

Southeast Journal of Educational Administration



Volume 15
Issue 1
Fall 2015

A referred journal sponsored and published by the
Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration

Southeast Journal of Educational Administration

Volume 15, Issue 1

Fall 2015

ISSN 2689-307X

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To Be or Not to Be: Online Educational Leadership Program

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To Be or Not to Be

To Be or Not to Be: Online Educational Leadership Program Online learning is defined as gaining knowledge and skills which are written, communicated, active, supported and managed through use of the internet (Morrison, 2003). Online postgraduate programs are established, and growing the United States. As of 2012, 66% of universities have online courses as a vital role of their learning strategy (Allen & Seaman, 2014). The fall semester of 2012 showed more than 7.1 million students taking at least one online class. Attrition to online programs have shown to be 20% higher than face to face programs, which indicates not only are these programs growing, but are also highly effective (Moody, 2004).

The prospect of being allowed to keep their current employment, being financially burdensome, and cutting down the need for travel or relocation are all benefits that an online programs affords its students (Angelino & Natvig, 2009). In fact, the 2011 Online Learners Priority Report indicated that convenience is the number one reason for enrolling in online programs. According to Reinhart (2008), the reason for online expansion in universities comes from the ease of the Internet and its infinite resources to reach more students than previously possible; thus allowing universities to capitalize on the advantages that today's technology allows.

Based on the statistics of the growing rate and attrition of online learning, developing an online program for Educational Leadership at Mississippi State University is the key for program expansion. As with many post-graduate programs, Educational Leadership is comprised mostly of adults in an established working environment. Because many online doctoral degrees are designed for those non-traditional students, the goal is to enhance the students learning through applied research and scholarly engagement (Radda, 2012). Online programs expand opportunities for those nontraditional students who struggle with maintaining adequate resources. These students are more likely to have a family at home, and prefer online learning when compared to on campus learning (Halsne & Gatta, 2002). Specifically, online programs are sought out for convenience and flexibility (Qvist-Eriksen, 2004). Being required to drive several hours to attend a class may not be feasible, and it may keep prospective students from registering. Many universities offer post-graduate degrees in Educational Leadership, but only a small percentage offer full online programs to obtain the degree.

With universities implementing new online programs yearly, Mississippi State can become one of only three South Eastern Conference (SEC) schools that offers complete online programs for Educational Leadership. Currently, ten SEC schools offer degrees in Educational Leadership, but only the University of Arkansas and the University of Florida offer them in a strictly online format. There are more than 1,000 miles between those two schools, which leaves many prospective students to reach. When exploring more prestigious universities such as Ivy League schools, none of them have online programs for Educational Leadership. This leaves a void where the universities that are first to take the initiative to implement this program will reap the benefits.

Over the past five years enrollment of new graduate students in public universities have declined by 2%, while for profit institutions such as the University of Phoenix, Kaplan, and

Capella have seen an increase of 11%. Once minimized in educational institutions, marketing to prospective students is now seen as a must to compete (Constantinides & Zinck, 2011). An effective marketing strategy is analyzing current students and the professions that this program attracts. This allows the program to collect potential student demographic data so contact can be made (Aldridge, 2010). According to the Graduate and Professional School Enrollment Management Corporation a student should be contacted 6-12 times before enrollment occurs. Contact can be in the form of e-mail, social media, phone, or special events.

A U.S. New and World Report article “Online Course Enrollment Climbs for 10th Straight Year” (2013) states that only 30.2% of faculty and administration value online learning when compared to face to face. One reason cited is that not all faculty members have the technological skills, or desire to learn such skills, that are needed with the new generation of students. A new era of learning is changing the way learning is approached, and faculty who do not change will become obsolete. It was once feared that online classes would diminish the demand for professors at universities. With the growing demand of online programs the reverse effect has occurred. It is estimated that nearly 300,000 faculty engage in online learning throughout the country (Finder, 2007). Faculty play a major role in the satisfaction of students enrolled in online programs. The 2011 National Online Learners Priority Report states that students have a higher expectation of online professors than that of face to face professors. In an age of 24/7 technology it may be expected that a professor responds immediately. However, answering e-mails in a timely manner and being reachable in their office are areas of concern for these students.

Once it is determined that an online program will begin, the faculty must determine the most effective source of learning that is conducive for student participation. Jonassen & Kim (2010) have designed a constrained discussion environment; which is a pre-structured environment that guides the students to participate. There may be a pre-defined phrase such as “The point being made here is”. The reasoning for this type of online learning environment is that it engages the students in the desired cognitive processes (Jonassen & Remidez, 2005). When compared to learning in a threaded forum, constrained discussion increased the frequency of interaction, and was found to be highly useful for less assertive students. Oh and Jonassen (2007) concluded that programs that implement on constrained environment generated more evidence posts, and more hypothesis and hypothesis testing posts. Constrained environment is one type of online strategy, but it may not fit for the type of environment being implemented.

Learning strategy instruction is defined as “behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning, and that are intended to influence the learner’s encoding process” (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986. P. 315). According to Shumaker and Deshler (2006) learning strategy instruction has two main components: cognitions used to finish a task, and metacognitive processes to select a strategy for such task. With adults this strategy has been shown to enhance the interaction between the instructor and learner, and help those struggling with learning the material (Hock & Mellard, 2011).

Gao, Wang, & Sun (2009) used literature from constrained discussion environment and learning strategy instruction to develop the following five online discussion strategies: elaborating and clarifying, making connections, challenging others’ views, building upon others’

views, and questioning. These strategies are linear, and based on a productive discussion model. Gao, Wang, and Sun (2009) stated that learners should be able to comprehend, discuss to critique, and discuss to construct knowledge. Peer questioning can actually increase the quality of peer interaction in an online setting.

Each strategy has its benefits and limitations, so each university must decide which is best for their particular circumstance. When the instructors are deciding which strategy to use, whether that strategy is appropriate for the task on hand should be considered. The instructor should also be aware that there are overlaps between the online learning strategies, which may result in a student using more than one strategy when participating in an online program (Gao, 2014). As with multiple areas of online learning, timely feedback is important from the instructor. It has been found that many instructors provide feedback to the discussion board as a whole, but not to the particular individual participating in the course. This may result in a student not fully grasping the course content.

When establishing an online program, the university staff have to be aware of the barriers that may occur. Already established is that Educational Leadership is geared toward nontraditional students with established careers. According to Snyder and Dillow (2010) the median age for a doctoral student is 33.7, with many between the ages of 45-55. This age difference means that many students received their bachelors 20-25 years previous and did not have to deal with much of the technology that today's student face. Saade and Kira (2007) discuss computer anxiety and how identify several constructs such as negatives beliefs about computers, insecurity, intimidation, and hesitation. Individuals with high levels of computer anxiety are at a disadvantage. In fact, the two biggest factors of dropping out of online programs are lack of understanding online media and computer related problems (Herbert, 2006).

There are barriers that must be addressed, but research has shown that steps can be made overcome most difficulties that may arise. To assure that a student does not feel alone in the program, the courses should combine peer interaction and individual assignments (Rovai, 2004). Peer interaction most commonly occurs in the form of online discussion forums. These forums have shown to be more self-governing and thought provoking than in face-to-face meetings (Oztok, Zingaro, Brett, & Hewitt, 2013). These forums have benefits that extend outside of the program as they allows students to interact with those who are becoming their profession colleagues. When exchanging information with their peers, graduate students increase their ability to acquire knowledge (Gansemer-Topf et al., 2006).

The transmission of content through online learning offers the participants a multifaceted approach to content mastery and understanding. In addition to traditional face to face approaches, online delivery generates the added value of the intentional peer mediated interactions that generally occur in a less targeted manner in a brick and mortar classroom setting. Furthermore, the learning that transpires virtually is molded from a unique and real time form where the learner chooses his best timeframe and location of origin rather than a one-size-fits-all approach where the location, the delivery, the interactions and the responses are preconceived by the professor before a single student enters the classroom. To be or not to be, for online delivery of Educational Leadership programs, clearly the time has come.

