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International Perspectives on Team Leadership

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Introduction

During the last several decades, the rise of the global economy launched an array of social, economic, and political changes in nations throughout the world. These shifts contributed to heightened concern about the quality of schools and resulted in what "arguably is the most intense, comprehensive, and sustained effort to reform education in America's history" (Björk, 2001, p. 19). As policymakers and economists linked academic performance of students to their nation's long-term economic survival, the scope and duration of educational reform around the globe expanded exponentially (Daun, 2002; Pang, 2013; Zhao, 2009). In retrospect, efforts to ensure national economic wellbeing have been defined by educational policies focused on ensuring broad-based access to schooling (Means, 2018), achieving academic excellence among students (Hanushek, Jamison, Jamison, & Woessman, 2008), networking among schools and students (Bathon, 2011; Glazer & Peurach, 2013), and reconceptualizing schooling (Ball, 2009; Mullen, 2017; Osborne, 2017). In many instances, these protracted efforts altered the conversation

about education reform, particularly with regard to reconfiguring how leaders work (Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011; Hairon, 2017; Nir, 2014).

The notion that leadership of schools is broad based and draws upon expertise of administrators, educators, and citizens is an essential ingredient in improving student learning. School boards and superintendents, central office staff members, principals, teachers, parents, and students collectively play important roles in creating circumstances in which every child has opportunities to become literate, numerate, and capable of solving increasingly complex problems (Björk & Browne-Ferrigno, 2012, 2014; Björk, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). Discourse on educational reform has increasingly focused on how key stakeholders have changed (Alsbury, 2008; Drysdale, Goode, & Gurr, 2009; Potterton, 2018) and are changing particularly regarding the nature and direction of leadership and teamwork focused on accomplishing systemic reform (Browne-Ferrigno, 2106; Sheriff, 2018).

Overview of Articles in Special Issue

This special issue of *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership* is devoted to the work of international scholars who conducted recent studies of educational reform focused on the nature of teamwork. They not only capture a collective sense of national commitment to education as a means for advancing national social, economic, and political wellbeing of nations and their citizens but also provide unique perspectives on the changing nature of leadership practices across a wide spectrum of organizations. Collectively, these seven articles are highly relevant to our understanding of national educational reform movements and

notions of leadership by diverse stakeholders who implemented change at the school and district levels through teamwork.

In their article, "District Strategic Teaming: Leadership for Systemic and Sustainable Reform," Thomas Alsbury (Northwest University) and colleagues Margaret Blanchard (North Carolina State University), Kristie Gutierrez (Old Dominion University), and Chris Allred and Dell Tolin (North Carolina State University) report key outcomes of their six-year project funded through a National Science Foundation grant to transform high-need rural schools serving children living in abject poverty. Their reform process, known as *District Strategic Teaming,* involved a representative vertical cross-section of administrators and support staff at the district office as well as administrators, teachers, and support staff in participating schools. The process aimed at building district capacity for sustainable innovation focused on improving program quality and subsequent student success. Implementation of the District Strategic Teaming model, which included leadership development for school personnel through an innovation academy, provided the four participating districts with a flexible, responsive leadership collaborative focused on building and sustaining capacity for innovation and reform.

In "Superintendents as CEO and Team Leader," Lars Björk and Tricia Browne-Ferrigno (University of Kentucky) and Theodore Kowalski (University of Dayton) present updated conceptions of roles assumed by superintendents to address the scope, complexity, and intensity of education reforms in the United States of America over recent decades. While superintendents remain responsible for managing their district's education enterprise, new challenges and opportunities for educating children in the 21st century require engagement by and support from knowledgeable experts. Teamwork

that integrates distributed leadership, actionable planning, and creative solution finding allows superintendents to respond quickly and knowledgably to new conditions in P12 education.

In the third article of this special issue, David Gurr and Lawrie Drysdale (University of Melbourne) report findings from their longitudinal work on system leadership and school leadership that includes requisite conditions for improving schools and enhancing student learning. Their article contains descriptions of two research-based models proven to support successful change, which they use to frame the presentation of a successful initiative that involved closing three under-performing schools in Australia and supporting a principal in opening and leading what ultimately proved to be successful schools.

Preparing today's children and youth to become active and responsive adults in transforming global societies require schools to change dramatically. To achieve that goal in most countries is daunting due to educational policies and structures within schools that hinder teamwork and creativity in classrooms. In "Teacher Leadership and Teaming: Creativity within Schools in China," Carol Mullen (Virginia Tech) and Tricia Browne-Ferrigno (University of Kentucky) report preliminary findings from data gathered over two years in China that suggest teacher leadership, teamwork, and creativity can thrive in settings often perceived by outsiders to be robotic learning environments.

Justin Bathon (University of Kentucky) and Jean van Rooyan and Rika Jobert (University of Pretoria) assert in their article, "Comprehensive Platform Networks for School Reform: A Leapfrog Strategy for Struggling State Systems," that digital networks of schools are emerging as an innovative way to tackle the challenges of

supporting leaders and teachers who implement structural and instructional models of school. Networks have always been a central element to public education because schools rely on relationships and connections to both inspire new ideas and implement existing concepts efficiently. New digital-based networks permit schools to connect with others nationally and internationally, thus stimulating transformations in learning and teaching. The article presents successes and challenges of digital-network use in the United States of America and in South Africa.

The school system in the State of Arizona is unique within the United States of America due to its mature education market with approximately 600 charter schools, tax-credit programs for public and private schools, and open enrolment policies promulgated over the past 25 years. Amanda Potterton (University of Kentucky) presents findings from longitudinal research conducted within a public school district in her article, "Market Pressure and Arizona Public School Leaders: 'That Package is Like a Brand New Cadillac!'" She reports how members of district- and school-based teams responded to efforts to counter market challenges on public schools. In particular, stakeholders understood and prioritized notions of *community* in various and sometimes contradictory ways as they discussed school choice issues.

Although the concept of student voice has been explored for quite some time, it is often overlooked in the field of educational leadership. To address that gap in research, Victoria Sherif (University of Kentucky) invited students in a rural school district to share their perspectives on leadership and how they might participate in the governance of their schools. Findings from her longitudinal qualitative study presented in this article reveal that

youths perceive leadership as a complex construct that integrates various skills, abilities, educational learning, and change opportunities. They assert that team and management processes can be utilized to improve the world and people in it but doing that requires responsibility, active and purposeful self-direction, inspiration, desire and willingness to make a difference.

In the final article, "Reflections on Education Reform and Team Leadership," the special issue co-editors Tricia Browne-Ferrigno and Lars Björk (University of Kentucky) synthesize seminal literature on organizational processes and key findings from the articles in this issue. They assert that leadership by teams has become an indispensable characteristic within modern organizations, and as such, must be utilized broadly in education to address effectively externally mandated education reform and internally created education renewal.

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District Strategic Teaming: Leadership for Systemic

and Sustainable Reform

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Abstract	Article Info
Reform efforts in schools have become increasingly focused on the nature and direction of teamwork in efforts to achieve sustained and systemic districtwide capacity for innovation and needed change. The six-year study reported in this article involved development, implementation, and assessment of a unique collaborative process for districtwide reform in some of the most challenging and fluid educational settings in the United States of America. This reform process, called District Strategic Teaming, involved a representative vertical cross-section of members from the district office to school-based support staff. Participating schools are located in isolated, rural communities in the south-eastern region of the United States of America that experience high rates of teacher turnover and serve student populations living in abject poverty. Despite these challenges, the longitudinal study revealed substantive improvement in organizational culture and reduction	

of systemic barriers for innovation through the process described in
this article.

Introduction

Many school reform initiatives have less than stellar results, lack sustainable gains, and eventually fail as a result of ignoring the power of complex organizational realities within schools. The encouraging news is that school leaders, when provided appropriate evaluative data on their organizational capacity for sustained change, can powerfully influence and ameliorate these barriers, while simultaneously building capacity for future innovation (Alsbury, 2007; Killion, 2015; Wallace, 2002). Currently, revolving-door reforms, what Fullan (2001) called *projectitis*, are jading the promise of new educational initiatives, draining energy and desire from teachers to support and implement these programs in their classrooms, and destroying district focus. Localized successes in school reform often fail to sustain due to multiple and shifting organizational priorities (Coburn, 2003; Farrell & Coburn, 2017).

Reform efforts over the past decade indicated that strategic planning, increased accountability, and school restructuring in various forms often result in an absence of clear student achievement improvements. Some researchers believe this is primarily due to inadequate consideration of system analysis and planning (Coburn, Toure, & Yamashita, 2009; Mintzberg, 1993). Others point to (a) a need to add district-and state-level leadership to frequently unsustainable

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building-level reform attempts (Coburn, Bae, & Turner, 2008; Fullan, 2005; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006), (b) more consideration for unique contextual variations in districts (Farrell & Coburn, 2017; Fullan, 2001), (c) inclusion of sustainability variables in reform plans (Coburn, 2003), and (d) use of distributed leadership (Elmore, 2000) and collaborative decision-making processes (Firestone, 1996) as reasons for failure. Further, Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2001) assert that "the consequences of tightening the accountability 'screws' often are a narrowing and trivializing of the school curriculum and the creation of work cultures that reduce rather than increase professional commitments" (p. 2). The local learning required for successful restructuring efforts must be aided by feedback about the consequences of innovative practices and information about remaining obstacles to change. An analysis of the system's unique culture during, and subsequent to, innovation or reform seems necessary if sustained change to a school's culture and a continuance of the resulting student achievement gains are to remain a viable goal (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger, & Leithwood, 1998).

Strategic Teaming Model

In response to the need for a model to measure and track changes in organizational barriers and to support the development of organizational systems, Alsbury (2008) created interview, observational, and survey tools. These tools incorporated a merging and modification of organizational learning theory and survey tools developed by Leithwood and colleagues (2001) and sustainability theory and components described by Coburn (2003). The tools were then tested as an additional organizational systems component of an already established National Science Foundation (NSF) four-year

longitudinal study implementing the Science Writing Heuristic (SWH) initiative (Hand, 2008).

The study was conducted in a mid-western community with a population of 14,500 and a school enrollment of 2,300. This rural community relied on agriculture and light industry as its economic base and was mostly comprised of middle class, blue-collar workers. The school district included a middle school (Grades 7-8), a high school (Grades 9-12) and five elementary schools (Grades K-6). The SWH program, introduced in 2002, involved all three middle school teachers and all five high school science teachers. The outcomes of the Hand (2008) study included (a) validation of the Organizational Assessment Survey (OAS), (b) increase in organizational capacity to implement and sustain innovation, (c) improvement of student achievement, and (d) conclusions for need to couple organizational systems support to any innovative program implementation. As noted, this 2002-2006 pilot study provided validation of the OAS, which revealed significant student achievement improvements, especially among traditionally low-achieving students with special needs, and measured increased sustainability of the SWH innovation.

The findings indicate the OAS analysis and ensuing recommendations for system changes led to increased organizational capacity for implementing and sustaining Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) initiatives in the district into the future. The study also gave hints concerning missing elements in the process; namely the need for a collaborative, cross-district leadership team. This District Strategic Team (DST) was trained to recognize organizational sustainability variables discovered in the pilot study and tasked with (a) managing the implementation of the organizational systems survey; (b) analyzing and interpreting data

within the context of the district culture; and (c) providing recommendations for the elimination of organizational barriers at the central office, building, and classroom levels. During the pilot study, these functions had been led by the university research team, but it was determined they would need to be continued by the district once the grant reached completion. In 2007, the need for a Strategic Leadership Team to administer the Alsbury OAS and organizational systems process was fulfilled with the development

Innovation Leaders Academy

The previously described OAS tools were coupled with the development of a new Innovation Leaders Academy (ILA) team and piloted during a long-term longitudinal study (2007-2011) with six under-achieving rural school districts serving high poverty and high minority student populations in a southeastern region of the United States of America. The ILA process involves selection of a district-level ILA Team. The team members are selected in conjunction with the school-district superintendent, but must include the superintendent, assistant superintendents or central office directors, school principals, teacher leaders, and relevant support staff. The recommended size of the ILA Team is approximately 10 members, which has been shown to be a workable size to ensure full collaborative decision making. Additionally, the composition should include district- and school-level personnel who are participating in the reform initiative being implemented. For example, if the district were coupling the ILA process with the implementation of a STEM initiative at the middle-school level, the ILA Team would likely be composed of the superintendent, director of curriculum, director of technology, middle school principals, and balanced selection of middle-school STEM teachers and school-level technology support staff members.

The ILA Team's purpose is to identify and eliminate organizational barriers and to develop and support positive organizational characteristics and processes that promote improved implementation and sustainability of innovative programs in the school district. In other words, an ILA Team's charge is to ensure system-wide organizational support and sustainability for the innovation through

1. *Describing and contextualizing the issue or problem that needs remediation in their district.*
2. *Delineating potential organizational barriers and supports at classroom, school, and district levels that likely influence success of implementation and sustainability.*
3. *Administering the ILA organizational systems assessment tools to measure existing variables that support or present barriers to the implementation and sustainability of the innovation.*
4. *Using the ILA disciplined inquiry processes to guide the team's approach, goal setting, program and procedure implementation, and assessment. The product outcome is to develop and draft an Innovation Program Support Plan (IPSP) that provides action items to address and ameliorate barriers to program implementation and sustainability.*
5. *Analyzing ILA organizational systems assessment tool data to evaluate and revise the Innovation Program Support Plan, and to craft recommendations for changes to the organizational system in the district.*

To prepare an ILA Team able to achieve these activities, the research team (a) provides normative leadership training in six areas i.e., building capacity for innovation, collaborative decision-making, change processes, distributed leadership, adaptive leadership,

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sustainability); (b) observes and coaches the ILA Team in teamwork processes; (c) facilitates collection of relevant contextual data within the district; (d) facilitates collection of organizational data on leadership, structural, cultural, and other identified constructs; (e) facilitates collection of baseline data and subsequent annual data; and (f) provides coaching to assist the ILA Team in making recommendations on contextual changes needed to realize sustainable success for their chosen program. The scale-up study of the ILA in the southeastern state provided revisions to and further validation of the ILA OAS tool and provided evidence as to the effectiveness of the novel Innovation Leaders Academy training and the ILA Strategic District Team.

STEM Career Awareness Project: Phase I

The development of the ILA Model began in 2011 with inclusion of the ILA processes into an STEM-education study was supported by a federal grant. The overall goal of the project was to connect six isolated middle schools in a rural southeastern state to the technology-rich resources and professional development opportunities at research universities in an urban center of the state. A project goal was to provide effective teaching in STEM disciplines to students in the participating middle schools and help them develop a better understanding of the potential of STEM careers.

The vision for the STEM Strategic Teaming strategy is accomplished using three component teams: (a) the School Teacher Team, (b) the School Student Team, and (c) the ILA District Leadership Team. The School Teacher Team provides traditional teacher training, curriculum resources, and technical assistance and equipment to create enriching experiences for the middle-school students. Specifically, students are exposed to a variety of experiences about STEM careers

(e.g. videos, guest speakers, information sheets) to enrich their understanding of STEM concepts and motivate them to pursue a STEM career. The School Student Team works outside the school with all students and parent participants to provide social and community support. Team activities include home visits; individual student follow-up to support positive school attendance, behavior, and academic success; and field trips to STEM competitions and sponsoring university activities. The ILA District Leadership Team members are trained and coached at a tri-annual academy to assess, track, and revise organizational systems that have often been found to complicate program implementation and sustainability.

One significant difference in the 2011-2014 study design was inclusion of a modified control group. All five school districts received the STEM Career Awareness curricular materials, fiscal resources, technology equipment, and teacher training on how to implement the program into their classrooms. The control group was not asked to form an ILA Team did not receive the ILA Support Team training. These modifications provided an opportunity to determine the effects of the ILA components on the implementation of the innovation.

The study findings emerged from analyses of pre- and post-administration of the OAS survey. These indicated that experimental districts improved their organizational capacity to sustain innovation through the use of the Strategic Teaming process while the control district declined in their support of the STEM initiative over the three-year study period.

STEM Career Awareness Project: Phase II

While findings from the first phase of the STEM Career Awareness projects were promising, some severe limitations to the OAS survey data occurred including (a) high turnover rates of the Strategic Teams

and school personnel over the course of data collection and (b) extremely low and fluctuating return rates for the pre- and post-surveys from some participant schools. Feedback from the District Strategic Teams indicated a number of concerns regarding the OAS survey: (a) questions in the survey that seemed too similar to respondents, (b) too many questions measuring the same organizational construct, (c) questions phrased in the negative that were confusing to some respondents, (d) questions regarding the STEM Career Clubs that were unknown to respondents who did not participate directly in the clubs, and (e) the survey included too many questions. These survey-design concerns led to revision of the OAS survey into a shorter instrument with (a) fewer questions, (b) a consistent number of questions linked to each organizational variable being measured, and (c) rewording all questions to be phrased positively. Results from optimal loading of questions using an exploratory factor analysis to determine internal instrument validity analysis provided a 35-item OAS survey that met internal validity criteria.

This new survey was used for program evaluation by the District Strategic Teams of four districts, some of whom were different from those in the Phase I study. These data were used to detect areas of strength and weakness in the organizational capacity to sustain the after-school STEM Career Club. This article describes the findings of the shortened 35-item OAS survey to assess the success of the after-school STEM Career Club reform initiative from Fall 2017 to Spring 2017. Although the initiative was in effect from 2014-2017, the returns of the surveys due to high turnover within the study schools made analysis of data in 2014-2015 invalid. Findings from the 2016-2017 academic year were sufficient to allow for data analysis.

These ILA studies moved the original idea of the importance of system-wide effects on program implementation from a survey to measure organizational variables to a more complete ILA district reform process. As the ILA process continued through the final stages of development, a new theoretical construct arose that successfully characterized the frameworks of the emerging ILA Model. This construct, *translational leadership*, was derived from a medical approach known as translational medicine and applied for the first time in an educational context when describing the ILA (Alsbury, Militello, Fusarelli, Overstreet, & Jackson, 2009; Fusarelli, Militello, Alsbury, Price, & Warren, 2010).

Translational Leadership

Translational leadership is a theoretical construct developed by Alsbury and colleagues (2009) and analogous to a rapidly growing approach for the translation of medical research to patient application, known as translational medicine (Cohrs et al., 2014). Translational medicine is a branch of medical research that attempts to more directly connect basic research to patient care. Translational medicine typically refers to the application of basic research into therapies for real patients. The emphasis is on the linkage between the laboratory and the patient's bedside, without a real disconnect, which is often called the *bench-to-bedside* definition (Woolf, 2008). Translational medicine can also refer to the development and application of new technologies in a patient-driven environment where the emphasis is on early patient testing and evaluation. In modern healthcare, a move to a more open, patient-driven research process is evident, which embraces a more research-driven clinical practice of medicine (Cohrs et al., 2014).

Translational leadership is similar to translational medicine because it focuses on custom-designed research based on contextual

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realities of organizational variation, particularly in school districts attempting to implement and sustain innovation aimed at improving student achievement (Fusarelli et al., 2010). Translational leadership focuses on early testing and evaluation of student learning, thus providing a more open, client-driven research process and a linkage between the research design and implementation and the student's needs without a real disconnect (Woolf, 2008).

While translational leadership emerged as a potentially useful construct to describe processes like the ILA, its use is descriptive only. The actual definition of cogent characteristics and variables within a school district that support improved innovation implementation and sustainability, and thus the content of the ILA assessment tools emanate from a series of foundational theories and studies in educational leadership.

Theoretical Foundations for ILA

The recent drive for standards-based reform has been accompanied by a rapid and unprecedented focus on leadership development at the center of system renewal and change. The research evidence shows that effective leaders exert a powerful influence on the success of the school and the achievement of students (Wallace, 2002). The ILA model of Strategic Teaming applies theoretical components in disciplined inquiry, distributive leadership, organizational systems learning, and sustainability.

Disciplined Inquiry

The ILA process utilizes the definition of disciplined inquiry forwarded by Cronbach and Suppes (1969) that suggests it has "a texture that displays the raw materials entering into the argument and the logical processes by which they were compressed and rearranged to make the conclusion credible" (p. 15). Within the context of the ILA,

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the hope for sustainable capacity building for innovation in districts that are unique and ever-changing requires that any reform process include on-going collection of data about the context of the system, analysis and public confirmation of the collected data by the participants, and transformative action in response to that data. The ILA is purported to be such a process, and thus, the evaluation of the process constitutes an empirical analysis of the cogency of discipline inquiry as a foundational component of reform process frameworks.

Distributed Team Leadership

Increased attention is being paid to the manner in which leadership can be conceived of as being *distributed* across the social and structural context within a school organization (Firestone, 1996; Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Leadership is no longer considered a role attached to one specific individual within the organizational hierarchy but rather distributed across a number of individuals within the organization (Firestone, 1996). This means that in the assessment of the quality or effectiveness of leadership in schools, not only the hierarchical leader but also the organization as a whole should be considered (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). The most recent literature on change and school improvement also suggests that the form of leadership most often associated with improved learning outcomes is one that is distributed or shared (Fullan, 2001; Hopkins, 2001). Similarly, the literature on teacher leadership (Harris, & Muijs, 2004; Muijs &Harris, 2003) reinforces the potential of distributed or diffuse forms of leadership to generate improvements in teaching and learning.

Organizational Systems Learning

For the past three decades, school reform changes have lacked sustainability due to narrow focus on change in instructional

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methodology and classroom practice rather than organizational structures and culture that provide the support systems critical to their survival (Coburn, Russell, Kaufman, & Stein, 2012; Sarason, 1990). The consideration of district organizational systems and processes, also called *systems thinking* by Senge (1990), is still rare in most organizations. Leithwood and colleagues (2001) developed a process for measuring school organizational structures and processes that support effective implementation of innovative programs directed at improving student achievement.

Sustainability

Researchers indicate that localized successes in school innovation often fail to sustain over an extended period of time (Coburn, 2003; Fullan, 2006; Guhn, 2009) and that even successful innovation efforts, resulting in significant student achievement gains over a short timeframe, often diminish or disappear after a few years even though the innovation appears to still be in place. Coburn (2003) indicated that sustainability can be attained by focusing on a principle called *scale*, necessary if reformers hope to maintain initial student achievement gains over time, with normal external forces such as social and political changes, and administrative turnover at work. The lack of studies that measure whether or not school districts incorporate the organizational components needed to sustain innovation over time is essential (Coburn, 2003).

Recently, researchers have begun to suggest that most educational reform efforts lack sustained change in a multilevel system. For example, Coburn (2003) and Farrell and Coburn (2017) indicated that localized successes in school reform often fail to sustain due to multiple and shifting organizational priorities. Thus, reform efforts likely fail both when exported to outside schools and districts or within

single school systems unless implementers of school improvement programs consider a principle she characterized as reform "scale" (Coburn, 2003, p. 3).

Scale is comprised of four main components: depth, sustainability, spread, and shift. All components of scale are necessary if reformers hope to maintain the initial student achievement gains over time, social and political changes, and administrative turnover. *Depth* involves a change in "teacher beliefs"(Coburn, 2003, p. 4), their underlying assumptions of how students learn, and involves a change in the "norms of social interaction" (p. 5) between the teacher and the student in the classroom. Further, "deep change" requires a change in the "underlying   pedagogical   principles"   in   the   "enacted curriculum"(Cohen & Ball, 1999, p. 5).

According to Coburn (2003), lack of studies that measure whether changes, once implemented, are actually able to *sustain* over time is problematic. She notes that most studies do not continue to gather data at a school over multiple years (e.g., 4 to 6), nor after the funding and excitement of the new program has ceased. However, Coburn and Meyer (1998) and McLaughlin and Mitra (2001) have indicated that the greater the depth of change, the more likely reform will be sustained—even in the face of reduced resources and increase of competing new programs and initiatives.

Additionally, Coburn (2003) suggests that *spread* is not restricted to exporting a program to another school but rather also in finding a way to export issues of value, culture, and pedagogical principles at the study site to elsewhere. The district itself can affect spread by developing a common set of values and principles within all of its schools and leadership practices. This shifts leadership of reform to the district level and provides greater engagement by district personnel

than simply providing resources to buildings, which Coburn "spread within" (p. 7).

Finally, the idea of *shift*, described as the moment a reform effort is internalized or controlled and continued by actions of the district itself. Coburn (2003) suggests that the outside reformer may help with shift by training the district in what will be needed over time and how to go about sustaining the change. The concept of shift is different than simply change adoption; rather, it goes to the heart of systematic mechanisms that sustain change within district or school structures. These mechanisms include (a) assuring leaders at all levels of the district and teachers understand the pedagogy and nature of the reform, (b) providing a mechanism for ongoing staff development, (c) assuring continued funding of the reform, (d) holding the district formally responsible for continued dissemination of the reform through various practices (e.g., policy development, hiring practices, budgeting, scheduling time for change activities, implementing procedures within buildings), and (e) disseminating reform-centered ideas and methods through school or district decision-making that involves the staff and key leaders involved in the reform.

Organizational Assessment Survey: Phase II

The OAS uniquely integrates proven organizational variables from pre-existing, validated assessment instruments that build upon the work of organizational, leadership, and reform theorists, for more successful implementation and sustainability of innovative reform in districts (Alsbury, 2008; Coburn, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2001; Wallace, 2002). A significant portion of the survey questions were developed from interview questions used and validated on a smaller scale by Alsbury (2008) in the NSF-funded Science Writing Heuristic Project

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(Hand, 2008), and identified disconnections that jeopardized the scale-up and sustainability of the program.

