75	-.4	.20	.11	96.8	96.8	25.3.don't fix if ok
18	180	185	22.67	4.56	.96	.0	.51	-.9	.22	.10	97.3	97.3	18.2.indivs.take time
MEAN	126.5	185.5	50.00	2.08	.99	.0	.99	.1			77.8	77.8	
S.D.	41.2	1.3	13.69	.70	.10	1.5	.21	1.6			11.8	10.8	

Figure 2. Items in measure order

It was hypothesized that students who were taught about the educational leadership dispositions would outperform students without such instruction. Descriptive statistics for all groups are listed in Table 3. From this data, we conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) in SPSS, resulting in an F value of 78.245 at 173 degrees of freedom, with $p = .000$. This analysis indicated a significant difference between the groups we had defined (sophomores, seniors, master's, and doctoral-level students). Since the difference in the mean ELCBS scores was significant, a post-hoc Least Significant Difference (LSD) test was conducted. The result of the LSD test indicated a significant difference, again with $p = .000$, between all pairs of groups except sophomores and seniors ($p = .315$). The group mean difference between master's students (the group being trained in dispositions) is about 1.8 standard deviations higher than seniors (with little to no experience in schools) and about 1.1 standard deviations higher than doctoral students. One might believe that the doctoral group would have been highest, but they have not yet benefited from instruction in dispositions.

Table 3
SPSS Output of Descriptive Statistics for ELCBS

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sophomores	24	53.50	3.95
Seniors	48	54.72	3.45
Master's	77	66.40	5.90
Doctoral	25	59.24	4.13
Total	177	60.37	7.40

Conclusions and Implications

Evidence of construct validity and reliability (internal consistency and separation reliability) were presented in this study. Use of the ELCBS is, therefore, providing useful data to document educational leadership program strategies that are working. This is evidence of construct validity.

In most contexts, we would expect doctoral students to score higher than master's-level students. In the research reported in this study, however, only master's students are receiving training in dispositions, so we view this as a positive finding, supporting our general hypothesis that training can make a difference in the development of positive dispositions in educational leadership. The master's-level students were trained during their program to improve their dispositions in educational leadership. This is not the case with the doctoral students since this cohort of doctoral students was new to the program and the cohort was composed of only a few students who completed a master's degree in Educational Leadership, but had many from curriculum and instruction, and an equal number from higher education with degrees outside education.

Eight items were dropped from the analysis as items that were not working well mathematically as described above. These items will need to be reviewed. In addition, all items will need to be reviewed for placement on Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) taxonomy as adapted by Wilkerson and Lang (2011).

Our goal is to increase students' awareness of the proper dispositions to be successful school leaders. Several possibilities for improving candidate dispositions in this area exist. Coursework that encompasses the Performance Expectations could be added into the program's curriculum. Candidates could then articulate their positions to appropriate audiences. Candidates could be counseled on an individual basis concerning dispositional areas in which to improve. A third possibility for improving dispositions would be to include special projects related to Performance Expectations in the candidate internships. This option might be especially viable; inasmuch as internships includes experiences related to social justice.

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Investigating the Benefits of a School/Industry Partnership Focused on Overcoming the Skills Gap and Fostering Student Success

Dana M. Griggs
Southeastern Louisiana University
Frances K. Kochan
Auburn University
Ellen H. Reames
Auburn University

Abstract

The focus of this investigation was to discover the participants' perceptions of benefits of a school/industry partnership designed to overcome the skills gap and foster student success. The researcher strove to give voice to the participants through storytelling in Appreciative Inquiry interviews. The perceived benefits presented themselves in four categories: (a) Curricular relevance – Students viewed school as relevant to the real world; tried harder in school; talked to parents and counselors more; and engaged in thinking and learning. (b) World of Work – Students learned real-world work skills; explored a wide variety of careers; clarified college and career readiness; engaged in a reflective process on their decisions; increased attainment of credentials; and improved behaviors outside school. (c) Essential skills – Students learned employability skills; practiced professionalism; learned the power of first impressions; gained confidence; learned the importance of networking; practiced etiquettes and essential skills; and the partners provided authentic audiences. (d) Industry – Employees shared talents and grew; addressed company's focus on education; provided an educational service to the community; and worked with teachers to develop the future workforce.

Keywords: school/industry partnership, skills gap, college & career academies, business academy, career/technical education

Investigating the Benefits of a School/Industry Partnership

An abiding characteristic of American education is its continuous state of reform. It is near impossible to find a whole decade in which reformers, politicians, parents, and the citizenship-at-large were content with their schools. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 persuasively articulated a call for educational reform specifically in mathematics and science. This report claimed that public support was the greatest resource available to influence the quality of education (Burke, 1986). One way in which this public support can be effectively integrated into school improvement is through partnership arrangements. A decade after *A Nation at Risk*, Tushnet (1993) pointed out that educational partnerships had become popular fixtures in thousands of school systems. He noted that these partnerships connect schools to the human and financial resources outside their facility and that they will be necessary for schools to create and implement the type of education that students need to compete in the global economy.

For the last two decades, partnerships have been used as a means of overcoming identified educational problems (Barnett, Hall, Berg & Camarena, 2010). Educational partnerships have been recommended in federal statutes from the Higher Education Act of 1998 to the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Act of 2006 (Barnett et al., 2010) and in grant requirements. The Perkins Act focused specifically on the need to create school and industry partnerships to overcome what has come to be known as the skills gap. This skills gap, is often found in young adults who lack the technical (hard) skills and the essential (soft) skills that are needed for the available middle-class job openings, and it creates an imbalance of qualified workers for available jobs (Mills & Whitney, 2012). The researchers point to the increasing evidence of a skills gap in the United States workforce. Therefore, many schools and communities have engaged in forming school/industry partnerships. The logic behind school/industry partnerships is that the partners can provide "complementary capabilities and competences" in educating students in which the school alone has been unsuccessful (Watters, Hay, Dempster, & Pillay, 2013, p. 3).

Other countries have addressed their skills gap similarly. In Finland, Denmark, Germany Norway, and Switzerland, 40% to 70% of upper high school students participate in vocational education and workplace training (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011). The researchers noted that these education models culminate in qualifications, which are recognized in the labor market. Although each country has a well-developed system of school/industry partnerships, none are exactly the same. Australia is a leader in collaborative efforts between K-12, Technical and Further Education (TAFE), and Universities to meet workforce needs (Symonds et al., 2011). It is now common for over 90% of the students who were registered in studies for a diploma, or an advanced diploma, to be enrolled in TAFE institutions and participating in school/industry partnerships that supported their educational pursuits (Symonds et al., 2011).

The United States has lagged behind other countries in partnering with industry to prepare students for future careers by placing more emphasis on college attainment (Symonds, 2012). A contributing factor to America's delay in forming school-industry partnerships is that business leaders admit to potential liability issues as barriers to seeking partnerships with local school systems (Advisory Committee, personal communications, March 03, 2016). Although America has fallen behind in promoting industry partnerships, there are pockets of excellence

that dedicate themselves to being learning organizations that seek to do the best for students and often find themselves on the cutting edge of innovation. This research studied one such organization, a school/industry partnership.

Benefits of School/Industry Partnerships

School/Industry partnerships have many benefits. Cardini (2006) observed that partnerships are most often described with terms such as cooperation, trust, and confidence reflecting the relationships that exist between the partnering organizations. They allow educators to capitalize on learning opportunities that occur in the real-world setting of a partner's workplace (Watters et al., 2013). These researchers stated that sharing of knowledge becomes a process in which the school and the business develop and adapt specific content to address the needs of the workplace as it is required for learning to take place in relevance to the work environment. Partnerships between school and industry benefit students by providing learning experiences that occur in real-world work setting (Watters et al., 2013). The sharing of knowledge to accomplish the shared goals of training the future workforce, building skills, and fostering student success is the cornerstone of educational partnerships.

Such partnerships have been a documented part of U.S. history. In the late 1800s, industrial changes demanded that businesses partner with education in response to the emerging needs of the workforce. In the 1970s, partnership efforts were seen largely as public relations efforts in which businesses gave financial initiatives. In the 1980s, businesses acknowledged a lack in preparation of entry-level employees as the economy moved from manufacturing to service driven. Business-education partnerships began to explode in number as industry realized the need to regain a vested interest in preparing its future workforce. (Grobe, Curnan, & Melchior, 1990). Burke (1986) found that most business people and educators consider school-business partnerships as essential for developing the workforce.

Examining school/industry partnerships Figgis (1998) found that when the partnerships are viewed as strategic investments, benefits to the school and industry are amplified. However, he found that most business partners saw their participation in such endeavors as a service investment in their local educational system with no expectation of returns. The companies that comprised the cases that Figgis studied were astonished to realize over the course of the research they were in a win-win situation that reaped a variety of benefits including a clear investment in their future workforce. Figgis reported additional benefits for businesses to be: (a) community recognition, (b) productivity, (c) enhancement of the company's skill base, (d) more efficient and effective recruitment, (e) personal satisfaction, and (f) bottom line improvement. Likewise, partnerships provided many benefits for schools including delivering relevant, work-based learning environments in which concepts can be applied to real-world situations.

Although school and industry partnerships have been in place for many years and seem to be increasing, the research on them is somewhat limited. Additionally, the industries of today differ significantly from those of the last century, meaning that the structures, the foci, and the value of these partnerships may differ from the partnerships of the past. Educational partnerships continue to form and thrive due to the benefits they provide the participating organizations. As

Dhillon (2005) related, through working with others in a structured partnership the achievement and success of the individuals are much greater than working alone.

Purpose

The investigation focused on discovering the perceptions of benefits to the participants and organizations involved in a school-industry partnership. Participants were also asked to look at areas for improvement. The overarching research questions addressed were, What is working in this partnership? and What are the perceived benefits to participants and the organizations involved?

Setting and Background

The partnership examined in this research study was a joint project between a high school (grades 9-12) located in a small, rural city in southeast Alabama in the United States, and a local industry. The high school had approximately 720 students. Prior to the initiation of this partnership, only 35% of graduates went on to college and less than three-fourths of them graduated college on time. A few students consistently entered the military; others began working for minimum wage with the intention of beginning a two-year college the following fall; others took the year off from school and usually did not begin college for three or more years—if ever. Leaders realized that the data indicated that they were not meeting their objective of preparing students for college, career, and life with the current system of education. They began researching and visiting other systems that seemed to prepare their graduates for college and career. It became clear that something needed to change.

Leaders met to shape a new vision for education in the city. They spoke to teachers, students, and community leaders to gather perceptions and input. Some visited systems in New Jersey and Texas that were implementing career academies and brought back possibilities. After a year of research, educational leaders broadened their stakeholder discussions. The entire high school faculty was included in meetings and invited to visit career academies in Florida. Two bus-loads of community leaders were also taken to visit the career academies in Florida and had lunch with the community partners that supported the academies. Later, stakeholders including parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders held a visioning retreat. Shortly thereafter, the high school restructured its instructional program and set up academies.

Six career-themed academies were created and added to the Freshman Academy that had been in place for two years. The freshman academy was established to address a high failure rate and discipline incidents that occurred in the ninth-grade year. Since its inception, the freshman academy concept improved the promotion rate and lowered discipline issues that began in the freshman year. It became the primary place for career exploration and academy recruitment when the career academies were added. All of the academies had an advisory committee and some interaction with industry partners.

A representative from the local office of the large, primarily utilities company that later became the partner in this educational partnership study was included in an academy visit to Florida. The high school hosting the visit had a partnership with a similar company to support a

utilities academy. The Alabama business office manager was able to talk with the Florida business partner and to see the possibilities that could be gained from supporting a high school academy. Four months after the academy visit, the representative in Alabama invited leaders from the school system to meet with leaders from his company to discuss the creation of an academy at the high school to be sponsored by the company and supported by employees. A core team of three professionals, two from the company and one from the school system, was created to plan and implement the academy.

Officials from the company committed to provide human and financial resources as needed throughout all aspects of the academy. However, the school maintained that they believed the power in this partnership was the human factor. Teachers wanted the industry employees to mentor their students more than they wanted money to funnel into the program. The officials committed to hosting student field trips and student events to develop career awareness and expectations in the future workforce. In return, the academy carried the company's name and industry representatives became involved in working on curriculum and providing authentic learning opportunities for students in an effort to prepare them for college and career attainment.

The business academy became the case for this research. On-the-clock employees took part in providing industry awareness to students. Two ladies in the business office spent the day with the different business classes to teach how to create and use Excel to make work easier and more effective. When the students were marketing the school store and the Boosting Engineering Science and Technology (BEST) Robotics Team, employees from the marketing department came to discuss knowing your audience to reach them. Guest speakers throughout the school year came in to discuss topics such as building your resume, selling your strengths, and being a team player in life. A team of employees devoted two-days during both school semesters to participate in mock interviews for the academy students. Another team of two came to train the academy students in business etiquettes before the Networking Luncheon that the company sponsored twice a year. On the day of the luncheon, 20 to 30 company employees and local business people showed up to network and eat with the students and then grade them on their dress, conversation, poise, and manners. There were many other visits to classes where the employees shared their knowledge and talents and mentored academy students. When the students participated in after-school or weekend competitions, their mentors were often seen cheering the students on to success from the sidelines. During the first year, the only funds provided to the academy by the business was money for the food and paper goods for the luncheons. This partnership flourished as a result of the committed presence and participation of the industry's employees.

Methodology

This was a qualitative case study. The methodology combined multiple methods of data collection to acquire valid and reliable information on the educational partnership on which the study focused. Lincoln and Guba (1991) wrote that reality is dependent on one's perception. Therefore, this study incorporated the perceptions of the participants—every participant group contributed their voices.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was chosen as the research approach used because a partnership is a human system, and it grows in the direction of attention and focus (Shuayb, Sharp, Judkins, & Hetherington, 2009). The focus was on strengths in the people and the partnership rather than on finding a problem to fix. This approach was not an attempt to ignore challenges or difficult experiences. It was built on the premise that examining what is working provides a good starting point for the next transition or change (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Michael, 2005; Shuayb et al, 2009). As participants shared their stories, their voices were heard and they became part of the description of the organizational change being studied (Michael, 2005).

The research design engaged two of the four types of triangulation recognized by Denzin (1989). Methodological and data triangulations were used to attain a thorough and credible understanding of the benefits of partnership from the different perspectives of those who lived it. Triangulation was used to check and establish validity by analyzing each research question from multiple perspectives.