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Perceived Benefits of a School- Industry Partnership

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Keywords: educational partnerships, career academies, Alabama Power Company, smaller learning communities, college and career readiness, high school reform

Perceived Benefits of a School-Industry Partnership

Partnerships between school and industry allow educators to capitalize on learning opportunities that occur in the real-world setting of a partner's workplace (Watters, Hay, Dempster, & Pillay, 2013). The sharing of knowledge becomes a process in which the school and the business develop and adapt specific content to address the needs of the workplace as it is required for learning to take place in the relevance of the work environment (Watters et al., 2013). Watters et al. (2013) found that the logic behind school-industry partnerships is that the partners can provide "complementary capabilities and competences" in educating students where the school alone has been unsuccessful (p. 3). Strong educational partnerships with industry are specifically needed today as Mills and Whitney (2012) point to the increasing evidence of a skills gap seen in the United States workforce. The skills gap, found in the young adults who lack the technical (hard) skills and the essential (soft) skills that are needed for the available middle-class job openings, creates an imbalance of qualified workers for available jobs (Mills & Whitney, 2012).

For the last two decades, partnerships have been referred to as the cure-all for educational problems (Barnett, Hall, Berg & Camarena, 2005). Educational partnerships have been recommended in federal statutes from the Higher Education Act of 1998 to the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Act of 2006 (Barnett et al., 2010). Figgis (1998) found that by viewing educational partnerships as strategic investments, benefits to the school and industry are amplified. However, he found that most business partners saw their participation as a service investment in their local educational system with no expectation of returns. The companies that made up the cases that Figgis studied were astonished to realize over the course of the research they were in a win-win situation that reaped a variety of benefits including a clear investment in their future workforce. Figgis reported additional benefits for businesses were (a) community recognition, (b) productivity, (c) enhancement of the company's skill base, (d) more efficient and effective recruitment, (e) personal satisfaction, and (f) bottom line improvement. Likewise, partnerships provide many benefits for schools including delivering relevant, work-based learning environments where concepts can be applied to real-world situations.

Background on the Partnership

The partnership examined in this research study was a joint project between Carroll High School (CHS) located in the small, rural city of Ozark in southeast Alabama, and the Alabama Power Company. The high school was the smallest 6-A high school in the state with approximately 720 students. In 2012, the school transitioned from a traditional to a technical high school supporting six career-themed academies in addition to a freshman academy. The change occurred when the system leadership realized that the high school was not meeting their expectations for graduation and college completion. The school's previous focus on preparing all students for four-year colleges was missing more students than it was reaching. School data showed that only 35% of graduates went on to college and less than that graduated college on time. The findings also showed that a few students consistently entered the military; others began working for minimum wage with the intention of beginning a two year college the following fall; others "took the year off from school" and usually did not begin college for three or more

years—if ever. The data revealed that many students were not prepared for college or career success.

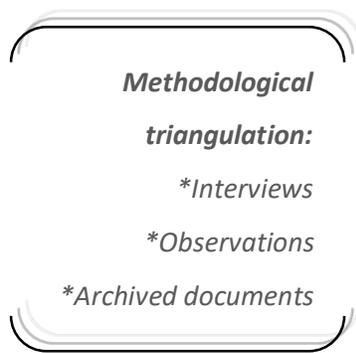
Leaders realized that they were not meeting their objective of preparing students for college, career, and life with the current system of education. They began researching and visiting other systems that seemed to better prepare their graduates. It became clear that something needed to change for the students of Ozark, Alabama.

Leaders met to shape a new vision for education in Ozark City. They spoke to teachers, students, and community leaders to gather perceptions and input. Some visited systems implementing career academies and brought back possibilities. After a year of research, educational leaders broadened their stakeholder discussions. The entire high school faculty was included in meetings and invited to visit a neighboring state's career academies. Two bus-loads of community leaders were also taken to visit the career academies and have lunch with the community partners that supported those academies. Later, stakeholders including parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders held a visioning retreat.

Shortly thereafter, plans were underway to build a new high school. Based on the investigations into career academies that had taken place, the visioning retreat, and the recognized need to reform graduate preparation, the system built their new high school to support career-themed academies. During the interim period, the high school restructured its instructional program and set up academies within the old high school so that they would already be in place when they moved to the new facility that opened to students on April 1, 2013.

Six career-themed academies were created and added to the Freshman Academy that had been in place for two years. The freshman academy was established to address the high failure rate and discipline incidents that occurred in the 9th grade year. Since its inception, the freshman academy concept improved the promotion rate and lowered discipline issues that began in the freshman year. It became the primary place for career exploration and academy recruitment when the career academies were added. The six academies were The Arts Academy; The Human Services Academy; The Industrial Technology Academy; The Medical Sciences Academy; The Business Academy; and the STEM Academy (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math). Six new programs were created to enhance the academies, which were Pre-engineering, Teaching and Learning, Masonry, Criminal Justice, Graphic Arts, and TV Production. All of the academies had an advisory committee and some interaction with industry partners.

A representative from the local office of Alabama Power was included in an academy visit to Florida, where the host high school had a partnership with Gulf Power to support a utilities academy. The Alabama Power Business Office Manager was able to talk with Gulf Power representatives and to see the possibilities that could be gained from supporting a high school academy. Four months after the academy visit, the Alabama Power representative invited leaders from the school system to meet with leaders from Alabama Power to discuss the creation of an Alabama Power Academy at Carroll High School. A core team of three professionals, two from Alabama Power and one from the school system, was created to plan and implement the academy. Alabama Power has referred to the Alabama Power Business Academy as a pilot that



may be reproduced at other high schools in the future (Ozark Business Office Manager, personal communication, July 8, 2014).

Officials from Alabama Power committed to provide human and financial resources as needed throughout all aspects of the academy. The officials committed to hosting student field trips and student internships in order to develop their future workforce. In return, the academy carried the Alabama Power name and industry representatives became involved in working on curriculum and providing authentic learning opportunities for students in an effort to prepare them for college and career attainment.

Purpose of the Study

This inquiry was a part of a larger study that looked at multiple aspects of a school-industry partnership through the pilot year of an industry sponsored career academy. The investigation focused on discovering the perceptions of benefits to the participants and organizations involved in a school-industry partnership. In addition to addressing the research questions, another objective of the study was to give voice to the participants. Increasing voice among the participants in school organizations, such as academies and the partnerships that support academies, expands the concept of distributed leadership and member buy-in among all involved (Mitra, 2007). Mitra (2007) found that students can contribute a unique perspective about opportunities in which they are involved. The school leaders wanted the students and teachers to be represented in the vision for the academy. Their voice in the reflection of the academy partnership was recorded in the school's evaluation data and then shared to become part of this study. Lincoln and Guba (1991) wrote that reality is dependent on one's perception. Therefore, this study incorporates the perceptions of the participants – every participant group contributed their voice.

The research questions addressed in this chapter were

1. What were the perceived benefits to participants and the organizations involved?
2. How might the partnership be improved?

Methodology

The methodology combined multiple methods of data collection to acquire valid and reliable (Lincoln & Guba, 1991; Merriam, 2009; Yin 2014) information on the educational partnership on which the study focused. The research design engaged two of the four types of triangulation recognized by Denzin (1989). Methodological and data triangulations were used in order to attain a thorough and credible understanding of the benefits of partnership from the different perspectives of those who lived it. Investigator and theory triangulations were not used as there was only one investigator and the study was inductive, not deductive, with theory building occurring through the process of data analysis and interpretation (Dhillon, 2013). Triangulation was used to check and establish validity by analyzing each research question from multiple perspectives.