Applying Senge's (1990) systems theory of organizational learning, Leithwood and colleagues (2001) outlined a series of effective conditions found in districts and schools that successfully implement reform initiatives. Fullan (2005) supports the notion that "systems thinking in action" (p. x) is needed to successfully implement reform. As such, successful reform initiatives require school leaders to anticipate and accommodate for a shift in culture, the introduction of new paradigms, and the natural resistance that will likely occur when new initiatives are introduced. As a result, organizational sustainability must be addressed at the outset of reform initiatives. This can be provided through a rigorous monitoring system that identifies organizational barriers and provides appropriate interventions to guide necessary system realignment.

The substantive content of the OAS included a series of modified variables developed from previously discussed theoretical frameworks and former research findings that were modified as required from the loading results of the internal instrument validity assessment. The ensuing categories for the survey included (a) accountability, (b) effective leadership, (c) systems thinking, (c) learning organization, (d) data-informed decisions, (e) staff development, (f) parent involvement, (g) vision and planning, (h) innovation and change, (i) teacher awareness of the program, (j) school supports and barriers, (k) teacher overall professional satisfaction, and (l) teacher involvement in the reform effort.

District Strategic Team Data Analysis Activity

During the first year of this three-year grant, the district-wide ILA teams in the four neighboring districts were formed and met at a

university research institute for three 1-day (fall, spring, summer) training institutes and participated in structured teamwork with a coach. In addition, during the academic year, the ILA OAS Surveys were administered, and ILA team members analyzed the data collectively and critiqued the surveys for relevance and improvement of face validity. Data from the ILA surveys were used by the ILA Team with leaders in each of the four districts, to revise their original Innovation Support Plan. ILA survey statements are evaluated by respondents on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *Strongly Agree* (5) to *Strongly Disagree* (1). Following are examples of statements to be rated: *Teachers will not have adequate support for the changes they are expected to make to accommodate this new reform; The staff and faculty regularly assess strengths and weaknesses to improve the STEM Career Clubs Program;* and *The STEM Career Clubs Program may positively impact students*. Subsequent data from the ILA surveys and from the ILA Team's tacit knowledge survey inform the ILA Team of the current success of program implementation and any potential barriers. More importantly, data indicates whether the district's capacity for sustained innovation and reform is increasing.

Study Methods

The south-eastern area of the United States where this study was conducted has long stretches of fallow cotton and tobacco fields and occasionally a stop sign at a perpendicular crossing of county roads. Short stretches of small-town commercial areas usually have a mixture of open and vacant stores and one small family restaurant, all representing economies resulting from loss of fishing, textiles, and furniture building industries over several decades. Unemployment rates in the rural region are among the highest in the nation. Table 1 shows the demographics of the middle schools in the study. Note that

the school districts have up to 100% student participation in the federal free and reduced-price lunch program and as high as a 33% turnover of middle school teachers annually.

Table 1

Middle School District Data for 2016-17

School District	Student Body Size (avg.)	Free& Reduced-Price Lunch*	AYP** Targets Met/Total	High School Graduation Rates (4 yr cohort)	Teacher Turnover Rate	Alternate or Emergency Certified Teachers
A	541	76.3%	77/80	84.3%	17%	16%
B	248	99.4%	29/37	76.2%	33%	42%
C	372	99.6%	59/69	81.9%	33%	24%
D	377	100.0%	44/47	79.3%	31%	43%

*Percent of students living in poverty; **Annual Yearly Progress (student learning performance)

Table 2 shows that districts are under-performing with percent of students at grade-level in mathematics as low as 21% and in science varied from 47.8% to 65.8% across the four districts. The juxtaposition of conditions in these rural districts' needs is sharp. These middle schools serve low-income families, about 90% of whom are minorities.

Table 2

Summative Test Scores of Districts (% at or above Grade Level) for 2016-17

District	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8		
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Science
A	46.0%	35.7%	39.3%	28.5%	38.8%	27.5%	65.8%
B	34.1%	32.8%	36.3%	21.0%	31.7%	16.2%	47.8%
C	44.0%	37.1%	44.5%	26.4%	37.3%	21.7%	58.5%
D	44.0%	34.0%	48.9%	15.0%	41.2%	11.2%	60.6%

Although capable, experienced teachers staff about 80% of the classrooms, the rest are staffed through alternative means because recruitment of state-certified teachers in core disciplines to these rural areas is a constant challenge for principals. Careers in the high technology industries located in the closest regional rresearch park are about two hours away, not a part of the daily life of the students. Teachers desiring to update their content knowledge or skills do not have resources readily available (e.g., universities, industry, technology firms) than do teachers in higher income, urban centers of the state. The *STEM Career Awareness* project directly served, on average, 30 STEM Club teacher leaders, 12 leadership personnel, and 200 students in four middle schools located in four participating districts during all three academic years (2014-2017).

ILA OAS respondents include personnel within the middle schools involved in the study and from whom a District Strategic Team was established. This included the middle school principals, assistant principals, all teachers in every subject, and all relevant support staff (i.e. technology support personnel, media center specialists). The two-part OAS survey was administered in Fall 2016 and again in Spring 2017. One part of the survey covers questions about general organizational dispositions and STEM preform involvement including (a) level of *involvement* of teachers and staff in the development and implementation of the reform program, (b) level of teacher and staff *satisfaction* in their current school, (c) level of concern over the *supports* and *barriers* that negatively affect their ability to do their job, and (d) teacher and staff *awareness* of the purpose and value of the STEM reform initiative. The second part of the OAS survey covers nine specific organizational variables linked to effective organizations that have the capacity to sustain reform efforts: (a) accountability, (b) effective leadership, (c) systems thinking, (c) learning organization, (d) using data to make decisions, (e) staff development, (f) parent involvement, (g) vision and planning, and (h) innovation and change.

Respondent Demographics

Survey demographic questions determined that respondents in all four districts were similar in terms of gender (87% female, 13 % male), ethnicity (70% African American, 30% White), and career tenure (approximately 52% with 10 years or more full-time teaching experience, 33% at 3 to 9 years, 15% at 0 to 2 years). More importantly, the demographics of survey respondents were representative of the gender, ethnicity, and tenure percentages in all faculty and staff in the four schools where the survey was administered.

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Survey Returns

Return rates for the surveys are shown in Table 3. These results are unfortunately typical among poor, rural districts like the ones in this study districts experiencing high turnover rates of staff and fluctuation in personnel. Indeed, fluctuating return rates were more prominent in districts with principal changes. The ILA District Strategic administrators had to be convinced to continue supporting a program that was started under their predecessor, which was not highly successful in three of the four districts (A, B and D).

Table 3

ILA OAS Survey Returns, 2016-2017

District	Fall 2016			Spring 2017		
	N*	Returns	% Return	N	Returns	% Return
A	63	22	34.9%	63	12	19.0%
B	32	26	81.3%	32	20	62.5%
C	20	20	100.0%	14	10	71.4%
D	40	35	87.5%	35	16	45.7%

* Total number of potential survey respondents

Table 3 shows that with the exception of District A for the Fall of 2016 and District D for the Spring 2017, return rates were quite high with the majority of participants providing responses. This seemed to indicate that survey participation among teachers and support staff in the ILA schools did not diminish despite changes in the school's principal and membership on the District Strategic Team.

Teacher Tenure

Notable is the discrepancy between the career tenure of the teachers and their school tenure at current middle school. Table 4 displays the percentage of teachers in the study whose career tenure and school tenure were 0-3 years. Overall, very few teachers had career tenures that were three years or less, except for District A. Indeed, most teachers in the study were very experienced with 60-70% at a tenure of 10 years or more. However, tenure at their current middle school was quite low, ranging from 63% to 100% of teachers with a tenure of three years or less. This also indicates the high annual turnover rate of teachers in the study schools.

Table 4

Teacher Career Tenure versus Tenure at the Study School 2016-2017

District	Fall 2016	Spring 2017
% Teacher Tenure of 3 Years or Less		
	Career Tenure (0-3 Years)	School Tenure (0-3 Years)
A	35%	75%
B	8.3%	100%
C	10%	71.4%
D	6%	63%

However, teacher turnover is not predicted to be as problematic for reform sustainability in districts using the ILA process, unlike the influence of high teacher turnover in traditional reform processes. In fact, the ILA process is designed to be a continuous learning system that involves multiple internal stakeholders at all levels of the school

organization and is therefore tailor-made to absorb a higher level of teacher turnover without effecting the fidelity of the reform process.

Study Results

The primary purpose of the ILA process is to facilitate the creation of, training, and coaching of a District Strategic Team (DST) to collect data measuring organizational variables common in effective and sustainable school reform efforts. The secondarily was to identify and measure organizational barriers that might create a problem for successful implementation and sustainability of a new innovative program. Given that purpose, if the ILA process is a success, it is assured that the OAS survey would measure differences in the teacher and administrator perceptions about real program implementation issues as well as changes in their own experiences within their organizational culture. In practice, if the ILA process is working, the organizational culture should support capacity for a school to implement and sustain reform, and the teachers and principals working in that school should recognize this change and alter their responses on the OAS survey.

ILA OAS Survey Results: Fall 2016

Organizational variables among the four middle schools were assessed using the 35-item OAS. Organizational variables measured via the OAS included accountability, effective leadership, systems thinking, learning organizations, data usage, staff development, parental involvement, vision and planning, innovation and change, awareness, supports and barriers, satisfaction, and involvement. The same OAS survey was administered during the Fall of 2016 and again during the Spring of 2017. The current study data resulted a coefficient alpha of .92 for the OAS during Fall of 2016 and a coefficient alpha of .93 for the OAS during the Spring of 2017.

Correlations and descriptive statistics for organizational variables measured during the Fall of 2016 show that *vision and planning* was correlated strongly to innovation and change (r(93) = .65, $p < .01$), *parental involvement* (r(93) = .61, $p < .01$), *program awareness* (r(93) = .65, $p < .01$), and three other organizational variables, making it the most strongly correlated variable in the study. Indeed, vision and planning failed to correlate with only one variable; *teacher satisfaction*. In addition, accountability was strongly correlated to all variables including *vision and planning* r(93) = .54, $p < .01$. Furthermore, *program awareness* among the staff was strongly correlated to four organizational variables including *vision and planning* (r(93) = .65, $p < .01$), and *parental involvement* r(93) = .65, $p < .01$. Conversely, there were no correlations between *teacher satisfaction* and four of the organizational variables, including *vision and planning* and *staff development*. Also, *staff development* did not correlate with three variables, most notably *teacher involvement* in the program. Finally, *learning organizations* did not correlate with either *systems thinking* or *using data* variables.

ILA OAS Survey Results: Spring 2017

Correlations and descriptive statistics for organizational variables measured during the Spring of 2017 show that *vision and planning* was correlated strongly to *innovation and change* (r (93) = .76, $p < .01$), *parental involvement* (r(93) = .59, $p < .01$), *program awareness* (r(93) = .55, $p < .01$), and three other organizational variables, making it the most strongly correlated variable in the study. In addition, *innovation and change* was strongly correlated to all variables including *vision and planning* r (93) = .76, $p < .01$. Furthermore, *effective leadership* was strongly correlated to five organizational variables including *innovation and change* (r (93) = .58, $p < .01$), and *supports and barriers* r (93) = .58, $p < .01$. Conversely,

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there were no correlations between *teacher involvement* and three of the organizational variables, including *systems thinking* and *staff development*. Furthermore, *staff development* did not correlate with four variables most notably *teacher involvement* in the program, *teacher satisfaction*, and *supports and barriers*. Notably, *learning organization* did not correlate with *using data* variables; and *teacher program awareness* did not correlate with *accountability* or *using data*.

Discussion

A number of interesting and critical findings emerge when the results are compared between the Fall 2016 administration and Spring 2017 administration of the survey. In reviewing these results, it is important to note that the District Strategic Teams (DSTs) had been working together for about two years, receiving coaching support and training, collecting and analyzing their own organizational data, and developing and implementing their Support Plan (IPSP) purposed to improve organizational capacity and sustainability for the STEM reform. As such, the teams may reasonably be expected to change their views regarding the importance they ascribed to various organizational variables between Fall 2016 and Spring 2017.

In addition, it is notable that all the variables in the study correlated with nearly all the other variables. However, in a few cases the number of strongly significant correlations (r value greater or equal to .50) changed. In addition, some variables did not show correlation. These subtle differences are worth noting given supporting qualitative evidence that DSTs from the four schools in the study varied in their principal's attendance and the DST members' participation, and implementation fidelity.

Vision and Planning

Vision and planning remained the strongest correlation in both the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 results on the OAS surveys. *Vision and planning* not only produced the highest number of correlations with other organizational variables (six and five respectively) but also resulted in some of the highest correlations (r= .76 and r= .65 respectively) in the study.

A critical change was the finding that *vision and planning* showed no significant correlation to *teacher satisfaction* in the Fall 2016 survey but was highly correlated in the Spring 2017 results. Qualitative data gathered during the 2016-2017 school year, including participant quotes and coach observation notes from the ILA DST collaboration and planning meetings, indicated that participant beliefs changed over time. This included the changing belief that *teacher satisfaction* with the reform program in their middle school was, in fact, linked to the *vision and planning* of the DST. Team members indicated they changed their belief as a result of

- *Data the DST collected and analyzed that showed teachers becoming more satisfied and supportive of the reform program over time.*

- *The DST's efforts providing awareness, information, and training to all of the school staff regarding the importance of the reform program.*

- *Changing conversations and staff participation over time as the DST implemented its' Support Plan.*

In essence, the ILA DST collaborations, planning, implementation activities, and analysis of the ensuing results from the OAS survey data convinced the members of the strategic team that their own leadership through *vision and planning* were even more important to organizational health and sustainability than they originally thought. *Vision and planning* is the variable with the highest effect size correlated

to improved organizational capacity for reform efforts in schools reported in research findings (Chaikoed, Sirisuthi, & Numnaphol, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2001; Lesseig, Nelson, Slavit, & Seidel, 2016; Tyler, 2015).

Innovation and Change

Innovation and change was an organizational variable that measured transformation between the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 survey responses. In the Fall 2016 survey, *innovation and change* was correlated strongly to only three other variables and had a low correlation to the variable *effective leadership*. However, in the Spring 2017 survey, *innovation and change* correlated strongly with 7 of 13 variables including *effective leadership*. Qualitative data, including participant quotes and coach observation notes from the ILA DST collaboration and planning meetings, indicated that participants changed their belief in the effects of leadership on school-culture change and reform success. The DST members became more convinced that their collaborative work influenced school culture, particularly in the area of increased innovation and the ability to change.

Current organizational systems research supports this finding. For example, according to Fidan and Balci (2017), school administrators need to understand more definitively how organizational structures must be compatible with an ever-changing, often *complexifying* environments and how promoting innovation is necessary to create and manage organizational changes. In the study reported in this article, the ILA provided a reform process for administrators to solicit data from every level of the organization and thus gain greater understanding about the complexities of their school culture. Further, the use of the District Strategic Team provided a collaborative vehicle

to promote innovative solutions by a broad cadre of stakeholders who intimately understand the complexities of the school.

Further, Bridwell-Mitchell (2015) asserts that three mechanisms drive teacher agency by either changing or maintaining institutionalized instructional practices. She contends that effective reform mechanisms favor innovation versus socialization in peer collaborations, cohesion versus diversity in community interactions, and cognitive and normative divergence versus convergence in teachers' shared understandings, aims, and practices. The ILA process and the composition of the DST supported an increase in innovative collaborations, cohesion within interactions with the internal community, and normative convergence in shared practices. The ILA process, however, expands this finding to include collaborative reform planning among administrators, teachers, and support staff, rather than among teachers only.

Effective Leadership

Effective leadership as an organizational variable was not measured as a key element in the Fall 2016 survey administration. In fact, *effective leadership* strongly correlated to only one variable: *accountability* and measured only a low correlation to two variables including *innovation and change*. This finding mimics a general concern among grassroots reformists (e.g. Cusick, 2014; Erskine, 2014), specifically that teachers have been led to believe that the primary administrative function is to hold teachers to disruptive high-stakes accountability mandates while discouraging risky innovation in the classroom (Guilfoyle, 2006; Johnson, 2006). Indeed, this concern has been evidenced by state and federal entities that pressure school leaders to standardize teaching practices and assessments. Given, the recent history of educational reform being primarily driven through removal of human agency in

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teaching practice and expansive high-stakes standardized testing, the results on the Fall 2016 survey were predictable.

However, the Spring 2017 results indicated that the ILA process changed teachers' view of leadership. Results included strong correlations between *effective leadership* and five organizational variables including *innovation and change* and no weak correlations. Qualitative evidence suggests that ILA participants changed their view about how leadership is enacted and about the roles of leaders. Indeed, the survey results are even more significant when considering that not only did the members of the DST change their views of leadership but so also did the majority of teachers in the middle schools. This change in culture is seen in non-STEM teachers as well as those directly participating in the STEM Career Club.

Research in this field support our study findings. Results from the Sebastian, Allensworth, and Huang (2016) study suggest that effective principals use   teacher leadership to   improve   the school learning climate. Specifically, the researchers point to the need for principals to promote teacher influence in all aspects of school organizational processes and conclude that this approach improves student learning. It is notable that one of the primary goals of the DST Team at the ILA meetings is to analyze collected data on all aspects of the school organizational processes to identify and ameliorate barriers to reform.

Parental Involvement

One surprising finding that emerged was the change in the survey responses regarding the variable *parent involvement*. In the districts, where the study was conducted, a common point of discussion and consternation at the ILA meetings was the lack of support and involvement of parents in their communities. Often, in the beginning

stages of the ILA process, the DSTs would become hamstrung in devising innovation to improve student learning because of the belief that the absence of parent support was a primary contributor to poor student performance. Initially, some members of the DST did not believe teachers could do much to overcome the negative influences from their students' home situations.

This perspective was reflected by many teachers in the participating schools, as evidenced by results of the Fall 2016 survey that *parent involvement* was correlated to 8 of the 12 variables leading to effective school organizations. In other words, teachers believed that the level of parent involvement has more influence on school effectiveness than variables like *effective leadership*, *using data to improve teaching*, and *teacher support* of the STEM initiative, to name a few. By the Spring 2017 survey administration, *parental involvement was* correlated to a moderate degree to only 4 of 12 variables. Qualitative data support the change in attitude among the DST members. Specifically, DST members began to believe that their collaborative leadership efforts had a more significant influence on improving student learning regardless of the level of parental involvement.

These findings are supported by Park and Holloway (2017) who found that parental involvement focused on parents helping their own child was more strongly related to school-level achievement in low-SES schools than involvement defined by school-event participation. This is particularly applicable because the DST members complained mostly about parents "only coming to sports events" rather than attending parent conferences or volunteering in the classroom. The perception of the type of parent involvement that influences improved student performance was changed by the participation in the STEM

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Career Club project and in efforts of the DSTs to analyze and innovate the most effective forms of parental involvement.

Professional Development

One of the more consistent negative findings in the OAS surveys was lack of correlation between the variable *staff development* and other organizational variables. This result appeared in both the Fall 2016 survey data with no strong correlations and three variables without correlation as well as the Spring 2017 survey data where *staff development* had a low or no correlation with four of the other variables. Indeed, *staff development* was the lowest rated variable among the 13 measured in the survey.

Accordingly, Whitworth and Chiu (2015) conveyed teachers' viewpoints that staff development was not largely effective in improving organizational culture, improving teacher performance, or increasing student performance. Their review of literature concluded that school district leaders are not just a contextual factor but rather an integral part of the process and should be integrated into and considered part of any professional development model in science education. They conclude that "involving school leaders in science education professional development efforts can support teacher change by helping teachers develop professional communities, connecting teachers with resources, and encouraging and supporting changes in practice" (p. 136). Similarly, Blanchard, Southerland, and Granger (2009) concluded that district-offered professional development often does not incorporate characteristics of effective professional development (e.g. sustained modeling, effective pedagogical strategies, teacher teams) and is typically delivered in the form of short in-service workshops with little or no follow-up.

The composition of the District Strategic Team implicitly requires that school principals participate as an active member of the DST, attending all ILA meetings and engaging fully in the data analysis and development of the Support Plan. This continual involvement by school leaders in the ILA process is a unique quality of our reform model and supports Whitworth and Chiu's (2015) findings. Indeed, ILA Teams whose principal failed to attend the meetings and participate fully produced the lowest positive findings in the survey results.

Qualitative Data

In addition to the Likert-scaled survey questions in the OAS survey, there was a single open-ended question that asked: *What do you believe is the actual purpose of the STEM Career Awareness program?* Samples of responses are given below and are typical of the overall responses from the districts involved in the project from the first year in 2011 to the culminating year in 2017. Below are three responses posted in the Spring 2011 administration of the survey:

> *I believe that the purpose of it is to make other districts know about the districts that are underachieving.*
>
> *Just another bandwagon program*
>
> *I don't know anything about this program.*

These two responses were included in the Spring 2017 survey administration:

> *To educate/enlighten students' knowledge of STEM careers available in the real world. Some students may find an interest in STEM careers they had never known existed or didn't realize that they had a talent for. Some of our students continue to say that they may not choose a STEM related career, however, they enjoy the activities and sparks their interest.*

To make students aware of some of the many career opportunities on offer in the STEM fields and then engage them in fun and interesting hands on activities so that they can consider the possibility that they might find these careers fun and interesting too.

Anecdotally, participants reported that the ILA process was unlike others they had experienced, noting that the process pressed teams to engage in genuine collaborative decision-making, utilize data to shape their strategic goals, and evaluate more effectively the success of their current plan of implementation. Components from the six leadership concepts were measured and analyzed including (a) increased capacity of district to encourage and support future innovation, (b) transformation of their district culture, (c) change in teacher pedagogy, and (d) improved sustainability of innovation, to name a few.

Respondents reported the discovery and remediation of faulty two-way communication, the absence or poor operation of feedback loops, and the coherence of the new program to existing programs and to other support facets of the organization (e.g., budget, personnel, training). The ILA teaming process was reported to significantly change the scope and content of action plans to recognize and capitalize on the interdependency of organizational systems. The use of disciplined inquiry provided ILA DSTs and coaches the data needed to develop customized training modules for each ILA team and caused the teams to view action plans as flexible, responsive guidelines.

The findings in this study support the fecundity of the use of the ILA process and the District Strategic Teaming model to improve organizational capacity for reform implementation and sustainability. In addition, the findings support the use of the ILA process and the DST model to improve organizational learning and school culture to

support student learning in rural, high-poverty schools with a majority of underrepresented student populations.

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Superintendent Roles as CEO and Team Leader

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Abstract	Article Info
The complexity and intensity of reforms over several decades in the United States of America led to large-scale systemic reform and shifted superintendent roles from emphasis on management tasks to pivotal actions in the complex algorithm for managing and leading change initiatives. National commissions, task force reports, and nationwide research on the American superintendency informed need for changes in school-district leadership. This article provides a scholarly and objective analysis of issues surrounding five roles superintendents assume and the emergent need for district-level team leadership to address successfully diverse and complex challenges in contemporary education.	

Introduction

Since middle of the 19th century, a wide array of social, economic, political, and technological changes altered the purpose and structure of public education in the United States of America (USA). Schools not only facilitated the nation's shift from agricultural and industrial

economies but also assimilated unprecedented waves of immigrant children with different social, economic, and political views and prepared successive generations to enter the American workforce (Cibulka, 1999; Glass, 2008; Goodlad & McMannon, 1997; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). During the last half of the 20th century, rapid changes in technology stimulated the emergence of a global, information-based economy that required students to develop decidedly different sets of skills and presaged need to alter fundamentally the nature and direction of schooling (Björk, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014).

Since the early 1980s, national commission and task force reports heightened concerns about the condition of public education and called for policymakers to pass legislation needed to reform state education systems. During the past several decades, however, most reform initiatives focused on improving schools, student learning, and teaching rather than rethinking the system itself. Although scholars, practitioners, and policymakers agreed that the socio-industrial architecture of schooling was characterized by Balkanized organizational structures and picket-fence federalism inhibited systemic reform, they also understood the growing urgency for undertaking this transforming work. At this juncture, the options are to dismantle and replace the current system or fundamentally change how schooling is delivered. An examination of these circumstances suggests contemporary superintendents' work must focus on developing coherent, district-level management systems characterized by effective teamwork and expanded communication networks.

Although the scope and duration of changing an education system may appear daunting, international precedents suggest it is possible. The Finnish example provides insight into how strategic education

policymaking and commitment to long-term change may be accomplished. For over 2 decades (1970-1990), Finland linked the notion of economic growth and preparation of an educated workforce, and its Parliament invested in enrolling top students in teacher education programs, raising licensure standards, promoting teacher professionalism, cultivating teamwork, nurturing trust-based educational leadership, and networking among collaborative schools (Sahlberg, 2011). School district superintendents and office staffs supported the work of teachers and principals at all grade levels in developing a fundamentally different school-based curricula that shifted learning from showing mastery of the curriculum and content to hands-on experimentation and problem-oriented learning. Thus, students were not only expected to master content knowledge but also apply what they learned to new situations and solve real world problems (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007). The knowledge and skills of new generations of Finnish students aligned with 21st century dimensions of the PISA test. As a consequence, Finnish students not only ranked at the top of PISA reports in reading, mathematics, and science since the early 2000s, but they also acquired knowledge and skills that fueled Finland's economic growth for the past several decades (Risku, Karnervio, & Björk, 2014; Sahlberg, 2011). The Finnish success story is instructive in that it suggests coherent education policies, district-level leadership, persistence, and active involvement of professional educators can accomplish systems change.