Data collection included interviews, observations, and review of documents. This study was comprised of three formally scheduled meetings with company employees and school administrators all signed consent forms before they were interviewed and were informed of their right to quit the study at any time. Informal conversations between the same participants and the researcher occurred throughout the school year on nine different occasions. Pre-existing data, which included transcripts of observations, student and teacher focus groups, and teacher interviews generated by the career academy director for academy evaluation purposes received analysis and interpretation through the lens of emerging findings within this study. Student reflections on presentations and events hosted by the industry partners were also pre-existing data reported through this study. Student perception and voice on the partnership captured from the school's academy evaluation supplied an important data source used in this study providing the student dimension to a school issue (Mitra, 2007). Copies of evaluation transcripts and reflections were made available to the researcher, void of any names or identifying tags. Transcripts of core partnership leaders from both the school system and the industry along with the pre-existing academy evaluation focus group transcripts, allowed for triangulation of multiple perspectives. Data gathering continued until saturation was reached confirming my interpretation without providing new discernments (Creswell, 2007).

The semi-structured interview method was used for addressing the research questions, and providing sufficient flexibility for discussions that developed around the participant's worldview on the topic (Merriam, 2009). All interviews were audio recorded, after obtaining the informed consent of each participant, and then transcribed by the researcher. During each interview, the researcher took field notes of any emphasis that the interviewee placed on spoken words, facial expressions, and noted non-verbal communications. All interviewees were offered their transcriptions via email by which to comment or clarify any point within the conversation. The interview transcripts were systematically analyzed using open and axial coding, which was developed by Strauss and Corbin and discussed in Creswell (2007). The coding was used to identify, categorize, and confirm themes that detailed the basis of the partnership and described the characteristics that illustrated benefits, strengths, and sustainability therein.

Findings

The data showed participants perceived many noteworthy benefits attributed to the school-industry partnership as a whole, instead of any single participant. Although the topics were varied, four main categories emerged. The four categories of perceived benefits are (a) Curricular Relevance, (b) World of Work, (c) Essential Skills, and (d) Industry. They are summarized in Table 1 and discussed in the section that follows.

Table 1
Perceived Benefits Reported by Participants

Curricular Relevance	World of Work	Essential Skills	Industry
Students view school as more relevant	Students learned real-world work skills	Students learned employability skills	Employees shared and grew
Students tried harder in school	Students explored a wide variety of careers	Students practiced professionalism	Employees addressed company's focus on education
Students talked to parents and counselors more about their plans for the future	Students clarified college and career readiness	Partners provided authentic audiences for communication and presentations	Employees provided an educational service to the community
Students talked more to parents about what happened at school	Students engaged in a reflective process on their decisions	Students learned the power of first impressions	Employees invested in the future of Alabama
Students engaged in thinking and learning	Partners provided work perspective to classroom projects	Students gained confidence	Employees and teachers developed the future workforce
	Students increased attainment of Microsoft credentials	Students learned the importance of networking and 'how to.'	
	Student behaviors improved outside of school	Students learned and practiced etiquettes and essential skills.	

Perceived Benefits Connected to Curricular Relevance

The high school decided to structure classes and pathways of learning around career-themed academies because they believed that providing career interest to all subjects would promote more engaged students in all classes by seeing the relevance of what they were learning to what they would do beyond high school. Thus, an expected outcome of the partnership was that it provided relevance to classroom learning through the employee mentorship. This benefit was perceived by the participants. A student summed it up in a focus group conversation:

> I think that having the business partners come in regularly to talk about their work experiences made school more relevant.

A teacher confirmed this prediction in her conversation:

> This partnership makes students see things as they are in the professional world…. Our partners provide relevance.

Regular exposure to multiple partnership activities seemed significant to student engagement in the academy and seeing relevance in what was learned at school.

> They [employees] also drive home why what we are learning in school is important! The more I am around them and hear them, the more I get it. – Student

Students in all focus groups reported that the business partners stressed the importance of high school subject knowledge and maintaining good grades. The partners explained how both would positively influence the students' futures. Students reported that they were trying harder in their core classes to attain higher grades and think a little deeper than before, because, they understood the importance of it all.

An unexpected result credited to this partnership was that students reported talking to their parents and counselors more about their plans for college and work. Examples of this came from student focus group and teacher interview transcripts.

> I think that working with the people from [the company] has made me talk to my mom more about what I want to do beyond high school. I see the possibilities. – Student
>
> I talk to my parents more, too, but about college mostly and the things I think I'll take. – Student

When my mom asks me what I did at school, I have more to talk about. – Student A teacher commented on the fact that she had received more positive feedback from parents this year as opposed to previous years. Here is one example:

> A parent stopped me in a store to tell me that she was not sure what we were doing at school this year, but her son was coming home excited about his day and what he was learning from business and industry people. It had given him a new outlook on what he was learning and he could finally communicate the relevance of the things he was learning. – Parent comment via Teacher

The students and teachers talked regularly about how learning seemed more relevant and interesting when delivered by someone from the workforce. Students began to see the connection between what was going on in the classroom and their interest for future employment.

> Speakers from [the company] come in and talk about real world experiences and opportunities. I think they will prepare us in a way that school cannot. – Student

Enhanced Understanding of the World of Work

The core team predicted that the partnership would provide information and experiences for students and teachers that connected them to the world of work. Career exploration is a primary goal of high school so that the world of work will not be so unknown and daunting for students when they are faced with the choice of what they want to be and where they want to work. The company appeared to be an excellent choice as an academy partner because it did not focus on just one type of job; the company employs came from multiple departments with varied skill-sets to fill a number of jobs to "keep the lights burning." The versatility and job experiences that each employee presented to students provided students with knowledge to make informed career choices and acquire the capacity to transition into those careers successfully.

> I used to think that [the company] was all electrical…I am learning that it offers me more…I can be anything in [the company]! – Student

Originally, students thought of the company as climbing poles and working with electricity. Many thought, "Why would I be interested in that?" One teacher explained the new understanding among students when she shared,

> The employees came and talked about the different jobs that are a part of within [the company]. Now students see that there are other jobs in nursing, business, engineering, and they are interested! The job opportunities are endless. – Teacher

The experiences they had also expanded students' perceptions of specific skills needed in the workplace, including specific work skills and personal attributes and skills that are required. Some student comments about this were:

> When the ladies from the business office came in to show us how they use spreadsheets in their job, the lesson became something that I need to learn because I will use it one day. – Student
>
> The marketing presentation stressed looking your audience in the eye, speaking clearly and slowly, and dressing and acting professionally. – Student reflection

Not predicted was the influence that the partners had on the increased number of students credentialing in Microsoft Office Suite, which is an opportunity provided by this career academy. The industry partners value credentials in their employees and spoke about them regularly to the students. Their interest in credentials was addressed in conversation with students by the industry partners.

> By working hard and obtaining the credentials that are available through my courses, students can get a good job with a good future. The employees have reinforced this by sharing stories of hiring people with high school diplomas and credentials, and then providing on-the-job training and growth incentives. – Business, Marketing, and Administration Teacher

The teachers appreciated the attention that the industry partners gave to the importance of credentialing. This appreciation was talked about in observations and in interviews. Students also talked about the role that the partners played in encouraging them to credential.

> [The Program Director] talked to us about the importance of credentials every time she spoke to us. – Student
>
> Our teachers encouraged us to earn credentials all the time; the partners supported that message every chance they got. – Student

Students in the academy earned more than three times the number of credentials than the previous year's business program students. Two of the students earned the credential of Microsoft Office Specialist Master, which is the highest level of Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification offered.

Data from this study suggested that the partnership with professionals provided motivation and a better understanding of what is expected of entry-level employees. Students regularly mentioned that the partners discussed requirements for being hired, which include basic skills, police reports, drug tests, and credit reports. Many students did not realize that employers check this information on employees. Students began to think more about their past behaviors and the importance of making the right decisions in a timely manner. Thus, the partners provided a stimulus that engaged the students in reflective processes. They were able to imagine themselves in situations that were never before seen as possibilities. They also recognized potential losses due to bad behavior. One teacher stated that she saw students who developed bigger dreams due to the possibilities that the industry partners presented to them.

> We don't get a lot of experience at school as to how it is on the job. I feel like we are the future of America and this is an outstanding privilege to be a part of the business world now through our partnership. – Student

Perceived Benefits Connected to Essential Skills

Knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and in the labor market take precedence in the education of a high school graduate. Teachers teach employability skills, which are called essential skills in this paper, and plan opportunities for students to use them regularly throughout the high school experience. The academy partners provide additional real-world experience in which to practice using essential skills. This research seemed to show that the more that students practice essential skills such as decision making, trustworthiness, work ethics, and problem-solving the better they work and are identified as leaders. The frequency of the use and application of essential skills within this school-industry partnership was an unplanned bonus for the students and teachers. An administrator who interacted regularly with the students participating in the partnership stated that she believed that the attainment of essential skills was the absolute best result to come out of the interactions.

Students also seemed to notice the benefits of being exposed to regular interactions with business representatives as demonstrated by the following statements.

> School feels more professional when our partners are here. – Student
> I think that the partnership has taught me the power in first impressions. A smile and a firm handshake can set the tone for business and how your associates view you. – Student
> Communication and presentation are things [the business partners] talked about often. You have to be able to communicate with a wide variety of people and to present yourself and your ideas in ways that interest others. – Student

A history teacher reported that after a visit from [the company] employees, a student came to her class and commented that he had never been around people that spoke like the people from [the company] except for his teachers and, with them, it was different.

The two networking luncheons that [the company] sponsored provided opportunities to practice essential skills over an extended period of time with a variety of adults. Students, teachers, and administrators voted the networking luncheons the most memorable moments within the academy. Two [company] employees came to the school prior to each event to go over rules of etiquettes and how to professionally network at a social function. They discussed with students how to dress and mingle, and how to eat at a formal affair. The students asked questions, created a Google document with additional questions and the two ladies answered every question. A teacher remembered:

> When the bus load of students arrived, they were greeted by about 30 employees from [the company] and the local community. The students were to walk around introducing themselves and carrying on conversations with as many adults as they could in the twenty-five minutes prior to the meal. You could see them relaxing as time went by, then they tensed again when it was time to sit down and remember all that they had learned about table etiquettes. By the time we reloaded the bus; the students had a new sense of confidence in their practiced communication skills. – Teacher

The same teacher later commented:

> A board member and the mayor who had both attended the luncheon stopped me in town to talk about how much they thought about the networking luncheon experience and how beneficial they felt that it was to the students. – Teacher

The week following the first networking luncheon, a student who participated was asked what his most memorable activity in the academy had been. His answer provided poignant insight into the influence that the partnership had on his life.

> The thing that I think I have learned the most from is the networking luncheon. After seventeen years, I learned how to eat! The ladies taught us a lot, and then we dressed up and practiced what we learned. My family was so excited about what I was learning that I taught them how to eat the next day. We practice what we learned every night now, together. – Student

[The company] seemed to come to this partnership committed to do whatever it took to succeed, including attending to the broader view of student development. This commitment was evidenced in every employee that came to share with the students. Students benefitted by wanting to succeed, having a bigger picture of success, and knowing that more than just their test scores were deemed important. As one student stated.

> They are preparing us for business no matter where we go. – Student

Perceived Benefits Connected to Industry

Research has shown that educational partnerships enhance classroom opportunities for students and afford teachers and business partners with chances to develop new skills in new ways (Dhillon, 2005 & 2013; Tushnet, 1993). The benefits to industry that were identified in this study were that employees shared and grew from their interactions with the students; employees addressed the company's focus on education when they provided an educational service to the community through their participation in the academy; employees invested in the future of Alabama when they invested in its students; and this partnership allowed employees to develop the future workforce.

When the [the company's] representatives were asked why they chose to participate in this educational partnership, they gave the following answers:

> This is a win-win project! We involve our employees because it is developmental to them. When we bring someone in for a specific task, they are the best to ask. Often, they have never shared what they do before coming to the school. We know the value of interacting with others…now we have a place for many of our employees to share and grow. – Program Manager
>
> We want to be the support that our community needs. When we strengthen our communities, it strengthens our company. – Business Office Manager

When asked what benefits they have received from the partnership the two core partners replied:

> We always hear about the 'bad kids.' We always hear how teenagers today have no drive and they just don't care. Our employees, that participated in the luncheon, walked away saying that not any of the kids at the luncheon were 'bad kids.' The academy kids aren't like that; they have drive and determination to achieve. It is kind of like the butterfly effect; with just a little push we can give them the wings that take them forward. – Program Manager
>
> Our future is in good hands. These kids will invent and think of things we never could. We are in good hands. This was the "ah-ha moment" for me. You don't hear about the good. Good doesn't sell papers. But our kids are good. There are some bright minds out there, we don't ever hear about. – Business Office Manager

Possibilities for Partnership Improvement

Throughout the implementation year of the academy, the school administration and teachers asked students to provide input by reflecting on activities, speakers, and solutions to the regularly asked question, "What do we do next?" A major emphasis in academy building is to generate pride and belonging to the group. Students and teachers who were asked their opinions and then saw their voice create change seemed to become active in the change initiative. A natural question for the evaluation team to ask at the end of the implementation year was, "How would you like to see the partnership grow?" The following are some contributions from teachers.

> I would like for the employees to come in for more activities like they do for the networking luncheons to model professionalism and community service to our students. – Teacher
>
> I think that the mock interviews for my students now mean more with the employees a part of the panel. I want to do more activities like this. – Teacher
>
> I would like for different partners to come in when we are doing specific projects and teach the lesson instead of telling us about how they use the tools we are learning to use. I would like to see them take on the mentor role, because our students seem to enjoy that interaction the most. – Teacher
>
> When the students were asked if they had any ideas for growth or improvement for the academy partnership, they shrugged their shoulders and shook their heads. One student volunteered Everything that we did this year has been great! I still want to do the field trips, the motivational assemblies, the lessons on Excel, and business etiquettes…and especially the networking luncheons, but I would like to add even more. – Student

Another student commented,

> I feel like this is the first year of the academy and the prelude to what is to come. It is hard to suggest things to change. Right now it is still too new. I don't want to change anything. – Student

The core team members from [the company] talked with the researcher about how they would like to see the partnership grow and change. The program manager stated that it is hard to say how we would like it to change, because it is always changing. Everyone agreed. Then, she thought about it and quantified:

> I think I would like to grow this across academies. We had one young lady that was in the STEM Academy and the Business Academy. She came to several of the events in the Business Academy. I would like that to happen more. If we can influence more students in different academies, I would like to grow in that direction. – Program Manager I would also like to bring people from other divisions who have ties in this area back to speak on their life experiences. We have some very interesting employees that can really aid us in what we are doing. We can reach farther within our company for resources. – Program Manager
>
> I think that we need to document the partnership more through pictures, videos, and news articles. That way we could recapture the events. – Business Office Manager I would like to see [the company] influence other businesses to partners like this in a career academy. They may not be a full sponsor, but a partner in the learning. Every business will bring something to the academies that none other can. I would like to increase participation in the academies for the sake of the students. – Program Manager

Discussion

An educational partnership provides learning benefits to its participants by offering pathways that are seen as engaging and relevant to life beyond high school. Participants asserted that the partnership provided relevance to classroom learning. Business partners easily drew clear connections from what students were learning in school to how it would be used in the world of work. Students talked openly about how what they were doing in class made sense to them as far as why they needed to learn it. This impact may have occurred because interactions with business partners provided a connection to the real world that motivated and clarified learning that under regular classroom circumstances may have felt disconnected for students. Career and Technical Education (CTE) was reported to add relevance to learning in core subjects. Taking into account the number of visits by industry partners, field trips, and the networking luncheons, this research indicated that the level of benefits realized by students correlates to the amount of exposure to industry partners. The academy director commented one day that the teachers and students were noticing that everyone from [the company] spoke the same language and walked the same walk. Everyone from [the company] that visited the classrooms shared the same message—it was a powerful teaching tool.