Research methods used included interviews, observations, and review of documents. This study was comprised of three formally scheduled meetings with company employees and school administration. Informal conversations between the same participants and the researcher occurred throughout the school year on nine different occasions. Pre-existing data which received analysis and interpretation through the lens of emerging findings included transcripts of observations, student and teacher focus groups, and teacher interviews generated by the career academy director for evaluation purposes. Student reflections on presentations and events hosted by the industry partners were also pre-existing data reported through this study. Copies of transcripts and reflections were made available to the researcher, void of any names or identifying tags. Transcripts of core partnership leaders from both the school system and the industry along with the pre-existing document transcripts, allowed me to triangulate multiple perspectives including those of the students and teachers on the two research questions addressed in this manuscript. Other pre-existing documents that supported the partnership and provided insight into the thought processes and strength of communication and expectations that were applied to this partnership, but were not used for quotes in the text of this manuscript included partnership literature, such as flyers, registration guides, informative brochures and memos, emails and meeting minutes. Data gathering continued until saturation was reached confirming my interpretation without providing new discernments (Creswell, 2007).

The semi structured interview method was used for addressing the research questions, yet providing sufficient flexibility for discussions that developed around the participant's worldview on the topic (Merriam, 2009). All interviews were audio recorded, after obtaining the informed consent of each participant, and then transcribed by the researcher. During each interview, the researcher took field notes of any emphasis that the interviewee placed on spoken words, facial expressions, and noted nonverbal communications. All interviewees were offered their transcriptions via email by which to comment or clarify any point within the conversation. This member checking led to respondent validation of the study and was defined by Lincoln and Guba (1991) as "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). It was used as one way for participants to ensure that the voices heard through this research were as intended by the speaker.

Data
triangulation:
 *Company
 employees
 *School
 administration
 *Teachers
 *Students

The interview transcripts were systematically analyzed using open and axial coding, which was developed by Strauss and Corbin and discussed in Creswell (2007). The coding was used to identify, categorize, and confirm themes that detailed the basis of the partnership and described the characteristics that illustrated benefits, strengths, and sustainability therein.

Findings

The concept of value-added is a strong motivator to partners within partnerships (Dhillon, 2005). Dhillon (2005) studied the idea that through partnerships with others the achievement and success of the individuals are much greater than working alone. The participants within the academy partnership studied, agreed with Dhillon's finding. The data showed participants perceived many noteworthy benefits attributed to the school-industry partnership as a whole

instead of any single participant. Although the topics were varied, four main categories emerged. The four categories of perceived benefits are (a) Curricular Relevance; (b) World of Work; (c) Essential Skills; and (d) Industry. The partnership seemed to encourage its members to share information and expertise with one another.

Perceived Benefits Connected to Curricular Relevance

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

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

A teacher confirmed this prediction in her conversation:

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

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

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

*Alabama
Power is a
company
where you can
learn and
grow.
- Student*

I listen better when employees from Alabama Power are here showing [things we learn] from their point of view...sure our teachers tell us the same things, it just seems more important, front line, when the people from Alabama Power come in and tell us. – Student

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

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

I think that working with the people from Alabama Power has made me talk to my mom more about what I want to do beyond high school. I see the possibilities. – Student

I talk to my parents more, too, but about college mostly and the things I think I'll take.
– Student

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

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

I think if we learn what [the Alabama Power Employees] are telling us now, we will be ahead of others, and we will know so much more than other people competing against us for jobs. – Student

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

Speakers from Alabama Power come in and talk about real world experiences and opportunities. I think they will prepare us in a way that school cannot. – Student

Perceived Benefits Connected to an Enhanced Understanding of the World of Work

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

I used to think that Alabama Power was all electrical...I am learning that it offers me more...I can be anything in Alabama Power! – Student

Originally, students thought of Alabama Power as climbing poles and working with electricity. Many thought, “Why would I be interested in that?” The Alabama Power employees came and talked about the different jobs that are a part of Alabama Power. Now students see that there are other jobs in nursing, business, engineering, and they are interested! The job opportunities are endless. – Teacher

College and career ready has been something that our teachers have mentioned, often, but it makes sense now that we hear it from the business world and see it in action. – Student
When the ladies from the business office came in to show us how they use spreadsheets in their job, the lesson became something that I need to learn because I will use it one day.

– Student

The marketing presentation stressed looking your audience in the eye, speaking clearly and slowly, and dressing and acting professionally. – Student reflection

The marketing presentation taught us that planning is a very important stage in all we do. I don't believe any of the students were fully prepared to market something as big as our robot, so the advice during our planning stage was extremely beneficial – Student reflection

We have experts that come in and bring real life experiences to the kids. – Teacher

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

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

From working in Human Resources I realize that people can put on an application that they are proficient in Microsoft Word and Excel, but what does it mean to be proficient to that one or that one? If they have a Microsoft Certification, that means something. I know what to expect from someone with the industry certification. I told them how important it was to an employer if you could provide a certification. – Program Manager

The teachers appreciated the attention that the industry partners gave to the importance of credentialing. This appreciation was talked about in observations and in interviews.

We want [our graduates] to go to college if that is what they want, but either way, we want them to be work ready with skills and credentials that matter. I think my students understand that now through their involvement with the academy partners. – Teacher

Students talked about the role that the partners played in encouraging them to credential.

[The Program Director] talked to us about the importance of credentials every time she spoke to us. – Student

Our teachers encouraged us to earn credentials all the time; the partners supported that message every chance they got. – Student

I think that I have tried harder to obtain more Microsoft credentials because the Alabama Power employees have talked about the job-landing power in them. – Student

The research data supported what the participants discussed at the end of the year. Students in the Alabama Power Business Academy earned more than three times the number of credentials than the previous year's business program students. Two of the students earned the credential of Microsoft Office Specialist Master, which was the highest level of Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification offered. Having dedicated, persistent adults who regularly and firmly reinforce the importance of completing tasks, such as credentialing, with their own experiences and work-related examples, was a definite advantage of the school/industry partnership.

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

developed bigger dreams due to the possibilities that the industry partners presented to them. We don't get a lot of experience at school as to how it is on the job. I feel like we are the future of America and this is an outstanding privilege to be a part of the business world now through our Alabama Power partnership. – Student

Perceived Benefits Connected to Essential Skills

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

Local business and industry representatives often complain that students do not know how to talk with adults and do not know what is expected of them in the adult world. So, regular practice with essential skills was a tremendous benefit provided by the partnership. Teachers and administrators felt that students leaving this academy interacted with confidence and better understood what was expected of them in the workplace. The school's goal is to make strong partnerships and reproduce these interactions within other academies.

Students have noticed the benefits of being exposed to regular interactions with business representatives, too.

School feels more professional when our Alabama Power partners are here. – Student

I think professionalism is something that should be exemplified in education, every day, all the time. – Student

I think that the partnership has taught me the power in first impressions. A smile and a firm handshake can set the tone for business and how your associates view you.

– Student

Communication and presentation are things [the business partners] talked about often.

You have to be able to communicate with a wide variety of people and to present yourself and your ideas in ways that interest others. – Student

I learned [from the regional director's motivational speech] that no matter if I do the right thing, it means naught if I did not have the right attitude to go with it. – Student reflection

I am looking for more ways to bring in Alabama Power employees, not just as speakers, but to do things, interact and model professional attitudes. Students get to see how professionals interact and work with others when they are working beside the employees of Alabama Power. – Teacher

We know that you cannot tell someone to do something right and expect it to be learned.