A common theme that emerged out of systemic reform in Finland is that those working is schools and districts were the engines of reform. An important dimension of superintendents' work over 2 decades involved redesigning traditional oversight and compliance roles of municipal education office staffs and forging them into teams

that supported building-level change and innovation (Risku et al., 2014; Björk et al., 2014). They accomplished this not by simply amending bureaucratic structures and job descriptions (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) but by reconfiguring them to support the work of teachers and principals.

Public Education in the United States

Changing the organizational and social architecture of school districts is a key dimension of systemic change in the USA. Although many countries like Finland provide education services under the auspices of a national ministry of education, responsibility for public schooling is reserved to individual states (Kowalski, 2013; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). In this regard, rather than a single national system of education, the USA has 50 different state systems composed of more than 14,000 local school districts (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). Although responsibility for public schools stresses local control (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007), there are many similarities across all public school districts with regard to governance, structure, and goals. Individual state legislatures establish a uniform system of education by enacting education laws and regulations, appropriating and allocating tax revenues to school districts, defining minimum teacher and administrator licensure standards, establishing salary scales, developing curricula and assessing student learning, and regulating services (e.g., books, buses, extracurricular programs).

Legislatures typically defer responsibility for education to an elected or appointed state board of education, which hires a commissioner or secretary to administer its programs and provide oversight of local school-district operations. Historically, local districts have been by viewed as the "basic unit of government in public education's organizational structure" (Kowalski, 2013, p. 74) and

although their legal authority may differ by state, school districts are viewed as extensions of state governments. Although the *Constitution of the United States* reserves the right to provide education to states, the *general welfare clause* gives Congress the authority to ensure *the common good* of its citizens. Consequently, the federal government may pass narrowly targeted education acts to ensure that public education benefits the nation as a whole.

School district superintendents typically are hired on multiple-year contracts (e.g., 42% have 3-year contracts) and over the span of 16 years serve in three districts (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). As chief executive officers (CEOs), their primary responsibility is to manage the day-to-day affairs of the district and rely on their central office staffs to accomplish work (Björk, 2005; Browne-Ferrigno & Glass, 2005). The size of school districts varies according to the number of students enrolled, which in turn often determines the number of central office staff engaged in middle-management activities. Although superintendents of small districts may handle several areas of responsibility, CEOs of large county or urban districts delegate responsibilities to their middle management staffs.

Historical antecedents contributed to school districts being centralized, hierarchical, and bureaucratic. Following publication of A *Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), however, a wide array of reform mandates, regulatory requirements, and accountability measures were promulgated. As a result, the locus of education policymaking shifted to the state level and school district bureaucracies grew in size and complexity in an effort to provide adequate oversight and accountability at the local level. When reformers encountered structures that they were instrumental in

creating, they often criticized them as being unduly hierarchical and rigid (Kowalski, 2013). After several decades of work focused on decentralizing decision-making authority and increasing the voice of a wider range of stakeholders, analysts concurred that neither centralization nor decentralization proved successful in initiating and sustaining reforms (Adler & Borys, 1996; Datnow, 2002). A longtime scholar of education change, Fullan (2003), argues persuasively that greater balance between centralization and decentralization need to be achieved to support systemic reform. However, accomplishing the redesign of hierarchical and rule-bound structures to emphasize "flexibility, participation and quality" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 52) requires considerable time and attention. When a proper balance between centralization and decentralization is achieved, increases in both efficiency and effectiveness become more probable. The key to achieving equilibrium resides in district-level leaders. Specifically, these individuals need to develop groups, teams, and networks that provide support to work across district middle-management structures—and they must do this while retaining responsibility for policy compliance and accountability (Kowalski, 2003; Kwalwasser, 2012).

District Office and Middle Management

At this juncture, the challenge facing school district superintendents is not whether to choose centralization or decentralization but rather to find an effective balance between the two (Fullan, 2003). Concurring with that assessment, Kowalski (2013) asserts "there is no single recipe for determining the appropriate mix of centralization and decentralization. Instead, conditions must be diagnosed and addressed on a district-by-district and school-by-school basis" (p. 100). Avoiding becoming the victim of a one-best system

mentality, superintendents should understand multi-directional pressures that eventually determine the outcome of their organizational redesign efforts.

Mintzberg's (1980/2016) discussion of organizational design suggests general principles for guiding district-level restructuring efforts. For example, at the strategic apex of the organization, superintendents tend to emphasize centralization as a way to accomplish their mission through rules, regulations, and policies. Conversely, district-office middle managers, committed to their own administrative domains tend to resist top-down control as a way to protect and enhance their units' parochial interests. This tendency can pull the organization toward balkanization. Although technocrats feel comfortable with predictability offered by centralized structures, other middle management staffs are most at ease when authority is dispersed and routine work is accomplished through on-going mutual adjustment achieved through committees, task forces, teamwork, liaison devices, networks and other forms of collaboration.

In sum, professional bureaucracies allow for the standardization of behavior through coordination rather than centralized control mechanisms. In retrospect, however, efforts at decentralization have presented significant challenges for practitioners who were academically trained and socialized by experiences in highly centralized education systems. Long-standing beliefs about how to work (e.g., efficiency, authority, control, risk, trust) may require time and effort focused on transforming the culture of education (Kowalski, 2006). When reconfiguring district offices, superintendents may benefit from analyzing normative tensions that exist between the forces of centralization and decentralization, the roles of executives and middle managers, and the unique dynamics of professional

bureaucracies. Understanding these issues remains critical to school district restructuring efforts.

Superintendent Role Characteristics

Mounting pressure on districts to improve student academic performance contributed to tensions between advocates for top-down and bottom-up change strategies. Neither end of this structural continuum, however, describes how real work is done. For example, Finland's neorealist perspective that centralization and decentralization are indispensable dimensions of education organizations contributed to transforming the function of middle management from oversight to support and the locus of change from districts to schools. Superintendents in the USA are faced with similar challenges that may require exercising five role conceptualizations. Brunner, Grogan and Björk's (2002) discussion of their roles is based on analyses of historical discourse and data reported in the last two 10-year studies (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011) authorized by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). While some roles can be traced back to the founding of the position in the 1850s and others materialized more recently, none of the roles has become irrelevant to modern practice (Kowalski & Björk, 2005). For example, the first four roles described by Callahan (1966) include *teacher-scholar* (1850 to early 1900s), *organizational manager* (early 1900s to 1930), *democratic leader* (1930 to mid-1950s), and *applied social scientist* (mid-1950s to mid-1970s). A fifth role, *communicator* (mid-1970s to present) is described by Kowalski (2005) as the warp and weft of the whole cloth of district-leadership practice. Although each role characterization is described individually, superintendents often enact two or more of them simultaneously (Björk et al., 2014).

Teacher-Scholar Role

Initially, superintendents served as master teachers; however, by the turn of the 20th century their work expanded to implementation of a mandated state curricula and supervision of teachers (Callahan, 1962). The state and district capacity to deliver a set of specified courses with uniform content was altered by rising industrialization, demographic shifts, urbanization, and influx of immigrants. In this environment, school districts served as a way to prepare children to enter the workforce as well as to assimilate them into the American culture. As school districts increased in size and complexity, the superintendent's role as teacher-scholar fluctuated in importance. However, after the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk,* heightened concern for the economic wellbeing of the nation linked student academic performance to a corporate bottom-line requirement. At this juncture in history, instructional improvement became an enduring aspect of superintendent work, although they enacted their teacher-scholar role differently than other educators. As instructional leaders, superintendents provided visionary leadership, articulated high expectations for teachers and students, engaged in long-term planning and budgeting, evaluated staff members' performance, and monitored student academic achievement through a lens of district-wide improvements (Kowalski & Björk, 2005).

Organizational-Manager Role

During the late 1800s, urban school-district boards expressed misgivings about superintendents' knowledge and skills to manage large, complex education enterprises. According to Cuban (1976), "the lines of argument crystallized over whether the functions of a big-city superintendent should be separated into two distinct jobs, i.e., business manager and superintendent of instruction" (p. 17). Scholars suggest

that these debates were influenced by pervasive corporate concepts of scientific management and business efficiency (Kowalski, 1999). Prominent education scholars including Franklin Bobbitt, Ellwood Cubberly, and George Sprayer supported adoption of business principles by superintendents and other education leaders (Cronin, 1973). Other scholars, led by George Counts, opposed adoption of industrial management practices because they were considered incongruous with schools and because corporate board authority and executive control contradicted democratic core values of public education (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Van Til, 1971). Despite these arguments, school boards adopted corporate governance models and expected superintendents to handle day-to-day management responsibilities (e.g., budgeting and personnel oversight, facility management, public relations). Although superintendents' management role remained a core aspect of their work (Browne-Ferrigno & Glass, 2005; Kowalski & Glass, 2002), the most recent AASA decennial report indicated that it had been eclipsed by their role as instructional leader (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Democratic-Political Leader Role

An integral part of superintendents' work is influencing state-level macro political decision-making processes and orchestrating micropolitics of district-level implementation. The nature and scope of these efforts include galvanizing public support for education, lobbying state legislatures for adequate budget appropriations, negotiating local tax rate increases and bond issues, interacting with school boards, responding to interest group demands, serving as the spokesperson on controversial public policy issues, and engaging staffs in change initiatives (Björk et al., 2014; Björk & Lindle, 2001). Superintendents acknowledge the rise in interest group politics and

how their political influence manifests itself in different ways depending on district size (Kowalski et al., 2011). The most overt political action is experienced by superintendents leading large districts. Conversely, superintendents serving in small or rural districts tend to work around and thru local relationships that are "close knit" and "life-long" and "have a prevalence of emotional responses to considerations for change in those communities" (Lambkin, 2006, p. 19). These circumstances suggest that influence on decision-making processes in smaller districts often require a more personal political strategy. Although enacting their political role typically differs according district size, a majority of superintendents viewed community involvement and listening to public opinion as key to the vitality of a democratic society (Glass et al, 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011; Kirst & Wirt, 2009). Although a majority of superintendents view their relations with school board members (i.e., micro-politics) as being positive, they also regard it as one of the most significant challenges they face (Kowalski et al., 2011). These findings suggest that it is not a question as to whether superintendents have a political role but rather how they enact it (Björk & Gurley, 2005). Having political acuity to work with and thru a wide array of stakeholders in enacting systemic reform at the local level is important for superintendents as well as for the wellbeing of society (Kowalski et al., 2011; Levin, 1999).

Social-Scientist Role

Recognizing changes in the social, economic, and political life of the nation and understanding how these shifts influenced public education contributed to the fourth conceptualization, superintendent as an applied social scientist. The W. K. Kellogg Foundation (1961) articulated its importance by noting that superintendents who had "a greater sensitivity to large social problems through an

interdisciplinary approach involving most of the social sciences" (p. 13) were well positioned to make strategic changes in their community's public schools. Although Callahan (1966) affirmed that perspective, observing that social-science research findings had profound implications for public education, he cautioned against its rigid, technocratic application to problem solving. He additionally argued that superintendents should understand the larger context in which changes are occurring to facilitate their making contributions to a more just and democratic society. During the 1950s, the theory movement and its emphasis on empirical data coincided with the rise of an information society. The convergence of these two events fueled widespread criticism of public schools, particularly those serving the nation's economic underclass and students of color. Behavioral scientists also applied systems thinking to describe relationships among external events occurring in society (e.g., socioeconomic, political, legal) to internal corrective actions (Getzels, 1977) and provided an initial framework for launching systemic reforms.

Beginning in the late 1970s, school districts were forced by education reformers to collect an ever-widening array of and increasingly finer grained data. This information was demographic and performance based; it pertained to students, teachers, and aggregate school performance; the assumption was that superintendents would use these data to make informed decisions that would contribute to improving schools, meeting the needs of all children (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002; Starratt, 1991), and eradicating social injustices (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2005).

Communicator Role

During the formative era of public education, superintendents emulated norms and practices prevalent in industry and tended to

issue commands like corporate CEOs down the school district's chain of command. Thayer (1961) characterized their communication style as being "top-down and impersonal, intended narrowing for informing, instructing (or directing), evaluating and influencing" (p. 4). Several decades later, social, economic and political changes occurring in the USA not only increased citizens' voice but also irrevocably altered executive communication patterns. In addition, scholars found that the top-down model of communication had deleterious effect on employee perceptions of administrators as well as on their morale, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organization--conditions that negatively impacted organizational effectiveness (Björk et al., 2014; Kowalski, 2001; Kowalski et al., 2011).

After publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the call for systemic reform expanded community and parental engagement as well as increased the level of collaboration among administrative staffs, teachers, and students (Björk, 2001). In this emerging environment, Schlechty (1997) argued that "the way social systems are put together has independent effects on the way people behave, what they learn, and how they learn what they learn" (p. 134). Consequently, to function effectively, superintendents were cautioned to minimize hierarchical forms of authority and adopt relational models of leading and "open, two-way and symmetrical" (Kowalski et al., 2011, p. 4) communication patterns. At an operational level, there is a reciprocal relationship between organizational culture and patterns of communication: "Cultures are communicative creations. They emerge and are sustained by the communicative acts of all employees, not just the conscious persuasive strategies of upper management" and "do not exist separately from people communicating with one another" (Conrad, 1994, p. 27). In other words, organizational communication and culture are iterative because "communication gives rise to culture,

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which gives rise to communication, which perpetuates culture" (Axley, 1996, p. 153).

Because changing school cultures was perceived to be key to launching and sustaining systemic change, effective superintendent communication patterns shifted from classical, top-down directive to reciprocal patterns that aligned with new ways of doing work (Heckman, 1993; Kowalski, 2000; Kowalski, Petersen, & Fusarelli, 2007). Superintendents reported that being an effective communicator became increasingly important near the close of the 20th century (Glass et al., 2000) and was *substantially* (85%) or *moderately* (14%) critical to their job performance (Kowalski et al., 2011) a decade later.

Redesigned Social Architecture of School Districts

Throughout the 20th century, school boards and superintendents emulated corporate governance and administrative structures built on the tenets of classical organizational theory that stressed efficiency, hierarchical-bureaucratic structures, and top-down communication (Marion & Gonzalez, 2014; Scott & Davis, 2007; Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2016). Such notions of efficiency however tended to stymie changes in organizational structure when circumstances changed, foster perceptions of conflict as being only negative, engendered treatment of non-administrators as subordinates, and nurtured conventional cultures designed to insulate organization from external influences (e.g., political pressures, government regulations). Because these classical tenets perpetuated traditional structures and normative culture of public schools with regard to administrator behaviors and communication patterns, rigidity within public schools thwarted attempts to realign learning and teaching with changing demographic contexts and economic demands.

Complementary Communication

The notion of *complementary communication* is a central tenet of classical theory and prescribes one-way, top-down, directive, and coercive information exchanges. This form of communication intentionally focuses on (a) maximizing power of administrators over subordinates (Burgoon & Hale, 1984), (b) thwarting mutual influence, and (c) preventing multi-level and multi-directional exchanges (McGregor, 1967). Complementary communication patterns negatively impact an administrator's relationships with employees, which is viewed positively through the lens of classical technical efficiency (i.e., relationships with employees are counterproductive).

Constructive Communication

As the USA moved from an industrial to a technical and information-based economy, scholars challenged the validity of fundamental assumptions within classical organizational theory. For example, as educational reformers sought to transform the nature and direction of schooling, they advised school and district administrators to replace rigid, authoritarian administration with democratic administration (Etzioni, 1993; Ogawa, Crowson, & Goldring, 1999) and to replace change-resistant cultures with learning cultures (Barth, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Schein, 1992). They viewed both democratic administration and learning cultures as being essential canons of effective teamwork and systemic change.

Challenging Teamwork

Because of the scope and complexity of the challenges facing schools and districts today, teams composed of members with diverse expertise have become pervasive. A *team* is defined as a group of "three or more people who perceive themselves as a unit, who are mutually interdependent, and who interact about some common goal"

(Wilson, 2004, p. 371). Effective teams are characterized by their possessing (a) complementary knowledge and skills required to complete assigned tasks, (b) member interdependence, (c) shared authority, (d) shared responsibility, (e) self-management, (f) accountability for collective performance, (g) common goals, (h) shared rewards, and (i) synergy (Edmonson, 2012).

Most teams visible in public education are school-based units focused primarily on improving curriculum and instruction or district-level units focused primarily on policies and governance. Some teams are permanent (e.g., school-level interdisciplinary team or site-based governance team), while others are temporary (e.g., district-level ad hoc team promoting passage of a bond referendum).

Superintendent as Team Leader

Scholars note that although teams have existed for decades, their structure, process, and levels of effectiveness remain relatively inconstant (Lencioni, 2002). Their unstable nature may be understood partly because teaming unavoidably unmasks conflicting dispositions about the role and authority of education administrators. A quintessential example of this tension is evident in conflicts between notions of professionalism and democracy. As professionals, superintendents are expected to rely on expert knowledge to make decisions that are in the best interest of the broad community. As CEOs of public school districts, however, superintendents are expected to engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders in decision-making processes--a condition that often makes them subservient to the will of the people and at times may compromise their professional judgment (Wirt & Kirst, 2001).

Recognizing social, economic and political shifts occurring in the nation, communication scholars advised administrators to exhibit the

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principles of democratic leadership and move from complementary communication to relational communication patterns (Littlejohn, 1992). The latter paradigm has two important characteristics. First, superintendents need to engage in interpersonal, two-way conversations in which those involved influence one another's behavior over and above their organizational role, rank, and status (Cappella, 1987). And second, superintendents engage in symmetrical exchanges intended to benefit all involved parties (Grunig, 1989). Being an effective communicator is currently viewed as a major role conceptualization for today's superintendents. In this regard, relational communication is the norm due to the intricate connection between communicative behaviors and relationships. Grunig and Huang (2000) argue persuasively that positive relationships are erected on four communication-driven pillars of mutuality: power sharing, trust, commitment, and satisfaction. In this regard, relationships are "bestowed, sustained, and transformed through communicative behavior" (Millar & Rogers, 1976, p. 87).

Because teams are vulnerable to several persistent problems, their effectiveness rarely occurs naturally, particularly when the quality and acceptance of outcomes are imperative. Following are examples of situations when superintendent leadership interventions and clear communication may alleviate potentially serious problems.

- *Allowing member self-interests to influence process or outcomes*. Individual team member predilections are often at odds with each other, especially in districts serving highly diverse communities. In these instances, team members often allow their social preferences and political choices to eclipse evidence, dismiss contradictory viewpoints, and sensible conclusions (Patton & Downs, 2003; Reitz, 1987).

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- *Tolerating excessive inefficiency.* Team decisions typically require more time and resources than do individual decisions (Clark, Clark, & Irvin, 1997). Without sound superintendent leadership, however, the amount of time expended may reach unacceptable levels and be counterproductive (Edmonson, 2012).

- *Allowing negative social and political obstructions.* Teams are vulnerable to goal displacement, a social condition in which cohesion among group members becomes a higher priority than decision quality, a condition is commonly referred to as *groupthink.* In addition, teams also may be vulnerable to manipulation, a political condition resulting from unequal distribution of power and knowledge among its members (Janis, 1982). In these circumstances, social and political problems usually steer teams in the direction of making mediocre or ineffective decisions.

- *Ignoring or tolerating dysfunctional conflict*. Group development theory posits that organizational conflict is both inevitable and essential to long-term effectiveness (Mohr & Dichter, 2001). On the one hand, if conflict is ignored or tolerated, dysfunctional conflict may negatively affect the quality of team decisions. On the hand, properly managed conflict may become a catalyst for desirable change (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008).

Despite possible disadvantages of teamwork, the concept is highly defensible professionally, politically, and philosophically. Professionally, team members usually acquire information, knowledge, and skills that improve their practice and motivate them to be creative and responsible (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Compared to individual decision making, the quantity and quality of evidence collected and analyzed are more substantial. Politically, compared to autocratic decisions, team decisions and recommendations are more

likely to be accepted and promulgated (Hirokawa, 1990; Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2004). Philosophically, teams are more compatible with democratic principles and shared leadership (Sergiovanni, 2006).

In the face of continuous change, school district effectiveness depends largely on organizational learning and developing highly effective central-office and school-level teams, which are the engines that drive systemic reform processes (Edmonson, 2012). Distributive leadership focused on principles of deliberative democracy, however, requires more than mere conviction and good intent. To facilitate successful teams, superintendents must be committed to and adept at symmetrical and ongoing information exchanges with multiple and diverse public constituencies and internal groups. To bring about effective teams, superintendents need to allow their spending "a tremendous amount of time and effort exploring, shaping and agreeing on a purpose that belongs to them both collectively and individually" (Katzenback & Smith, 2004, p. 7). In other words, highly effective superintendents are acutely aware that a group never "becomes a team until it can hold itself accountable as a team" (p. 13).

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System Leadership and School Leadership

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Abstract	Article Info
This article describes research on system and school leadership from three perspectives. At the system level, leadership was evident at the senior levels of the central and regional systems, with principal network leaders having potential to exercise occasional leadership. Principals tended not to operate as system leaders because they had limited influence across multiple schools. At a regional level, it was clear that directors acted as system level leaders, exerting wide influence on clusters of schools to improve. At a school level, the work of the principal, other school leaders, and critical friends was more important to the improvement journey of the school than system leadership. It seems that whilst system leadership can be important, it needs to work in conjunction with school leadership to maximize influence on school success.	

Introduction

Surrounding the work of schools are many contexts, from the local and school level through system and national contexts. We adapted Hallinger's (2018) contextual leadership perspective to construct a leadership-context framework that captures some of the complexity of the multiple contexts that influence the work of principals and schools (see Figure 1). The model identifies four general contextual factors that impact schools (i.e., economic, socio-cultural, political, technological) and indicates that the school exists within a broader educational system where central and regional system initiatives and system leadership can influence schools. Hallinger classifies these as the *institutional context*. Within the educational system context is the *school perspective*, and in the center of the school perspective is the school performance and development context with leadership as the central feature. Leadership influences school culture and climate, teaching and learning, with these impacting student outcomes. The model identifies four direct contextual influences on school performance and development: (a) nature and type of school, (b) personal characteristics of the leader, (c) surrounding community, and (d) external agencies, networks.

Figure 1

School Leadership in Context (adapted from Hallinger, 2018, p. 17)
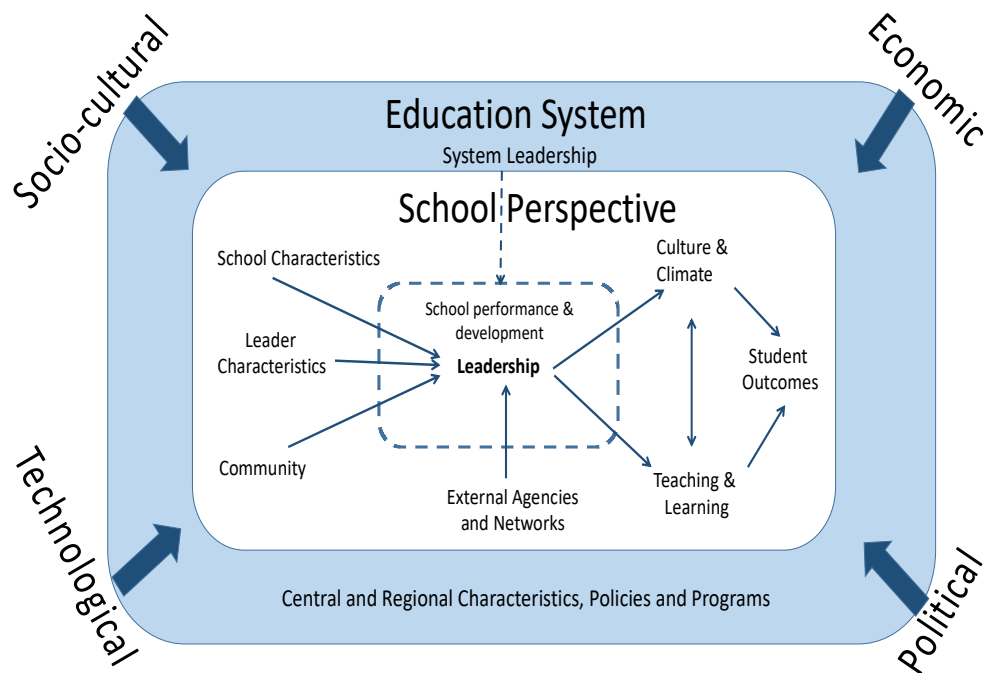
In this article we describe the intersection of system and school leadership and show that whilst system and school leadership are important for school success, they need to work in a synergistic relationship to have the most impact. This article is a more concise version of a chapter we recently wrote on system leadership within the State of Victoria in Australia (Gurr & Drysdale, 2018). In the next sections we describe research that shows how leadership at the system, regional, and school level interact to promote school success.

System Level Leadership

In a study on leadership in the Victorian education system, Butler (2014) described *system leadership* as "the ability to generate change across a system or nested system where this involves creating, utilizing or exploiting connections within the system" (p. 96). It is a modest definition in many respects. Whilst it captures the core focus to improve a system of schools, it lacks mention of the typical control/power mechanisms such as governance, fiscal and human resource management, direction setting, accountability and so forth (Nir, 2014). It is, however, an inclusive definition because it allows many people at different levels of a school system to demonstrate system leadership.