The greatest and most unexpected result of the partnership was the growth in essential skills that was seen in the academy students. The teachers and administrators reported that the students exhibited the greatest increase in confidence, communication skills, employability skills, and understanding of why the essential skills are important as compared to previous yearend results. This outcome could be described as inevitable since a multitude of professionals

spoke with and worked with students on a regular basis. Regular practice with essential skills with adults through professional interactions would logically lead to students acting in confident, professional ways. The program manager was observed by the researcher and described by a teacher to be comfortable correcting minor mistakes in communication and explaining the expectations in the professional world. The students seemed to respect the program manager and the other employees that worked with them. Their respect led them to emulate and work to meet the expectations of the business partners. Therefore, implications of this finding are that knowledge in essential skills transfers to students in regular, professional interactions with industry partners within a school-industry partnership. The teaching of essential skills became a regular conversation among teachers and administrators. It was believed that essential skills were important enough to be evaluated, so CTE teachers worked with their administrator to develop a rubric to assess workplace skills in students.

Students and teachers believed that the partners influenced the students' acquisition of industry related credentials. This result could be due to the fact that the program manager made it her mission to discuss the importance of credentials each time she talked with students. Other employees talked about the job-embedded credentials earned and the increase in salary or position that resulted. When something, such as credentialing, has attention called to it regularly it gains the students' attention. When told over and over that it is an irrefutable accomplishment that will positively affect your future wage earnings, it is understandable that students would devote more time to earning the credentials. The credentialing attainment of the participants affirm the maxim that "the more you hear something from people you revere, the quicker you learn it—or believe it—and then act on that learning."

Students, in grades 10 through 12, reported that they had talked with their parents and counselors more this year than ever before about their plans for college and work. This benefit was a result of engaging students in learning and providing them a believable picture of what they could do. When students were exposed to life beyond the school walls, they began to understand what was important, and to plan what they would do to navigate previous insurmountable barriers. It was also believable that if students were talking more about their future in school, they continue that discussion at home. Simply talking about college does not guarantee that it will be attended; however, without such discussions, it would be hard to imagine that a commitment to attend college would likely occur. Therefore, the number of students that stated they were talking about college with counselors and parents was a positive accomplishment of this partnership and an essential first step for the students.

The data spoke to the fact that students need high levels of exposure to industry partners to increase their interest in school and in their future. Students reported that they could see the connection between what they were learning in school and where they will go in the future, because of the association with business partners. This benefit likely occurred because the partnership experiences, unlike the traditional school activities and curriculum, afforded a link to the real world that motivated students who may feel marginalized otherwise. Watters et al. (2013) found that partnerships that provided students with both in-school and work-based-learning experiences could significantly enrich learning results and aid transition into a related career. Partnerships, such as this one, also assisted students in understanding expectations and industry culture.

A noted benefit to both organizations was the opportunity to self-reflect and to ask how the partnership can become better. Self-examinations set up a system for examining different ways of relating to internal departments, external partners, and the community. A partnership can be a medium for institutional reform and/or improvement.

There were not a lot of suggestions for improving the program. Participants seemed to primarily want to expand it. This may be because the program was in its first year and there were so many positive aspects to it that it was difficult for those involved to identify potential or real weaknesses. It would be beneficial to provide additional opportunities for discussion about this in the future and perhaps to conduct individual survey of all those involved on an annual basis.

Implications for Future Research

Future research of this academy partnership is needed. A study over multiple years to include quantitative data is encouraged to add the statistical data of participant test data to the perceptions of the participants. A longitudinal study of the partnership to determine whether facilitating factors, benefits, and outcomes are maintained and changes made over time is recommended.

When other school partnerships are formed with this particular industry, year one implementation research would be a good comparison to this study. This would help determine whether another school-industry partnership yielded similar results in participant-perceived benefits. It would also be advantageous to replicate this study with other school/industry partnerships in different fields and verify or refute the findings of this study. There is a need for additional qualitative research on school-industry partnerships that looks at successes and sustainability. Not all partnerships are the same, so it is recommended that researchers look at the differences. Much can be learned from the differences discovered in partnerships. It might also be advantageous to examine the elements that specifically foster school-industry partnerships and those that hinder its success.

Conclusion

The language of partnership is powerful when implemented in practice. Benefits seemed to abound for the participants of this academy partnership. Everyone spoke of benefits that they personally received from their participation. The voices of participants were powerful and told the story very well. An educational partnership was seen, through this study, as building relationships to educate the youth of a community. The value-added idea of partnership was clearly understood through the voices of the participants in this study. A couple of closing remarks from students in this partnership and one from the program manager captured the essence of these feelings.

> I would like the employees to know that I really appreciate what we have seen so far, and I appreciate the time that they give to prepare us for what work is like. – Student
>
> It is an outstanding privilege to be a part of this academy. – Student
>
> This is a sustainable, continuing project for [my company] as long as the high school feels that we are valuable. It is worth continuing. – Program Manager

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Perceptions of Succession Planning in Four Florida School Districts: A Mixed-Methods Study

Christopher M. Parfitt
Florida Gulf Coast University

Abstract

Through a mixed-method study, perceptions of succession planning were researched in four Florida school districts. The study was conducted in two phases. First, 99 participants responded to an online survey, which contained 44 items in five categories. Analysis indicated no statistically significant differences among independent variables. Respondents indicated input, development, and review of a succession plan were conducted infrequently, while opportunities for development and a clear list of the qualifications for administrative positions occurred frequently. Second, 11 individuals participated in an interview. Qualitative findings included five themes. Complete findings may be used by school district administrators to address succession-planning issues.

Keywords: succession planning, educational leadership preparation, leadership development, pipeline, mixed-method study

The term succession planning evokes greatly varying responses from people, and implementation of succession plans are widely varied. Lost productivity and lack of direction from poor succession could quickly doom a for-profit enterprise to failure (Lewis, 2013). While Neefe (2009) stated that formal succession plans have been utilized by businesses for more than 30 years, succession planning in the field of education has often been nonexistent. The lack of planning has often yielded poor results for schools (Fullan, 2005). However, the field of education has slowly begun to adopt models and practices long employed by other disciplines (Riddick, 2009). To ensure sustainability in school leadership, succession plans need to be created in advance, and must account for the organizational culture (Fullan, 2005).

Need for Further Research

Chavez (2011) provided a framework for succession planning with three major components: (a) identification of top talent, (b) targeted development, and (c) retention of the highest performing employees. Beeson (1998) agreed and contended the succession plan had to account for all levels of the organization, and warned against presenting generic management training instead of specific and targeted opportunities. The concept of replacement planning in which one individual was identified for succession was no longer an effective strategy (Beeson, 1998; Conger and Fulmer, 2003). Conger and Fulmer (2003) also stressed the importance of a systems-oriented approach for the succession-planning process. Furthermore, Beglinger (2013) postulated that potential candidates had to be prepared for positions of greater responsibility knowing that some will leave to accept promotions with other organizations.

I could not locate any study conducted on perceptions of succession planning through a quantitative or mixed-methods approach. A mixed-methods approach will permit an examination of perceptions of leadership candidates, assistant principals, principals, and principal supervisors on the processes of identification, development, and retention, while considering organizational sustainability through the culture as an overarching theme.

Statement of the Problem

Overlapping themes are distinct in the academic literature, though a clear definition of succession planning is not evident. Furthermore, in-depth studies into succession planning in educational organizations were limited. Four examples were found in which succession planning was examined from a qualitative perspective (Hengel, 2007; Riddick, 2009; Steele, 2015; Thomas, 2011). Other authors addressed specific aspects germane to succession planning in schools, such as mentoring and professional development (Brittingham, 2009; Drago-Severson & Aravena, 2011). Therefore, a study to examine the perceptions of various employees in a school system regarding succession planning would provide beneficial insight. From the literature, four research questions were developed.

Research Questions

1. How do school administrators define succession planning in their schools and school districts?
2. Are the requisite components, as identified by Chavez (2011): identification, development, and retention evident for a succession plan to yield quality results?
3. Do the stakeholders (principal supervisors, principals, assistant principals, and leadership candidates) involved in the succession plan view the process as successful?
4. In what ways do participants believe that succession plans be improved?

Significance of the Study

In an era of high-stakes testing and accountability measures, school system administrators cannot afford to choose the wrong person to lead a school. The importance of the principal on student achievement is evident from Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), who ascribed a .25 effect size to the principal.

Using Chavez's (2011) three points for succession planning, in conjunction with Fullan's (2005) focus on organizational sustainability, and Rothwell's (2005) process for creating a succession plan, an instrument was developed to assess an educational organization's succession plan (Parfitt, 2017). Results can be used to modify and strengthen succession planning for various administrative positions in the educational organization.

Review of the Literature

Chavez (2011) addressed the importance of succession planning for future growth using three components for succession planning. The first component was to identify the organization's emerging leaders. She described the characteristics of emerging leaders as openminded, visionaries, who took risks while being respected because of core values. The second component was the engagement and development of employees at each organizational level. She recommended a combination of traditional and non-traditional methods, including opportunities within and external to the organization. The third component of the succession-planning process was to retain the highest performing employees in the organization, as the return on investment was much greater for retention of proven talent, rather than attempting to recruit top talent.

Early succession planning can be traced to the research and development board established by the National Security Act of 1947, which produced the first study on succession planning (Zaich, 1986). The modern concept of succession planning was derived as a function of human resources development theory in the mid-1950s and changed over time. From inception in the 1950s, the focus evolved into technology-based employment planning in the mid-1960s, to a focus on "manpower" in the early 1970s, and eventually toward more comprehensive human resources planning in the 1980s (Zaich, 1986). Although the focus had changed, the core components were evident through the various iterations. Succession plans was primarily utilized by governmental agencies, businesses, and non-profit entities (Riddick, 2009).

Succession Planning in the Business Discipline

Although Neefe (2009) stated that succession planning had been employed in the business discipline for over 30 years, the implementation has been inconsistent. Gurchiek (2015) cited a survey conducted by XpertHR, in which 58% of 505 major corporations did not have a succession plan in place. Furthermore, of the organizations with succession plans, 9% focused solely on senior executive positions, 20% focused on critical positions, and 33% were in various stages of creating a succession plan. Failing to have a robust succession plan can be detrimental to an organization. McDonald (2015) described "the pain felt watching a star employee walk out the door with no backup in place is immediate and costly" (para. 2). The lack of planning was most detrimental at senior executive level.

In addition to the focus, the scope of succession planning has changed over time, as well. Succession planning in the 1950s and 1960s was focused almost exclusively on the chief executive positions; whereas, through human resources planning in the late 1970s and 1980s, the focus was broadened to include the needs of the entire organization (Zaich, 1986). The trend continued into the 1990s, as Beeson (1998) contended a quality succession plan must address each level of the organization; not just focus on executive succession.

Beeson (2000) further opined that succession planning had undergone another change at the turn of the 21st century. Fast-paced and unpredictable change had rendered the models used over the previous quarter-century obsolete. Retention of top talent became a focal point, and organizations took greater risks in promoting people before they were deemed fully ready. Because of uncertainty, quality succession planning became even more important. Because of which, McDonald (2015) stressed the importance of having several qualified people ready to assume senior executive positions. As Cappelli and Hamori (2004) noted, failure to deliver on promises of upward mobility was the prime reason executives left a previous organization. However, Conger and Fulmer (2003) reviewed the readiness of selected individuals, and discussed the lack of development as a reason for high-profile failures from CEOs who were the identified heirs-apparent. The challenges faced in succession planning were not unique to the corporate sector.

Succession Planning in Non-profit Entities

Many non-profit entities have also adopted principles of succession planning. In reviewing succession planning for human services organizations, Gothard and Austin (2013) stated that the executive and board of an organization are responsible for preparing for the planned and unexpected exit of a top executive. Because of the nature of a non-profit organization, the discussion of succession strategies had to include the members of the governing board early; otherwise, challenges from the lack of a succession plan magnified issues for the organization upon the departure of the executive. Schall (1997) contended that public-sector organizations faced two problems that businesses did not in managing succession: (a) limited access to search technology and professional search firms, and (b) a lack of understanding of how to conduct a strategic search process. Despite these challenges, the scope of action could not be limited by frequent problems faced by the organization.

The current executives were responsible for creating an environment conducive to leadership development in a nonprofit setting; however, boards were often uncomfortable with the fact that turnover increased due to employee marketability (Gothard & Austin, 2013). Smeltzer (2002) believed employees had to be prepared for higher positions, knowing some of them would leave to pursue positions with different organizations. Having a pool of trained employees, of which some will leave, was better than having no potential successor after the unexpected loss of an executive.

Succession Planning in Education

As Riddick (2009) posited, the field of education had been slower to embrace succession planning. Without mentioning the concept directly, Fullan (2005) addressed the lack of succession planning. Without describing succession planning, he focused on the failure to perpetuate a sustainable culture, which stemmed from a lack of planning. When there were no measures to ensure a sustainable culture in place, Zepeda, Bengtson, and Parylo (2012) contended that rapid turnover of principals—which they defined as four years or less—resulted in an adverse negative effect on student achievement and school culture. Because of the increased responsibilities, greater accountability for student achievement measures, and long working hour, the desirability of the principalship has diminished. With a perception of the position as principal being less desirable, there were fewer qualified candidates to assume administrative roles.

As an example of Riddick's (2009) contention that education has been slow to adopt principles of succession planning, Zepeda et al. (2012) focused significantly on replacement planning. Beeson (2000) asserted that business models for succession planning had moved away from replacement planning before the turn of the last century. However, Zepeda et al. (2012) also included a need for development of candidates.

Qualitative succession-planning studies in school districts.

In three large school districts, Riddick (2009) interviewed two senior-level administrators from each district and conducted follow-up interviews with other personnel to triangulate the data. She found that administrators from all three school districts believed succession-planning strategies were employed and effective, yet none of the administrators could produce any formal documentation or used a process to evaluate the effectiveness of the implied succession plan. According to Riddick (2009), officials of one of three school districts stated that opportunities for teachers to earn a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards licensure was a succession-planning initiative. The administrators interviewed also erroneously cited turnover data for principals as evidence of succession planning; however, no data were available for other positions.