They have to see it in action and to understand why it should be learned. – Program Manager

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

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

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

The same teacher later commented

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

Employees of Alabama Power who were at the networking luncheon from different areas in south Alabama talked about how they wished their children in other schools could experience this learning opportunity. – Business Partner

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

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

During the year-end evaluation of the partnership, a teacher related to the recorder,

We were all most impressed at how the partners realize the importance of developing the whole student and worked to help us do it, not just focus on office skills and knowledge. – Teacher

This comment resonated with the school faculty and administration. Alabama Power seemed to come to this partnership committed to do whatever it took to succeed, including attending to the broader view of student development. This commitment was evidenced in every employee that came to share with the students. Students benefitted by wanting to succeed, having a bigger picture of success, and knowing that more than just their test scores were deemed important.

Employees with Alabama Power have shown us the technical aspect of the business. – Student

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

I am excited about the Alabama Power partnership and expect it to grow. – Student

Perceived Benefits Connected to Industry

Research has shown that educational partnerships enhance classroom opportunities for students and afford teachers and business partners with chances to develop new skills in new ways (Dhillon, 2005; Tushnet, 1993). When investing time in schools, partners never know what to expect, the challenges are motivating and the results are rewarding. The benefits to industry that were identified in this study included employees shared and grew from their interactions with the students; employees addressed the company's focus on education when they provided an educational service to the community through their participation in the Alabama Power Business Academy; employees invested in the future of Alabama when they invested in its students; and this partnership allowed employees to develop the future workforce.

When the Alabama Power business representatives were asked why they chose to participate in this educational partnership, they gave the following answers:

This is a win-win project! We involve our employees because it is developmental to them. When we bring someone in for a specific task, they are the best to ask. Often, they have never shared what they do before coming to the school. As with the office ladies who came to share Excel with the students, one has since taken on a new role and additional responsibilities and I think that the presentation to the students was a pivotal moment for her. We know the value of interacting with others...now we have a place for many of our employees to share and grow. This partnership is certainly a win-win project. – Program Manager

We want to be the support that our community needs. When we strengthen our communities, it strengthens Alabama Power Company. – Business Office Manager It [the academy partnership] fits our focus on education. We are a company that wants to see things better for our communities. The career academy is just one way to do that. We want to assist in any way that we can. If someone is doing something good in our community, we want to be onboard! – Program Manager

A little later, the Business Office Manager commented

I believe that more than anything, you can never go wrong when investing in the future. When you are investing in students, you are investing in the future and you are not going to go wrong. – Business Office Manager

The academy concept was innovative, and we knew that we could not go wrong partnering with you. – Program Manager

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

We always hear about the 'bad kids.' We always hear how teenagers today have no drive and they just don't care. Our employees, that participated in the luncheon, walked away saying that not any of the kids at the luncheon were 'bad kids.' The academy kids aren't like that; they have drive and determination to achieve. It is kind of like the butterfly effect; with just a little push we can give them the wings that take them forward. – Program Manager

I can echo that, we hear that kids are bad and are about to run the future into the ground. From my interaction with the academy, I can say that we are in good hands. These students are great! – Business Office Manager

When I became a new employee of Alabama Power, I was told that this company was great before you came on, don't mess it up. I thought about that as I interacted with these students, the world was great before they came along and they are going to keep it that way. Our future is in good hands. These kids will invent and think of things we never could. We are in good hands. This was the "ah-ha moment" for me. You don't hear about the good. Good doesn't sell papers. But our kids are good. There are some bright minds out there, we don't ever hear about. – Business Office Manager

At one of the luncheons, I asked an Alabama Power employee from a nearby city why she decided to participate in the luncheon? She replied

I heard about this opportunity and wanted to see what the academy was all about. Now, I wish my office could partner with our local high school in this way. Everything that the students at my table told me was amazing. I am so proud to be a part of a company that means so much to students!

Later, she stated that she believed that her investment in the networking luncheon was an investment in education and an investment in the future.

Possibilities for Partnership Growth

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

I would like for Alabama Power employees to come in for more activities like they do for the networking luncheons to model professionalism and community service to our students. – Teacher

I think that the mock interviews that I normally do with my students would now mean more if Alabama Power employees are a part of the panel. – Teacher

I would like for different partners to come in when we are doing specific projects and teach the lesson instead of telling us about how they use the tools we are learning to use. I would like to see them take on the mentor role, because our students seem to enjoy that interaction the most. – Teacher

The kids have enjoyed the learning WITH the business partners and they talk about those experiences more often. So, I think we need to do that more. – Teacher

The students have really benefitted from this partnership, and that is why we are here.

The only change I would like is more of the same. – Teacher

I am looking for more ways to bring in Alabama Power employees, not just as speakers, but to do things, to interact and model professional attitudes. Students get to see how professionals interact and work with others when they are working beside the employees. – Teacher

When the students were asked if they had any ideas for growth or improvement for the academy partnership, they shrugged their shoulders and shook their heads. One student volunteered

Everything that we did this year has been great! I still want to do the field trips, the motivational assemblies, the lessons on Excel, and business etiquettes...and especially the networking luncheons, but I would like to add even more. – Student

Another student commented,

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

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

I think I would like to grow this across academies. We had one young lady that was in the STEM Academy and the Business Academy. She came to several of the events in the Business Academy. I would like that to happen more. If we can influence more students in different academies, I would like to grow in that direction. – Program Manager I would also like to bring people from other divisions who have ties in this area back to speak on their life experiences. We have some very interesting employees that can really aid us in what we are doing. We can reach farther within our company for resources.

– Program Manager

I think that we need to document the partnership more through pictures, videos, and news articles. That way we could recapture the events. – Business Office Manager

I would like to see Alabama Power influence other businesses to partners like this in a career academy. They may not be a full sponsor, but a partner in the learning. Every business will bring something to the academies that none other can. I would like to increase participation in the academies for the sake of the students. – Program Manager

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceptions of benefits to participants and organizations involved. The benefits were related through the voices of the participants. Every participant group was given voice in this research. Students, teachers, administrators, and business partners shared their perceptions on the benefits of the partnership. This inquiry also pursued possible growth ideas for the academy partnership.

An educational partnership provides learning benefits to its participants by offering pathways that are seen as engaging and relevant to life beyond high school. School/industry partnerships keep educators up-to-date on how workplace skills continually change. Workplace learning also provides a more flexible educational experience that values innovation and creativity. When we learn, we infer, transform, and produce applicable, cultural, and career-ready systems of knowledge. We learn from people, with people, and through people. School/industry partnerships grant learning opportunities that are not limited to the usual constraints of school time and space. When learning happens in real-world environments with real-world people, the learning becomes relevant life experiences. Student reports of increased motivation to learn in core and career classes possibly occurred because the partnership, unlike

traditional school opportunities, provided access to the real world. The activities and experiences motivated students to understand and learn because it seemed relevant to their futures.

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

Table 1
Perceived Benefits Reported by Participants

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

The greatest and most unexpected result of the partnership was the growth in essential skills that was seen in the students. The teachers and administrators reported that the students exhibited the greatest increase in confidence, communication skills, employability skills, and understanding of why the essential skills are important as compared to previous year-end results. This outcome could be described as inevitable since a multitude of professionals spoke with and worked with students on a regular basis. Regular practice with essential skills with adults through professional interactions would logically lead to students acting in confident, professional ways. The program manager was observed by the researcher and described by a teacher to be comfortable correcting minor mistakes in communication and explaining the expectations in the professional world. The students seemed to respect the program manager and the other employees that worked with them. Their respect led them to emulate and work to meet the expectations of the business partners. Therefore, implications of this finding are that knowledge in essential skills transfers to students in regular, professional interactions with industry partners within a school-industry partnership. The teaching of essential skills became a regular conversation among teachers and administrators. It was believed that essential skills were important enough to be evaluated, so CTE teachers worked with their administrator to develop a rubric to assess workplace skills in students. The Workplace Expectations Scoring Guide that was created during the implementation year is slated to be implemented during the next school year (Appendix 4, *contact the author for a copy*).