At the time of Butler's (2014) research, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) had an organizational structure for schools that was headed by a Secretary, Deputy Secretary Office for Government School Education, nine Regional Directors, and many regional network leaders (RNL), who were generally former principals responsible for 20–25 primary and secondary schools and their principals. Butler (2014) was interested in how system leadership was manifested and how it contributed to school improvement—particularly the construction of the regional networks and the RNL role to supervise them (DEECD, 2008; Pike, 2008) and how this arrangement was influencing school improvement. RNLs served a new role in the Victorian sector: They acted in supporting principals and school communities to improve as well as in supporting the school accountability process as line managers for system initiatives and processes. There was, however, uncertainty about what the role could be, with conjecture and concern that it might be akin to the trust and control elements of the superintendent role in

the USA (Björk, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). In a previous paper (Gurr, Clarke, Drysdale, & Wildy, 2014), we identified RNLs as having some of, but not all, the characteristics of superintendents. Butler (2014) described this as regulatory action "to deliberately construct a narrowly but explicitly defined system leader role within education" (p. 1). Butler's study relied on system documents and individual interviews with four central senior managers (including the DEECD Secretary and members of the senior management team of the Office of Government School Education), three regional directors, 14 RNLs, and 23 principals to examine system leadership within the Victorian government education system.

Findings from the study indicated that senior managers in the Victorian system were clearly viewed as system leaders. There were also expectations and indications that RNLs could be system leaders, but many interviewees also viewed the RNL role as being more concerned with line management and compliance. The research indicated the potential of this role to enhance horizontal/heterarchical leadership. Principals were not generally viewed system leaders, primarily because of their single school focus competitive pressures not to support the work of other schools. The evidence that system leadership led to school improvement relied more on argued cases of indirect impact, rather than clear empirical evidence. The work of RNLs seemed to rely more on developing trust as they did not have sufficient power to exert control. Conversely, senior department managers relied more on control than trust, as they were too removed from schools to establish the type of relationships needed to promote trust. The exception was that of the regional director role. In the past, some directors established strong, positive relations with school principals and communities that allowed the directors to use both the trust and control to influence school direction, budgets, and

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accountability. In the next section we present an example of this type of leadership.

Regional Level Leadership

The edited book by Hopkins, Munro and Craig (2011a) described the school improvement journey of the former Northern Metropolitan Region (Melbourne, Victoria) led by Wayne Craig as the Regional Director. The book tells the story of how Craig led improvement of this region through (a) development of a school improvement framework, *Powerful Learning*; (b) use of experts in literacy, numeracy, student welfare, and system leadership; and (c) support of RNLs, principals, and teachers in a collective effort to improve student learning.

At the time of the reform, the Northern Metropolitan Region included 195 schools comprising 137 primary schools, 36 secondary schools, 13 special schools, 7 primary and secondary schools plus one school that provided education from primary years to Year 9 as well as one school that only spanned Years 10–12. These schools collectively served 75,000 students and were located in areas that had some of the highest levels of social disadvantage in Australia. It was also one of the lowest performing in the state.

With the help of Hopkins (an expert on school improvement) and Munro (an expert on pedagogy), Craig constructed an improvement process centered on what they termed Action Improvement Zones or AIZ (Hopkins et al, 2011b). They enlisted support from Lewis (2011) for student welfare and Sullivan (2011) for mathematics. The booklet *Powerful Learning* (Northern Metropolitan Region, 2009) summarized the approach to the AIZ through a succession of circles of practice beginning at the center with the intention to develop students that were literate, numerous and curious. The model is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Northern Metropolitan Region Powerful Learning Model (Northern Metropolitan Region, 2009, p. 11)
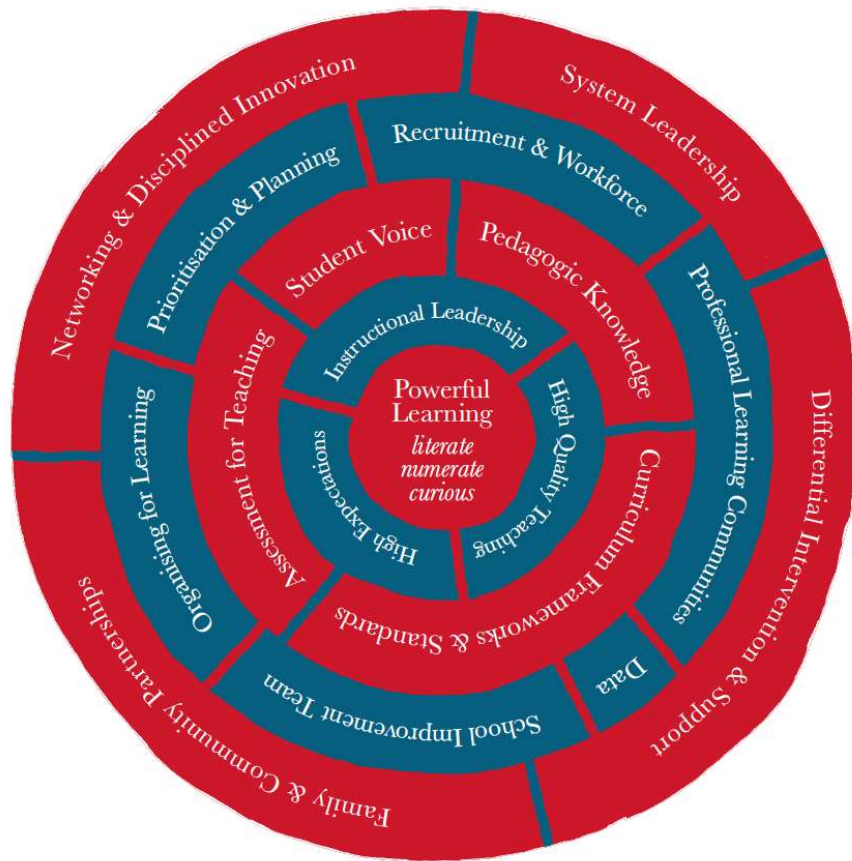
This inner circle aligned with national statements about schooling, such as the Melbourne Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs, 2008). The next circle included three pre-conditions for school effectiveness: (a) high leverage learning improvement strategies of instructional leadership, (b) high quality

teaching, and (c) high expectation. The focus then was on the classroom by developing quality teaching and learning through pedagogic knowledge, curriculum frameworks and standards, assessment of teaching and student voice. *Schools supports* (organizational capacity) for improving teaching and learning then followed by focusing on professional learning communities, collection and use of data to inform action, school improvement teams, organizing for learning, prioritization and planning, and recruitment and workforce planning. The outer circle represents the systemic context through considering big picture and external supports for schools such as system leadership, differential school improvement intervention and support, family and community partnership, and networking with other schools and disciplined, evidence-informed innovation. For system leadership, whilst there was no formal definition given, the system leadership initiatives described in this outer circle focused on getting principals to influence the improvement of many schools and to support this work through system leaders (like RNLs). This framework was used to galvanize schools to create improvement climates. Through their research, Fraser, Glover and Craig (2011) found evidence of positive change by considering a range of school data collated at the system level (e.g., student learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy, standardized tests, teacher judgements); survey data from students, parents and teachers; and student pathway and transition data (e.g., retention, student destinations on leaving school). Fraser and colleagues concluded that

> *The overall conclusion to be drawn from the review of data in this chapter is that over the past four years there has been a quite dramatic shift in the metrics from a largely negative to a strikingly positive direction. In particular, literacy and numeracy measures for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are at or near state benchmarks with the data generally trending upwards. (p. 151)*

Whilst the performances in literacy and numeracy were particularly pleasing, other data sets were showing positive trends but without substantial gains by the time the chapter was written. So, in some ways, it is a generous conclusion. Nevertheless, they did make an argued case that the Northern Metropolitan Region improvement strategy compared favorably with best practice initiatives worldwide, noting in particular that there was

- *A clear and comprehensive model of reform*
- *Strong leadership at the regional level*
- *Substantive training related to the goals of the program*
- *Implementation support at the school level*
- *An increasingly differentiated approach to school improvement (Fraser et al., 2011, p. 152)*

Further, Fraser and colleagues suggested that the reforms would continue to show improved school outcomes. Unfortunately, the reform continued for only a few more years without any further major evaluations, and thus, it is difficult to judge the degree to which success was sustained. We now turn to the school level to describe the progress of one school within this region.

School Level Leadership

This section reports the first six years of the improvement journey of Hume Central Secondary College (HCSC) and its principal, Glenn Proctor (real names). Proctor was appointed as the executive principal of HCSC in 2008, although the school was not officially opened until 2009. Three failing secondary schools were closed to allow creation of HCSC. The establishment of the new school was part of a government regeneration project in the Northern Region aimed at transforming educational opportunities and achievement levels for students in one of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia with 75% of

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students from the bottom quartile of socio-economic advantage (Department of Health and Human Services, 2014).

In analyzing and exploring the school's improvement, we use the school leadership framework depicted in Figure 1. We explore the school's perspective in the following order: education system context, contextual influences (i.e., school characteristics, leader characteristics, community), the school performance and improvement, and external agencies and networks. We acknowledge the importance of the general environment factors (e.g., socio-cultural, economic, political and technological), but do not discuss these, and instead limit ourselves to those contexts that directly influenced the school's improvement trajectory.

Education System

The Victorian government system was an early adopter of school self-management and thus characterized by a high level of school autonomy and flexibility. In the case of HCSC, this allowed the school principal to undertake significant change. In establishing a new school from the closure of three failing schools, Glenn's mandate was to set about establishing a new school philosophy as well as new policies, processes, programs and practices. Glenn sought guidance from central and regional personnel. In particular, he relied on the Regional Director, Wayne Craig, to support decisions that were integral to the successful foundation of the school, such as extending the contract of key staff that were on loan from other schools and introducing a minimum attendance expectation on students to make them more personally accountable for their learning. Glenn had extensive experience working as a school principal, and his familiarity with the system was essential in understanding when he required the regional director's support and when he could utilize autonomy available

within a Victorian government school. From a system leadership perspective, the role of regional personnel was more to support Proctor's work than to intervene or control what was happening. So, it was a light-touch form of system leadership that highlights how successful principals often do not need close supervision from systems.

Contextual Influences

As executive principal, Glenn was responsible for closing the campuses of three separate Year 7–12 colleges and establishing the new school. The three schools had suffered from decades of neglect, poor leadership, declining enrolments, low student performance (some of the worst in the state), negative school cultures, low staff morale, and disruptive and disconnected students. The schools' reputations were such that most families in the area passed by the schools to educate their children elsewhere. Glenn had to work with the existing staff and leaders from the three schools while simultaneously being himself responsible for the construction of three new campuses, with two situated on new sites. The new school was a Year 7–12 co-educational secondary school consisting of two Year 7–9 campuses and one Year 10–12 campus. The new buildings, completed in 2011, were in striking contrast to the previous school buildings that were outdated and poorly maintained. In 2009, there were 1,000 students enrolled at the three schools with enrolments projected to decline. Staffing included an executive principal, three campus principals, and 108 teachers. By 2015 the enrolment was 1,125 (508 girls and 617 boys) with projection for further growth, and there was an executive principal, six other principal-class personnel, and 131 teaching staff.

Leader characteristics. Glenn had more than 35 years' experience in schools, beginning as an economics and accounting teacher before moving into school leadership. Prior to arriving at HCSC, he was

principal of Mount Waverley Secondary College for 11 years, a high-performing school in an affluent suburb of Melbourne. However, Glenn was raised in Broadmeadows and thus had an affinity with the area and an intimate understanding of the context of HCSC.

Glenn demonstrated the characteristics of what we have termed the *post-heroic leader* (Drysdale, Bennett, Murakami, Johansson, & Gurr, 2014). Initially, he began as a directive leader and showed many of the characteristics of typical "heroic leadership" (Adair 1989, p. 227). He set clear improvement directions, challenged the status quo, and showed courage to stand up to any in power and authority who may have questioned the direction he was taking. Throughout his principalship, he had a clear social justice focus and demonstrated a strong commitment to improve the education of students in challenging circumstances. His general and educational values never wavered: He showed respect for others, strongly advanced social justice and equity issues, took personal responsibility for his actions, and held firm to the beliefs that every student could learn and wanted the opportunity to succeed. He showed integrity by modeling the way forward and putting duty before self.

After gaining some initial success (e.g., improving student attendance that increased from a low of 60% in 2009 to 89% in2016, Glenn's final year as principal), he changed to a more collaborative and post-heroic style of leadership that involved the leadership by many. An example is how he recognized early that there was a need to build the leadership capacity of his principal leadership team, which he accomplished through coaching (the *Coaching for Success* program), targeted professional learning opportunities, and using research that supported the school's context and improvement trajectory. Glenn was able to adapt his leadership to the circumstances, sometimes serving

as a transformational and somewhat disruptive leader (Drysdale, Gurr, & Goode, 2017; Drysdale, Gurr, & Longmuir, 2017). He was effective in motivating, understanding, and developing staff and in looking for ways to promote innovation and change.

Community. The community of HCSC was composed of students mainly from the suburb in which the school was located. The initial observations of HCSC made by Glenn following his appointment was that there were many students walking past the school to go to other schools. The school enrolment numbers were low, and students experienced disruption to their learning due to misbehavior and poor attendance. Except for those parents who sat on the school council, there had been a history of little to no parental involvement in the three schools prior to amalgamation. The low level of parental engagement did little to support the vision of the college. As a result, Glenn identified the need for greater connection between the school and home to promote aspects that would help students succeed, such as coming to school, a challenge since some students' attendance was as low as 60% and one of the amalgamated schools had an average student absence rate of 35 days. Greater accountability for regular student attendance was implemented (e.g., minimum attendance requirements to ensure promotion to the next year level), along with clear structures for teachers to follow in the event of low attendance. Students were also expected to arrive at school on time and be punctual to classes. A system called *Time Counts* was developed and required students to be seated in their first-period classroom by 8:45am. If a student was marked as late three or more times in a week, they were required to work for 30 minutes of their lunchtime on missed learning. Staff members on monitoring duty at the beginning of the school day regularly announced "time counts" as a signal to the students to move to class quickly. This, along with the expectation of

regular attendance at school, quickly changed students' perception about the importance of their education and their accountable for their learning.

Performance and Improvement

The historical context of a school and its improvement trajectory directly relates to school performance and continuing improvement. Hallinger (2018) notes that this context also defines the nature of the principal's challenge. Given that HCSC was the result of the closure of three failing schools, it was not surprising that the schools had a history of poor performance, inadequate facilities, and decades of neglect. An author of this article reviewed one of the three closed schools in the early 2000s and judged the school to be one of the lowest performing schools in the state. When HCSC began, there were extremely low academic standards, poor attendance, few students continuing to tertiary education, and limited aspirations among students: "They were at the bottom of the tables academically; nearly half the students weren't even turning up, and only 30 per cent finished year 12" (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2011).

One of Glenn's first priorities was to set about establishing a new history, direction, and culture for the school. His strategy for improvement was to engage students, build staff capacity, improve teaching and learning practice, raise staff and student expectations, develop a positive school culture, more effectively manage resources, and introduce a higher level of staff accountability for student learning. To engage students, he created Curriculum Design Teams (CDTs) to develop a guarantee and viable curriculum and to promote appropriate assessment practices, such as moderation between teachers. To set high expectations, he developed a 2:1 strategy in which the school tried to provide two years of learning growth for each

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calendar year. To build leadership capacity, he invested significant resources in developing a high performing leadership team that included senior and middle-level leaders. To support the work of teachers to improve teaching and learning, Glenn focused on developing professional practice in general and purposeful teaching in particular. A key strategy was initiating a common instructional model and establishing peer coaching and classroom observation to build collaborative practices and a culture of relentless improvement.

External Agencies and Networks

External agencies and networks played an important role in helping to influence the school performance and improvement context. The school acknowledged the support of agencies such as the charity organization, The Smith Family, which worked in partnership with the college to facilitate programs to support student learning, especially for those students who had difficult family circumstances. The school worked with the Technical and Further Education sector to provide vocational programs and facilities. The school partnered with several primary schools to ensure transition to secondary school was smooth and effective. Local business also supported the college with on-the-job training and work experience for students.

While these initiatives were important, the use of several critical friends was crucial to the school's improvement. Critical friends can provide professional support, advice, reflection, but also question and challenge assumptions and practices. It is not a formal role, such as a mentor or coach, but rather a professional relationship based on mutual regard, respect. and trust. Critical friends can offer a critical perspective and another lens through which to view the school. Huerta Villalobos (2013) explored the role critical friends played in the school's improvement.

The role of the critical friend was found to be a dynamic one, requiring a high level of skill, flexibility, and professional judgement. Rather than following a checklist of scripted "technical assistance," it was about developing a repertoire of strategies and skills, and learning when and how to use them, taking account of the context. (p. 68)

Two critical friends greatly influenced the school leadership team and the principal. Educational consultant Vic Zbar was engaged to work with the leadership team to implement a framework of school improvement based on his research on successful schools in educationally disadvantaged areas. He was employed on a regular basis to support the improvement agenda. Lawrie Drysdale, a co-author of this article, was voluntarily engaged as a critical friend from 2009 to 2015. He regularly attended senior leadership meetings and conducted a program for emerging leaders for five years. His insight into the role was captured by Huerta Villalobos (2013) who conducted a single-site multiple perspective case study involving interviews with 13 people (i.e., two critical friends, the executive principal, three campus principals, one assistant principal, six teacher members of the leadership team). Interview questions centered on participants' perceptions of the role and impact of the critical friends. She found the critical friends had a direct impact on the work of senior and middle level leaders, and through this, an indirect impact on the work of teachers and student outcomes. Further, the critical friends were considered by participants to be more important and influential in school improvement than would be the case if they were an internal coach or external agent working with the school. Their trusted and acknowledged expertise, combined with their close connection with the school, promoted a more influential role within the school. This study of the work of critical friends highlighted again the potential for

extensive control of improvement at the school level, and the lesser role of system players.

Discussion

This article described several empirical studies within the one jurisdiction, with these studies going from system- to school-level perspectives. Using Butler's (2014) definition of system leadership, at the system level we saw that there were people that seemed to operate as system leaders; these worked at senior levels of the central and regional systems, with RNLs having the potential to exercise system level leadership. Principals tended not to operate as system leaders because they had limited influence across schools. At a regional level, it was clear that regional directors could act as system-level leaders, exerting wide influence on clusters of schools to improve. When we moved to the school level, we saw in the case of one successful principal that system leadership was helpful but not the most important influence on school success. Whilst it could be helpful and act as a support, the work of the principal, other school leaders, and, in the case study school, critical friends were more important to the improvement journey of the school. So, what the reader perhaps can see is that while system leadership can be important, but it needs to work in conjunction with school leadership. Without effective school leadership, the level of impact of system leadership is likely to be limited.

In a review of school leadership practices involving 22 country reports and 5 detailed country case studies, Pont, Nusche and Hopkins (2008) claimed,

> *One of school leaders' new roles is increasingly to work with other schools and other school leaders, collaborating and developing relationships of interdependence and trust. System leaders, as they are being called, care about*

and work for the success of other schools as well as their own. Crucially they are willing to shoulder system leadership roles because they believe that in order to change the larger system you have to engage with it in a meaningful way. (p. 9)

The researchers cited Belgium, England, and Finland as examples of systems that have encouraged principals to cooperate with other principals. In our past research in the Victorian context, we saw little evidence of the presence of this type of leadership operating at the principal or school level. Despite various system initiatives over time to promote greater cooperation between principals in Victorian government schools, the competition between schools for enrolments (Bentley & Butler, 2017) and intense workload and high stress (Riley, 2017) work against such efforts.

When we consider our own extensive research on school leadership in Victorian schools through projects like the International Successful School Principalship Project, there has been very little consideration of the positive impacts of systems. Indeed, in our successful school leadership research, our principals have often described how they had to shape system behavior to ensure it did not impact negatively on their school. An example is the leadership of Jan Shrimpton (Drysdale, Goode, & Gurr, 2009, 2011; Goode, 2017) who had turned around two failing schools during her career. At her last school, she had raised the school to a level of performance that was above expected levels. Although there was a push from the system for her to achieve an even higher level of student learning performance, she resisted because further improvement in literacy and numeracy meant compromising other areas of the school's success. For example, further improvement in literacy might have required more time, compromising time for other curriculum areas. In the leadership models we have produced (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Gurr, 2015, and in our discussion of context and leadership (Gurr, 2014; Gurr, Drysdale,

Longmuir, & McCrohan, 2018, in press), we described how our successful leaders worked with and changed context to benefit their schools. Our aim is not that school leaders will be against system-leadership efforts of senior bureaucrats, but rather that school leaders modify and adapt the mandates to suit their school needs—and perhaps even try to influence the system to provide a climate more suited to what principals need to promote school success. This is activist and somewhat heroic leadership (Drysdale et al., 2014).

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Teacher Leadership and Teaming:

Creativity within Schools in China

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Abstract	Article Info
Preparing today's children and youth to become active, responsive adults in transforming global societies requires that schools change dramatically. To work towards this goal is daunting in light of educational policies and school structures that hinder teamwork and creativity. Despite challenges due to education policies, traditional school structures, and teacher-culture expectations, teacher leadership and teamwork have nonetheless emerged in many countries. This article reports interesting and even surprising preliminary findings about education in China gathered through onsite school observations and interviews with teachers and principals. The popular belief that Chinese education is uniformly creatively impoverished and that schools are nothing but robotic learning environments are dispelled.	

Introduction

Throughout the world, pressures placed on schools to raise student achievement demand leadership by teachers (Curtis, 2013; Hairon, 2017; Harris, 2011). Although the term *teacher leadership* has no universally accepted definition, common assertions are that it emerges when teachers have time and opportunities to build collegial relationships, share resources and strategies that improve instruction, and engage together in ongoing professional development (Browne-Ferrigno, 2016; Poekert, Alexandrou, & Shannon, 2016; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Metaphorically, the actualization of teacher leadership is "like an evolving thread that appears in widely diverse locations and in a variety of shapes and colors in the school reform tapestry" (Murphy, 2005, p. 11).

Teacher leadership engenders formation of communities of practice. In these, educators try out strategies that can transform their collective practice and enhance their collective efficacy (Donohoo, 2017; Frick & Browne-Ferrigno, 2016; Hord & Sommers, 2008). The greater autonomy afforded a teacher community, the more empowering are members' interdependence and active engagement (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; Hargreaves et al., 2013). Synergistic teamwork has resulted in teachers' curricular integration of "creativity-enhancing activities" (Hartley & Plucker, 2014, p. 389). Although a creative teacher tolerates ambiguity and "encourages reasonable risk and unpredictable situations" (Morais & Azevedo, 2010, p. 331), creativity is not universally evident in schools because people perceive creativity differently (Kettler, Lamb, Willerson & Mullet, 2018; Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Sarsani, 2007). For creativity to thrive, leaders who are "courageous,

transformational, and engaged" must redesign schools (Jefferson & Anderson, 2017, p. 150).

Paradoxically, teacher leadership supporting creativity and innovation integration was apparent in Chinese schools studied by Mullen (2017, 2018)—despite reported systemic "disparity and inequality of education in China" (Cheng, 2009, p. 2) and change-resistant teacher cultures. Kwo and Intrator (2004) issued a call for rethinking teacher leadership in support of greater autonomy in students' learning," claiming that "the majority of teachers [is] not naturally inclined to change and renewal. This creates a gap between the discourse on the desirable, as [stated] in policy documents, and routine practices in authentic settings not conducive to learning and development" (p. 284).

The general reform mindset, described later, is consistent with policy shifts that Hong Kong has long initiated. The changes favor developing students holistically and supporting lifelong learning beyond classrooms within the wider global community. While problematical and challenging, given the linearity implied in such reform measures and the constraints teachers face in their daily lives, a question emerges: *Is teacher leadership occurring around creative teaching and learning in support of creativity and innovation integration into Chinese primary and secondary schools?* The response to this complex question is presented below.

First, we offer a multifaceted working definition of *creativity* that transcends popular associations with arts and crafts. While making and producing of one's own works is commonly understood as creative (Mumford, 2003), thoughtfully appraising knowledge is a less familiar view of creativity (Robinson & Aronica, 2015) as is wrestling

with open-ended questions that defy a single answer or solution (Eisner, 2004). A distinguishing quality of creative people is that they turn unrelated things into something new or extraordinary. Producing new ideas and artifacts can be a mysterious process (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Goldberg, 2018), thus dispelling the notion that creativity is knowable to the point of being formulaic and replicable.

Dynamics Burdening Teacher Leadership and Creativity in China

Education scholars from different countries have repeatedly claimed that test-centric policy and curricular mandates compromise teacher and student creativity and creative education more generally. These diverse scholars who are American (Li & Gerstl-Pepin, 2014), British (Ball, 2012), and Chinese (Zhao, 2014) are among the growing voices criticizing restrictive mandates that subvert equity, liberty, and socially just gains in the education enterprise. Unfortunately, studies of wealth disparity in China paint a picture of stark inequalities in opportunity for families and communities (Osnos, 2014).

Place-bound immobility, poverty-burdened households, and low-resourced communities affect many Chinese citizens. Rural-bound families endure fewer quality education opportunities, limited access to services, and inadequate support for disabilities (Jensen, 2009). In high-poverty rural districts, it is difficult to attract quality teachers (Cheng, 2009), let alone those prepared to handle a 21st century curriculum of creativity and entrepreneurship. All of this and more adds up to distressed schools lacking the quality teachers and resources needed to build and sustain creative learning environments.

Further, high-stakes testing cultures, and the proliferating markets that profit from these, have been "outed" for dominating schooling

with "a narrow means/ends orientation" (Eisner, 2004, p. 300). His argument is that these schooling trends interfere with creative mindsets, a growth-producing catalyst for human beings and the environments and societies they construct. Like Dewey (1934), Eisner sees as first-rate intellectual and creative dispositions to be "risk-taking, exploration, uncertainty, and speculation" and "curiosity and interest in engaging and challenging ideas" (p. 300). Evidence exists of a valuing within China's policymaking arena of these capabilities within actions implemented toward school improvement and renewal (Draper, 2012).