Stressing the importance of development, Riddick (2009) found evidence of sustainable collaborative programs between one of the school districts and a local university. Depending on budget allocations, funds were available to offset the cost for teachers to complete a cohort-based leadership program. However, identification of talent was lacking, as rigorous selection processes for future leaders were limited, or completely absent (Riddick, 2009). There was no

mention of retention in Riddick's (2009) dissertation; though, the importance of finding the right person to maintain the organizational culture was evident.

Steele (2015) also conducted a multiple case study analysis and interviewed 10 principals. None of the administrators indicated a formal succession plan had been utilized; though, all 10 principals had served as assistant principals. Participants indicated frustration over inconsistent hiring practices. Furthermore, while a majority of the respondents indicated a future plan to retire, or a desire to seek a promotion into a district-based administrative role, none were actively seeking an employment change.

While none of the individuals were seeking a change in employment, there were several aspects as important to success in roles as administrators. Mentoring and networking were cited as major themes, as all respondents indicated a reliance on mentors. Mentors included colleague principals, former supervisors, and current principal supervisors. Respondents also indicated an obligation to train the next generation of principals (Steele, 2015). Despite the small sample size, Steele (2015) generalized that serving as an assistant principal was useful in training future principals, because most of the respondents were promoted within the same building. Transparency with the succession-planning process was not evident in any case; however, all stakeholders would have benefitted from transparency in the process (Riddick, 2009; Steele, 2015).

Succession planning in Canadian school systems.

Hengel (2007) studied a Canadian school system's effort to understand why teachers were not pursuing administrative opportunities. Throughout the study, he also interviewed individuals who were seeking promotions to administrative positions. Hengel (2007) cited several factors that yielded a positive influence on potential candidates to pursue administrative positions, these included support from colleagues, professional development opportunities, and leadership opportunities, both formal and informal.

Current principals needed to recognize the accomplishments, and leadership activities of current staff members to assist in identifying potential leadership candidates. Furthermore, current principals needed to encourage potential candidates to pursue leadership opportunities. Once identified, leadership candidates needed specific and targeted professional development opportunities. The organization's top leadership had to support development opportunities by providing growth opportunities, providing release from certain duties, and providing financial support (Hengel, 2007). Hengel (2007) specified retention of school administrators as an important research implication; however, he did not provide any specific information about retention efforts in the Canadian school districts.

Thomas (2011) conducted a case study to analyze efficacy of succession planning in school systems located in Alberta, Canada. He addressed the important aspect of identification of candidates and indicated the need to hold the proper degrees and credentials; however, ascribed the responsibility of identifying candidates solely to the principal. The rationale was based on interviews with superintendents who specified the job of identification of future leaders belonged to the principal. A reliance on a direct supervisor as the only source of talent identification

contradicted the best practices identified by Beeson (1998), who specified that subjective personal factors influenced decisions more so than an objective assessment of ability and skills.

The superintendents interviewed by Thomas (2011) indicated their district-based leadership training programs were successful; however, the evidence was not empirically based, and relied on assumptions of quality because internal candidates who attended the district-based programs filled all vacancies. One important aspect identified by Thomas (2011) was the importance of quality training programs at the university level coupled with mentoring by successful administrators.

Challenges to Succession Planning in Education

Ambiguity in subordinate administrative positions.

Instability within the organization often resulted from the ambiguity in subordinate administrative positions. Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary, and Donaldson (2001) cited that professional development and formal training focused on the role of the principal. Specific professional development focused on the assistant principal role was extremely rare, and in most cases non-existent. Because of the lack of specific training and development to become an assistant principal, there was a lack of understanding and clarity of the role.

Rintoul and Goulais (2010) examined moral decision making by vice principals in Canadian schools. The respondents all conveyed a sense of ambiguity in the role, and specified their roles were dependent upon the leadership style of the principal. Oleszewsku, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) also asserted the role of the assistant principal varied from school to school, and in agreement with Hausman et al. (2001), the role was not clearly defined. As a recommendation, the role of the assistant principal needed to be clarified with specific boundaries, and a clearly defined role. Any restructuring had to be consistent with the culture of the school; however, a focus on shared or distributed leadership was beneficial for student learning (Oleszewsku et al., 2012).

Leadership experience was important. Santacrose (2016) indicated prior leadership experiences influenced the confidence of assistant principals to perform successfully in the role. Mentoring and support were also needed to help novice assistant principals build confidence and competence and overcome feelings of isolation and anxiety. An increased sense of self-efficacy was developed by novice assistant principals through support from principals, fellow assistant principals, leadership team members, and assigned mentors. A long-term strategy was needed to help develop knowledge and skills, as well foster the socialization into the position.

Lack of a consistent vision.

Lee (2015) asserted that poorly managed succession quickly destroyed progress built over several years and greatly affected faculty and staff members. Some faculty and staff members were affected disproportionately; Meyer, Macmillan, and Northfield (2009) found that younger teachers were affected more by the uncertainty of poorly planned succession of principals. Not only for younger teachers, lack of stability and administrative support was a

leading reason for faculty departure, as Steele (2015) asserted that teachers were more likely to seek employment elsewhere when a change in principal is made in three years or less. Hargreaves (2005) stated that moving a successful principal from one school to address problems with another had contributed to discontinuity and prevented lasting improvement. He contended a principal should remain in a position for five years or more. Even though the time in position should be increased, Hargreaves (2005) also echoed Fullan's (2005) assertion for leaders to plan for a departure from the organization from the beginning of one's tenure in the position. A key strategy for an organization to deal with the loss of a dynamic leader was to utilize more distributed leadership opportunities (Hargreaves, 2005).

While analyzing challenges for incoming principals, Lee (2015) described three scenarios for incoming principals: (a) planned continuity, (b) planned discontinuity, and (c) unplanned succession. Planned continuity ensured succession of principals, while keeping the same direction and overall goals. Planned discontinuity allowed for a smooth transition to a new principal, yet allowed him or her to make changes in the organization; often times to turn around a declining school, or push a good school toward status as high achieving. Both methods provided for support from various stakeholders, and also time to prepare for the transition. Those appointed to positions without any preplanning were often consumed by day-to-day tasks, which prohibited enactment of meaningful change initiatives. Even though planned discontinuity involved appointing a new principal to bring change to the organization, the individual had support, and was better prepared for the task. Planned continuity provided the least resistance to an incoming principal, as the vision was compatible with the vision and goals of the outgoing principal (Lee, 2015).

Developing a Succession Plan

According to Rothwell (2005), effective succession plans frequently exhibited all or most of 15 characteristics: (a) participation of senior management, (b) benchmarks and needs assessments, (c) a developmental focus, (d) dedicated responsibility, (e) emphasis at all organizational levels, (f) a systemic approach, (g) analysis of future potential, (h) a timeframe for high-level replacement, (i) accountability to prepare successors, (j) specific training and development, (k) continual performance of current employees, (l) an understanding of the specific culture, (m) critical review of procedures, (n) focus beyond the next promotion, and (o) formal mentoring. Beeson (1998) noted an important factor in succession planning; the most successful organizations developed talent at each level of the organization, and did not simply focus on grooming a CEO, which aligned with several characteristics identified by Rothwell. Conger and Fulmer (2003) called a flexible systems-oriented approach to development of employees as the fundamental rule. Rothwell (2005) listed a systemic approach as one of the characteristics of an effective succession plan. Conger and Fulmer (2003) also stressed the importance of specific development over replacement planning, which solely focused on providing a list of names of top-tier candidates.

Combined with an assessment of organizational culture, a quality succession plan includes measures for organizational leaders to identify candidates, provide targeted training and development, and retain the most promising employees (Chavez, 2011). Only when organizational culture is considered in conjunction with each component, can a succession plan

yield effective results (Griffith, 2012). Using the scholarly research pertaining to effective succession planning, I developed an instrument to assess perceptions of stakeholders pertaining to succession planning (Parfitt, 2017). Using Lawshe's (1975) content validity ratio, the items were reviewed by a panel of experts. The panel results indicated the instrument had content validity and reliability.

Research Method

Rationale and Characteristics of a Mixed-Methods Study

A mixed-methods study was chosen to provide a quantitative analysis of survey results from current school administrators, aspiring school leaders, and principal supervisors, along with qualitative data to yield in-depth responses from participants identified through survey results. Creswell (2012) rationalized the purpose of mixed methods research as an alternative to pure quantitative or qualitative studies, and as a method to provide a better understanding of the problem. Torrance (2012) asserted that mixed-methods research had a long history in program evaluation; the proliferation of usage has spawned specific techniques and associated vocabulary.

The study was designed as sequential-explanatory, which Creswell (2012) defined as research in which quantitative data are collected first and prioritized in analysis. Then, qualitative strategies are used to explain and clarify the quantitative results. Torrance (2012) believed mixed-methods research should focus on triangulation through comparing and contrasting data, with the findings being useful at the local level.

The first phase of data collection focused on the quantitative data obtained through administration of an electronic survey to reveal perceptions of various groups of stakeholders surrounding succession planning in their respective school districts. A case study approach was used for the second phase. Creswell (2013) contended a case study is useful when the concept being studied was bound by a specific time and place to reveal natural generalizations. Yin (2009) cited an examination of a decision-making process as a case to be studied. While Stake (1995) delineated case studies into two categories: (a) intrinsic and (b) instrumental. An intrinsic case has unique interest and must be defined and detailed. An instrumental case is used to analyze a specific problem or issue. Because different school districts were studied, the approach was labeled as a multiple-instrument case study, which Creswell (2013) defined as a collective case study.

Research Design

A purposeful sampling of respondents for the qualitative portion were identified through a question on the electronic survey asking if the respondent would volunteer for a follow-up interview. Creswell (2013) recommended selecting participants to yield maximum variation in responses; though, he did not specify an acceptable sample size for a case study. Stake (1995) and Yin (2009) also did not provide specific guidelines for sample size. Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbon (2015) contended qualitative research authors did not provide recommended sample sizes, because qualitative research is not intended to yield generalizable results. However, through a synthesis of sources, Gentles et al. (2015) listed an acceptable sample size as

four to 10 for a multiple case-study approach. As Creswell (2012) recommended, care was taken to ensure data were collected ethically and respectfully.

Once the quantitative data were analyzed through a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) for differences between age range, current level, current position, district, gender, and years of experience, I created qualitative questions based on the results. After identifying the potential participants, I contacted each through e-mail, and arranged a time and place for a personal meeting, or via video conference. Upon completion of the interview, all participants had the opportunity to member check the transcription of their individual responses (Creswell, 2013). Data from the qualitative interviews were triangulated with the quantitative survey results, and any written documentation provided by a human resources administrator for each school district.

Instrument

The purpose of my study was to determine how administrators and administrative candidates defined succession planning, and if the school districts in the study were implementing succession planning. The framework for the survey is shown in Figure 1.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">⇦ Organizational Culture ⇨
• Norms
• Values
• Beliefs</td></tr>
<tr><td>Identification of Talent
• Multiple measure
• Internal and external
• Open-minded and willing to take risks
• Passion, courage, and integrity</td><td>Development of Talent
• Specific and targeted
• Knowledge, skills, and dispositions
• Coordinated
• Formal and informal mentoring</td><td>Retention of Talent
• Valuable employees are rewarded
• Evidence of high-quality employees staying</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 1. Succession-planning framework

Procedures for Data Collections

Institutional Review board approval was obtained before any research was conducted. Prior to distributing any surveys, or conducting any research, I sought approval from the superintendent, or appropriate designee from each school district to distribute surveys to principals, assistant principals, principal supervisors, and aspiring leadership candidates. An informed consent agreement was provided along with the survey instrument, and no personally identifiable information was used in the manuscript.

Collection of Data

The use of an electronic survey allowed me to disburse the instrument quickly and collect results efficiently for phase one. The survey is divided into five sections, with the first section devoted to demographic information. The second through fifth sections contain items to identify

perceptions of how the characteristics of effective succession plans are utilized in the educational organization. The survey items were developed using a five-point Likert-type scale (Parfitt, 2017).

Qualitative data were collected through interviews. Questions were open-ended to allow for the respondent to provide information without being influenced. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Results of the interviews were analyzed for themes. Triangulation was used to reconcile the quantitative and qualitative data (Torrance, 2012).

Data Analysis

An adequate number of responses were required. Respondents were given two weeks to complete the initial quantitative survey. A follow-up message was sent after a week; however, two of the participating school districts specified no follow-up requests were to be sent. At 100 respondents, Creswell (2012) indicated a confidence level of +/-9%. Survey data were analyzed using separate MANOVAs, descriptive statistics were utilized to present trends from the quantitative data. Differences in responses by organizations, gender, years of experience, age range, and the different levels of position were analyzed.

Follow-up interviews were transcribed for qualitative research. Creswell (2012) recommended focusing the qualitative data collection on elaboration and in-depth exploration. Therefore, the qualitative data analysis was used to identify themes, which explained and elaborated on the results identified through the quantitative survey. Finding reoccurring clusters among the transcripts was an important component to qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2013). Silverman (2000) believed in the importance of analyzing elements from an interview, not merely listing information.

Establishing Validity

The survey instrument was designed based on the characteristics identified in the review of the literature. An expert panel reviewed the contents of the instrument for validity. Each item was reviewed for job-essential content validity using Lawshe's (1975) content validity ratio (CVR), and the content validity index (CVI) was calculated for the instrument (Lawshe, 1975). The CVI for the survey is .91. To demonstrate validity and reliability for the survey instrument, Gilbert and Prion (2016) recommended a CVI of .80 or higher. After validation, the survey was administered to a small pilot group of 12 assistant principals and leadership candidates before full distribution. The pilot responses indicated there were no ambiguous items. For further detail on the validation process, see Parfitt (2017).

Triangulation was used to establish validity for the qualitative items (Torrance, 2012). Triangulation included the survey results, and the documentation provided by the human resource administrators from the school districts. Creswell (2013) recommended triangulation as one strategy to validate qualitative research. He also recommended employing "member checking" as a method of validation. Member checking is achieved by asking participants to review transcribed materials to confirm accuracy of statements.

Limitations

A potential delimitation included the fact the survey was only distributed to current administrators and leadership candidates. Other limitations included the reliance on the individual organizations to identify leadership candidates, and provide a list containing contact information. Two of the school districts did not permit a follow-up request for participation, and therefore the completion rate for the two school districts was lower. Limitations may affect the generalizability of the study. Future studies may reveal additional information.