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

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

The data spoke to the fact that students need high levels of exposure to industry partners to increase their interest in school and in their future. Students reported that they could see the connection between what they were learning in school and where they will go in the future,

because of the association with business partners. This benefit likely occurred because the partnership experiences, unlike the traditional school activities and curriculum, afforded a link to the real world that motivated students who may feel marginalized otherwise. Watters et al. (2013) found that partnerships that provided students with both in-school and work-based-learning experiences could significantly enrich learning results and aid transition into a related career. Partnerships, such as this one, also assisted students in understanding expectations and industry culture.

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

Implications for Future Research

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

When other school partnerships are formed with this particular industry, year one implementation research would be a good comparison to this study. Did another school-industry partnership yield similar results in participant perceived benefits? Was there a dramatic growth in essential skills development as seen in student behavior by teachers and administrators?

There is a need for more qualitative research on school-industry partnerships. Not all partnerships are the same, so it is recommended that researchers look at the differences. Much can be learned from the differences discovered in partnerships.

Conclusion

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

I would like the Alabama Power employees to know that I really appreciate what we have seen so far, and I appreciate the time that they give to prepare us for what work is like. – Student

It is an outstanding privilege to be a part of this academy. – Student

This is a sustainable, continuing project for Alabama Power as long as Carroll High School feels that we are valuable. It is worth continuing. – Program Manager

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Little Red Riding Hood: Sexual Abuse Cloaked by a Teaching License

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Little Red Riding Hood

Just like the story of Little Red Riding Hood tells, as she travels to see her grandmother:

*She was surprised to find the cottage-door standing open, and when she went into the room,
she had such a strange feeling that she said to herself:
'Oh dear! How uneasy I feel today, and at other times I like being with grandmother so much.'*

She called out: 'Good morning,' but received no answer; so she went to the bed and drew back the curtains. There lay her grandmother with her cap pulled far over her face, and looking very strange.

'Oh! grandmother,' she said, 'what big ears you have!' 'All the better to hear you with, my child,' was the reply.

*'But, grandmother, what big eyes you have!' she said.
'All the better to see you with, my dear.'*

*'But, grandmother, what large hands you have!'
'All the better to hug you with.'*

'Oh! but, grandmother, what a terrible big mouth you have!' 'All the better to eat you with!' (Grimm, 2008).

Every day millions of children head out to school in the United States. They range from preschoolers to 12th graders, ages from 3 to 18 years. With lunch boxes, backpacks and even a hooded poncho now and then, they are sent out of their homes, eerily unaware of the lurking dangers that may await them.

Child Sexual Abuse is defined as: “Any sexual act between an adult and a minor or between two minors when one exerts power over the other...forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act. It also includes non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or Internet. It is an agonizing and traumatic experience for its victim and a crime punishable by law” (The 5 Steps to Protecting Our Children, 2013).

With 4.5 million students currently in K-12 who have been sexually abused by an educator (Palmer, 2012), these atrocities are likely to impact students in every district in the United States (Associated Press, 2015). In “The sex offender no one suspects,” Anne Kington details how the trust both the students and parents have for the teachers is “exactly what allows them to offend.” Incredibly, during the trial of public opinion many such offenders are rallied as “excellent teachers” (Kington, 2014). Clearly, this is an oxymoronic comparison. One cannot be an excellent teacher and a child molester.

The frequency of the abuse can be easily accessed by a cursory search of the Internet. For example, “Teacher jailed for not reporting a colleague’s alleged sex with student” (Berger, 2015).

The child was under 13 and the colleague had reason to know. In this case the accused, Michael Vucic, a middle school teacher, is accused of videotaping the child(ren) in sexual acts which transpired in his classroom. The judge that heard the case said she was “disheartened that the system let this child down” calling the case “devastating to children and the criminal justice system” (Berger, 2015).

Ernest Timmons, dean of students, at Westside High is alleged to have had a sexual relationship with a teen for the past two year (Amiker, 2015). This investigation lead to a series of allegations of other felonious relationships within the same school including a coach, one Kenneth Anderson, Jr. who is alleged to have had sex with female students. Also, Clarence Thomas, a part time coach told the investigator although he’d had sex with a student approximately 20 times, he thought she was 18 and had just made a “poor choice.”

The sickening incidences of abuse are also noticed among special needs populations of children. In June of 2015, middle school special education teacher, Kelly Dan Williams, was accused of sexual assault of an 11 old child (Hope, 2016). They include both genders and often leave a next generation of victims. For example, Rebecca A. Boicelli, a former teacher in Redwood City, California conceived a child with a 16-year-old student. Joseph E. Hayes, a former principal in East St. Louis, Illinois, impregnated a 14-year-old child (Associated Press, 2015).

One of perhaps the most notorious pedophile educators is William James Vahey whose incidences of child molestation crossed continents from the United States to Managua to London and included over 90 boys ages 10 to 14 (Hines, 2014).

The evidence of educator sexual abuse is also prevalent in the courts across the country (Shakeshaft, 2003), for example:

- Henderson, NC: Board agrees to pay \$1.78 million to families of 17 children.
- Augusta, WI: Allegations of sexual assault of 12-year-old boy.
- Ann Arbor, MI: Male teacher assaults female student.
- Omaha, NE: Wrestling coach sentenced to 45 days for assault of student.
- Westminster, CO: Male softball coach gets 6 years in prison for sexual assault of 7 students.
- Bullhead City, AZ: Male teacher charged with sexual contact with 12-year-old. Teacher is registered sex offender in Florida.
- Charleston, WV: Female middle school math teacher charged with sexually abusing a 13-year-old child (Kington, 2014).

Unfortunately, these pedophiles do not enter the schools wearing a label or appearing out-of-place. They, like Vahey, are often “popular” members of the staff with both parents and students...an index of sophistication...to abuse children (Hines, 2014).

In an unprecedented and intense investigation by the Associated Press, findings included 2,570 educators whose teaching licenses were removed for allegations of sexual misconduct just between the years of 2001-2005 (Associated Press, 2015). Separate research by Kington (2014) reveals similar findings, indicating that only five to fifteen percent of abused children ever reveal the abuse. Furthermore, in 93 percent of child sexual abuse cases, the child knows the perpetrator

(Douglas, 2005). The tools of the trade used by educational perpetrators include vast access to social media. For example, one teaching assistant was proven to share “3,000 WhatsApp messages with a student during their relationship” (Kington, 2014). The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) suggests that children do not have the same understanding of stranger danger as an adult might. They advocate that it is “more beneficial to children to help them build the confidence and self-esteem they need to stay as safe as possible in any potentially dangerous situation they encounter rather than teaching them to be *on the lookout* for a particular type of person” (FAQ: Child Safety, 2012).

While much light has been shed over the past few years into the Roman Catholic Church’s scandals of 4,400 children abused over the last 50 plus years, until recently, there has been comparatively minimal comprehension of the “extent of educator abuse”. With the discovery of over 2,500 cases of child sexual abuse by educators documented over a five-year period with the actions against children ranging from “bizarre to sadistic” (Associated Press, 2015), clearly additional focus, support and resources must be given to combat the frequency of these crimes against children. Given the access that teachers (and other school personnel) have to children, grooming techniques are often used to lure the child and the surrounding community into the perpetrator’s lair. According to (Child Sexual Abuse—It is Your Business, 2012), grooming is a method of building trust with a child and adults around the child in an effort to gain access to and time alone with her/him. However, they note that in extreme cases, offenders may use threats and physical force to sexually assault or abuse a child. While much light has been shed over the past few years into the Roman Catholic Church’s scandals of 4,400 children abused over the last 50 plus years, until recently, there has been comparatively minimal comprehension of the “extent of educator abuse” (Associated Press, 2015).