Contemporary political scientists describe China as a highly adaptive communist regime (Dimitrov, 2013). Notably, measurable economic recovery is most evident in the rapid construction of cities, schools, and universities (Osnos, 2014). But China also has a capacity for creatively adapting in different domains of life. As one example, the Chinese government's pursuit to modernize education has taken the form of democratic components being introduced in mandates for teaching creative curriculum (Draper, 2012).

Nonetheless, more changes are needed to diminish threats to Chinese students' dispositions and skills. One study found that China's exam-focused education system "stifles a student's imagination, creativity, and sense of self, qualities crucial for a child's ultimate success" (Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011); consequently, the passive learner in China exhibits attitudes aligned with a view of education "as nothing more than merely passing examinations" (p. 36) rather than creativity and hopefulness. Zhao (2014), himself educated in China, describes the dreaded exam called *gaokao* that determines secondary students' university fate and future income. The all-consuming preparation for the exam comes at great cost, impeding

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imaginations and creativities, perhaps indefinitely lost to the individual, the school community, and ultimately to China itself.

Flawed Frame: One-Dimensional Thinking

The country's strict education regimen leads to the assumption that Chinese students lack creativity—meaning that they cannot think flexibly and laterally. Much of the literature builds on this generalization, adopting it as a starting point for making international comparisons (Li & Gerstl-Pepin, 2014; Staats, 2011). However, such views fail to account for granular strides that some schools in China have made to reduce class size in primary grades (Draper, 2012). This change in numbers, albeit gradual, may be allowing for personalized attention and creative work. Problems accompanying this change include a lack of full support outside schools for such reforms, uneven teacher training across schools, and overloaded classrooms due to rapid population growth.

A policy argument is that China launched its suite of education reforms in response to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results. The PISA accountability benchmark, explains Sjøberg (2016), has severe consequences in exam-centric regimes wherein creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship in schooling disappears. As stakes for measurable success increase, inequality worsens for under-resourced, low-income schools and populations. Low scores on competitive entrance exams and other tests have discouraged some Chinese students and their teachers. A deep sense of shame over having failed one's family and nation has escalated the suicide rates of students in China, exceeding other PISA-benchmarked countries (Cheng, 2014).

Global-Ready Frame: Creativity and Curriculum

Curriculum that welcomes the elusive, ambiguous, unmeasurable, and mysterious aspects of learning and life itself is needed in all schools. Linear thinking is conducive to a rote, fact-based style of instruction, whereas a focus on everyday creativity and innovation fosters experiential learning, abstract thinking, and problem solving (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Eisner, 2004; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009; Robinson & Aronica, 2015).

Creative learning environments. Despite escalating pressures from external accountability demands, creative classroom educators worldwide find ways to personalize, enliven, and cross-pollinate their curriculum with other subjects (Mullen, 2017, 2018; Robinson & Aronica, 2015). Because global-ready graduates are skilled in creative thinking, critical thinking, and problem solving, the assumption is that innovative teaching pedagogies likely benefitted them (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2006; Kurczek & Johnson, 2014; Robinson & Aronica, 2015). Enriching preparatory experiences serve graduates in forging their own paths while maximizing their creative expression, ingenuity, and freedom as responsible, ethical citizens improving the world community.

Curriculum and culture in China. Creativity has been an important component of education in China since 2001, and its development is a main concern, with varying effects across the country. Hong Kong has led the nation's work towards progressively implementing creativity in schools and colleges. Acting on the priority for transforming societal institutions through creativity, policies have changed; new practices are being implemented in preschool, primary, and secondary education (Draper, 2012).

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Creative Methodologies Used for the School Visits

Puzzling over the world issues raised, Mullen (2017) wanted to see if any of China's primary and secondary schools exhibit signs of creativity. If so, she wondered whether she would be able to make sense of any such signs in environments unfamiliar to her and write about the experience.

Setting and Participants

In 2015, Mullen (2017) visited five preK–12 schools in China. Three were high-poverty rural locations (i.e., public kindergarten, public elementary school, public special education school) and two well-resourced urban schools (i.e., private primary Montessori school, public high school). The site selection is obviously not a representative sampling of China's schools.

Study participants included veteran teachers and one novice (n = 19); principals (n = 4), and officials including a dean, a director, and a teacher trainer–supervisor (n = 3). All were Han Chinese and mostly female (two of the principals were male). (All names are non-identifying, as per the terms of the Institutional Research Board approval.)

Bicultural Strategies

Research protocols were in Mandarin and English. A political gulf was likewise traversed—China and North America have different views of human and civil rights (Zhao, 2014). Learning that this difference also applies to research ethics, Mullen used various measures to help bridge the cultural gap. After distributing her printed packet to all participants in the meetings, she reviewed the key

documents (e.g., consent form), shared a study overview with procedures, and elicited questions while trying to build trust (utilizing her Chinese translator). Two-way communication was facilitated, and concerns were eased for gaining signatures on consent forms.

Conversational Analysis

At all schools, there were informal conversations and interviews with leaders and teachers, most taking place in a group fashion with some one-on-one (Mullen, 2017). Time had been permitted for observation of activities, which fostered more conversational interactions with the practitioners. She observed creative learning activity with students and engaged as a guest participant.

Data collected from these conversational exchanges with the practitioners revolved around contextual issues of creativity and accountability. Mullen's interpretations were grounded in making sense of naturally occurring, guided conversations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), in addition to what she observed, perceived, and experienced within the diverse Chinese schools.

The practitioner teams were also given a list of creativity topics for guiding sessions, such as creativity and learning in participants' learning environments and the work being done. At all schools, this topic proved the most popular, eliciting discussions of creativity extending to evidences of creative processes and products.

Data Sources and Analyses

Field notes were independently generated by Mullen (2017) and her translator. In addition, a photographic archive constituting a data source served to spark recall and confirm details of creative work. Site

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visits were high quality and productive, lasting three concentrated hours each.

Qualitative models (e.g., Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013) were used for coding and analyzing data. With two faculty experts, interrater reliability was established using sample selections from the data sets. Displays were created of key-word-in-context charts, along with frequency distributions of key words and phrases. Consulting an unconventional source encouraging transparency around areas of discomfort in data sets (i.e., Charmaz, 2005), Mullen made national comparisons of fundamental differences in sociopolitical systems, human and civil rights, and research ethics and expectations. Perspectives from the literature, the news, and her translator helped her to navigate this challenging analysis.

Field-based Thematic Results

Generalizations abound of China as creatively impoverished and of classrooms as machinelike learning environments. Yet, in the select sites where Mullen (2017) gathered data, Chinese teachers and leaders described and also showed an array of creativity in teaching and learning on their campuses. In the vignettes that follow, the main thematic outcome is revealed: *Creative expression was cognitively and vividly apparent in a multitude of ways within the younger grade levels and accountability-steeped advanced grade levels*.

Rural Schools Vignette

Creative teachers at the *rural public kindergarten* explained how they developed a monthly schoolwide curricular theme (e.g., friendship and sharing). The themes incorporated special days in China and the school's daily activities involving learning, games,

sports, and life. Creativity had a strong visual presence: As led by teachers' creative pedagogies, artwork, arising from lessons, was thematically arranged in many building spaces. Sources of inspiration included children's storybooks, celebrated occasions (e.g., Mother's Day), and festivities (e.g., Dragon Boat Festival).

A kids' gallery featured displays dangling from ceilings, some celebrating Father's Day. A cutout of miniature men's shirts hung from tiny pegs on strings across corridors (symbolizing an adult clothesline); on the flipside were personal notes to fathers. Red dragons dominated another display and children's hand drawings of fathers decorated with images of nature, animals, and family. The dragon, traditionally associated with masculine energy, hints at how Chinese children are socialized to accept the power and authority of patriarchal figures. Obedience is expected, as the hierarchical values of Confucianism convey.

Another display of paper cutouts was of mothers—hand-drawn with babies (symbolically, newborns are descendants of dragons) glued onto the stomachs. Included in their family photos were the young creators as babies. Family–self creativity was a subject of this display, just as it was throughout much of the school. While creativity is an aesthetic medium that celebrates life, it can inadvertently communicate gender stereotypes and expectations to children.

The beautification and personalization of garden and school spaces by students brought nature, family, and culture to this rural elementary school. As framed pictures showed, they enjoyed the locally grown foods and rituals of family feasts. Participating in the work as beginning gardeners and cooks, they were developing life skills while learning about food in its natural, healthy state.

A surprising finding in the *rural public elementary school* located in a remote mountainous region was that one-third of the children lived at the school. Such accommodations are made in China when families live too distant from schools. The other unique feature was an L-shape aquarium connected to many small fish tanks, which may have substituted for family members.

Students took care of the sheltered guppies throughout the aquatic lifespan as part of the arts-and-sciences curriculum. They learned about classifications of plants and animals, the circulatory system and brain unique to fish, and healthy environments for enabling fish to thrive. Children had fish friends and life-stage teams. The whole-child curriculum incorporated "A Tadpole Looks for Her Mum," a story from an English teacher's text. Adapting it for performance, students selected their role (e.g., tadpole, mother) and wrote a script. They were being introduced to life cycles and solutions for coping with such difficulties as isolation and homesickness. Caring for Earth and humans was taught through the topic of fish habitats and aquatic ecosystems.

Another unique element of this school was its adoption of a tradition of Chinese culture in its curriculum—the dragon bench dance. Like the care of fish, it was a potent embodiment of ancestral worship. The teaching staff innovated the school's dragon bench dance to benefit their young community. All children, extending to the wider community, could experience and even perform it. In 2012, the performance, enacted by kid teams, was broadcast live on TV. Prominently framed pictures chronicled the public dragon bench demonstrations—hundreds of red-and-gold costumed student performers moved in an orchestrated, undulating motion.

At a *rural public special education school*, the teachers and entrepreneurial principal and staff demonstrated artistry with their fund-raising ingenuity. They generated traditional Chinese arts and crafts, among these porcelain-engraved plates. School materials and supplies were purchased with the proceeds to help support low-income families. This popular cultural art form was also curricular: Students did porcelain engraving under close teacher supervision. In the art course where they were engraving, nature was observed. Sometimes, they would go outside to sketch their ideas, then improve upon their paper sketches (without using technology). With their teacher's help, these artisan-like apprentices chiseled their designs (e.g., butterflies in motion) onto plates. One such engraving is a playful take on the almighty dragon in Chinese culture.

During the interview, the school director relayed another situation as the most impressive, motivational creative lesson she had observed to date. Occurring in a math class, concepts were conveyed as shapes formed by human bodies. A semicircle was used for student introductions. Delighted, the young people thought their teacher was doing magic by turning their semicircle (and bodies) into a circle and other shapes. This game of high involvement encouraged understanding of subject content by way of an interactive kinesthetic activity; through it, mathematical concepts were being taught. The director saw this teacher as exceptionally creative and attuned to children with special needs.

Urban Schools Vignette

At the *urban private primary Montessori school*, cultural examples of creativity were evident in the eco-friendly, specially constructed environment. Real-world student simulations of activities (e.g.,

cooking and building objects) were part of daily school life. Developmental creative learning activities involved teacher guidance, including reading, play, cooperation, and negotiation. Each classroom had three teachers, and the lead was Association Montessori International certified with three years training in Europe. Another educator was a native English speaker who fostered a bilingual environment. Inventing to scale, the teachers made some of the tools and materials themselves.

A discovery model was used to teach students from China, America, and Europe by doing rather than direct instruction. Children, some of whose parents were foreigners working in the area, shuffled among the special stations, trying out new things. They were being prepared for life while having their childhood respected and preserved. The creativity advantage in learning allowed children to find their way in a safe but philosophical world of exploration. Rooftop gardens and open-air play areas enlarged the learning space. Vegetables and fruits were enjoyed and children clamored in the kitchen to learn culinary skills. Hands-on connections linked the table and planet with their food.

The *urban public high school* is a top-ranking PISA competitive high school. The teachers creatively adapted their curriculum beyond the core of internationally tested subjects. Arts and technologies were brought to life throughout the campus, capitalizing on student–student and student–teacher synergies. Productive and affirming relationships between the adults and students was encouraged by the teachers' original designs of numerous displays and renovated spaces that housed—and indeed highlighted—student projects. A sense of pride shone through.

Nonetheless, this stellar, award-winning multimedia arts site, which participated in gallery showings and competed in contests, adhered to the national curriculum standards. The curricular testing requirements of reading, mathematics, and science are key subjects, but this school also excelled at the arts and technology. Creativity was cultivated through an interdisciplinary approach to coursework and student-driven elective courses. Real-world components in the curriculum allowed for activities (e.g., taking measurements outside math class and interviewing family members who had left their rural communities). A few youth had earned patents for their robotic and computer-assisted design projects. Entire spaces—made into student galleys—showcased theme-based science and arts projects, some featuring sprawling cityscapes and landscapes.

Educational leaders at the *urban teaching training institute* whom Mullen (2017) interviewed after the school visits confirmed that creative education is alive within some preK–12 schools in their region. A powerful spoken message was that "creativity is manifesting in China's schools at tiers lower than the government, given its tightly controlled structure." Despite the Chinese government's apparent lack of direction and interest, creativity was occurring.

Discussion

The teacher leaders at the institute asserted that creativity is evident in many Chinese schools. Their critique of authoritarian governmental control and apparent disinterest in what happens within schools outside of the competitive international testing arena left a lasting impression. While it proved challenging to elicit criticism during the school visits, with the exception of the special education

school, the leaders at the teacher training institute openly offered their opinions and pushed against the status quo.

Study results suggest that the Chinese teachers and principals participating in Mullen's (2017) study were open to discussing creative work, processes, and successes at their schools. In fact, they seemed eager to point out the creative activity, shining the light on student works, some impressively displayed, others tenderly.

Images of family, dragon festivity, and ancient symbolism prevailed. Communal celebrations of ancestry came across as highly prized by the schools. Moreover, expressions of creative teaching and learning seemed remarkable at times as did the conscientiousness of staff members in their efforts to design meaningful and engaging learning on behalf of their pupils. All of the creativity observed, then, seemed highly attuned to Chinese culture, myth, and ancestry. Yet, there were many different examples of creative sense-making and different topics. These encompassed subject matter and global themes, much of it supportive to some extent of students' development as well-rounded, culturally attuned citizens. However, gender-based roles and expectations, as well as critical thinking about such phenomena as societal inequities and masculinist–authoritative paradigms, and so forth, seemed outside the creative curriculum.

Specifically, it was in the primary schools that Mullen (2017) noticed creative work that fed stereotypical gender-based images, such as of males (fathers) as powerful and females (mothers) as nurturing. When asked about the socialization of girls and boys, a few study participants reported efforts taken to debunk gender stereotypes in some places. For example, in the Montessori school, there were stark differences in the dress of boys (informal) and girls (formal), except for

the youngest children. The director explained that the Montessori administration was persuading parents to dress their daughters for comfort in the high activity environment, not in expensive dresses and formal shoes; however, progress toward change was slow. This expectation befitting Montessori schooling was being thwarted by some of the elite Chinese parents whom he thought might adjust to the wealthy Americans' relaxed style.

Overall, creativity came across as a natural, integrated part of the curriculum within the school sites. Teachers and leaders, presenting themselves as tightly knit teams, were expressive about the creativity within their buildings and its impact on the community. For example, invitations from the rural public elementary school leaders were sent to the local residents to participate in the dragon bench celebrations and join in the live performances.

School teams invited Mullen (2017) to explore by asking questions and, except for policy restrictions in the Montessori and special education schools, by freely roaming around during the guided tours. She witnessed creativity as process and product in varied forms at all of the schools, especially the more permissive ones. Despite the packed classrooms dominated by direct instruction, there was creative work occurring at all grade levels and across subject areas. At times, creativity was blatant; at other times, she inferred it. She also searched for what was absent and omitted from what was being (re)represented.

China seemed accustomed to handling substantial populations of students. Its top-rated schools have "high student/teacher ratios and enrollments that grow to the capacity of the building" (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009, p. 34). These researchers exhibit a deep understanding of primary schools in China (extending to Japan and

the United States), although their fieldwork concluded in 2005 and much has been changing since then.

Classical and contemporary life themes were expressed in all the Chinese schools visited, often through myth and metaphor. Science and art had a seamless quality, as in the way that fish were the object of care within one school's living laboratory and anthropomorphized in child-centered, fish-like dramas. Innovative use of space and quiet time reserved for creative engagement was apparent across a spectrum of grades and ages. Additionally, creative performances were planned and then executed, sometimes in a particular subject, such as English, and at other times across the curriculum with the full strength of the student body and teaching staff.

Conclusion

The creativity paradox comes to mind as a way to describe contradictory messages arising from Mullen's (2017) study. For example, China's political leadership and people, worldwide, believe that Chinese citizens have a creativity deficit. Yet, the region-wide teacher training institute's leaders confirmed that some of the primary schools are active places of creativity and innovation. This testimony and research results at least question the veracity of the creativity deficit belief that plays into global mindsets about China and its schools.

Further, China's government has often been reported by journalists as wanting China to become a world-class innovator. Paradoxically, it clings to control and the one-party political system. Something important has to happen: The Chinese government needs to dispel myths that its nation cannot innovate if it wants robust

creative innovation to transpire (Abrami, Kirby, & McFarlan, 2014). Creative innovation is a springboard for nurturing collaboration and cooperation beyond schools and across nations. At minimum, all Chinese educators keen on generating 21st-century opportunities for students need encouragement within a bounded structure that is transforming in the global era.

Innovation and control—this is the very paradox that has been described as at the core of China's future (Gracie, 2014). Just how attuned are education policy officials to teacher teams' creative work within Chinese schools, particularly in distressed parts of the vast country? While the rote mechanization tactics used in education are surely oppressive, it cannot stamp out creativity and individuality altogether. Hinted at is the resiliency of these schools.

Transformation of Chinese society could come from a vigorous generation that pushes boundaries, asks questions, and interrogates authority in the process of becoming creative. Looking forward, our hope is that the creative work already occurring in China's schools is recognized—not missed or ignored. In general, teacher leadership and teaming can be described as a situated learning process that varies from one context to another. As such, what teachers do together involves artistry because it is "embodied, delicate, active, social, negotiated, complex process of participation" (Wenger, 1998 p. 49). Participation in teacher-led professional learning communities demands creative collaborative synergy. One could even say that creative participation and leadership is necessary for developing and sustaining teacher leadership and teaming in contemporary times.

Acknowledgement

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Comprehensive Platform Networks for School Reform: A Leapfrog Strategy for Struggling State Systems

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Abstract	Article Info
This article presents a review of the development of platform network models that rely on partnership contracts to implement comprehensive school reform. The literature from the previous three decades of development of school networks, emerging largely from the United States of America, is reviewed. The recent development of similar network models in South Africa is then presented for comparison. Through the addition of technology-based platforms, emerging models of platform networks are presented through a review of minimal contractual requirements for partnering school boards. Finally, implications for educational leaders, particularly in struggling, low-income school contexts in South Africa and the United States, are presented as the impetus for considering partnerships with existing platform networks and the development of additional public models.	

Introduction

In a small town in a neglected loop of the Ohio River in Kentucky, a big change is underway in schooling: The schools in Trimble County are engaged in a platform-network driven upgrade of their learning systems. To a local reporter, an eighth-grade student reflects, "It feels like I'm learning more. Before, I thought I wasn't really that smart because my grades were always bad" (Harp, 2018.) By the end of the school year, the student was engaging in coursework at the ninth-grade level. Where two years previously the middle school in Trimble County was nearly indistinguishable from any other rural middle school, now the learning experience is personalized, project based, digitally engaging, and heavily infused with mentoring. The percentage grading system, which punished struggling learners into disengagement, has been replaced with a mastery model that encourages iterative failure in the process of learning. These advances were all linked to district's partnership with Summit Learning, but they did not come easily, and everyone—from local teachers to parents and community members—is still coping with this new version of schooling.

The research on such network-driven changes in education continues to emerge (Peurach, Glazer, & Lenhoff, 2016; Summit Public Schools, 2017; Zeiser, Taylor, Rickles, Garet, & Segeritz, 2014). While the changes have been stressful, the collective sense within Trimble County is that children are, as the middle school boy noted, learning

more. Similar changes using the same platform network, though, are proving difficult in other communities as parents have revolted over the amount of change (Melia, 2017). While the research picture continues to emerge slowly, the Summit Learning network model is growing exponentially from its initial launch in 2014 to today's 380 schools serving 72,000 learners, including those in Trimble County (Summit Learning, 2018).

This article explores the development and potential of platform network school-reform models, particularly within the context of struggling school systems and choices that local school leaders face to encourage reform. Reforming schools has long been a struggle, particularly in challenging school contexts where the diverse implications of poverty depress learner experiences. Sustainable and scalable changes toward progressive, constructivist learning models within local school contexts have frequently been met with a variety of challenges that frustrate and ultimately derail those efforts. As such, traditional models of school largely persist in the developed regions of the world, while nascent structures of school are still developing elsewhere.

Against this backdrop, a new iteration of education reform, dubbed a *platform network*, is emerging that largely combines existing concepts of networking with new digital iterations of learning platforms. Vander Ark and Dobyns (2018) help to define the concept of platform networks by articulating the three core characteristics: "a shared approach to learning implemented through a school model, common tools and systems implemented through a learning platform, and a shared adult-focused professional learning community" (p. 97). Underlying and enforcing these shared characteristics is a legally binding contract between the platform-network provider and a local

school board or charter-school authorizer that links access to the platform network to minimal compliance with the shared attributes. Summit Learning, used in the opening context and whose contact provisions are reviewed within, is just one amongst an emerging group of platform networks that are using similar models to influence school reform broadly across the United States of America and may offer a new strategy for other struggling contexts.

This review examines the historical literature around school networks, particularly networking approaches that take comprehensive approaches to school change. First, it includes a brief review of school improvement networks, charter management organizations, and other network iterations that have provided groundwork to modern platform-network iterations. Second, the continuing technological development underlying these modern platforms is presented. Third, two educational contexts, first South Africa's newly forming network models and then the United States' deeper learning platform-network models, are introduced and compared. Finally, a review of both opportunities and threats inherent in the platform-network model is provided as a potential tool for school leaders seeking to engage such approaches.

School Networks

School networks have a long and rich history. While networks within the world of education are nothing new, novel approaches to such networks are showing promise and gaining momentum as a renewal strategy, particularly among funding organizations and governmental entities worldwide (Barletta et al., 2018). Such networks build on a long history as favored school-reform drivers, although supporting evidence for such networks over time is mixed.

The foundations for today's comprehensive reform models emerged during the 1980s in the United States as reformers sought to develop collaboration models that influenced classroom practice within network members (Desimone, 2002). Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2007) coalesced many of the studies of characteristics and impacts into their book, *Extending Educational Reform: From One School to Many*. Also, the edited book by Murphy and Datnow (2002) provided a leadership lens within which to review ten different school network contexts operating throughout the United States in the early 2000s. The student-achievement impact of these comprehensive reform networks was harder to estimate. A meta-analysis of 29 models, as reviewed through 232 studies, revealed a mixed review of impacts on achievement (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003) with two notable results. Some reviewed networks did manage to show strong effects on students learning. Further, the network commitment over time proved powerful as schools that had been committed to networks for 5 years or more demonstrated higher achievement in both high-income and low-income schools. But, when these ideas were attempted to be scaled by the U. S. Department of Education (USDE) in 2001, the results were mixed. After a demonstration pilot launched in 1998, the approach was scaled up in 2002 when $300 million was allocated to support implementation of research-based comprehensive school reform strategies (Borman, 2009). The third-year evaluation of the program, though, found no impact on student achievement and only limited implementation of recommended comprehensive models or research-based practices (Orland et al., 2008). Concerns about sustainability were reinforced further by Datnow (2005) who found that in 6 of 13 comprehensive school reform sites studied, schools had withdrawn from implementation of the networked, comprehensive model within only a few years. Due to these poor reviews and

struggles with implementation and sustainability, the USDE terminated program funding in 2007 (Borman, 2009).

While the comprehensive school improvement network momentum was waning, momentum around charter-school models was strengthening. Charter schools provided new energy and momentum for school networks. Since their start in 1991, charter schools have proliferated across the United States, often with single organizations authorized to operate multiple schools within their own network. Research on the overall impact of charter schools evidences wide variations in levels of effectiveness but no conclusive determination that charter schools achieve higher levels of student achievement (Silvernail & Johnson, 2014). However, research conducted by Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (Woodworth et al., 2017) found that charter schools that were part of non-profit charter management organizations performed stronger than independent charter schools on reading and mathematics assessments. In many ways, the emerging research on charter schools published by Woodworth and colleagues (2017) reflects similar results from Borman and colleagues' (2003) meta-analysis: Both research teams found student achievement impacts of some specific networks to be strong. Scholars continue to find promise globally in various iterations of networks and argue for further evidence about which networks actually work (Chapman & Hadfield, 2010). Thus, as Peurach and colleagues (2016) assert, "this research suggests that *success depends on understanding and improving networks themselves*, and the ways in which they function as new types of 'learning systems' that produce, use, and refine the practical knowledge needed to realize intended outcomes" (p. 4).

While focus has shifted somewhat over the years, the thread of networks as critical tools for implementing school reform has persisted. Characteristics of these networks continue to refine as "over the past twenty years . . . billions of dollars in public and philanthropic investments" (Peurach et al., 2016, p. 607) have supported network development and research.