Results

The purpose of the study was to identify to what extent succession planning was utilized in four school districts in South Florida, and to analyze the perceptions of various stakeholders on the fidelity of the process. There were 99 respondents to the survey, and 11 individuals participated in a follow-up interview—with a minimum of two from each district, one from each school level (i.e., elementary, middle, & high school), and one of each position.

Quantitative Findings

Among the four school districts, 659 individuals were asked to participate in the study, and 99 completed the online survey (15.02%). Principal supervisors had the highest percentage of respondents with 18.75%; however, because fewer individuals hold the positions, the number of respondents was the lowest of the four categories ($n = 3$). Leadership candidates comprised the only category of participants who were not active administrators. The number of respondents by school district are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Number of Respondents by School District

Level	District A	District B	District C	District D	Total
Supervisors	0	1	2	0	3
Principals	3	1	7	9	20
Assistant Principals	15	3	8	17	43
Leadership Candidates	7	0	0	19	26
Other	0	1	2	4	7
Combined	25	6	19	49	99

The distribution of age ranges was approximately normal. Age ranges of respondents are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Age Ranges of Survey Respondents

Age Range	Number	Percent
25 to 34	20	20.2%
35 to 44	28	28.3%
45 to 54	35	35.4%
55 to 64	14	14.1%
65 or older	2	2.0%

Time as an administrator was skewed, as the second largest demographic of respondents, leadership candidates had zero years of experience. Table 3 shows the years of administrative experience of respondents.

Table 3
Years of Experience for Survey Respondents

Years of Experience	Number	Percent
0 to 2 Years	42	42.4%
3 to 5 Years	22	22.2%
6 to 10 Years	14	14.1%
11 to 20 Years	14	14.1%
21 or More Years	7	7.1%

Among respondents, females (n = 71) outnumbered males (n = 28), 71.7% to 28.3%. With the exception of principal supervisors, females outnumbered males in every position category. Current school level for respondents is shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Current School Employment Level of Respondents

School Level	Number	Percent
Elementary School	49	49.5%
K-8 Combination School	7	7.1%
Middle School	10	10.1%
High School	22	22.2%
Central Office	7	7.1%
Other	4	4.0%

Findings based on talent identification.

Participants answered 12 questions focused on the identification of talent in the organization. The survey item responses ranged from (a) never, (b) rarely, (c) sometimes, (d) frequently, to (e) always, with an option of selecting not applicable. Descriptive statistics are provided for each category and include the mean and frequencies. The answer choice *Never* was assigned one point, and at end of the continuum, *Always* was assigned five points. Results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Number and Percent of Responses from Identification of Talent Questions

Item	Never		Rarely		Sometime		Frequently		Always		M
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
I-1: The school district has a formal succession plan in place.	11	11.1	9	9.1	23	23.2	19	19.2	26	26.3	3.45
I-2: Resources are devoted to develop high-quality leadership candidates.	1	1.0	7	7.1	33	33.3	32	32.3	25	25.3	3.74
I-3: Assessment of candidates is based on multiple sources, not just a recommendation from the direct supervisor.	4	4.0	3	3.0	28	28.3	23	23.2	39	39.4	3.93
I-4: Potential Candidates are encouraged to seek leadership development opportunities early in their careers.	1	1.0	12	12.1	30	30.3	34	34.3	21	21.2	3.63
I-5: Future career aspirations are sought from all faculty and staff members on a routine basis.	5	5.1	23	23.2	41	41.4	23	23.2	5	5.1	3.00
I-6: Stellar candidates are considered to be organization-wide assets.	2	2.0	7	7.1	26	26.3	38	38.4	24	24.2	3.77
I-7: The organization looks for people with passion, courage, and integrity.	2	2.0	4	4.0	26	26.3	29	29.3	36	36.4	3.96
I-8: Individuals are encouraged to take risks.	3	3.0	15	15.2	41	41.4	29	29.3	9	9.1	3.27
I-9: Open-mindedness is considered to be a desirable trait.	1	1.0	10	10.1	31	31.3	38	38.4	17	17.2	3.62
I-10: Newly promoted or transferred administrators are trustworthy, humble, and authentic.	1	1.0	3	3.0	47	47.5	32	32.3	11	11.1	3.52
I-11: All aspects of the succession plan are transparent.	8	8.1	20	20.2	34	34.3	23	23.2	8	8.1	3.03
I-12: The succession plan is clearly communicated to all stakeholders.	11	11.1	22	22.2	31	31.3	20	20.2	10	10.1	2.96

Note. M = Mean

The mean score for the category was 3.49. Question I-12*, the succession plan is clearly communicated to all stakeholders* was the only question with a mean score less than 3.0 (*n* = 2.96), and seven of the 12 questions had a mean score greater than 3.50.

Findings based on development and mentoring.

Questions pertaining to development and mentoring comprised the largest category with 14 items. The questions utilized the same five-point Likert-type scale as the talent identification questions. Descriptive statistics for development and mentoring are shown in Table 6. Question D-14, *who is involved in selecting leadership candidates?* is omitted from the table because the answer choices were: (a) principal, (b) central-office administrator, (c) colleague, (d) university professor, and (e) other, and the participants could select multiple answers.

Table 6
Number and Percent of Responses from Development and Mentoring Questions

Item	Never		Rarely		Sometime		Frequently		Always		M
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
D-1: An established succession plan is conveyed clearly to all stakeholders.	11	11.1	18	18.2	26	26.3	21	21.2	8	8.1	2.96
D-2: Succession plan results are reviewed regularly.	11	11.1	13	13.1	25	25.3	19	19.2	6	6.1	2.95
D-3: Constant follow-ups occur to ensure the success of the succession plan.	8	8.1	20	20.2	25	25.3	17	17.2	7	7.1	2.94
D-4: Succession plans are reviewed based on organizational performance.	9	9.21	15	15.2	25	25.3	20	20.2	7	7.1	3.01
D-5: Developmental high-leverage assignments are identified for candidates to develop needed knowledge and skills	3	3.0	15	15.2	40	40.4	24	24.2	5	5.1	3.15
D-6: Specific assignment to high leverage opportunities is available.	2	2.0	18	18.2	33	33.3	27	27.3	5	5.1	3.18
D-7: A specific person or office coordinates development assignments.	6	6.1	5	5.1	21	21.2	31	31.3	17	17.2	3.60
D-8: Clear feedback is provided to leadership candidates.	3	3.0	15	15.2	35	35.4	23	23.2	11	11.1	3.28
D-9: Specific skills and competencies are identified for administrative positions.	1	1.0	9	9.1	18	18.2	33	33.3	28	28.3	3.88

Table 6 Continued
Number and Percent of Responses from Development and Mentoring Questions

Item	Never		Rarely		Sometime		Frequently		Always		M
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
D-10: Participation in professional organizations is encouraged.	1	1.0	14	14.1	21	21.2	30	30.3	23	23.2	3.67
D-11: Formal mentoring opportunities are arranged.	3	3.0	14	14.1	36	36.4	18	18.2	17	17.2	3.36
D-12: Informal mentoring opportunities are available.	2	2.0	9	9.1	30	30.3	29	29.3	19	19.2	3.61
D-13: A robust, formal leadership development program is in place.	4	4.0	17	17.2	21	21.2	29	29.3	14	14.1	3.38

The mean score for the development category was 3.31. Questions D-1 through D-3 each had a mean score lower than 3.0, and Question D-4 had a mean score slightly over 3.00. All four questions pertained to establishment, review, and conveyance of the succession plan. Question D-9, *specific skills and competencies are identified for administrative positions* had the highest mean score for the category (n = 3.88). Questions D-11 and D-12 focused on mentoring opportunities. Informal mentoring, question D-12 had a higher mean score (n = 3.61) than formal mentoring (n = 3.36).

Findings based on retention.

The retention of talent questions comprised the smallest category with four items. The same Likert-type five-point scale was used for questions in the identification and development sections. The results for retention questions are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Number and Percent of Responses from Retention Questions

Item	Never		Rarely		Sometime		Frequently		Always		M
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
R-1: Rewards and recognition are clearly given to valuable employees.	2	2.0	22	22.2	46	46.5	11	11.1	8	8.1	3.01
R-2: High performing employees are encouraged to stay in the organization.	2	2.0	9	9.1	31	31.3	26	26.3	21	21.2	3.62
R-3: There is evidence of high performing employees staying in the organization.	0	0.0	5	5.1	32	32.3	37	37.4	12	12.1	3.65
R-4: Administrative vacancies are filled by qualified, internal candidates.	2	2.0	6	6.1	39	39.4	34	34.3	8	8.1	3.45

With a category mean score of 3.43, the retention category was the only category to have the mean scores from all questions exceed 3.0. Question R-3, *there is evidence of high performing employees staying in the organization*, was the only question in the survey in which no participant selected "never" as an answer.

Findings based on organizational culture.

The category included seven questions. The items used the same five-point Likert-type scale as the identification, development, and retention categories. The results for organizational culture questions are shown in Table 8.

Table 8
Number and Percent of Responses from Organizational Culture Questions

	Never		Rarely		Sometime		Frequently		Always		M
Item	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
C-1: Executive administrators appear to value succession planning.	1	1.0	10	10.1	30	30.3	25	25.3	9	9.1	3.41
C-2: Growth and improvement are clearly high priorities of the organization, and fostered appropriately.	1	1.0	7	7.1	24	24.2	34	34.3	18	18.2	3.73
C-3: A person from outside the organization would be hired for a position, if he or she had superior credentials, and was the appropriate fit.	2	2.0	8	8.1	34	34.3	25	25.3	15	15.2	3.51
C-4: Succession plans are made with the input of all stakeholders.	10	10.1	23	23.2	23	23.2	14	14.1	6	6.1	2.78
C-5: Succession plans consider the unique organizational culture.	6	6.1	7	7.1	35	35.4	20	20.2	6	6.1	3.18
C-6: Executive administrators have visible input into the selection-planning process.	3	3.0	7	7.1	23	23.2	27	27.3	11	11.1	3.51
C-7: Executive administrators are open and honest about challenges and issues.	2	2.0	16	16.2	29	29.3	21	21.2	10	10.1	3.27

The mean score for the category was 3.34. Question C-4, *Succession plans are made with the input of all stakeholders* had the lowest mean score ($n = 2.78$) for the category and for entire survey. Only three questions in the category had mean scores greater than 3.50.

Multivariate analyses.

A one-way MANOVA was conducted to analyze differences among responses by district. No significant differences were found ($p > .05$). Separate one-way MANOVAs were also

conducted for age range, current level, current position, gender, and years of experience. There were no statistically significant differences found, as all *p*-values were greater than .05.

Quantitative summary.

Because there were no statistically significant differences among any of the independent variables, the quantitative analysis focused on questions in each category with the lowest and highest mean scores, as well as the category mean scores.

Qualitative Findings

Based on analysis of the survey responses, I created qualitative questions for a follow-up interview. The final question from the online survey asked if the individuals were willing to participate in a face-to-face or video-conference interview. A total of 11 of participants were interviewed. Creswell (2013) recommended selecting participants with diverse experiences and viewpoints. The participants covered all job positions, all school levels, all age ranges, both genders, and a wide range of years of experience. Seven of the participants were selected from the two larger school districts because of the sizes. Table 9 includes the demographic results for the interview participants. The participants are only identified by an interview code, age range, range of experience, and current employment level.

Table 9
Interview Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Age Range	Gender	Years of Experience	Current Setting
LC-1	25-34	Female	0 to 2	Elementary
LC-2	35-44	Female	0 to 2	Elementary
LC-3	25-34	Female	0 to 2	Middle
LC-4	35-44	Female	0 to 2	Middle
AP-1	55-64	Female	0 to 2	Elementary
AP-2	35-44	Male	6 to 10	High
AP-3	35-44	Female	3 to 5	Elementary
P-1	45-54	Male	3 to 5	High
PS-1	65+	Male	21 or more	District
PS-2	45-54	Male	21 or more	District
PS-3	45-54	Male	11 to 20	District

Note. LC = Leadership Candidate, AP = Assistant Principal, P = Principal, PS = Supervisor

Qualitative themes.

All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. Each participant had the opportunity to member check by reviewing the transcription of his or her interview; provide clarification or further insight. Transcripts were read multiple times, and then coded for themes. Based on the coding of the interview results, five major themes emerged: (a) culture, (b) mentoring, (c) lack or resources and job complexity, (d) situational input, and (e) a lack of input.

Culture.

Although the MANOVA from the quantitative results did not indicate any statistically significant differences among respondents, one major difference between smaller and larger school districts, the importance of considering culture for administrative positions was apparent through the interview process. A principal supervisor aptly described the reason, and indicated that "one of the advantages of being a small district is that there is a small enough group; we know one another, see everyone in the community." The downside for smaller districts was the lack of resources and time for having robust leadership development opportunities.

The respondents from larger districts indicated there was often a lack of consideration for the unique organizational culture of each school when new administrators were hired. The process for selecting administrators was very political, and greatly influenced by one's connections and networking abilities. Respondents agreed that assessment of talent occurred from multiple perspectives; however, the multiple perspectives were almost always current principals and central-office administrators. Parents and students were rarely involved, and colleagues and community members were only peripherally engaged.

Mentoring.

Every participant agreed that informal mentoring occurred more frequently than formal mentoring. There were myriad reasons listed, including: (a) convenience, (b) time, (c) location, (d) comfort level or trust, and (e) a need to build upon skills. The level of comfort and trust were important aspects. An assistant principal indicated "you have to be willing to jump in the fire at any time, and ask questions when you don't have someone immediately at your side." One of the principal supervisors relayed the widely varying situations an administrator might encounter, "especially beyond the formal training requirements, all the different things no one told you about."

Self-advocacy was cited as a necessary trait, as was the importance of networking. One of the leadership candidates indicated there was pressure to have a wealth of experiences, more so than the experiences from a leadership preparation program. An assistant principal indicated that one had to advocate and network to find proper mentors. One of the leadership candidates captured the essence of informal mentoring with the belief that "you have to go out and search for people who are willing to invest in you and help build you to be what you need to be."

Lack of resources and job complexity.

A lack of resources and times were addressed in the cultural theme; however, in a larger sense, lack of time and resources were a consistent theme for leadership development opportunities. Many of the respondents felt the programs were designed to meet the required mandates from the State Department of Education, not to provide needed professional development. One of the principal supervisors indicated the developmental program for principals existed because of the state requirements, but "it has never been the quality program, we would like it to be." Therefore, the respondents believed the process was not robust enough, and needed to be strengthened.

Complexity in administrative positions added a challenge in developing and mentoring new administrators. One of the assistant principal described the phenomenon well:

> I feel because the job itself has so many vast responsibilities, that training for each of those responsibilities is almost impossible. There are so many moving parts. It is great to "target this right now," but that is just one piece of the 300.