Most frequent, however, are subtle approaches to establish relationships with proximal family members. Often times, the perpetrator takes on a friendly role, befriending the victim, or the child’s family, increasing the opportunity that the time spent with the child is viewed as normal (The 5 Steps to Protecting Our Children, 2013). Initially perceptions begin as positive, “You don’t know whether it’s intentional, that this person is setting the kid up, or that she’s flirting, sending gifts and texts, then crosses boundaries. Either way, the kid is generally flattered” (Kington, 2014). Furthermore, in a school setting, perpetrators tend to exercise “institutional grooming” in order to play the role of gatekeepers of access, grooming criminal justice and other institutions (like schools) into believing that they present no risk to children (The 5 Steps to Protecting Our Children, 2013). The purpose of grooming is:

- To reduce the likelihood of a disclosure.
- To reduce the likelihood of the child being believed.
- To reduce the likelihood of being detected.
- To manipulate the perceptions of other adults around the child ○ (Child Sexual Abuse—It is Your Business, 2012).

There are over three million public school educators in the United States. Thankfully, the vast majority are dedicated to their work of educating students. However, with the number of documented abusive educators, children are clearly at tremendous risk, especially when one considers that academic studies estimate that only about ten percent of children report the abuse to someone who can help (Associated Press, 2015). Identification of educator predators spans the

spectrum of educators. With current data indicating nearly 10 percent of students are sexually abused (Palmer, 2012), this issue is clearly one of epidemic proportions.

According to Shakeshaft (2003), the following table demonstrates the frequency of predation based on gender and ethnicity:

Table 1

Educator Sexual Abuse Contact and Non-Contact

	% All	% Females	% Males	% White	% Black	% Latino	% Asian
Non-contact	8.7	9.7	7.6	7.9	10.8	11	1.8
Contact	6.7	7.6	6.2	5.5	9.1	9	1.8
Either or Both	9.6	10.3	8.8	8.4	12.3	12.2	1.8

To combat this epidemic violation of the most helpless citizens where 20% of the children victimized are molested before the age of eight years, it is critical that everyone know and respond to the following steps established by the Darkness to Light foundation (The 5 Steps to Protecting Our Children, 2013)

- Step 1: Learn the Facts
- Step 2: Minimize Opportunity
- Step 3: Talk About It
- Step 4: Recognize the Signs
- Step 5: React Responsibly

In school settings the following table delineates the abusers by job, (Shakeshaft, 2003)

Table 2

Percent of Abusers by Job

Job Title	Percent
Teacher	18
Coach	15
Substitute Teacher	13
Bus Driver	12
Teacher's Aide	11
Other School Employee	10
Security Guard	10
Principal	6
Counselor	5
Total	100

In school settings, all employees are mandated reporters. A mandated reporter is someone required to report reasonable suspicions of abuse (The 5 Steps to Protecting Our Children, 2013). Naturally, anyone can and should report abuse. There is some variance between state laws regarding the reporting period. However, if a child could be in danger, wherever or whenever, law enforcement should be called immediately.

Unfortunately, the perpetrators of sex crimes against children in school appear to be “everyday educators.” They include teachers and principals and school personnel alike who are often popular and regularly acclaimed for their work with children (Associated Press, 2015). Furthermore, 70 percent of perpetrators have 1 to 9 victims while 30 percent victimize up to 40 children (The 5 Steps to Protecting Our Children, 2013). With an average of 500 convicted molesters each year, over 2,500 in 5 years according to the Associated Press’s investigation, the likelihood of a molester working within the confines of any given school is remarkably high.

Much like the Brothers Grimm story of a small, helpless child fooled by a devious wolf, unfortunately, many children become prey to vicious molesters in their formerly comfortable and familiar and ‘safe’ surroundings. Often times the very places their parents send them off to each day, trusting that they are protected, can become danger zones children. Much like the wolf in grandmother’s clothing, predators cloaked behind the façade of a teaching license, prey on the most vulnerable victims.

It is also related that once, when Red Riding Hood was again taking cakes to the grandmother, another wolf spoke to her, and tried to entice her from the path. Red Riding Hood, however, was on her guard, and went straight forward on her way, and told her grandmother that she had met the wolf, and that he had said ‘good morning’ to her, but with such a wicked look in his eyes, that if they had not been on the public road she was certain he would have eaten her up....and the grandmother saw what was in his thoughts (Grimm, 2008).

According to California attorney, Mary Jo McGrath, who has spent 30 years investigating abuse and misconduct in schools, “It doesn’t matter if it’s urban or rural or suburban. From my own opinion, I think every school district in the nation has at least one perpetrator” (Associated Press, 2015).

Is every parent’s responsibility to ensure that his or her children are vigilantly shielded from predators. Unfortunately, one never knows where a molester may lurk. Much like the latter version of Little Red Riding Hood’s character where she becomes suspicious of the wolf’s intentions and flees to the safety of her grandmother (Grimm, 2008), parents must protect their children. For in the real world, such predatory wolves are more difficult to recognize. They are often cloaked by celebrated careers, social capital and perhaps even a teaching license.

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An Education Out of Reach for Rural America

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Abstract

This article will address whether there is a relationship between socioeconomics and academic achievement of 12th graders in six area high schools within a 50-mile radius. Educators in one of America's more rural States consistently struggle to reach sustainability of performance over a three-year period by 1830 12th-grade students on a State's high-school graduation examination. This instability is due in part to the inability to retain high-quality faculty, poor parental support, diversity of thought, and limitation in transportation for after school tutorial activities. These aforementioned conditions that affect these 12th-grade students encounter while attempting to pass their state graduation exam is why this study was undertaken. Data was gathered using the Schools Report Cards, State Department of Education website, and STI databases and assessed using the descriptive method of research to describe the Graduation Examination results of the high schools' students. For decades, many scholars, politicians, educators, and parents have debated whether or not socioeconomics play a role in the difference in academic achievement of students at or below the poverty level in contrast to students above the poverty level. It has been determined, along with other factors/variables that socioeconomics play a role, but much is still not known.

An Education Out of Reach for Rural America

The American Dream is for those who wish to do better can do better. Individuals, who are willing to work, will be afforded this opportunity. Earnhardt (2013), states that at the moment in our country's history only a small portion of America has this opportunity. He further asserts that where a child is born and grows up will affect their ability to earn a living. Students born in rural America fair even worse when they are not afforded the opportunity to be exposed to basic strategies that are needed share in Dream. Without this strategic skills development the Dream becomes a nightmare.

In America examining inequality as the path to success has been studied and a fundamentally disturbing trend of diminished opportunities was uncovered. These diminished opportunities lead to poverty, single-parent homes, unsound school systems; fewer people involved in community institutions that are essential to upward mobility. Poor children living where the public schools are weak are unlikely to break out of a hand to mouth existence.

According to the Alabama Poverty Project website (2013), “in general the Southeast United States and Alabama in particular, has a higher density of poverty than most of the country.” This density can be attributed in large part to living in large rural, agrarian economy, poor schools, and poor highway accessibilities. Thus, these insufficiencies have increased the already staggering high-poverty levels that exist within this state to future generations.

The purpose of this study was to test the assumptions that students below the poverty level in grade 12 at six area high schools in a Black belt state average lower standardized test scores than students above the poverty level on the Alabama High School Graduation Examination (AHSGE). The specific objectives of the study were: (a) To determine whether students at or below the poverty level perform not as well on the AHSGE than students above the poverty level for the school year 2001–2002; (b) To determine whether students at or below the poverty level perform not as well on the AHSGE than students above the poverty level for the school year 2002–2003; and (c) To determine whether students at or below the poverty level perform not as well on the AHSGE than students above the poverty level for the school year 2003–2004.