Extensive investments in networks as mechanisms for large-scale school reform continue to this day. For example, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Gates Foundation) launched a new Networks for School Improvement initiative with an initial outlay of $ 92 million for 19 projects (Gates Foundation, 2018). Network distribution of best practices now forms the core of the substantial Gates Foundation K12 investments going forward. Further, considerable recent research on school-improvement networks has been led by Peurach, Glazer, and colleagues. This team of researchers has provided new insights about core features of modern school-improvement networks (Glazer & Peurach, 2013) and integrated ideas from broader industry successes with networking on educational approaches (Peurach & Glazer, 2012). Throughout these investigations into school-improvement networks, implications for educational leadership are prevalent. For instance, much recent attention has been given to the task of evaluating investments in school-improvement networks while identifying and capturing the breadth and complexity of impacts of these networks. Peurach and colleagues (2016) identified four different school improvement network approaches to organizational change. A *shell enterprise* is when a school subscribes to a brand and is provided a set of core concepts but does not receive much centralized support from the hub organization. A *diffusion enterprise* promotes a set of classroom practices but lacks feedback mechanisms to support local implementation and exploration. An *incubation* enterprise subscribes

to core principles but not specific practices, choosing instead to heavily support the local creation of implementation. And, fourth, an *evolutionary enterprise* seeks both to incubate local iterations and support strong diffusion from a robust central network hub. These evolutionary enterprises, however, require large investments in time, money, and effort to maintain.

Educational leaders at the network level struggle to develop the necessary capabilities of the network without extensive support (Peurach et al., 2016), while local school leaders struggle to make choices around network alignment, embrace network principles, adapt network practices to local contexts, and evaluate the impact of these partnerships. Nonetheless, despite the abundant leadership and implementation challenges, school networks in their various forms still offer the glimmer of hope that efforts at reforming schools can be *better together* (Vander Ark & Dobyns, 2018).

Learning Platforms

While networks continue to develop through major monetary investments, a similar story has been emerging in the technology of learning platforms. At least three different technological developments have coalesced to provide a current infrastructure for the development of modern platform networks. Student devices continue to drop in price, thus allowing public schools in the United States to provide a learning device to each attending student. Second, what used to be costly productivity software (e.g., word processors, presentation software, spreadsheets) have been made freely available. And, third, software that is specifically designed to support learning deployment within schools and universities has continued to advance. Following are reviews of the development of these digital tools that serve as critical infrastructure for platform networks and associated schools.

Google's slimmed down Chrome Operating System has become the dominant K12 operating platform in the United States. Hardware companies, such as Dell, HP and others, can make devices using the Chrome OS that are cheap, reliable, and possess day-long battery life. Despite an Internet-only application format, the combination of features has brought Chromebooks to the forefront and allowed many public schools to deploy 1:1 computing environments where each student has a school-purchased, individual laptop that they take home at night. In 2016, Chromebooks represented nearly 60% of all new device shipments to schools in the United States, while in the rest of the world devices based on Microsoft Windows still dominate at 65% of new devices shipped (Nagel, 2017). Because Chromebooks permit mass distribution of devices, it is likely that most learning systems within the United States are transitioning to 1:1 learning environments. Globally, however, there is still a substantial technological and financial hurdle to overcome.

With a device in hand, students still need to complete their work. During the 1990s and 2000s, Microsoft Office dominated productivity software. From documents to presentations, such software is vital to the workflow within schools. Installing the Microsoft Office suite on a computer's hard drive could cost over $100 per device, substantially raising the cost of any device purchase. Around 2012, a shift in school productivity emerged with the widespread adoption of the Google Drive productivity suite. Google "took over the classroom" (Singer, 2017) by providing free or low-cost productivity and storage software to accompany its low-cost devices. In exchange, critics worry that Google is not only capturing student data and student loyalty but also promoting a shift in student learning from academic content mastery to more project-based active learning. This shift corresponds and

supports a broader shift toward development of knowledge workers rather than factory or service workers (Singer, 2017).

The third major shift critical to expansion of platform networks is the development of various iterations of learning management systems (LMS). The market for LMS providers globally is likely over $ 1 billion (Kim, 2017). These platforms are deeply rooted to higher education because LMS options such as Blackboard, Canvas, Brightspace, and Moodle are ubiquitous. All of these LMS platforms also provide specific K12 iterations of their platforms (e.g., Schoolgy, Haiku, Agilix Brainhoney, Pearson Successnet). Many LMS options are also developing outside the United States, such as Decebo in Canada and Europe, xuetangX in China, and Teamie in Singapore. Beyond formal LMS options, streamlined learning platforms such as Google Classroom and Edmodo all provide the ability to help teachers manage learning processes within classrooms.

While much progress has happened in the digital development of learning platforms, devices, and productivity software, Vander Ark and Dobyns (2018) contend that K12 learning platforms are still in the early stages and mostly "the tools are just not very good yet" (p. 40). They predict the next generation of learning platforms will (a) provide better learning feedback, (b) be interoperable and portable, (c) link into motivational and social-emotional supports, (d) permit scheduling for both onsite and online learning, and (e) continue to improve user interfaces, particularly for early learners and students with special needs.

Emerging School Networks in South Africa

Across Gauteng and the Western Cape in South Africa, a school network launched in 2012 is impacting thousands of learners with the goal of addressing an identified crisis in education. Today, SPARK

schools operate 15 primary schools educating over 7,000 students in Gauteng around Johannesburg and Pretoria with one additional school in Stellenbosch in the Western Cape. SPARK schools are independent, non-governmental, low-fee schools that provide a combination of personalized learning, blended learning, and core-value development. In a profile at the Clayton Christensen Institute submitted by SPARK schools founders, even early elementary students spend approximately 25% of their day utilizing digital tools to support their learning (Brewer & Harrison, 2013). The school founders noted the uniqueness and challenges of their approach in the South African context.

> *Blended learning and technology-based education is so foreign to the people of South Africa that school administrators had a difficult time convincing cautious parents that blended learning could be effective in a school environment. Also, the school has struggled to find high-quality online content providers willing to work with a South African school. (p. 4)*

Early results for SPARK Schools have shown significant success, and both enrollments and the school network are growing rapidly. These results led to the network being featured in *The Economist* (2017) as a reason for optimism in the otherwise gloomy picture of South African education.

The co-founders of SPARK Schools met Bailey Thompson Blake through an existing American-based platform network, Rocketship Schools. At the time, she was teaching through the Teach for America program when the two South African entrepreneurs who ultimately created SPARK Schools connected with her during a leadership-development session. During those first conversations, a vision emerged to develop "a network of schools that would leverage

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blended learning" (Smith & Thompson Blake, 2016) as a way to revolutionize the South African education landscape.

SPARK Schools is not unique as a private network within South Africa as fee-paying schools have been part of networks since the adoption of the new national constitution in 1990. South Africa has even permitted models akin to for-profit education management organizations in the United States. For instance, the larger Curro network, a hybrid of a traditional Christian-based private school network and corporate for-profit school operator, presently operates over 100 schools across South Africa serving over 40,000 children. The expansion has not been all smooth for the corporate school network, however, as recent allegations of racism have been linked to multiple schools within the network (Pather, 2018).

Criticism of these supposedly low-fee schools has emerged with claims that SPARK Schools are unaffordable for most South African families (Din, 2017). A professor at the University of Johannesburg contends that such low-fee schools "allows one to frame a privatization expansion project in social justice terms" (Languille, 2016, p. 536). She further contends that these schools are not targeting the bottom of the social pyramid because low-income families cannot afford the low fees charged by SPARK Schools. Instead, the schools are operated primarily for the benefit of the middle class, which another scholar at the University of Johannesburg's Centre for Education Rights and Transformation argues only "perpetuates inequalities . . . along social class lines" (Din, 2017). Srivastava (2016), a scholar on low-fee private schooling based in Canada, asserts that SPARK Schools' low-fee tuition represents 62% of the total wages of low-skilled workers in South Africa.

While SPARK presently owns and operates schools within its network, the opportunity to develop the model further into an extensible platform-network exists. During a TEDx Johannesburg talk, a SPARK co-developer stated, "I wish I could tell you that what we do is exclusive or expensive or exceptional in some way that prevents others from doing the same. That's not the case" (Thompson Blake, 2017). Later in the talk, she posits that other schools struggle to do the same thing because integration of core values "is hard." This difficulty, particularly for no-fee schools, might be ameliorated through the distribution of a version of the SPARK model through a platform-network distribution. The strength of the founders' core values might be leveraged as a tool to help other school communities upgrade the experience of learners. It has been reported that 200 million rand (over $13 million) has been invested in the SPARK model for South Africa (Todd, 2018). Perhaps, as has been seen with Summit Learning and other models based in the United States, some of those funds could be used to develop a no-fee, adoptable platform-network model.

This question is particularly relevant in South Africa because its tradition of independent local school governance. After apartheid, the South Africa Schools Act of 1996 instituted a model whereby each school is governed by a locally constituted independent governing body (Joubert, 2017). This massive decentralization of school governance was studied by Naidoo (2005) who found that the structures between the national officials, provincial officials, and local governing boards "were often very ambiguous" (p. 91) and that relationships through networks were limited mostly to top-down directives and a focus on local compliance. Hence, within this governance structure, there is no formal way for schools to network together at a governance level.

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Perhaps partly in response to this limitation, elements of the government in South Africa have sought to advance school networking in other ways. For instance, Gauteng Province has advanced the idea of *twinning* schools together to intentionally link higher income schools, which are frequently fee-paying, with lower income schools, which are mostly no-fee schools. In practice, this means twinning a township school with a suburban school. The process of twinning the schools links both under guidance from a single governing body tasked with operating both schools in the new network. Section 17 of the South Africa School Act (2018) gives members of the executive council, in the best interest of education, the authority to link two or more schools together under a single governing body. Media reports have suggested that although the strategy was met with resistance by some schools and communities (Monama, 2015), a few schools did join together under this twinning concept, and thus, the leader of the Gauteng Department of Education continues to advance the idea (Tshetlo, 2017).

Comprehensive Platform Networks in the United States

While schools in South Africa struggle to take advantage of network strengths, those in the United States are increasingly choosing to network on their own at the local level. The Trimble County School Board, mentioned in the opening, made an intentional choice to join a national platform network to enhance student-learning opportunities. The details of this network are expressed most clearly in the contract in which both the network and the school district "agree to work together in good faith to implement personalized learning." Although there is no cost for participation in the network, member schools are selected based on their application for inclusion.

Under the contract, the Summit Learning network agrees to provide access to its base curricula and assessments as well as ongoing support and professional development for teachers. The base curricula includes full-course builds for Grade 4 through Grade 12 that are aligned to the Common Core standards for English, mathematics, science, and social studies. These curricula are delivered through access to the custom-built Summit Learning Platform, a digital learning management system that permits high levels of personalization. The ongoing support includes a direct mentor for the partnering school leadership team as well as access to pre-built resources (e.g., parent night templates, assessments). Finally, professional development is provided over three years through both summer trainings and regional convenings.

In exchange, the school district agrees to "follow the general program requirements" of the Summit Learning framework. These include (a) changing the academic calendar and class schedule to incorporate the Summit model, (b) mentoring students through 1:1 check-ins at least 10 minutes per week, (c) embedding the Summit Cognitive Skills Rubric into projects and assessments, (d) teaching mathematics in the specific way recommended in the platform, (e) adjusting grading policies to fit the platform approach and specifically not include homework in grading, (f) administering a prescribed standardized assessment at least twice a year, (g) providing each student with a computer with a keyboard, (h) using the Google Chrome browser, (i) syncing the district's student information system software with Summit's platform, and (j) providing robust Internet access in every classroom. By committing to these changes within their school, the participating teachers set a new minimum expectation for teaching that includes assigning projects, providing personalized learning time, mentoring and coaching, changing grading processes,

and integrating technology. These commitments form the core of the reform within the classroom level. Meanwhile, at the school level, leaders are tasked with changing school structures, such as the school schedule and technology purchasing.

Outside of the specific network hub itself, responsibility for student performance tracking is not clear due to limited published research. Studies are presently underway to explore the impact of this specific platform network approach on student learning. A similar platform network, The New Tech Network, has been operating far longer than Summit Learning. Research on this long-standing network has revealed a variety of formats that helps to provide insight into the impacts of a platform network approach.

The New Tech Network, operated by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, has over 200 schools across all school levels in the United States and Australia serving over 80,000 students. Participation in this platform network is also a whole-school reform approach in which a school district agrees to implement components of a progressive learning model that includes project-based learning, performance assessments aligned to a broader profile of student skills, establishment of external partners, shared professional development, onsite and virtual coaching for staff members, and a shared, digital learning-management platform that contains exemplar projects, assessments, and gradebook (Vander Ark & Dobyns, 2018). As opposed to the Summit Learning's free cost of entry, the cost of entry to the initial 4.5-year contract with New Tech Network can reach $500,000 with a $20,000 sustaining access fee beyond the initial contract term.

A developmental evaluation of the New Tech Network using an exploratory case study of the hub organization and three school-

implementation sites was conducted by Peruach and colleagues (2016) during the 2010-2011 school year. The researchers deemed at that time that the Network was an *incubation enterprise* that allowed for high variability within local contexts. At the school level, the network platform, Echo, was reported as the source of routines and guidance; all participants interviewed during the study acknowledged that the content in the platform was useful only as a model and that not all project examples were rigorous. Success within the New Tech model at that time depended on schools embracing the task of designing their own implementation of the ideas, supported both by the platform and by the network. At the hub organization level, a robust community supported innovation, communication, and a culture of learning but lacked formal processes around data collection, analysis, and sharing. Thus, the network lacked a way to assure student learning. After the researchers presented their report to the network hub, several changes were implemented that help to shape the modern iteration of the network today.

Further, the New Tech Network was part of one of the most rigorous examinations of progressive school network impacts conducted to date. The American Institutes for Research examined 20 model schools within 10 comprehensive school-improvement networks that were all committed to deeper learning models, including two New Tech schools (Huberman, Bitter, Anthony, & O'Day, 2014). These schools were matched to comparison schools outside of the networks. Analyses were conducted across a wide variety of assessments. These included the strategies, structure, and cultures within deeper-learning network schools (Huberman et al., 2014), access and opportunity to experience deeper learning (Bitter, Taylor, Zeiser, & Rickles, 2014), evidence of deeper-learning model outcomes on students' high school graduation and college enrollment

(Zeiser et al., 2014), relationships between deeper learning competencies and high school graduation rates (Rickles, Zeiser, Mason Garet & Wulach, , 2016), and impacts of school features, including leadership, on providing student access to deeper learning (Huberman, Duffy, Mason, Zeiser & O'Day, 2016). In short, though, students in the network schools scored higher on the PISA examination, reported more positive interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes, were more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in four-year institutions rather than two-year institutions; further, low-performing students were more likely to enroll in college (Zeiser et al., 2014). This extensive research also indicated direct leadership implications through teacher surveys reporting higher levels of instructional leadership and coherence (Huberman et al., 2016).

Discussion: Potential Leapfrog Strategy for Leaders

According to Vander Ark and Dobyns (2018), "while a few schools with heroic leadership can function in the long term on their own, most schools should join a network or operate within a network—or a district that operates like a network" (p. 130). While this broad pronouncement is perhaps too forward leaning for most educators, school leaders should consider the potential benefits of joining comprehensive school-improvement networks and, in particular if feasible, networks that are coupled with electronic platforms. Schools have struggled, globally, for decades with a variety of challenges. As in both Kentucky within the United States and South Africa, school governance laws place much of the responsibility for critical choices about school models and supports at the local district level or even at the school level itself. While these approaches may positively increase democratic participation among parents, teachers, and students, it likewise places enormous burdens on school leaders

to provide a structural model, curriculum guidance, pedagogical supports, assessment development, data analysis, and evaluation of both programs and personnel. These responsibilities are only compounded by the complexity of changing learning support technologies. These tasks can be onerous and lonely for school leaders. The research on school networks, while not proven effective in all cases, evidences enough positive impact that leaders should consider the costs and benefits of these additional supports.

For developing countries, particularly those invested in site-based governance such as South Africa, school networks represent a promising, non-governmental alternative to supporting school reform. Even without electronic devices and Internet-access requirements to support modern learning management platforms, lessons can be drawn in how local networks can be developed, deployed, and evaluated. It is estimated that billions of dollars over decades have been invested in the United States in the slow development of effective comprehensive school-reform networks (Peurach et al., 2016). These investments, hopefully, do not need to be replicated within each context. Clear lessons are emerging about the impacts of school networks, particularly those paired with platforms that can be replicated more efficiently. For instance, the usage of clear network participation criteria in the contracts that are signed by local governing councils can help to set minimum teaching and classroom expectations as well as help to change stubborn school structures.

One large outstanding issue is how such networks are funded. The New Tech Network helps to establish a price for initial implementation of large-scale, network-based reforms at nearly $500,000 over five years. Summit Learning is rapidly showing, however, how philanthropists can offset funding of the central hub

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activities to permit local schools to join networks at low or no direct cost. Further, as all countries continue to invest in networks, consideration of the development of publicly owned networks should be a critical issue as intellectual property and other benefits remain mostly in private hands. Local school districts and, in particular, public universities may have both the strength and the interest to support public platform networks.

Alternatively, while clear opportunities are inherent in the networks, threats are present as well. First, a large amount of capital has been invested in networks over the past few decades, but the results are still mixed. It is hard to build, scale, and sustain robust learning environments across a wide variety of contexts. Operating great schools is hard, and networks are not a magic bullet. When network implementation is dependent on distributed leadership models that have the risk of being disconnected from the ideas and energy of the central hub, the potential for low-quality execution and thus disruption is high.

Second, existing networks are largely private in nature. Most are not-for-profit organizations, but even within this context the ideas are copyrighted and reside behind various walls that limit usefulness beyond the networks. The private nature of these enterprises also opens the door to risks such as unauthorized data sharing. Further, as a private enterprise, a network could close and, with it, access to the learning platform and constituent data.

Third, as Means (2018) articulates more broadly, a socio-technology platform approach to learning carries with it potential risks such as the ability to extract value from the public learning systems, potential for easily-measured low quality implementation that lead to a lack of robust student skills, expansion of socio-emotional health

concerns and digital dementia, and risk of exacerbating inequality. Algorithmic-driven learning, in particular, risks lacking the nuance and relationships that underlie a more personalized approach to learning.

As with any new innovation in learning systems, school leaders must be cautious. Disruptive technologies have great potential to help with generational challenges, but they also have the potential to disrupt children, the very lives we hold most sacred (Lehmann & Chase, 2015). It is not a surprise that communities struggle with such large-scale reform. The confusion and difficult conversations in the rural loop of the Ohio River in Trimble County, Kentucky, reflect hard conversations and new learning that need to unfold in every community. For countries such as South Africa where networks are beginning to take hold, the potential for disruption is even greater. Still, society largely acknowledges the existing limitations inherent in our industrial systems of schooling. Thus, schools are facing new pressures to personalize learning, integrate technology, conduct robust performance assessments, use competency and mastery advancement models, and equip students with a broader range of skills on top of the vast existing challenges of operating the buildings and providing care to children and families on a daily basis. As is a tradition for education in much of the world, schools are being asked to do more while being provided less. Creative exploration of the collective strength of networks coupled with the amplification power of platforms may permit schools and school leaders to not only to meet the expectations of society but, more importantly, provide a better education to every child.

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Market Pressure and Arizona Public School Leaders:

"That Package is Like a Brand New Cadillac!"

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Abstract	Article Info
In the United States, long-standing school choice policies and practices in Arizona have developed into a market-based system of schooling for many residents in the state, especially in the larger cities. In this study, I analyze qualitative data gathered from school leaders and parents in one Arizona district public school who discussed marketing pressures and various notions of accountability and whose perceptions related to rapidly growing school choice reforms and increasing testing demands. I also describe the ways in which many members of the school team (e.g., school administrators, teachers, staff) were affected by ever-increasing competitive expectations. By examining market pressures experienced by parents and other stakeholders, we can understand better some consequences of expanding school choice policies and programs on those experiencing educational reforms in local settings.	

Introduction

In the United States, long-standing school choice policies and practices in Arizona have developed into a market-based system of schooling for many residents in the state, especially in the larger cities. For example, in Maricopa County, which includes the Phoenix and surrounding metropolitan area, approximately 37% of students open enroll, which means that they attend schools outside of their designated district school. When including enrollment data of charter schools, which in the United States are publicly funded schools that are chartered by various authorities such as universities, charter boards, or public school districts, nearly one in two students participate in school choice because they attend schools outside of their assigned neighborhood (Powell & Laczko-Kerr, 2017). Powell and Laczko-Kerr (2017) even suggest that district attendance zones are indeed becoming obsolete in some parts of Arizona due to these revealing figures.

Shifting enrollment numbers have a direct impact on district schools that are faced with maintaining enrollment in ways that are different from more traditional public school systems in the United States and beyond. For Arizona public school leaders, decreasing student enrollment in a school means that the school receives less government funding, which can become problematic since per-pupil financial allocations follow students to the schools where they choose to attend. The school choice enrollment numbers also necessarily influence perceptions and actions of school and district leaders and their team leadership approaches, since competition-based school systems are often dependent upon successful marketing and popularity for sustainability. The responsibility to recruit students is placed on schools and, therefore, school leaders.

This article expands upon earlier research that I conducted at one Arizona district school and in its surrounding community, where I observed the ways in which parents, teachers, school leaders, and community members made sense of school choice policies and practices and studied how they made decisions and choices for their children and families (Powers, Topper, & Potterton, in press). In the community where I conducted this research, there were a number of high-profile education management organization (EMO) charter schools located around them, and school choice options were continually increasing. School choice policy and program options included but were not limited to charter schools, tax credits for private schools, and open enrollment--all policies that were commonly practiced.

Arizona is a leader in the United States school choice movement and was one of the first states to open charter schools. In 1994, the state's legislature approved charter schools and open enrollment for all students as a means to generate a public school market (Powers, 2009; Potterton, in press). Due to open enrollment, there was perceived enrollment instability. Parents could change schools where their children attended relatively easily and freely, provided they had access to transportation since most schools do not provide open enrollment transportation.

Below, I focus specifically on the district school leaders and parents at the district school who discussed marketing pressures, not only due to rapidly growing school choice reforms but also due to increasing performance accountability demands. I also describe the ways in which many members of the school team (composed of school administrators, teachers, and staff members), were affected by ever-increasing competitive expectations. By examining these market pressures, it was possible to identify some unintended but real

consequences of expanding school choice policies and programs on team leadership at schools and in districts as well as those impacting stakeholders in communities who are experiencing educational reforms in local settings.

Theoretical Framework

Parents can take action as agents by leaving traditional public schools or charter schools, especially when choice options are profuse. School leaders thus must respond to this competition and take part in the school choice environments where they are employed. Leaders' responses to market-based reforms have been examined in numerous settings, and researchers have found that overall local contexts of choice policies matter greatly and that leaders do indeed respond to competition (see Potterton, in press; Holme, Carkhum, & Rangel, 2013; Jabbar, 2015a, 2015b, 2016). Jabbar (2015b) reported how in New Orleans, where the entire school district was turned over to charter schools after Hurricane Katrina devastated the area, one leader expressed that "every kid is money" (p. 6).

Whilst leaders work to maintain sustainable school environments for students in settings like these, parents who have the resources make choices as consumers to stay or leave in times of disagreement, disaster, change, or turnover at schools. Regarding changing schools, Hirschman (1970) describes this consumer-based type of exit as a withdrawal of voice. On the other hand, some authors such as Garcia (2010) argue that the freedom to make choices in a market is more complicated. According to other researcher perspectives, a market-based system can empower families (Robinson, 2015; Stewart & Wolf, 2014).

Still other researchers offer notions of alternative public spaces, called *counter publics* (Wilson, 2016), wherein school teams work to

meet unique needs for students with specific visions and practices. These might include district schools or charter schools that serve the public in ways that support certain cultures, learning interests, and abilities via centric schools (Eckes, 2015; Fox & Buchanan, 2014). In other instances, schools may assume a role in positively supporting students who may not feel welcome elsewhere (Bloom, 2013).

In a progressively competitive environment where leaders in traditional and other public schools must work to maintain justifiable student enrollments, they must also follow rules that are mandated by their district leadership teams. Public schools, aiming to serve the public equitably, may not cap enrollment for students who live in a specific neighborhood zone but rather accept all students. Charter schools, though, may cap enrollment, and they may very strongly encourage (but are not allowed to require) criteria for students to stay enrolled in the school, such as completion of specific standards of work or contracted volunteer hours for parents. District school leaders ultimately face tensions in this type of environment while supporting stakeholder teams that include teachers, school leaders, staff members, and parents or other family members. Team members may perceive themselves at times as customers *of their organizations* due to their keen awareness of the new business ontology of competing schools (Wilkins, 2016). School leaders know that parents have relatively easy potential to stay or go.

Marketing Schools

While promoting their schools, leaders in a competitive school choice environment must also consider the importance of school team collaboration and parental voice. How a school is marketed thus matters? For example, leaders could use promotional strategies that highlight the spirit of team collaboration and decision making, such as

prioritized academic rankings, or they could promote specific, niche offerings that their school has compared to others. Leaders may also spotlight school details through commercial-style materials and websites, with the support of marketing teams (Lubienski, 2007; Lubienski, Linick, & York, 2012; Olson Beal & Beal, 2016; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2012; Wilson & Carlsen, 2016). In the school choice literature, the newly coined term *edvertizing* (DiMartino & Jessen 2018; Jessen & DiMartino, 2018) describes the new ways in which school teams must function in an increasingly competitive school choice education environment within the United States. A difference between district schools and charter schools is that the latter have autonomy to hire staff members in whatever way best fits the school. District schools do not often have the economic, social, or political resources to market in the same ways that business-oriented organizations do. Nonetheless, district schools in Arizona are held to similar standards of accountability and sustainability as competitors who function in much more clearly defined, market-oriented ways.