The number of aspiring leaders seeking leadership opportunities add to the complexity. One of the leadership candidates asserted there was a lack of high-leverage assignments because so many people were seeking the opportunities. The issue of complexity is compounded through the very diverse school settings for which administrators need to be prepared.

Situational input and preplanned transitions.

Depending on the context and the situation, many respondents indicated they had some input into the succession planning process, and some of the transitions were preplanned. However, the decision-making authority rested with a senior administrator, and there was no guarantee the input would be honored. However, there was evidence of identifying and preparing new leaders from current administrators.

Lack of input.

All of the assistant principals indicated a lack of input into training and professional development. One of the assistant principals stated, "I don't think at the assistant principal level, they have ever been asked how can things be improved." Leadership candidates felt a similar lack of input or even knowledge of the process. One leadership candidate indicated, "I think it is literally those people in that bubble, that's who knows what is going on. No one else knows unless they are supposed to know."

Most of the respondents from the larger districts indicated that many administrative hiring decisions were political. One of the leadership candidates described the sentiment, "I don't think it is fair that they post positions that we know are already filled." Another leadership candidate agreed by stating, "I would say it is very political in terms of who you know." One of the assistant principals agreed, "there are some administrators that are not held to the same criteria."

Triangulation of results.

A single document outlining a succession plan was not located for any of the school districts. Policies and processes for leadership development, as well as strategic planning initiatives were available for some of the school districts. A strategic plan goal for one school district was to expand leadership development programs for assistant principals and principals, which was to be aligned with the district leadership evaluation model. The material for the programs for development of principals and assistant principals focused on the requirements, specified the outcomes of the programs, and indicated alignment with the Florida Principal Leadership Standards (Florida Department of Education, 2011). In addition, a handbook was available for mentoring new principals.

Materials for another school district indicated the school district had a leadership development program for preparing new assistant principals, preparing new principals, supporting new principals, and developing experienced administrators. The available documentation also indicated the programs focused on the 10 Florida Principal Leadership Standards (Florida Department of Education, 2011). A strategic goal for the school district was to attract and retain high-quality administrators; however, no detailed steps were provided.

Discussion

Succession planning is a function necessary for organizations to move forward by having a pipeline of qualified applicants at every level of the organization (Beeson, 1998). As Neefe (2009) believed, education as a field has been slow to adopt models of success from other disciplines. Therefore, I focused on the perceptions of administrators and leadership candidates in four school districts toward the concept of succession planning.

How is Succession Planning Defined?

In the literature, a lack of a consistent definition for succession planning led to inconsistent findings, which were summarized by Steele (2015), who believed that education professionals were unfamiliar with the terminology associate with succession planning. Echoing the research by Steele (2015), one of the leadership candidates stated, "this is bad to admit, I had to look up to see what the term succession planning meant." Based on the response, Steele's (2015) assertion that educational professionals may not be familiar with the terminology traditionally accepted by other disciplines was confirmed.

From the responses to the survey, respondents believed their districts had some type of a succession plan, yet the plans did not include input from all stakeholders, and were not conveyed to all relevant stakeholders. The theme was highlighted by multiple respondents from the interview phase of the study. Rothwell (2005) listed 15 characteristics of effective succession planning, and several were not evident through survey results or follow-up interviews. From the triangulation of documents, and follow-up interviews, the school districts focused on preparing and developing principals, with some evidence of programs to create pools for potential assistant principals.

One of the pool admission requirements was a recommendation from the current principal. Beeson (1998) contented sole reliance on evaluations from direct supervisors was a very poor source of talent identification. Based on survey and interview responses, multiple sources were used during the identification process; however, in most cases, only principals or senior administrators were involved. Of the survey respondents, 72.7% indicated the principal and central office administrators were involved in identifying talent, and only 17.2% indicated colleagues had any input. Two of the qualitative themes addressed pool requirements, the political facet relating to culture of larger districts, and a lack of input.

Formal plans were not evident beyond documents for state-mandated principal preparation and administrative pool requirements. Two separate principal supervisors indicated their districts needed to adopt a more thorough and systematic plan. While there were pool

processes for principals and assistant principals, the required training appeared to be generic, which directly contradicts the best practices identified by Beeson (1998) and Chavez (2011). However, some of the documents from the larger districts for entry into the pool indicated applicants had to write individualized plans to demonstrate competency.

Are Succession Planning Components Evident?

Defined skills and competencies for administrative positions and coordination of leadership opportunities received high survey scores, yet opportunities for growth, formal mentoring, and a robust development program received low scores. As indicated in the interview responses, input was not solicited from school-based administrators on training needs. Although documents for admission into the administrative pools indicated a plan for addressing specific growth needs, none of the interview participants indicated receiving target professional development.

The retention category was the only category in which all questions had a mean score of 3.00 or greater. Evidence of high performing employees being encouraged to stay in the organization and evidence of employees remaining in organization were the questions with the highest mean scores for the category. Beeson (1998) and Chavez (2011) addressed the importance of retaining the top talent in the organization. Through the follow-up interviews, several administrators indicated they would make recommendations for internal promotions; however, the decision rested with senior central-office administrators.

Hargreaves (2005) indicated that all stakeholders needed to provide input to ensure maintenance of the culture was achieved through succession. During the follow-up interviews, principal supervisors from the smaller districts indicated culture was considered during administrative appointments; however, a lack of time and resources often prohibited a robust identification and development program. Whereas, respondents from larger school districts indicated a frustration with the political aspect of administrative appointments, and contended there was a lack of consideration for the unique school culture from senior administrators.

Do Stakeholders View the Process as Successful?

From the follow-up interviews, at each level, respondents indicated a need for more robust succession-planning processes. The survey respondents deemed some aspects were successful, and indicated the specified qualifications and competencies were identified for administrative positions. According to respondents, potential leadership candidates were encouraged to seek administrative opportunities early in their careers, and newly appointed administrators were trustworthy, humble, and authentic. The newly appointed administrators were able to receive support, as opportunities for informal mentoring were shown through the survey responses.

There were many challenges identified, as well. Riddick's (2009) contention that educational organizations were slow to adopt succession-planning models was evident through interviews with principal supervisors. One of the principal supervisors in a small district indicated the preparation program for principals was in place to meet the guidelines from the

State Department of Education, and the assistant principal training program was nonfunctioning. While several interview respondents indicated having some input with the choice of a successor, an element of uncertainty existed because senior administrators might not honor the input. Interview respondents from larger districts also expressed concerns pertaining to the lack of consideration for the unique school culture when new administrators were hired. As demonstrated through survey results and through follow-up interviews, certain groups of stakeholders were not involved in the succession-planning process. Hargreaves (2005) contended that all stakeholders need to have input.

How Can the Process be Improved?

The qualitative theme of a lack of input is a major impediment to succession planning, as reflected during the interviews. The comments mirrored the contention by Hausman et al. (2001) that training was focused on the job functions for the principal, not for the role of the assistant principal, or other subordinate administrators. An assistant principal believed administrators needed training on engaging stakeholders. The additional training would help to bring more stakeholders into the succession-planning process. One of the leadership candidates indicated more information needed to be provided to all stakeholders.

Bringing stakeholders into the process is important; however, engagement cannot occur without a written plan. During the interviews, several of the respondents commented about a need for a well-documented plan. Furthermore, the plan needed clearly outlined goals, and procedures to meet the goals. A leadership candidate echoed the position that a plan should not just be established, but also implemented fully. Another leadership candidate believed implementation of a succession plan would mitigate the political aspect of positions and assist in building a positive culture in which dedication is valued.

As evidenced through one of the qualitative themes, establishing succession planning as part of the culture is needed. A principal supervisor believed succession planning must be in the forefront every day, and not exist as an ancillary item. Another principal supervisor stated that plans had to be reviewed annually with adjustments to the plan be made as needed. To have a robust plan, individualized development is essential. Though additional professional development does not necessarily equal better, as Beeson (1998) warned against substituting targeted professional development with generic training.

Training was also needed for formal mentors. Bengtson, Zepeda, and Parylo (2013) cited the importance of having a robust formal mentoring program for new principals. One of the leadership candidates stated there needed to be follow-through and accountability for formal mentors. Accountability for preparing the next generation of leaders was cited by Beeson (1998) and Rothwell (2005) as extremely important facets to succession planning. The results from the survey and the interviews highlighted the importance on Beeson's (1998) assertion that a succession plan must address every level of the organization.

Implications

The results of the study reflect a lack of comprehensive succession planning in four school districts. Based on the four components of effective succession planning, some of the best practices identified in the literature were not evident. Administrators at all levels of a school district can use the results of this study for strategic planning, creating and revising succession plans at the district-level, providing targeted development and mentoring opportunities for teachers and administrators in schools, and strengthening measures to retain high-quality employees at all levels.

While the identification of talent, development and mentoring, and retention of high-performing employees are all vital components to creating a quality succession plan, consideration for the unique organizational culture is critical. As one of the leadership candidates described during an interview, there is a need for new administrators to understand norms and beliefs of the school, and to recognize the established traditions.

Recommendations

As indicated through the survey results, respondents believed succession plans were inadequately conveyed, did not consider input from all stakeholders, and did not consider the unique organizational culture of each school. Therefore, senior school district administrators need to engage all stakeholders in the process of creating, conveying, and revising of succession plans. Specific goals and procedures need to be established for the identification and development of leadership candidates. True multiple measures for talent need to be considered for identifying future administrators. While development plans addressed transitions from teacher to assistant principal, assistant principal to principal, and mentoring new principals, there was no indication of professional development for principal supervisors.

The culture of each school is unique, and succession plans must address the complexity and specific organizational culture. Informal mentoring was frequently cited as necessary because of time, convenience, and need for self-advocacy. However, some participants sought informal mentors because the assigned formal mentors did not adequately serve in the required capacity. As Rothwell (2015) indicated, supervisors need to be held accountable for training new leaders. Bengtson et al. (2013) also stressed the importance of matching mentor to protégé. Practical issues including a lack of resources for succession planning efforts can be addressed through creative approaches.

Limitations

The survey and subsequent qualitative interviews were limited to four districts in South Florida; though, with 99 survey respondents, the population sample was sufficient to yield generalizable results, albeit with a +/-9% confidence level (Creswell, 2012). I am presuming all respondents answered questions truthfully. A total of 26 leadership candidates completed the survey, and are not practicing school administrators, which may be considered a limitation. However, the limitation is mitigated, as Conger and Fulmer (2003) and Rothwell (2005) stated the importance of transparency and engagement at all levels.

The 99 respondents from a population of 659 yielded a response rate of 15.02%. Baruch and Holtom (2008) asserted response rate was only one indicator of quality. One recommended analysis to mitigate for potential bias was to compare early responses to late responses. In this study, no noticeable differences were evident. Another factor was to consider non-respondents. Since response rates were similar for all four categories within the population, the possibility of bias in responses was lessened. Also, electronic surveys typically have lower response rates than hard-copy surveys (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). Nulty (2008) agreed that online survey response rates are traditionally lower; therefore, additional methods of evaluation were needed to confirm findings.

For two of the districts, participation was requested through a district central-office administrator, and that fact could have influenced several participants. However, those school districts distributed the survey directly, as a condition of agreement.

While this study was focused on perceptions surrounding succession plans, the scope of the survey interviews was limited to practicing administrators, and leadership candidates aspiring to obtain administrative positions. The perceptions of classroom and specialty teachers were not reviewed, nor were the perceptions of students, parents, support staff members, business partners, and other stakeholders.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations, future research recommendations include:

1. Examine perceptions of school board members, teachers, students, parents, support staff members, business partners, and other various stakeholders to broaden the perception of effectiveness.
2. Specific quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies can reveal important information surrounding, (a) identification of talent, (b) development and mentoring, and (c) retention of high-performing employees.
3. A study can be conducted to analyze the concept of succession planning to include recruitment and selection of teachers, and the impact on the organizational culture.

Conclusions

Succession planning is vital for ensuring high-quality candidates are prepared to assume positions of greater responsibility at every level of an organization. A quality succession plan contains measures to identify potential candidates, provide for development and mentoring, and retain the highest performing employees. Across all three components, the specific organizational culture is honored.

The quantitative and qualitative results confirmed there are gaps in every component in the each of the four school districts. As school districts continually strive for improvement, the results contained in this study can be used to develop and strengthen quality succession plans. As Owens and Valesky (2015) defined organizational culture as the norms, values, and beliefs of a school, they also contended that an administrator must understand and strive to shape the culture in a positive manner. Only by understanding the organizational culture, can a succession plan yield effective results.

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Self-Advocacy and Post-Secondary Success of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Andrew Nelson
Marshall University
Charles Bethel
Marshall University

Abstract

Administrators in secondary and post-secondary education are supporting increasing numbers of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who are interested in attending college or other post-secondary settings. Self-advocacy skills play a critical role in the academic and non-academic success of students with ASD. Few, if any, studies have been conducted to examine tools or procedures to help school systems determine the self-advocacy skills of their students with ASD. This study built on existing research in college supports for individuals with ASD by examining the utility of a specific survey to assess self-advocacy factors that affect student success. Administrators in Bengaluru, India used the survey to sample educators' perceptions of the self-advocacy skills of their transition-age students with ASD. Results from data collected suggest that this survey could be used to determine the overall likelihood of postsecondary success of a student group based on several key self-advocacy indicators. Specific self-advocacy domains needing increased support were also generated by the survey. Implications for secondary and post-secondary leaders interested in developing the self-advocacy skills of their students are discussed.

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Self-Advocacy and Post-Secondary Success of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Nearly 500,000 young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) will make the transition to adulthood in the next decade in the United States. Neurodiverse people, including those with ASD, face challenges as they make this transition; struggles with post-secondary education, employment, living arrangements, community participation, health, and safety are commonly reported (Roux, Shattuck, Rast, Rava, & Anderson, 2015). Young adults with ASD in transition often find themselves with little or no support after leaving their childhood homes as the structured programs and entitlements of young life disappear. Self-advocacy and self-determination skills have been shown to play a vital role in navigating this transition period as students with ASD access resources and make important life decisions (Ryan & Griffiths, 2015).

Self-advocacy has countless definitions in the research literature. For the purpose of this work, the authors defined self-advocacy as the ability to communicate one's wants and needs (Paradiz, 2009; Paradiz, Kelso, Nelson, and Earl, 2017; Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005). Successful self-advocacy often relies on the degree to which a person has developed competencies in the following three areas: self-awareness, or knowing one's strengths, tendencies, and needs; competence, or having the tools to advocate for oneself; and autonomy, or initiating advocacy on one's own behalf, independent of prompts or cues (Paradiz, 2013). Disclosing one's diagnosis to others and developing self-advocacy plans and scripts are also important skills in one's self-advocacy repertoire (Paradiz, 2009).