Methods

Six high schools within a 50-mile radius in the central section of a black belt state were chosen to participate in this study. The total population includes 1830 students. These students, as well as other public high-school students in a black belt state, must pass the AHSGE as part of their requirement to receive a diploma. This exam has an equivalency rating at the eleventh-grade level. The data from this study were taken from various sources: State Department of Education, various STI databases, and school-related reports. This information was used in comparing the results of the students at or below the poverty level to the results of the students above the poverty level.

Population

The population for this study consisted of students at six high schools in a 50-mile radius in a rural Black belt State. The final sample size ($n=1830$) 12th-grade students at each of the six high schools identified as schools A-F within a 50-mile radius for the study years 2001–2004. The high schools included were in a fifty mile radius of each other (six schools were chosen and will identified as schools A-F), Benjamin Russell High School (A), Childersburg High School (B), Central High School (C), Dadeville High School (D), Horseshoe Bend High School (E) Sylacauga High School (F). Each year all students who are required to take The Alabama High School Graduation Examination (AHSGE) are remediated in all subject areas prior to the exam.

The total population in the study will include 618 students from the 2001–2002 school term, 630 students from the 2002–2003 school term, and 582 students from the 2003–2004 school term. Three years of data will be used to increase the validity of the research.

Significance of the Study

This research will provide a clearer understanding of how the relationship of State Department of Education high-school graduation requirements and funding related resources can affect the high-school graduation rate at different area high schools. This study sought to identify whether or not there was a relationship between the socio-economic status of a student and the students' academic performance on the standardized test. Perhaps the results from this study may increase the awareness of politicians, instructional leaders, teachers, and parents of the potential link between socioeconomic and student academic performance. It is hoped that the results of this study will cause the general public, politicians, etc. not to assume that poverty has a direct impact on student poor academic performance. It might also motivate educators and those who fund schools to provide adequate financial support for those poverty-stricken schools.

Variables

A persistent issue in education is how to evaluate student achievement and the effectiveness of public schools. The inclusion of unique factors/variables affecting individual students and schools is essential in assessment designed to evaluate academic performance. Development of equitable and fair methods to evaluate performance will only be effective if variables associated with student achievement are included in the measurement model.

For the current study, the following six variables were considered:

- Variable 1- common language among staff, teacher expectations. Spiegel (2013) stated that a teacher interacts with the children they teach in a thousand almost invisible ways.
- Variable 2- student mobility and parental involvement. The majority of students move from one school to the next for reasons other than mobility.
- Variable 3- socioeconomic status and profitability for failure.
- Variable 4- class size recommendation (CSR). CSR can result in greater in-depth coverage of the subject matter by teachers, enhanced learning and stronger engagement by students, and safer schools with fewer discipline problems (Cohen, Miller, Stonehill, & Geddes, 2000).

- Variable 5- Physical Education and Pre-k access.
- Variable 6- race. There is extensive evidence for a link between race and academic achievement (Bankston, & Caldas, 1997).

Data Collection

The data collected for this study were obtained and then triangulated from the State Department of Education website; school data reports cards, and various STI databases. To clarify the research three tables follow, which consist of results of the admissions of Alabama high-school graduation Examination (AHSGE) for 12th-grade students at each individual school during 2002–2004. Additionally, the data collection included the results of the respective State Graduation Examination for six different area high schools in a 50-mile radius. The tables contain passing percentages of 12th-grade students receiving free/reduced lunch and the passing percentages of 12th-grade students paying full-price lunch.

Results

Table 1 depicts this data graphically. The students above the poverty level at high schools A, C, D, E, and F scored slightly higher than the students below the poverty level, resulting in a negative difference. However, there was a negative 34.9% point gap on Table 1 in high school D verse the other high schools in the study year. This large percentage of students above the poverty level scoring higher than the students below the poverty level illustrates a significant disparity of student success (high test scores).

Table 1
AHSGE 2001–2002

HS	# tested	% passing	% passing Free/reduce	% passing full pay	difference	total difference
A	186	94.6	92.3	95.4	-3.1	
B	85	90.6	91.67	91.23	+44	
C	84	90.5	87.5	89.1	-1.6	
D	81	80.3	57.1	92	-34.6	
E	47	91.5	91.7	93.3	-1.6	
F	135	93.3	90	93.81	-3.81	
						-7.43

Note. Full pay student outperformed free and reduce pay students.

Table 2 depicts High School F as the only school during the school term to have a positive difference. This indicates that students at or below the poverty level at High School F scored slightly higher than students above the poverty level. The students at the poverty level at High Schools A, B, C, D, and E resulting in an important and significant negative difference of -7.43.

Table 2
AHSGE 2002–2003

HS	# tested	% passing	% passing Free/reduce	% passing full pay	difference	total difference
A	192	98.1	94.7	98.9	-4.2	
B	96	95.8	92.7	98.2	-5.5	
C	83	86.8	93	93	-13	
D	76	94.4	89.3	97.4	-8.1	
E	48	96.9	*	96.5	N/A	
F	135	98.5	99	98.4	+1.4	
						-3.44

Note. * No data were available. Full pay student outperformed free and reduce pay students.

Table 3 below depicts a summary of, High Schools A, B, C, and F, all of whom had a positive variance during this school term. However, there was no data available for High School E during the study year. This indicates that students at or below the poverty level at these area high schools scored slightly higher than students above the poverty level by 16.62% lower. Conversely, the students above the poverty level at High School D scored 8.1% higher than the students above the poverty level, resulting in a negative difference. In addition, the students at or below the poverty level at High School A scored 14.5% higher than the students above the poverty level. This indicates that there was not an important and significant difference of -3.44.

Table 3
AHSGE 2003–2004

HS	# tested	% passing	% passing Free/reduce	% passing full pay	difference	total difference
A	182	81.5	92.4	77.9	+14	
B	80	90.6	91.67	91.23	+4.44	
C	76	85	86.1	84.5	+1.6	
D	70	83.4	80.9	84.7	-3.8	
E	38	84.7	87.3	83.2	+4.1	
F	135	93.3	90	93.81	+3.81	
						+12.93

Note. Free and reduce pay students outperformed full pay students.

After careful studies of the accumulated data encompassing a three-year period of the six area high schools, by the authors it can be surmised that there is an important relationship between a high school student's academic success and place of residency or their respective zip code. Of the students tested during the academic year 2001–2002 there average pass rate was 85% for students receiving free and reduced lunch. The average pass rate was 91% for the 2002–2003 school term. The average pass rate for the 2003–2004 school term was 87%. However, during the same periods of the study the average passing percentage of high school students paying full price lunch fees was 92.47%, during the 2002–2003 school term it was 97.07%, and for 2003–2004 school term 83.88% respectively.

During the 2001–2002 school term high school students paying full price lunch fees outperformed students who received free/reduced priced lunches by +7.47% points. In 2002–2003 school term high school students paying full price lunch fees outperformed students receiving free/reduced by +6.07% points. However, during the 2003–2004 performance average of students in the six area high schools changed students receiving free/reduced lunch outperformed the students paying full-priced lunch fees. During 2003–2004 success of the high school students receiving free/reduced lunches outperforming students who pay full price lunches was reflective of the results throughout the state. The reasons for this turn of events may be attributed to the many different remediation's programs, after-school programs, and special attention and increased expectations for the passage of Alabama Graduation Examination for At-Risk students (students receiving free/reduced lunch) that came into effect after the establishment of 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. The resulting findings of a -7.43 {table 1}, -3.44 {table 2}, and +12.93 {table 3}, indicate that there is a slight relationship that exists between academic performance and socioeconomics of a student (the zip code of a child).

Conclusions

The authors undertook this study to determine whether there was a tautological relationship between rural education (socioeconomics) and academic achievement on a high school graduation exam at six area high schools. The study's result reveals that there is a relationship between socioeconomics and academic achievement; still much is to be studied. Other variables play a very important role in a child's academic achievement. Some of these variables are lack of diversity of thought, rural location, poor support systems, and poor transportation for after-school programs, parental involvement, teacher expectations, student mobility, class size, and race. The state department of education needs to be aware of these challenges when policy and legislation agendas are created.