Accountability and School Choice

Notions of accountability are embedded in the school choice movement and a foundational concept for educational reforms (Garn & Cobb, 2001, 2008), yet, little research has specifically examined stakeholders' experiences with school choice in an increasingly complex accountability environment. Complicating matters further, individuals perceive accountability and school choice policies in different ways, and their interpretations are patterned by both personal and collective concerns (e.g., Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1996; Jennings, 2010). Garn and Cobb (2008) identified four models of accountability embedded in the school choice movement: bureaucratic, performance, market, and professional. Their models

also sometimes overlap as individuals attempt to make meaning of school choice policies and programs, interpret competitive pressures, and make choices (Garn & Cobb, 2008).

Bureaucratic accountability refers to compliance and monitoring systems that support the regulations and rules governing education systems. It includes a set of rules and norms aimed at ensuring that public functions are performed in a way that is democratic and legal. Under *performance accountability systems*, states, districts, or schools are ranked based on the results of standardized tests. Outcome measurements of student learning (e.g., school report cards, statewide assessments, National Assessment of Educational Progress) provide data used for statistical interpretation. *Market accountability* is the process whereby consumers or customers choose between schools; when schools are no longer viable, they eventually close. Under market accountability, government regulations could also be used to proactively prevent monopolies in a market and to require schools to provide accurate and complete information to families. Finally, *professional accountability* refers to the idea that experts in practice assume responsibility for their work, and thus, they are involved in decision making and monitoring of their progress and standards.

The complicated processes of school choice in local contexts may result in individuals and groups interpreting notions of accountability in different ways. Such interpretations can be affected by competition-oriented school choice rhetoric from individuals and groups, such as EMOs or leaders at high-performing traditional public schools, and can shape the ways in which individuals and groups think about and act upon their school choices.

Method

I conducted a secondary analysis of data collected during a larger qualitative study that used ethnographic methods to explore experiences with school choice policies and practices from the perspectives of stakeholders at a district school, Southwest Learning Site (SLS), and in its surrounding community. I conducted fieldwork between 2014 and 2016 and wrote fieldnotes during participant observation at the school during informal conversations throughout the community, at school and community meetings, and in homes where and when I was invited. I created analytic memos throughout diverse stages of data collection and when it was helpful to gather findings and insights. Although I conducted 37 interviews with 35 stakeholders, Table 1 displays information about the 17 interviewees from whom data were analyzed for this study.

Table 1

Semi-Structured Interview Participants Included in Analysis for Study

Participant		Parent	Parents' Children at SLS, Current or Previous	Administrator, Teacher, or Staff in or near the District
1	Eleanor	X	X	X
2	Ellie	X	X	
3	Grace	X	X	X
4	Joan	X	X	
5	Joy	X	X	X
6	Marcus	X	X	
7	Marie	X	X	
8	Marsha	X	X	X
9	Megan	X	X	
10	Mike	X	X	

11	Monica	X	X	X
12	Nadia	X	X	
13	Robert	X	X	
14	Ron	X	X	X
15	Samuel	X	X	X
16	Sarah	X	X	
17	Tom	X	X	

For data analysis, I first focused on information that was connected to the initial codes (i.e., *market behavior*, *accountability*, *agency*, *process of choosing*, *reasons to move schools*). Then, I conducted qualitative data analyses through a reflective process of reading and re-reading field notes, analytic memos, and interviews transcripts and through later cycles of coding that resulted in themes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I triangulated the data throughout the analysis period in order to validate findings and to get a full picture of experiences in the community (Creswell, 1998).

Community Unit of Analysis

For the larger ethnographic project, the school and its surrounding community was my unit of analysis. I defined *community* as the individuals who were attached to SLS because they were parents with children at the school, teachers or leaders at the school, or somehow involved with the school due to previous affiliations (e.g., parents of children who attended the school in the past) or because they were active in the neighborhood. Although I rely extensively on interviews with parents, teachers, and school leaders at SLS for this study, I also draw on my larger observational data to provide rich descriptions and fuller context in the reported findings.

School and surrounding area. SLS was a district public school and identified distinctly as a *school of choice*. It was started in 1990 and

described on its website during the time of my original data collection study as a demonstrative project for the Desert Public School System (DPSS) to provide alternative methods for learning that relied on innovative educational research that was developing at the time. In practice, stakeholders and foundational staff members at the school shared with me, and I observed, that the school was largely run as a Montessori-type or school that served students in multi-age classrooms from Kindergarten through Grade 8. During my time in the field (many years after the 1990 opening when school choice policies and practices had not yet influenced the area), there was a fragile working definition about the school's purpose. Many community members blamed both accountability pressures and charter schools for the discord amongst stakeholders concerning what the school should prioritize, how it should serve the students and community, and how the school should and should not be run.

It is important to note that although SLS was a school of choice for students, it was not a charter school. It was supported by the district and governed alongside the other public schools. Nonetheless, the school faced identity tensions, especially when student test scores significantly dropped one year alongside gradual changes whereupon more diverse student populations enrolled. Around this time, the district leaders carefully watched for improvements to the test scores, which in turn, affected how teachers spent their days and prepared lessons. These changes generated disagreements between the multi-grade teams and some families, which created a period of unrest before the principal resigned during my time collecting data. Concurrently, a district superintendent change occurred. This period of transitions is contextual to the perceptions and experiences described in the findings section.

City. The city in which SLS was located is a popular retirement location and a well-known area for its relatively high-income neighborhoods in many sections. Although the city has approximately 250,000 residents, they had not passed the previous two school bond overrides to provide much-needed local funding to the district's public schools. Demographics varied within the city limits, with the northern part being home to many high-income residents. The areas to the east, west, and south of the city were known for their diverse populations, both racially and socioeconomically. During the period data were gathered for the larger study, SLS was located in a high-income neighborhood with a diverse population around it to the east, west, and south.

High-Profile Charter Schools

A growing number of high-profile, "high-performing" EMOs were opening around SLS. These schools were located either in or adjacent to high-income areas, and over time a number of families left SLS to attend the charter schools. I had previously written a commentary (Potterton, 2013) that described how the charter schools in the area served a majority of students who were White, had few if any identified learning disabilities, or were English language learners; no students at the charter schools received free or reduced price lunches. The students attending the new charter schools did not reflect Arizona's population of public school students.

Findings

An individual who was deeply invested in and committed to the school poignantly described SLS's future as "earth-quaky." As I was completing data collection there, stakeholders remained quite unsure about how the district might organize or re-organize the school under

the leadership of a new principal and a new district superintendent. The mounting pressures faced by stakeholders were, in part, a direct consequence of accountability policies. Stakeholders at SLS and in the surrounding community had different perspectives about how the new "accountability" policies that affected their choices, which I discuss below.

Bureaucratic Accountability

Bureaucratic processes, such as increasing rules and regulations at the school, proved to be a point of serious consideration for individuals at SLS, and their assessments influenced how they made decisions about choosing schools. Some school members were angered by the bureaucracy that seemed to interfere with what was perceived to be best for students at SLS. Some stakeholders felt that there was an unnecessary preoccupation with the rules and regulations at the school, which were impeding the school's unique opportunities to support children. In one case, stakeholders described how they were upset that a dog, who was owned by a staff member and accompanied her to school every day, had to suddenly be barred from the school upon direction from the district. Many SLS stakeholders loved the dog because students were rewarded for making good choices by having time to play or brush the dog. Although some stakeholders were not overly concerned about the recently implemented rule concerning pets at school, others were offended that district personnel did not seem to appreciate or honor the dog's beneficial presence at the school. That is, for some, adhering to new rules and regulations appeared to be more important than considering the benefits to students.

Performance Accountability

A number of teachers felt increasing pressures from the standardized testing and high-stakes teacher evaluation systems that seemed to be inconsistent with the Montessori-styled, multi-age methods and collaborative team efforts that had always been paramount to their school. Many teachers at SLS wanted to work with the DPSS to be a flagship and distinctive school for the district, but they did not want to lose the vision of their school that was unique and important for them. For example, a local school leader talked about the difficulty of maintaining parents' support of the school in the face of increasing "performance accountability" models. This leader spoke about the community's long-standing shared philosophy:

> *You have a philosophy that does not mesh with the demands of testing and curriculum and policies and rules, and you have a philosophy that's just kind of like, "We will teach our kids and when they leave here they will be self-advocating, self-directed, self-motivated learners, and they will be okay, just okay. Some of them will go to college and some of them will not but they will be okay, they'll be good members of society." That was our philosophy. When you put all of these other things there becomes this huge battle of trying to maintain your philosophy under all these rules. And so when they said, "You have to start doing this curriculum," and so then they start splitting by the grade, because that's the only way we can figure it out. . . . When you have to do all this testing and you have to do this mandatory, "They must focus and learn this even when they're ready or not," there's an internal struggle because some things you shake your head and you say, "This is not what's in the best interest of this child! It might be in the best interest of that child, but it's not what's in the best interest of this child.". . . But you don't have a choice. You have to do it because that's what the rules, policies, and regulations state. So… your ground becomes very earth-quaky and you have to either mold with what's happening or you sink. And we have to change… [like] the year that Arizona said, "We're testing everyone and it's all about performance." And, I think, was that the year*

that the No Child Left Behind came into play? It's all about performance. . . . And then the one year we got the C, the hammer came down. . . .We can't do this, we're [DPSS's city]… I do have to say this . . . if you're teaching kids right, they should be able to perform. So, this philosophy that we have is supposed to work, experiential learning. So the kids should be getting B+, A, I mean basically they should be getting it.

Ellie, a mother with a young son, felt the same way. She had an extensive educational research background and was planning to enroll her young son into Kindergarten the following year. Ellie knew that while assessments did not provide a complete picture of student learning, and, although she was looking forward to sending her child to SLS because many aspects of the school were attractive to her, she still planned to keep a close eye on the quality of opportunities for learning provided to her son.

Other families saw past singular viewpoints on testing and accountability, especially in terms of students' performance on standardized tests. Megan was a relatively new mother to SLS with young children who was contemplating whether or not to keep her children at SLS. During her interview, she mentioned the conflicts that had occurred during the school year related to district pressures to raise test scores and then explained why she resisted evaluating schools only on students' test performance. According to Megan,

it was a choice that was good not just for our kids but also for our family. We wanted a sense of community. We wanted to know about the space and place where our children were going to be spending a portion of their waking hours. It was not just teaching them their math facts. It was teaching them how to be good, healthy people, and that was more important to us than a test score.

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Market Pressures and Accountability

An administrator working at another district school in the area shared with me the way she was encouraged to think about ways of increasing enrollment and potential problems that would occur if the schools did not maintain sustainable numbers. With increasing charter school options in the area, the district school leader worked hard and took very seriously her responsibility to provide tours for potential parents and to give them brochures that boasted her school's many instructional strengths and proud diversity amongst the student population.

This school administrator reported that a large amount of her time was spent comparing her students' rankings on tests to those of other students at other schools. She was very proud to say that her school's numbers were strong and, upon considering the diverse set of students they served, she realized her students actually performed very well on learning assessments administered within the district. Indeed, the brochures she created highlighted for parents how competitors' scores were not always better in order to dispel myths.

> *When I tour, I show our competitors' scores compared to ours [on brochures she creates]… We're constantly sharing such things with even our own parents because that idea that charter schools are better, at least with two main competitors which would be the [charter] schools and the [charter] schools, is not always the case.*

Other leaders at the public schools felt that they had to please parents to keep their children and that they were increasingly working to add new programs at the district schools to mirror curricular choices available at the charter schools in the area. Continuous tinkering with the curriculum at the school proved to be damaging because teachers felt pressured to change their instructional strategies. Ultimately,

implementation of too many changes caused significant tension among the teaching staff.

Professional Pressures and Accountability

One district school leader talked about a perceived general awareness in the area that education was being treated like a commodity and that leaders needed to cater to the next "trendy" products in education. These types of pressures were felt by administrators at the same time that teachers were feeling pressured to change how the school was run to make in order to make it more competitive within the district and wider area.

I felt that for some stakeholders the term "professional accountability" meant that teachers should automatically trust the curricular programs provided by professionals to whom they were accountable (e.g., teachers were accountable to principals, principals were accountable to superintendents). This perspective did not sit well with some teachers and parents who were attracted to SLS because of its vision to encourage students' creativity and self-direction; thus, some challenges to the current ways of "doing things" felt like a threat to experienced teachers' professional and team-leadership capabilities. One teacher, however, reported that there were other experienced teachers who did not feel as threatened and thus were willing to work within new frameworks so long as the process felt collaborative and mutually respectful. Joy, a well-respected veteran teacher at SLS, perceived that the school was unique and valued within the district and that, despite recent conflicts, the DPSS wanted to see the school succeed. She defended some of the newer changes in the school.

> *The district says, "I want you to be [a particular subject] academy. That's how they were going to save SLS, I guess." So anyway, we went through some difficult times with that because there were some things that were just too rigid.*

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Forced. And some of the things that the parents complained about worked in my classroom. And there [was] some common language that was used that I thought was very powerful for the school. Some parents thought it was an overkill. Well, when you're having difficulties in your class and you have a common language [that] everybody understands, there's some value to that. And not every classroom has to look different. So there was some stuff going on with that. And [some new curricular programs] just seemed to be kind of forced down upon us and that created some difficulties.

Joy referred to the new principal's suggestion to try a different way of organizing her classroom for a year, which was based on the principal's leadership experiences at other schools. Joy respected the new principal's demeanor and her apparent respect for the SLS teachers' existing practices. According to Joy, her new principal gently suggested that the teachers might be open to see how things could go if they experimented with other ways. Joy then said,

And the new principal came in and said, "I want you to try it for a year. Just try it for a year for me, please?" And there's something to be said about that. So they all agreed to do that. And we did it not by any pressure from anyone, we just said we think we'd like to try . . . but that will be the only time during the day. The rest of the day [we] decide how [we're] going to cut that pie [i.e., organize] . . . which is really free.

Joy's comment shows that some of the committed veteran teachers at SLS were open to how the school might be developing differently, yet were willing to work together as professionals to see how new ideas impacted student learning. As parents saw the respected teachers' responses to the new principal (who was likely facing pressures from the district to sustain and increase student enrollment and produce high test scores) and as relationships began to "heal,"

some were influenced to keep their children at SLS despite the conflicts that had occurred over the year.

Selling a New Thing: "The Cadillac Effect"

How schools were or were not marketed affected families' choices significantly as did the school's state-assigned grade, the students' performance on standardized tests, and the teachers' unique teaching methods. Some stakeholders were aware that SLS did not market itself in the same ways that other district and charter schools did. Therefore, SLS' performance results tended to stand out as a defining characteristic. Some stakeholders, however, wanted to change this because they realized the role of marketing in the district might be important for sustaining the school's unique vision and teaching styles. Some parents, both long-timers and newcomers to the school, supported efforts to increase marketing throughout the community to maintain the school's relevance in the district, especially because SLS was often misunderstood due to its uniqueness. Others parents, however, rejected the notion of marketing because they felt that it contradicted the school's non-competitive approach to education.

Whereas many parents spoke of trying to gather as much information about schools that they could prior to making decisions, others stressed that it was important to use a critical eye through which to view marketing as a requirement of public education. Some teachers were concerned about how marketing to attract families could result in clashes of visions for SLS, whereas the administrators understood that marketing and attracting new families was a necessary part of their professional roles and responsibilities.

Robert, a father who was drawn to SLS when the principal gave him a tour of the campus, provided a fantastic metaphor for the tricky

process of school choice in Arizona. He talked about what he called "The Cadillac Effect" with confidence and concern.

> *When you're buying a car, you go look at, we all have this vision of what kind of car we want. We want a nice sporty luxury car [or] whatever. . . . [such as] a Cadillac. So schools are kind of like that for parents. We want our children to be in the best academic learning environment that we can put them in. And [charter schools] and some of the other schools . . . have marketing teams, and they have a budget to design their schools a certain way. And a lot of the newer charter schools [have] architecture [that] is just phenomenal. But the way that they design their schools to look, and I haven't really been to too many inside of them, I hear stories from other parents. . . . it's all this glitz, all the pomp and circumstance, the package. . . . my impression is that . . . [the charter school organizations] do a really good job of making this package so that it looks really, really appealing to parents. . . . that package is like a brand new Cadillac.*

School leaders, both at district schools and charter schools in the area, were aware of the importance of this "packaging." Although others did not describe the process as selling a Cadillac, one district school leader did say that she felt like her job was to sell education as a salesperson might sell a car.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this secondary analysis of data highlight the complex ways in which market pressures affected public school leaders in Arizona and how stakeholders interpreted leaders' actions. Robert articulated it well in his notion about marketing schools and charter schools' potential advantages when he said, "That package is like a brand new Cadillac." Although DiMartino and Jessen (2018) discuss *advertising* inequities amongst charter school management organizations (or EMOs), I argue that the same can be said for the

competition both between and across sectors within the deregulated district public school system in Arizona. This is due to its mature education market, expected outcomes, and potential consequences for failing to compete well. Teachers at SLS were faced with ever-changing demands that were certainly influenced by the expansion of school choice around them.

DiMartino and Jessen (2018) further discuss how EMOs have an advantage because they have built up their marketing campaigns and departments in ways that can overpower smaller, less-resourced schools.

> *Within the market-driven framework, organizations employ a variety of edvertising tactics to increase their market share. . . . Larger and nationally oriented [EMOs] are at a distinct advantage in this system because they have strategically built up their marketing and branding departments to support large-scale recruitment and outreach efforts. . . . These organizations' use of highly glossified branded materials from direct mailers to brochures . . . allows them to craft campaigns to targeted communities. (p. 42)*

The school leader who was working hard to promote her school in comparison to the EMO charter schools that had marketing teams and were high performing and located nearby provides an example of the new ways in which public school leaders in Arizona must place their efforts towards gaining "customers" while simultaneously competing for financial resources. The EMO's sharp focus on touring and branding was obvious to many SLS stakeholders, and there were concerns within the district and its public schools about how much energy leaders should place on marketing efforts since their financial resources were thinly spread already.

School choice policies and programs are expanding not only in the United States but also across the globe. In the United Kingdom, for

example, academy schools, which are publicly funded schools that are independent of any local authorities (and therefore similar in some ways to charter schools in the United States), taught nearly 69% of secondary-age pupils and approximately 24% of primary-age pupils (Department for Education, 2017). Specialty offerings are a major part of promoting schools and programs in academies and free schools, which are similar to academies but can be started by groups of teachers, parents, charities, and others. How these schools are promoted changes the ways in which leaders must function and schools must sustain. Indeed, Wilkins (2016) reasoned that contemporary schools in the United Kingdom are changing so much that they must to be understood through a business ontology. This description can be said for privatization efforts globally as school choice programs continue to grow.

Many questions need to be considered and hopefully answered. For example, how will these pressures among schools to compete for resources affect neighborhoods and traditional notions of public schooling? What will this competition mean for leaders as they prepare their teams for envisioning and running schools? As further research closely examines school choice educational reform in local contexts, scholars must focus on the ways in which leaders can move forward with supporting students and teachers amid these newly organized learning environments.

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Voices that Matter: Rural Youth on Leadership

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Abstract	Article Info
Although considerable research has explored what it means to be a leader from an adult perspective, little has been conducted from the student perspective as an integral component of leadership education, decision making, or educational change. Findings from a longitudinal qualitative case study presented in this article reveal how youth perceive leadership as a complex construct integrating diverse skills, abilities, learning, and change opportunities as well as team and management processes utilized to improve the world and people in it. Youth perceptions of leadership also include responsibility, active and purposeful self-direction, inspiration, desire and willingness to make a difference, ethical character, and collaborative partnerships with school and district leaders. This article thus bridges the gap in research involving rural youth and informs high school principals and leadership educators about ways to initiate and foster a positive educational change and sense of community among youth, community, school, and district leaders.	

Introduction

Increasing participation of high school students in leadership activities and learning in recent years has greatly contributed to our understanding of collaborative relationships between youth and school administration. Although youth leadership is not an emerging concept, important work is being done to empower youth to take leadership roles in learning activities, community action, decision making, and later their career choice. Facilitation of leadership development at a young age predetermines youth's readiness to assume leadership as family and community members, continuous learners, and future professionals. To provide necessary support and assure educator preparedness to meet student needs in leadership development, it is crucial to understand how leadership is defined from a youth perspective. This is especially true in rural areas, where a substantial percentage of students are from low socio-economic backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) and have limited educational, economic and career opportunities (Gallo & Beckman, 2016; Kannapel, Flory, Cramer, & Carr, 2015). Thus, there is a continuous need to close the achievement gap and promote family and community engagement to reduce high dropout rates among students (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Traditionally, the general understanding of *youth leadership* has been influenced by research conducted with adults. Further, youth are rarely considered as a source of a valid and valuable insight about leadership development and its practice and often perceived as not mature enough to inform leadership education. With this mindset, youth are positioned as recipients rather than active and central partners of leadership development. Such an approach lacks necessary perspectives about the nature of and challenges associated with

student leadership and its development, which in turn impedes the design of effective, engaging, and empowering leadership interventions in any setting or with any group.

This article highlights the importance of student voice and how rural youth perceive leadership and themselves as leaders while developing their leadership abilities. In the following sections, I first describe the relevant contextual details about student voice and its role in education and student development and then position this study in research literature that examines leadership of youth. To explain how the purpose of this study was achieved, a brief overview of the research design is presented, followed by research findings. The article concludes with implications drawn from this study of youth leadership education and student voice in educational leadership.

Student Voice and Educational Leadership

The place and role of students in educational leadership and reform efforts changed over the past several decades. Historically, student opinions were often disregarded and believed to have less legitimacy and value than the views of adult educators and leaders. Over time and through changes in education expectations, this attitude also changed: Students have become active players in their own learning, decision making, problem solving, and knowledge creation (Manefield, Collins, Moore, Mahar, & Warne, 2007). Additionally, engaging students in conversations fosters discovering students' values, beliefs, previous knowledge and experience, thus allowing student voices to inform curricular and educational direction while likewise encouraging and supporting student initiative.

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Student voice in this context is a determinant of change. Successful change emerges through recognition of the value of their ideas for school improvement (Fletcher, 2005) and enhances their opportunity for self-reflection, exploration, and development of self-respect (Ranson, 2000) that lead to trusting partnerships with adults, thus influencing student involvement in school and learning. During times of educational reform at local, national, and international levels, student voice has great potential in improving student learning outcomes and increasing the effectiveness of school leadership (Mitra, 2003; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Student engagement with educational leaders to improve schools has many forms: from sharing student opinions and solutions to school issues to collaborating with educators to improve educational outcomes (Manefield et al., 2007).

In this research project, youth voices were recognized as critical components of leadership development and effective school administration. Further, findings confirmed Mitra's (2008) assertion that student voice is essential to reform movements since any action taken to improve a school or district will impact its students. Elevating student voice as part of educational reform can encourage educational leaders to revise and align their mission, goals, and activities with greater focus on social justice, equity, and diversity (Mitra, 2008). Student voice also serves as a catalyst for change in schools and helps to improve curriculum, relationships between students and faculty, teaching and instruction, student assessment, teacher training, student mentorship, and school administration (Fielding, 2001; Mansfield, 2015; Mitra, 2008; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000).

That said, involving students in educational reform is complex. As noted by Cook-Sather (2015), engaging students in reform efforts requires adults to embrace the diversity of perspectives and its value

because it has the capacity to generate a new vision, catalyze mission, and inform action. Student voice, in fact, can help to develop partnerships in education and serve as a bridge between community and educational leaders. Manefield and his team (2007) emphasize that involving students as active leadership agents not only builds up their confidence, self-esteem, and respect but also provides practical direction for educational improvement that is secured by student support. By elevating voices of youth to build their individual capacities as learners and equal partners in educational innovation, students become "actors in sharing policy" rather than being the "subject of policies" (Mansfield, 2014, p. 398). Additionally, by acknowledging students' diverse perspectives, informed by their unique experiences in education and leadership development, it becomes important to create a dialogue about the nature of leadership and the role of school administrators in the design and implementation of leadership development interventions.

Youth Leadership in Contemporary Contexts

In recent years, thinking among youth leadership researchers and educators has dramatically shifted. The previous focus on leadership giftedness of individual youth has begun to be replaced by new ideas on the capacity of *every* youth to develop leadership potential and fulfill their leadership purpose (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007; Klau, 2006). In his essay, Avolio (2016) emphasized one's readiness to lead and learn from other leaders in a specific leadership-ready environment. Priest and Middleton (2016) argue that one's leadership is self-defined and determines an individual's thinking and behaving as a leader and realizing leadership development opportunities.

Throughout the years, researchers of youth leadership have attempted to describe the nature of leadership. Underscoring its complexity, youth leadership has been examined within the context of social and personal development (Day et al., 2014) and found its correlation with responsibility (Hammond-Diedrich & Walsh, 2006), leadership giftedness (Roach et al., 1999), and gender-based roles (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). From a competency perspective, youth leadership includes cognitive and intellectual abilities, motivation, self-awareness and self-efficacy, behaviors, past leadership experience, and various interpersonal, learning, and professional skills (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Jones, 1938; Klau, 2006; van Linden & Fertman, 1998). Other youth leadership theories outline personal growth and conceptual awareness (Mawson, 2001), activism (Chambers & Phelps, 1993), and personal values, beliefs, persuasion, inspiration, and motivation (Kosutic, 2010) as possible leadership metrics. Although not all scholars agree that motivation and previous leadership experiences are required for effective assessment of leadership in youth (Chambers & Phelps, 1993), those traits play an important role in determining the impact of leadership practice on leader's personality and community (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Mawson, 2001).