Self-advocacy involves more than just asking for help. Awareness of the laws and policies relevant to one's diagnosis is crucial, as is active participation in meetings to determine one's life course (Shore, 2004). Greater self-advocacy leads to positive increases in self-concept, leadership ability, belonging, and one's impact on community (Paradiz et al., 2017; Ryan & Griffiths, 2015; Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman, 2015). Self-advocacy training and support for people with ASD is not limited to youth in transition or adults and can begin to inform the lives of children with ASD as well. Paradiz et al. (2017) stated that "self-advocacy requires that a young person with autism develop awareness of his or her needs, preferences, interests, and rights and build competencies in implementing strategies to attain them" (p. 3). Self-advocacy goals are recommended across broad categories as young people with ASD prepare for transition (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016).

Self-determination, or the ability to set and pursue one's goals (Ryan & Griffiths, 2015), is closely related to self-advocacy. Wehmeyer (1992) defined self-determination as "the attitudes and abilities required to act as the primary causal agent in one's life and to make choices and decisions free from undue external influence and interference" (p. 305). Teaching and supporting self-determination skills during times of transition can lead to improved outcomes in employment and financial independence (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Paradiz et al. (2017) stated "ensuring that students with autism not only understand their differences, but also have the liberty and power to act on their needs and rights, is one of the most essential lessons we can impart to them before they transition to adulthood" (p. 8). Self-determination, in concert with self-advocacy, is essential to effective leadership which can be seen as collective self-determination (Johnson, 1999).

Significant numbers of the 500,000 transitioning young adults with ASD in the United States are likely to pursue post-secondary options in the next decade. Secondary and postsecondary administrators and personnel will play ever-increasing roles in the preparation and support of said students. Several key factors associated with successful college experiences have been identified through research by pioneers in the field of college programming for students with ASD. Ellison, Clark, Cunningham, and Hansen (2013) identified self-advocacy skills as necessary for academic and non-academic success for college students with ASD. A Delphi survey panel of experts agreed that self-advocacy is a top challenge for college students with ASD (Ellison, 2013; Ellison et al., 2013). While self-advocacy is recognized as critical for postsecondary success, an established process or tool for assessing the self-advocacy skills of transitioning students with ASD does not exist. The need for such a protocol is especially paramount in situations where assessing large groups of students from school districts or counties is required for targeted self-advocacy training and support.

Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of a survey tool for assessing self-advocacy and related skills of a group of transition-age students with ASD. Specifically, researchers were interested in educator responses to survey items tied to a variety of self-advocacy domains and the utility of those responses for generating training plans for students and school systems. The research questions were:

1. Can survey data on the self-advocacy skills of transition-age students with ASD provide indicators about the likelihood of that group's post-secondary success?
2. Can specific self-advocacy domains be identified as possible areas for targeted training and support to help educational systems better prepare students with ASD for success in post-secondary settings?
3. Do educators want greater support in their students' self-advocacy preparation?
4. Are educators open to receiving self-advocacy training and help from adults with ASD?

Setting and Participants

The authors of this report have been involved in various educational projects outside of the United States. For one author, projects included multiple trips to South India to support people with ASD (Ramamoorthi & Nelson, 2011) and provide training for educators and families. Self-advocacy, self-determination, and leadership opportunities for individuals with ASD seemed low or non-existent in many of the schools and communities visited during those trips. As a result, planning and coordinating efforts were increased to design programs to help school systems and students better understand self-advocacy. Partners at the ASHA Assessment, Training, and Guidance Centre in Bengaluru, India hosted a three-hour self-advocacy workshop for special educators in July of 2017. Twenty-four autism educators from the city of Bengaluru attended the workshop.

Materials and Procedure

A brief survey tool called the *ASD Self-Advocacy and Leadership Survey* was designed by the authors and shared with the ASHA Assessment, Training, and Guidance Centre. The

survey had 23 questions, used a combination of percentage and yes/no questions, and had been piloted with special educators in the United States prior to use by the ASHA Centre. Educators who taught students with ASD ages 14 and above were asked to volunteer to take the brief survey following the three-hour workshop in Bengaluru. The age of 14 was chosen as the student cutoff as it is widely recognized as the beginning of transition for young adults in the United States (Roux et al., 2015). Of the 24 total educator attendees, 46% (n = 11) completed the survey. The ASHA Assessment, Training, and Guidance Centre hosted both the workshop and study, and permission to share data results was granted to the authors.

Results

Data in Table 1 show educator perceptions of the self-advocacy skills of their students with ASD. Scores indicated that a high percentage of students with ASD in Bengaluru likely do not know they have a diagnosis (73% of responses in 0-20% range). As a result, student disclosures of their diagnoses are almost non-existent (100% of responses in 0-20% range), and many are unaware of common terms used to describe ASD (64% of responses in 0-20% range). Very few students know about laws and policies relevant to their diagnosis (82% of responses in 0-20% range), and small numbers of students with ASD are reported to attend relevant meetings about their services and supports (64% of responses in 0-20% range).

Educator responses suggest that some students with ASD are able to identify sources of comfort (9% of responses in 0-20% range) and discomfort (9% of responses in 0-20% range), and a significant portion of students are believed to be able to ask for help to get their needs met (27% of responses in 0-20% range). A moderate percentage of the surveyed educators in Bengaluru believed their students would benefit from learning more about their own diagnosis of ASD (36% of responses in 0-20% range). All surveyed educators who responded were interested in receiving educational support and consultation from trained professionals with ASD (100% Yes responses, 2 did not respond). These data are not listed in Table 1.

A total of 14 survey items and their response data were omitted from this report. Some items did not relate to the research questions addressed in this study or were based on prerequisite skills that students were missing. For example, some survey items about the leadership skills of students with ASD were rendered irrelevant due to students' apparent lack of awareness of their diagnoses and missing disclosure experiences.

Table 1
Educator Responses to ASD Self-Advocacy and Leadership Survey *Bengaluru* (n = 11)

Survey Item	0-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%	No Response
			Percentage of students who:			
know they have an ASD diagnosis	8	3				
have disclosed their diagnosis to others	11					
are aware of common terms used to describe ASD	7		4			
know about the laws and policies relevant to ASD	9	2				
participate in meetings about their services and supports	7	3	1			
can identify things that comfort them	1	5	4		1	
can identify things that discomfort them	1	5	2	2	1	
can ask for help to get their needs met	3	1	2	1		
Would benefit from learning more about their ASD diagnosis	4	3	1	3		

Discussion

The *ASD Self-Advocacy and Leadership Survey* provided relevant information for this study's research questions. For example, data collected provided some indication of the likelihood of post-secondary success of the educators' students; one could conclude that a small percentage of students with ASD in Bengaluru have the self-advocacy skills needed to meet the academic and non-academic demands of post-secondary life. The survey produced strong evidence of educators' interest in receiving increased educational support in self-advocacy, and consultation from trained professionals with ASD was also a near-unanimous interest. Finally, survey results generated specific self-advocacy domains that could be targeted for training to help educational systems better prepare students with ASD for success in post-secondary settings.

Based on these survey results, leaders in secondary and post-secondary settings could design an action plan, focused on self-advocacy, to better prepare students with ASD in Bengaluru for college success. Such a plan might include the following key points:

- assess why parents and educators are reluctant to tell students about their ASD diagnoses;
- work on building a stronger culture of ASD awareness and acceptance at the secondary and post-secondary levels;

- increase secondary and post-secondary students' access to relevant laws and rights affecting their lives;
- work to increase student participation in meetings about their school supports and services;
- use student strengths in identifying sources of comfort, discomfort, and asking for help from others to introduce self-advocacy terminology and concepts in secondary school settings;
- find students who are above average in ASD knowledge and self-advocacy foundations to serve as peer supports for other students;
- help secondary and post-secondary students learn more about their ASD diagnoses and how it affects their lives; and
- increase staff development and training in self-advocacy.

Limitations and Future Research

The sample size of surveyed educators in this study was small and responses were based on educator perceptions only. Also, the survey was a cross-sectional convenience sample and lacked the rigor of a randomized control trial. Deep statistical analysis was difficult and survey tool refinement is required to increase statistical applications. Also, the survey tool was still in early stages of application and its validity and reliability were not fully known.

Future research is needed to determine best practices which help leaders in secondary and post-secondary education identify and meet the self-advocacy needs of their students with ASD, especially in terms of transitions to post-secondary settings. Examining collaborative models between secondary and post-secondary leaders to help students with ASD achieve postsecondary success would be useful. Studies to determine educators' needs to better understand and teach self-advocacy skills to their students is also needed. Finally, authentic coaching in self-advocacy from trained individuals with ASD is a support method worthy of deeper investigation.

Conclusion

Self-advocacy skills play a critical role in the academic and non-academic success of students with ASD. Administrators and professionals in secondary and post-secondary education are likely to encounter increasing numbers of students with ASD who are interested in attending college or other post-secondary settings. Few, if any, studies have been conducted to develop tools or procedures to help school systems determine the self-advocacy skills of their students with ASD. This study built on existing research in college supports for individuals with ASD by examining the utility of a specific survey to determine some of the self-advocacy factors that affect student success. Though the understanding in this area is in its infancy, this study began an important, new research step in self-advocacy supports for post-secondary students.

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Today's Technology: Using Snapchat to Connect Educators, Learners, and Content

Jana M. Thomas
University of Alabama

Abstract

Today's educators are not expected just to teach academic content; they are expected to integrate culture, listening, speaking, creativity, and problem-solving as they prepare their students for a multi-cultural global world that relies increasingly on technology to create and maintain interpersonal connections. While computer-assisted language learning (CALL) on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Blogger has gained much attention, less research has been done to emphasize another educational tool: Snapchat. This oft-overlooked video, text, and imaging platform offers teachers and students a myriad of ways to practice vocabulary, reach different styles of learners, and connect with each other and with other cultures (Ernstberger & Venable, 2016; Ram, 2015). Snapchat is a free social media platform that runs on tablets or smartphones. Although primarily used for entertainment purposes, its popularity with American youth has prompted many educators to begin using Snapchat to supplement and augment their lessons (Sterling, 2015). Some advantages of Snapchat explored in this article are student popularity, immediacy, and visual/audio complements to traditionally written tasks. Disadvantages include the app-enforced brevity of communications, lack of access, and lack of student interest.

Keywords: educational technology, apps, Snapchat, mobile devices, CALL

Today's Technology: Using Snapchat to Connect Educators, Learners, and Content

Snapchat is a phone and iPad application that allows users to send 10-second photos, chats, videos, and subtitles to friends on the app. After the 10 seconds, individual photo or video clips, called snaps, are permanently deleted from the phones of both the sender and receiver, making it ideal for quick, impermanent exchanges of an informal nature. The app has 35 million users in the United States alone, and the app facilitates the exchange of over 4 billion videos a day (Ernstberger & Venable, 2016). Despite its overwhelming popularity, the app is predominately used by teens and young adults (Sterling, 2015).

Many educators have already heard of Snapchat: 77% of college students use it daily (Lee, 2016), while teens reportedly use the app as much as Instagram and even more than Twitter (Bailey, 2015). Many educators are aware of the technological fads fleeting through our students' devices, from Clash of Clans to Flickr. Yet while so many student fads are difficult to shape to educational purposes, Snapchat can be an excellent tool to connect our students' classroom with their out-of-school world.

Current Literature

Certainly, there is a link between learning outside of the classroom setting and educational gains (Lai & Gu, 2011; Gan, Humphries & Hamp-Lyons, 2004). Research has supported the notion that personal technological devices offer opportunities to move learning beyond the classroom into multiple spheres of students' lives (Burston, 2011; Wood, Zivcakova, Gentile, Archer, De Pasquale, & Nosko, 2011). Wood et al. (2011) state that the benefits of personal use technologies such as laptops, smartphones, tablets, and other smart devices open the door to Anywhere Anytime Learning (AAL) that can remove learning from a classroom-only activity to multiple and varied environments. Mobile technologies such as iPhones, tables, iPads, cell phones, and other web-enabled devices have been shown to facilitate increased levels of active engagement with subject matter, even outside of the classroom setting (Demouy, Jones, Kan, Kukulska-Hulme, & Eardley, 2015). Burston (2011) claims mobile phones have enjoyed far more popularity among educators than similar technologies such as Portable Digital Assistants (PDAs), the most well-known of which are Blackberries. In 2011, at 4.2 billion mobile phones, mobile phone usage almost quadrupled that of personal computers or laptops (Burston, 2011), and their popularity among younger populations is well documented (Bailey, 2015; Ernstberger & Venable, 2016; Junco, 2014; Lee, 2016).

Potential Obstacles to Mobile Devices in the Classroom

However, this is not to state that all mobile technologies have an equal place in education. These devices' educational possibilities are not automatically realities. In their examination of off-task student activity while using technology, Wood et al. state, "In general, there is a consensus that existing and emerging digital technologies have *the potential* to expand the reach and effectiveness of current educational tools" (emphasis added) (2011, p. 366). Possible detractors from achieving educational objectives with technology include the cost of devices and their associated data plans (Lindaman & Nolan, 2015; Kim & Kwon, 2012), limited storage capacity (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013), student resentment of intrusion into their

personal space (Sterling, 2015; Demouy et al, 2015; Burston, 2011; Kennedy & Levy, 2008), and student distraction from the task (Lindaman & Nolan, 2015; Wood et al., 2011; Krausshar & Novak, 2010).

While Burston (2011) notes educators embracing potential pedagogical applications for mobile devices goes back to the introduction of the mobile phone at beginning of the millennium, he cautions that using students' personal phones for learning has always been fraught with obstacles. First, although students enjoy having their devices with them at nearly all times, they often perceive the phones' function as fun, personal use only, and resent the intrusion of teachers and other non-peers into their personal domains. He states, "[students] have proven rather intolerant of pedagogical messages invading what they regard as their private space" (Burston, 2011, p. 58). Similar findings were reported by Kennedy and Levy (2008), who found that a small minority of students, for all their enthusiasm about texting friends, disliked receiving even one educational text a day.

This resentment of educator intrusiveness was also described by Demouy et al. (2015), who found students elected to use their devices to listen to audio or watch videos with greater frequency than they did to read content-related material, write, or practice grammar. The researchers also found students preferred to use their phones or smart tablets to access online dictionaries and media, but did not reportedly enjoy using them for educationally-based social media tasks.

Even if learners enjoy using technology, it has not always proven beneficial to the learning process. With personal use technologies comes the increased risk of off-task activity that proves detrimental rather than complementary to the learning process. Wood et al. in particular demonstrated that technology as a learning tool can be a distraction to learning rather than an aid. Given the choice to use technology or not during 3 learning sessions, 33% did not choose to use any technology at all, 24% choose to use it only intermittently, and not even half (43%) used it for all three sessions. These findings indicate students may not be as enthusiastic about using technology in their learning environments as is sometimes assumed. Those with access to Facebook, chat, and email engaged in considerably more off-task activities, and the students who elected to use no or minimal amount of technology outperformed those who opted for greater technological use during the sessions.

Stockwell and Hubbard (2013) also add that educators should not assume so-called "digital native" students will automatically be familiar with the applications. Although students in today's classrooms may be adept at navigating a wide variety of device and applications, teachers should still expect there to be learners in every group who are not familiar with a target technology and that even those who are may not understand the complete array of functions and features the teacher is planning to use. This is especially true if the learners have never used the app for an educational purpose before, which is often the case with social media platforms like Snapchat. Therefore, careful instruction on how to utilize the target application should be an integral piece of introducing any new tool, even a seemingly widely-used one such as Snapchat.

Given these potential pitfalls to technology in the classroom, Lindaman and Nolan (2015) caution, "Significant preparation is required to design applications that are pedagogically sound,

make the most o a mobile platform's potential for interactive learning, and are well suited for use in and outside of…classrooms" (p. 2). They believe there are several key factors to successfully utilize technology in the classroom, including collaboration, a student-centered mindset, and high levels of student engagement and participation.

Successful Integration of Mobile Technologies in the Classroom

Clearly, not all technological resources are appropriate for educational designs. Still, the potential of mobile devices and their associated social networking capabilities should not be overlooked. Currently, more than 2 billion people use social media, the most well-known of which are Facebook and Twitter, but which also includes Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Flickr, Tumblr, and more (Adami & Jewitt, 2016). Smartphone apps are personal and student-centered (Kim & Kwon, 2012) and have been shown to increase learners' active interest in otherwise traditional tasks (Demouy et al., 2015). Further strengths of pedagogically sound use of technology-assisted learning are fingertip access to on-demand learning opportunities, contextualization of subject matter, spontaneous learning, lowered affective filters, a broader learning ecosystem, and increased student engagement in learning (Lindaman & Nolan, 2015).

Despite his warnings about the potential student-perceived intrusiveness of using student technological devices for educational purposes, Burston (2011) maintains they may reasonably be expected to be more effective at aiding in certain specific educational goals. He specifically mentions their effectiveness at aiding the acquisition of basic-level vocabulary, even more so when they have the capacity to combine rich multi-sensory input of text, graphics, audio, and video, which is exactly what Snapchat offers.

This idea was echoed by Kenney and Levy (2008), who posit that far from being appropriate for every out-of-the-classroom educational task, phones are useful for tasks that are naturally suited to short chunks of time that do not require elevated levels of concentration or a considerable time commitment. As such, the authors identify vocabulary-building as a particular strength of mobile phones as educational tools, as it lends itself easily to brief definitions or audio-graphic examples comfortably managed on a phone or other smart device.

In addition to vocabulary, the researchers used phones to send messages about Italian culture, suggest extracurricular Italian-themed music or videos that might be of student interest, and course announcements and reminders. Many posts therefore did not require a student response, but some did; for instance, the researchers sent a list of Italian words and ask students to respond with opposites, or they sent a photo and asked students to reply with a description of the image in Italian. The authors also found students enjoyed teacher-generated messages more when they were not repetitive (i.e. not reinforcing the same lexical item multiple times over several days). Many reported enjoying this method of vocabulary reinforcement as an extracurricular refresher for Italian vocabulary learned in class.

The results in this study were promising: 84% of respondents enjoyed the messages, 83% reported the activities improved their vocabulary acquisition, and 80% indicated an increased level of interest in the course content. However, the study also revealed students found these messages more useful for vocabulary learning, with fewer numbers reportedly enjoying course

reminders, audio or video suggestions, or cultural information. The study results also indicated the students used the messages for their own self-study purposes, but the messages did not tend to increase interest or discussion among classmates or with the teacher after the message had been received (Kennedy & Levy, 2008).

Another survey of smartphone apps in the classroom revealed that these applications, including social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, WhatsApp, and Snapchat, have broad educational potential in the areas of vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, writing, grammar, speaking, and listening (Kim & Kwon, 2012). One study done with Japanese learners of English found that, when students became comfortable making videos in English, they were able to produce increasingly lengthy and complex videos in the target language (Gromik, 2012). Snapchat offers an informal way for students to practice making short videos to build target skills.

While not every popular student app can be harnessed for educational goals, prior research supports the use of mobile technology and social media in certain cases. Educators hoping to connect with students via technology should carefully plan and collaborate with their peers and local technology experts and design pedagogically sound, student-centered activities (Lindaman & Nolan, 2015). They need to tailor the technology to appropriately short tasks such as vocabulary building, basic review, and providing brief contextualization of simple classroom concepts (Kennedy & Levy, 2008; Kim & Kwon, 2012; Burston, 2011). Taking these factors into consideration, educators can apply these tenets to introducing Snapchat into their array of educational tools.

Snapchat as a Potential Learning Tool

Like any other tool, Snapchat has its detractors. Some teachers view Snapchat as inappropriate for the classroom setting, citing students' continuous use of the app in class for non-related purposes as disruptive to the learning process and at times dangerous (Sterling, 2015). In addition, the impermanency of Snapchat interactions made it famous for its ease and expediency of sexting (Bailey, 2015; Miller, Costa, Haynes, McDonald, Nicolescu, Sinanan, Spyer, Venkatraman, & Wang, 2016; Sterling, 2015).

Junco (2014) does not dispute Snapchat's popularity among teens and young adults but maintains the app is still inappropriate for school. One foreign language teacher who used Snapchat to reinforce vocabulary later reported disappointing results, as students only interacted with the word for 10 seconds each before moving on, which she believed led to lower vocabulary retention rates (Lee, 2016). Echoing Burston's (2011) critique of mobile devices in general, Sterling (2015) cautions that not all students will react favorably to educators attempt to integrate Snapchat into the classroom, as it may be viewed as adults attempting to invade an adult-free, private space. He further adds that while snaps may be educational, they disappear quickly and students cannot reference their work later.

Yet as Miller and Sinana (2017) point out, this platform-required brevity of Snapchat interactions can be facilely circumvented by using the screenshot or screen-capture function. As an added measure of safety, Snapchat alerts the original sender when a recipient has taken a

screenshot of an image, but this allows both educators and learners to save still images to their photo roll for later perusal or subsequent uploading to another platform or site, such as a classroom website or Facebook account.

Sterling (2015) adds that Snapchat has other positive attributes, such as an inherent flashcard-like feel to the app due to its Story feature, which allows a user to save several 10second media clips over a 24-hour period. These snaps can be viewed in sequential order an unlimited number of times over that 24 hours by friends on the app. It is also useful for brief collaboration among students or between a student and the teacher, and it provides a free way for students to create an original visual narrative on a topic of their choice.

Like Sterling, Lee (2016) defends the use of snaps for learning, expressing the attitudes of many educators: "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." Snaps can be sent to show examples of concepts taught in class, as study prompts before a test, and to access students' prior knowledge. Kim and Kwon (2012) suggest individual apps such as Snapchat should be used occasionally as one tool among many varied technological tools, and Demouy et al. (2015) cite apps such as Snapchat to be easily applicable to learning vocabulary in many content areas. Bailey (2015) found the app to be very accessible, as it is free on any phone or iPad, easy to participate in, and boasts privacy features such as letting students follow a teacher-led or classroom/school account without the teacher needing to follow them back. In fact, many major universities now have a snap filter that allows students within the geographical campus area to add school-related icons and graphics to their snaps, as well as to upload their personal snaps to the school's account for moderation and potential posting by a university-appointed moderator.

Adami and Jewitt (2016) point out that the self-expression allowed by the creation of personalized avatars, provided by the app Bitmoji within the Snapchat app, are popular with young learners such as pre-teens and teens. Within Snapchat messages, these Bitmoji avatars can be personalized to look like students and have a myriad of fashion choices, including some brand name clothing lines and costumes based on popular media icons (such as the HBO series *Game of Thrones* or the rap group The Lonely Island). Therefore, students can be engaging in self-expression while practicing classroom concepts.

A specific use for Snapchat is that, like Instagram, it is most effective when the desired focus is visual, rather than text-based, in nature, making it a strong candidate for use in art classes or to convey content-related visual information such as math graphs, historical art, or scientific charts, as well as for visual and auditory learners. If desired, Snapchat allows for "a conversation that is almost entirely without voice or text" (Miller et al., 2016, 177). This allows users to communicate multimodally. It also provides rich opportunities for teachers to visually communicate content to ELL students, students with low reading levels, or those with special needs (Miller et al., 2016).

Practical Applications

Ideas by Educators, for Educators

For those educators intrigued by the possibility of connecting with students using Snapchat as a tool, the authors of the aforementioned articles have several ideas that can be specified and tailored to any subject area:

- Student-to-student collaboration (Sterling, 2015)
- Student-to-teacher collaboration (Sterling, 2015)
- Flashcards A: Teacher sends all users a snap using audio or photo; students reply with a snap and identify in the target language (TL) (Sterling, 2015)
- Flashcards B: Teacher gives all students a list of vocabulary words in class; students find and snap the objects, possibly with subtitles or TL pronunciation (Sterling, 2015)
- Teacher sends all users snaps with brief summaries of topics covered in class each day (Bailey, 2015)
- Students send teacher snaps with feedback on activities from the previous class (Bailey, 2015)
- Teacher sends a series of snaps as a study guide before a formal assessment (Lee, 2016)
- Students snap a series of reflexive photographs to create and build their identity in the TL and target culture (Wallace, 2015)
- Ask students to perform segments of TL literature, such as Shakespeare, Voltaire, or de Cervantes (Ram, 2015)
- Users find real-life examples of vocabulary or concepts from class and share them with other members of the classroom community (Pannoni, 2015)
- Teacher sends all users a question as homework. They are given a certain amount of time to respond via snap (Popoff, 2014)
- Use Snapchat to communicate announcements, reminders, and alerts, as well as to communicate weather or emergency alerts at your institution (Ernstberger & Venable, 2016).

In addition to these ideas from prior literature, my own experience as a Snapchat-using educator has allowed me to expand my school and classroom from a geographical, time-specific experience to a holistic one that can be accessed by learners anywhere and at any time of day.

For instance, school administrators can use snaps and a public snap story to connect with parents and the community by sharing videos and snapshots of sports events, fundraisers, music and drama productions, and art displays. Snapchat can be used to document and publicize school efforts to give back to the community, as well as spread awareness about community and school events of interest. These short, 10-second video or photo clips provide public interest and opportunities for parent, educator, and student engagement on an informal, fun platform.

Beginning to Use Snapchat as an Educational Tool

For those educators convinced about this app's educational potential and ready to start introducing Snapchat to their universities, district, or classroom, it's simple to begin. System

requirements include any brand smartphone or iPad with a functional internet connection." Users can search for and download Snapchat for free in their device's App Store. The download should take only 1-3 minutes, and it takes less than a minute to create a username and password. For educator accounts, I recommend creating a separate account using an institution email account and a corresponding username, such as *Professor_Martinez*, *MSU_HistoryDept,* or *SeñoraCoffman.* Reserve personal email and Snapchat accounts for non-school activities to preserve professional distance and decorum.

Once an account is created, users decide how Snapchat can best be personalized as a tool for their audience, whether it is an entire university or district community or the students in your 7th grade English classroom. Educators can opt a top-down communication method where they send messages to their audience without requiring a reply, such as course reminders and announcements, or elect to use a two-way method designed for interaction between educators and recipients. This two-way communication is best suited for educators who envision their lesson designs to require interaction between the educator and individual students but not among the students themselves. A third option is whole-class or whole-group communication, where all student and teacher users interact with each other, best suited to models where group collaboration and study are being used to reach academic objectives. If this option is used, educators must clearly outline their expectations for sharing, as users must first add other users to their contact list and then individually select each message recipient. Of course, when deciding from among these three communication models, the age and maturity of the students, as well as each individual school or institution's technology policy, should be the final guide.

Before using Snapchat in the classroom or educational setting, it is necessary to assess the app's requirements and gauge the intended audience's access to those resources. In general, Snapchat is very accessible, although be aware it is most well-known among younger populations, often middle school to undergraduate college students rather than older adult populations such as might be found in a PhD program (Sterling, 2015). In cases where a learner might not have the necessary device or access to internet, an easy alternative is to modify the assignment so the learner can complete it using a camera or camera phone, then emailing or printing the images.

The short video or image files created using Snapchat, referred to as *snaps*, can be used at any learning level to create content-rich media clips and files, practice content vocabulary, communicate brief messages to students, and allow students to play with academic material in a low-risk, informal atmosphere. At its most basic, Snapchat sends 10-second clips of a photo or video. However, there are a variety of filters, fonts, drawing tools, emojis, and animations that can allow students to create their own stories and narratives in the classroom. Try singing the alphabet as a gun-firing cowboy, or perhaps model new content words in context while appearing to the audience as a unicorn adorned with falling flowers. One of the most appealing aspects of Snapchat is its inherent user maneuverability combined with easy-to-use personalization features. The app has many fun features to try, many of which will be demonstrated in the live presentation component of this paper.

In my experience, Snapchat has the capacity to be a powerful tool for forging essential connections among educators, learners, and their target content. In my foreign language

classroom, I have used Snapchat at the secondary and university levels to narrate my experiences in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, over spring break, including close-up videos of market haggling in action, artisans making intricate designs, and an Aztec ballet performed by a high school co-ed dance group. The sights and sounds of the city, as well as my reactions and comments, were well-viewed by my students, many of whom responded with snaps of their own or referenced my snaps in face-to-face conversations later, encouraging interest in the material as well as encouraging connectivity between learners and the target language and culture.

Additionally, I have used the app to teach low-frequency Spanish vocabulary that would not appear in an introductory foreign language course, such as a video of my daughter snoring and the caption, "*Ella ronca"* (Spanish "She is snoring") displayed in text across the image. The next day, several students either asked me if *roncar* meant "to snore" or used it in classroom conversation, indicating they had both understood the verb and remembered it. For their part, students have used Snapchat to send me a picture of online homework that was giving them trouble, often with subtitles expressing their questions or area of confusion. In these cases, I was able to give a brief grammatical explanation in a series of one to three 10-second snaps. Finally, students will often use the app to ask me brief questions that don't seem to warrant an email, such as, "Is there homework due today?" or "The quiz is only over Ch12, right?" Ultimately, however it is used, Snapchat offers a unique way to connect educators, students, and academic content outside of the classroom norm.

Conclusion

Snapchat is a popular, free application specializing in temporary, 10-second video clips and images that can be sent to individual or group users. The app has risen in popularity to equal that of Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, especially among younger student-aged populations (Miller et al., 2016; Sterling, 2015). While not originally educational in design, the app can be harnessed and adapted to meet a myriad of educational goals, creating an innovative way for educators to connect with students and to make classroom content come to life.

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