Further Research Needed on Youth Leadership

Despite this growing scholarly interest in the topic of youth leadership, there is much that remains unknown. According to Hogan and Kaiser (2005), youth "leadership is one of the most important topics in the human sciences and historically one of the more poorly understood" (p. 169). Research has been conducted *quantitatively* (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Guerin et al., 2011; Oakland, Falkenberg, & Oakland, 1996; Ogurlu &

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Emir, 2013; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Ehrhart, 1999; Zacharatos, Barling, & Kelloway, 2002) and *qualitatively* (Close & Lechman, 1997; Ferguson, Kim, & McCoy, 2011; Haber, 2011; Hammond-Diedrich & Walsh, 2006; Hastings, Barrett, Barbuto, & Bell, 2011; Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Osteen, & Owen, 2006; Mortensen et al., 2014; Mullen & Tuten, 2004; Roach et al., 1999; Webster & Worrell, 2008; Zenkov, Harmon, Bell, Ewaida, & Lynch., 2011). These diverse explorations on youth leadership and its development revealed that adolescent leaders are motivated, socially and culturally competent, self-directed, responsible, compassionate, and community-oriented. However, while numerous programs and models inform youth leadership and its development, these lack rigorous inclusion of youth insights on leadership and their potential to be leaders. This study was conducted to fill that research gap.

Methods

This study focused on developing a picture of leadership from a youth perspective through answering the following research question: *How do rural high school youth perceive leadership?* As part of this overarching research question, youth were also asked to share their opinions on leadership role modeling and leadership potential. For the purpose of this study, a qualitative longitudinal case study was conducted. The study was conducted over a two-academic year period in a rural high school setting in Kentucky within the context of a youth leadership development course. The main objective of the course was to engage students in local and global community improvement initiatives, responsible decision-making, implementation of technology in classroom, and school-oriented project development. The study population included 16 students enrolled in the course. The

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sample was comprised of 14 female and 2 male participants ranging in ages from 15 to 18 years old.

Data Sources and Study Participants

To assure data validity, data were triangulated by employing several methods of data collection, including face-to-face semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The dataset also included researcher field notes, interview and observation protocols, and subject-relevant documents shared by study participants and lead teacher. Each student was interviewed at least twice for approximately 10-15 minutes. Forty interviews were conducted and produced seven hours of audio data. Observational data included detailed information about observational settings, time, interpersonal interactions, participants' responses and behaviors within the given observational contexts. The observations focused on educational settings and course activities where development and practice of youth leadership occurred, characteristics of youth leadership in practice, nature and content of activities offered as part of the course, and opportunities created by the instructor to practice student leadership. A total of 20 observations were conducted during the study timeframe.

The dataset also included documents collected to augment the observational and interview data to assure credibility of research findings. Collected materials included two types of data—documents provided by study participants and the course instructor, and publicly available documents. A total of 62 documented materials comprising over 135 documented pages were collected. Documents created or provided by study participants and course instructor included students' essays, open-ended leadership surveys, reflections about

course activities (e.g.,, readings, leadership experiences, school values), and students' electronic presentations. Publicly available school and course documents included student organization teams, community mission, school vision and values, course curriculum, and Lead2Feed lessons that were used as a curricular foundation of the course.

Data Coding and Analysis

Collected data were reviewed and organized using a web-based qualitative and mixed-methods research data analysis tool (Dedoose® v.6.1.18), and thematic and structural approaches were used to code the data. During thematic analysis, data were reviewed and codes were developed in Dedoose to organize the data based on emerging thematic patterns and categories. The codes were informed by the research question, and as the thematic analysis emerged, were merged into categories (Notz, 2005; Rabiee, 2004; Szabo & Strang, 1997). Individual quotes were then used to develop descriptive statements for further analysis (Bustamante-Gavino, Rattani, & Khan, 2011; Rabiee, 2004). Once the statements were grouped in themes, the researcher compared and contrasted coded narrative until each category and theme was viewed as an independent, identifiable structure (Burke, 1992). These procedures supported the creation of a narrative structure with logical, reliable, and valid relationships between the research question and study findings (Bowen, 2009; LeCompte, 2000).

Research Findings

Following the initial analysis of data, three themes emerged. First, leadership is viewed by youth as a complex and interconnected

construct that incorporates the elements of personality, management, and team work and leads to positive change, impact, or overall success. Second, every individual has the potential to be a leader. And, third, family members serve as first role models of leadership behavior for youth.

Leadership Complexity

It was clear from the onset that the youth's perspectives on leadership were unique and diverse. In general, they defined leadership as a way to contribute to the community and make a positive change. Matthew noted, "Leadership is using your ideas and ideas of others to better your surroundings and better your people who are around you. And just make the world a better place – making improvements whether they are small or big." Similarly, Emily shared that leadership "is something that you don't have to have a big role, you don't have to have people following you, but you take the stand to do something better."

Students' perspectives on the nature of youth leadership gathered across the 2-year study included critical features such as role modeling, teamwork, personal skills and qualities, and capacity to make a positive change. Youth leadership was viewed as a multifaceted construct incorporating various aspects of personality, management and organizational processes, and ethical qualities. It integrates personal skills, abilities, opportunities for leadership practice, and team processes to improve the world and people in it. Youth leadership also requires responsibility, active and purposeful self-direction, inspiration, desire and willingness to make a positive difference, and strong moral character (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Complexity and interconnectedness of youth leadership
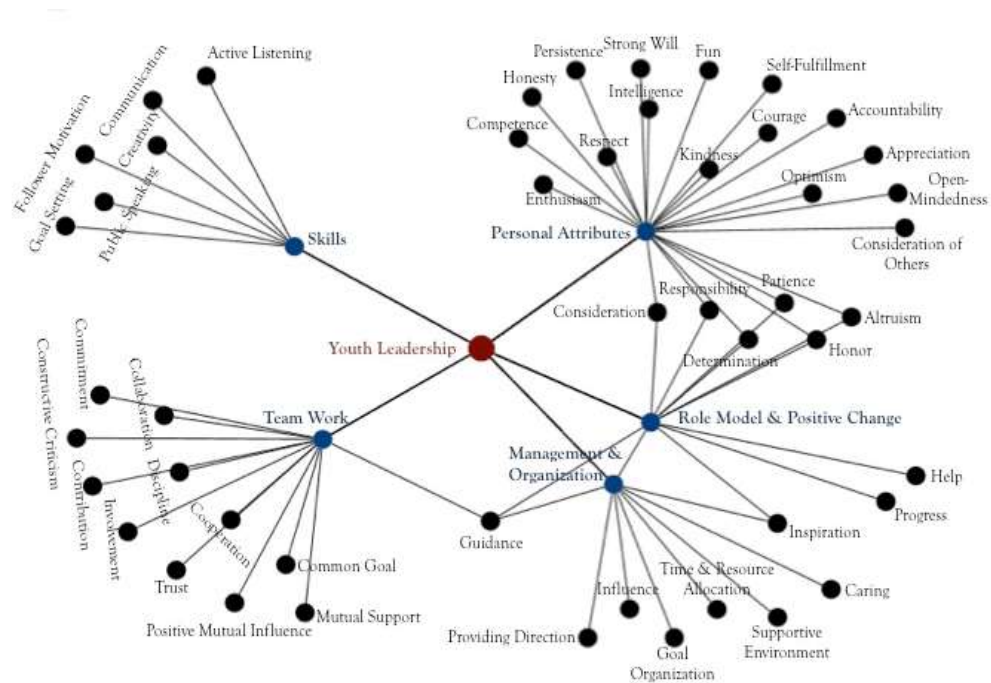
The construct of leadership as shown in Figure 1 above demonstrates the breadth and interconnectedness of youth leadership characteristics described by the study participants. Such characteristics as inspiration, altruism, patience, responsibility, determination, and guidance or mentorship were ascribed to two or more leadership categories when describing youth leadership as a sum of personal attributes, participants emphasized a number of personal qualities making a leader to stand out among others. Responsibility, for instance, was one of the most cited ones. Elaine noted that leaders have

to be responsible for themselves, knowing that they're setting the example, and they need to help others set expectations for themselves, not really just fulfill them. But help others see what they can do. And see what all they can be.

Danielle concurred that "leadership is about being responsible with what you are doing. If you have a project as a leader, you know, your peers expect you to get it done."

Other participants outlined leader's ability to be humble and empathetic as important characteristics. When sharing her observations of leaders, Natasha stated that they do not think highly of themselves. She or he is in a position where they feel that they are as equal as everyone else. They don't really feel like a leader but they are leading." Weston agreed:

They [leaders] don't know that they've done a lot until the work is done. They constantly strive to help others and seek help as well. They don't think they are better than everybody else. They try to learn just like everyone else. When there's a problem that arises, they ask and try to find answers. They are also good at communicating, willing to talk to new people even though maybe they don't like them. Sometimes, [they] just get over the fact that [they] don't like each other. Just work. And, I guess, awarding people for their good behavior I think as being good leadership.

Emily also reported her perspective on leadership, in which she used masculine pronouns.

He tries to understand how people feel and what they think, and I guess be understandable too of their ideas and their opinions. He is intelligent, so I guess that helps because he is someone who knows what he is talking about and he is pretty strong-willed. If he wants to do something, he gets it done.

Leadership, as recounted by youth in this study, is inseparable from a well-rounded, kind, respectful, responsible, and determined character. For example, according to Natalie, it requires "knowing your strengths and weaknesses and using those to improve self first." Self-reflection also inspires others and helps in determining what leadership style is suitable to various circumstances. Empowered by numerous examples of their family members' and peers' leadership styles, students believed no matter what mistakes others make, a leader should always support them, build them back up, and learn from mistakes without blaming others.

Skills is another leadership dimension identified by youth. When describing leadership, they also emphasized goal setting, motivation, active listening, public speaking, creativity, and communication skills. Taylor suggested, "Effective communication was definitely essential to our success. We took many ideas from various people and put them all together to make one big, great idea." Chris added, "As a leader, you have to be able to express your ideas well to the group. But also, be able to listen to other people's thoughts."

With regard to teamwork and management, youth leadership was viewed as a process of creating a supporting environment that encourages mutual trust, goal and group commitment, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Matthew noted, "Leadership is using your ideas and ideas of others to better your surroundings and better your people who are around you. And just make the world a better place - making improvements whether they are small or big." Effective leadership provides guidance. According to Emily,

Leadership is not really taking charge, but showing people the way, like guiding them, because leaders should not be demanding or overcontrolling. But they

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should be the ones who are willing to help everybody. It shows people what they need to do and sets the example.

As a form of teamwork, leadership is "about other people wanting to be with you and learn from you. And being able to teach other people a lot of things," according to Jane. To be a leader in a group, Chris perceives one needs to "have an opportunity to go out and make friends, communicate, help and receive help in return. And just complement each other on what they've done. And tell them ways that they can do better." The students stressed that effective team leadership instates equality of opportunities for each team member to contribute and provides ongoing support, mentorship, and guidance to develop leadership potential and independence in others.

Leadership Potential

The idea that anyone can be a leader was emphasized often by the high school students. At the beginning of the study, a majority of the participants believed in leadership potential in every individual (73%). At the end of the study, 93% of the youth reported they were able to recognize leadership potential in others.

Highlighting different leadership characteristics and skills necessary to be a leader, the students often mentioned the importance of one's willingness to be a leader and assume fully the responsibility for being one. They emphasized choice and passion of being a leader as well. One of the study participants, Alice, stated, "I think everyone can be leaders if they wanted to. They have the abilities inside them whether they show it or not." Chris agreed, "Everybody has the ability to be a leader. It's just if we choose to use [that ability] or not." Jennifer continued, "I think if you have the passion for [leadership] then you can . . . dedicate yourself to being a leader, then you can grow."

Another respondent, Matthew, was more assertive: "You always have that choice, and you always have that right. You are who you make yourself." Indicating that leadership is authentic to everyone, study participants also agreed that without hard work, continuous self-realization, and willingness to grow as a leader, becoming an effective leader can be challenging. Chris asserted, "Everyone has the opportunity to be a leader. It's not like you are born with it or you are not. I feel like what you do and your attitude and your willingness makes you a leader. So, anyone could be a leader." Maranda also explained:

> [W]e all have leadership values. And I think you need to be enthusiastic about it. You need to spend as much time doing it, and helping others when you are done with your [leadership assignment]. Leadership is helping others when they don't understand something, or not being afraid to ask questions if you don't understand something.

Some high school students also underscored the importance of working hard to realize their leadership potential. According to Bonnie, people "need to be giving their 100% [effort] each day, or at least try" to become a leader. Even if everyone has leadership potential, what matters is "what they did with [it]" and "whether they have the courage and the fighting strength to get up there and actually be a leader."

It is apparent that the high school students perceived leadership potential in everyone and recognized that this potential can remain unrealized if not properly developed and practiced on a regular basis. They shared a common belief that all individuals have a choice to be a leader and the capacity to change and lead in their own way. Empowered by their own and peer examples, these study

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participants believed no matter how often and in what way one assumes leadership responsibilities, every leader is important.

Leadership Role Modeling

All participants in this study believed that personal leadership is ignited by leadership of other people. When asked who they admired as leaders (i.e., *Who do you look up to?*), all the students referred to someone in their family, either parents or relatives. The majority were encouraged by leadership of their parents due to their hard work, diligence, persistence, ability to make others happy, and ability to work through life and family issues. Speaking of her mother as her leadership role model, Maranda provided this justification:

> *She always puts everyone else before her. And that includes clothes and haircut, food, anything. . . . She puts their fun ahead of hers. So, sometimes she doesn't even do anything just so everyone else gets fun and enjoys life. A lot of people look up to her just because how great she is. And she is always influential and always has someone's back.*

Chris recognized his father's hard work and its importance for being a leader,

> *He works so hard, and everything he's got has been through hard work. I think that is really important as a leader is to have that determination. You have to work hard to get there. It's not just going to come to you.*

Although Emily admitted that her father is not in a leadership position, he still exhibits all leadership qualities.

> *He is not in the position that he is a leader, but he works really hard. He works night shift... And he is away from home during the day. So, he gets just a few hours of sleep and he is always helping other people out, takes things for them, and he is just a really hard worker.*

Helping others was another consistent attribute of a leadership role model. While talking about his mother, Chris shared her life challenges and highlighted the importance of altruism for a leader.

My mom is my role model because she is a very strong person. She took leadership on at a very young age to raise her kids. Now I want to help other people, because I know that my mom helped other people, helped us succeed in life.

Alice concurred because her mother has altruistically devoted herself to being a life-long leader for the family: "She had her first kid at 16, and she finished school while raising us. She is taking care of her family. My mom is a leader because she puts others before herself."

Although parental leadership role modeling was commonly mentioned by the participants, the high schools students also learned leadership from their relatives and siblings. For example, Nicole's leadership was inspired by her sister's:

She was seven when we moved from Europe here. She didn't know the English language. So, she had to learn it herself, in school in the first grade. And she had to teach us [because] my parents didn't know English either. So, as we got older, [my sister] still had to translate things for them and deal with all of that. So, I think she had to grow up more than anybody else. So, I'd say she is a leader.

Altogether, family and close family members were the primary sources of leadership examples because they evidenced the purpose of leadership, its impact, and importance in lives of others. Parental leadership models inspired youth "to be nice to everyone, try to do their best around everyone, and keep them happy," according to Matthew. They instilled confidence in student leadership capacity and demonstrated how putting others ahead of the self can make a positive change in the family and community.

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Conclusion and Implications

The findings from this study suggest that student voice is crucial in understanding the nature of youth leadership. According to the participating high school students, leadership nature is complex, interconnected with skills, character, and abilities, and influenced by organizational and team processes. The overarching purpose of student leadership lays in youth willingness to make a positive change in their families, school, and community. Youth preparedness to positively contribute to other people's lives begins with the development of their leadership potential and purposeful engagement in responsible learning and community service.

Viewing youth leadership as a combination of personal values, virtues, and skills could and should be foundational to youth leadership education and learning. According to students, leadership is inseparable from such qualities as responsibility, determination, persistence, honesty, courage, optimism, accountability, altruism, et cetera. Development of these virtues furthers and improves not only youth leadership but also their personality, which can serve as a catalyst for a positive life-long character change. This is especially important because these student participants perceived a leader as someone humble and who is a great communicator, understands and appreciates others' needs, and is socially and emotionally intelligent, open-minded, and self-fulfilled. These leadership qualities develop and refine over time as student leaders acquire hands-on leadership experience.

Unique Findings

As a continuum, youth participants also viewed leadership within the contexts of organizational and team processes. For them, leadership was a mechanism for effective collaboration, partnership, guidance, support, team contribution, and goal accomplishment. Leadership as a teamwork and managerial process was integrated into positive personal and community change, which was perceived by the high school students as a personal responsibility—that a leader must give back and contribute to the collective growth of community and its members. This finding supports research on youth leadership as a process, thus illustrating youth predetermination for continuous improvement of their personal and team leadership. Although this finding does align with current scholarship, the youth participants in this study emphasized the ethical and altruistic nature of team and organizational work, which is minimally described in existing youth leadership theories.

Many contemporary youth leadership theories are also self-centered, rather than other inspired, focusing little on the role of family members in creating a positive image of leadership and providing leadership examples. In this study, the high school students identified parents and other family members as imperative to their learning and recognition of leadership in themselves and others. Indeed, encountering leadership in family settings shaped participants' understanding of leadership, served as a continuous source of leadership inspiration, and allowed youth to foresee leadership potential in everyone regardless of their socioeconomic status and education level.

Practical Implications

This research suggests three practical implications for *youth leadership scholarship*, *rural community*, and *school leadership*. First, the findings emerging from this study allude to the importance of student voice in defining the nature of leadership. Since leadership development interventions are grounded in adult perspectives of leadership, youth leadership educators, administrators, and practitioners can use these findings to evaluate the extent to which leadership learning materials match the perspectives of youth. The voices shared by youth do not invalidate previously derived research; rather, they emphasize the need to connect youth ideas on leadership with leadership training programs. As similar research shows (Mortensen et al., 2014), everyone is predisposed to leadership. However, leadership potential can and should be furthered in any youth who is interested in a positive personal and community change.

Second, these study findings suggest student voice can be valuable in the dialogue on the nature of leadership in order to make youth leadership education more responsive to the developmental and social needs of youth in marginalized areas. Elevating the voices of rural youth can excite their interest in leadership development and practice, being role models for their peers, teams, and student organizations, thus providing opportunities for youth leaders to serve their schools and communities as equal partners and change agents. Extending this dialogue to their families can also motivate youth to exercise their leadership potential for their family and community common good early on in life to prepare them to lead now and in the future.

Last, the findings of this study have implications for school leadership. A central goal of education should be to create a safe environment within a school to meet students' learning and socio-emotional needs as well as foster student development at an optimal rate. School leaders and teachers have the responsibility to ensure ready availability of tools and frameworks necessary to recognize student leadership potential and provide adequate activities to address different levels of students' leadership development. To that end, school leaders must help teachers discern leadership in youth and design frameworks that emphasize development of a youth leader's personality, skills, ethical qualities, and team processes. This will also support personalization of leadership learning that can lead to a positive personal and community change, youth's commitment to learning goals, learning success, increased awareness of school and social issues, effective communication, ethical action, and responsible decision-making.

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Reflections on Education Reform and Team Leadership

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During recent decades, the notion of team leadership has emerged as a central theme in the international discourse on systemic education reform. This issue of *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership* not only captures a collective sense of commitment to education as means for advancing national social, economic, and political wellbeing but also reflects a changing nature of leadership across a wide spectrum of educational organizations and contexts. Given the increasing complexity of 21st century education, effective leaders at all levels tend to rely less on bureaucratic, hierarchical structures and more on relational approaches to accomplish tasks. In this regard, teamwork has become an indispensable characteristic of organizational life, and depending on the task, teams may involve a wide array of stakeholders (e.g., superintendents, school board members, district support staff, principals, teachers, parents, students) or a select few representing specific constituencies to address specific issues.

Having a greater diversity of perspectives within teams enable them to identify and solve complex problems, coordinate work, facilitate communication, resolve conflict, and build commitment to

accomplish shared goals (Edmondson, 2012; Handy, 2005; Parker, 1990). Teams are "potentially the most versatile performance units of any organization" (Katzenbach & Smith, 2007, p. 223) because their collective learning embeds "new thinking and practices that continuously renew and transform the organization in ways that support shared aims" (Collinson & Cook, 2007, p. 221). The resulting systems learning creates new knowledge, enhances organizational decisions, and generates resiliency in responding to external forces (Choo, 2006; Fullan, 2004; Senge, 2006). The authors contributing articles for this special issue provide important insights about the nature and impact of team leadership within diverse organizational types, contexts, and cultures.

The confluence of national education reform mandates, heightened interest in school culture, and postindustrial leadership perspectives contributed to creating complex organizational contexts. These circumstances heightened the importance of cooperation and teamwork in accomplishing large-scale systems change that is continuous and human centered rather than reactionary, episodic, and short term (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014; Murphy & Datnow, 2002). Emphasis on cooperation and teamwork challenges traditional industrial-management perspectives that view subordinates as self-serving, motivated by earning rewards through avoiding punishment, and willing to comply with directives (Burns, 1978). In bureaucratic, hierarchical organizations, managers coordinated work and efficiently accomplished organizational goals with limited, if any, input from those doing the work. In recent decades, new perspectives emerged within research and professional literature suggesting that leadership is "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect

their mutual purposes" (Rost, 1991, p. 102). Leadership defined as such is not vested in a person but rather a process utilized by change agents to achieve specific goals. Transformation leaders empower others who in turn commit to accomplishing the work and through their efforts build a sense of community that changes an organization's culture (Bjork, Kowalski, & Young, 2005; Bolman & Deal, 2017; Kowalski, 2002).

The notions of re-culturing, cooperation, and teamwork emerged as key concepts in launching and sustaining educational reform. These ideas were informed historically by diverse disciplines, such as anthropology (Foley & Gamble, 2009), sociology (Selznick, 1957), organizational theory (March & Olson, 1985), and political science (Dittmer, 1977). Although Tooby and DeVore (1987) attribute human ecological success to superior cognitive abilities, evolutionary biologists and anthropologists suggest that culturally evolved, cooperative social environments offer an equally compelling argument for survival and adaptation. For example, Boyd and Richardson (2009) and Foley and Gamble (2009) describe human social behavior and cooperation as being central to successful adaptation when external environmental conditions change. They suggest that cultural evolution and adaptation are linked to the ability of people to learn from each other, create cooperative social environments, and transfer positive social behavior through natural selection processes. Simplistically, Darwin (1871/1981) explained rapid cultural adaptation in primitive societies as being in their "plainest self-interest" (1981, p. 155). From a modern sociologist perspective, Schein (2010) defines organizational culture as

> *a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its*
> *problems of external adaptation and integration, which has worked well*

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enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to problems. (p. 18)

More simply defined, organizational culture is "the way we do things around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 2000, p. 4). In this regard, the culture of an organization was viewed as a powerful tool for both survival and adaptation to changing environmental contexts.

Discussions about organizational culture and evolution of cooperation also suggest that competition between groups not only contributes to the spread of social behaviors but also enhances collective adaptation (Boyd & Richardson, 2009; Foley & Gamble, 2009). Notions of conflict and competition were viewed by political scientists as inherent characteristics of society and organizational life. For example, Laswell's (1990) classical definition of *politics* refers to decisions about the allocation of goods in society or organizations (i.e., who gets what, when, and how). During the education reform movement, scholars studied implementation processes particularly with regard to the role of individuals and groups in reshaping or even resisting intentions of legislative bodies. In their regard, micropolitics was viewed as a central mechanism through which major organizational outcomes related to school change and reform are produced. According to Blase and Blase (2000),

> *An organization's political processes, for example, a school's formal and informal structure (e.g., organizational stakeholders and their power sources, interests, ideologies, and interchanges) as well as its political culture (e.g., patterns of interests, ideologies, decision making, power distribution) dramatically influence school outcomes, including teaching and learning. The degree to which political processes and political culture account for a given outcome (e.g., decision, policy, program, practice, events) varies, of course, from one school to another and, over time, within the same school.* (p. 10)

Blase and Blase further assert that micropolitical processes describe the political culture of school or district offices and may help explain how staff members influence stability and change. Although scholars acknowledge that micropolitics incorporates both cooperative and competitive processes (Ball, 1987; Blase & Bjork, 2010; Boyd, 1991; Cibulka, 2001; Mawhinney, 2000), its use in analyzing education reform in the past tended to emphasize conflict and competition rather than cooperation and teamwork. Although this perspective may contribute to an understanding of the formative stages of educational reform when externally-imposed change increased ambiguity, uncertainty, and goal disparity, it is not as relevant to implementing educational reform in 21st century contexts.

As evidenced by the articles in this special issue, a promising line of educational reform research focuses on organizational culture, cooperation, and teamwork as strategies for educational transformation. This body of work not only describes efforts to re-culture schools and districts but also reflects more broad-based notions of leadership. These scholarly papers provide important insights into leadership enacted by teachers, parents, and students as well as by superintendents, school boards, central office staffs, and principals—whose collective efforts play important roles in improving contemporary education. Team leadership and the resulting organizational learning and systems thinking can transform how educational organizations respond to mandated school reform—from past automatic adherence to externally determined processes to locally designed educational renewal strategies addressing the unique contextual features of the organization, its members, and most importantly, the locally identified needs of its students.

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