Knowing all of this, the need to improve the educational outcomes of the students in rural and poverty-stricken areas is urgent. In the United States, the gaps in achievement between poor and advantaged students are substantial. The nation's poorest students, for example, enter high school at or about the 30th percentile of academic achievement while those with the highest family incomes enter at about the 70th percentile. Moreover, these gaps persist into later years of schooling, not only in the United States, but in other nation as well. Therefore, the problem on how to improve the academic learning of students living in poverty is nearly universal in modern society.

To date, effort at school and instructional improvement (schooling and academic achievement) in the United States has had only small effects on poor students' academic achievements. The key issues affecting academic achievement in this rural black belt state can be related to transportation, per-pupil spending, and teacher salaries. Schooling is defined for the purpose of this study as the act or process of imparting or requiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment. Academic achievement is defined for this study as the educational goal that is achieved by a student, teacher or institution over a certain period of time. This is due in part to many factors other than schooling and is related to students' academic achievement- including teacher expectations, student mobility, parental involvement, race, class size, and socioeconomics.

Since the late 1960s a variety of federal, state, and local programs have been designed and implemented in an effort to offset the profound difficulties' children from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds encounter when they enter the school-house doors. Many of these programs prepared preschoolers of low socioeconomic (SES) status for the challenges they face as they begin their education. Other programs sought to improve the achievement level of low-SES students who are already struggling in schools that lack the resources to provide them with special attention they need for success. The idea, of course, is to educate these students beyond their poverty, that is, to give the intellectual knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to become productive citizens.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations have been formulated.

1. Rural schools have a wide range and unique challenges, including helping teachers understand how to make decisions using data and how to integrate rigor into the curriculum without being punitive when assessing students.
2. Equity must remain at the forefront of educational standards-setting because public policy that develops standards and associated consequences for failure to meet them is inherently unjust without adequate funding. There is very little doubt that education production in the United States is in need of improvement. (a) Generations of social promotion, low standards, and profound socioeconomic inequity have resulted in achievement gaps, both domestic and international. (b) If we wish to continue as the most prosperous nation in the world, providing our youth rigorous education and the necessary resources for success is imperative. (c) Our current tact toward raising standards and increasing accountability is justified but while holding potential for positive outcomes requires certain cautions. (d) Learning is a function of schools, families, communities, peer interactions, needs various social efforts (mentoring, internships, and apprenticeships) economic, and cultural factors. (e) Investments in family and social capital—raising income levels and reducing poverty, improving nutrition, ensuring adequate health and prenatal care strengthening of sense of community, and mobilizing community assets and reducing dependence on external solutions to problems-could possibly prove to be more effective and resource efficient in overcoming the effects of poverty on education performance.
3. Research further to determine exactly what some schools are doing to decrease the gap between their low performing, poverty-stricken students and their high-performing non-poverty students. Perhaps attempting to duplicate the strategies or various methods of schools that have been effective would be a good starting point in narrowing this gap between low performing, poverty-stricken students and high performing non poverty-stricken students.

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The Androgynous Message for Educational Leaders

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Abstract

The evolving society of the 21st Century encourages a new wave of interest focusing on the need for developing the androgynous educational leader: a school administrator possessing the capability to blend the best of male and female characteristics. This article addresses ways that an effective leader can utilize both logic and intuition, recognize both facts and feeling, and be both technically competent and emotionally caring. Interested readers will also have an opportunity to measure their androgyny quotients (AQ) using an instrument designed for this specific purpose.

The Androgynous Message for Educational Leaders

"What is Real?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become Real." "Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?" "It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

The Velveteen Rabbit
by Margery Williams

In *the Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams, a stuffed toy rabbit comes to life in the timeless tale of the transformative power generated by a positive relationship built on understanding and compassion. Simply put, the story's message is that relationship building is important.

In three-quarters of a century of our combined years of service as practitioners in the field of professional education, we have encountered the problem that when making transformational organizational change some principals experience success in their managerial roles, while others fail; some coordinators or directors experience success in their supervisory roles, while others fail; and some superintendents experience success in their executive roles, while others fail. None of the failures, however, appear to be connected to incompetence. Rather, the failures seem to be tied to an inability to build meaningful relationships with those who the particular administrator is responsible for supervising: faculty and support staff members.

We believe the evolving society of the 21st Century calls for educational administrators—superintendents, principals, directors, and coordinators—who have developed their leadership capability to the level necessary to transform school districts and schools for the better. Simply put, they transform the “way things are done” through relationship building: by creating an organizational culture that encourages and values the importance of developing positive relationships among those—administrators, teachers, and support staff—who are charged with the responsibility of providing children and youth with a quality education.

Our experience further leads us to believe that educators crave positive interactions; so it makes sense that the better our relationships are at work, the happier and more productive we are going to be. Work in a school setting is more enjoyable when we have good relationships with

those around us. Also, faculty and support staff members are more likely to go along with transformational changes that the leader wants to implement.

The Role of Transformational Leadership

Transforming a school or school district for the better through change requires transformational leadership. According to Northouse (2013), transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people in an organization. Being a transformational leader requires assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings. Moreover, transformational leadership exerts an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them.

James MacGregor Burns—an American historian and political scientist, presidential biographer, and authority on leadership—is credited with developing the concept of transformational leadership in relation to business and industry. According to Burns, transformational leadership can be recognized when leaders (e.g., executives and managers) and followers (e.g., employees in a corporation) help each other to advance to higher levels of quality performance. Through the strength of developing ownership in a common vision, energized by their personality characteristics, transformational leaders inspire others to work towards achieving the organization's mission and goals (Burns, 1978).

An example of transformational leadership in an educational setting, such as a school, would be the principal who attempts to change his or her organizational culture to value a more humane standard of fairness and justice. In the process, both the principal and the teachers may emerge with a stronger and higher set of standards.

Northouse suggests that authentic transformational leadership is socialized leadership concerned with the collective good, causing leaders to transcend their own interests for the sake of others.

Northouse also believes that transformational leaders stimulate followers to be creative and innovative: for example, employees may be encouraged to try new approaches and develop innovative ways of dealing with organizational issues.

Transformational leaders provide a supportive environment in which they listen carefully to the individual needs of followers. Leaders act as coaches and advisers while trying to assist followers to reach their potential. An example of this type of leadership is a manager who spends time treating each employee in a caring and unique way. To some employees, the leader may give strong affiliation; to others, the leader may give specific directives with a high degree of structure.

Trinidad and More (2005) further contend that transformational leaders utilize a variety of effective tools and means, ultimately convincing others that they should be followed for the benefit of themselves as well as of the institution as a whole. Also, they point out that the traits of transformational leadership often relate to female values. Developed throughout their careers,

these characteristics include relationship building, consensus building, working together with a unified purpose, influential power, and communication.

Warrilow (2009) provides additional value to the discussion of transformational leadership by suggesting that such leaders create positive change in their supporters through ensuring that the group and individual interests and concerns are regularly met. Such leaders focus on values and escape short-term goals for higher order needs of the organization while simultaneously meeting the needs of individual employees.

Natural Allies: Transformational Leaders and Androgynous Managers

The late Alice Sargent, a longtime family friend of one of the article's co-authors, took the transformational concept developed by Burns a step further by proposing a definition of relationship-driven leadership that draws on the best in both men and women. She called her definition androgynous, having the characteristics of both genders. In 1981, Sargent published her managerial androgynous theory in the format of a highly praised book titled *the Androgynous Manager*. Unfortunately, the book is presently out of print.

Both Burn's transformational leadership theory and Sargent's androgynous management approach appear to be natural allies in the quest to help leaders understand and make use of their masculine and feminine personality characteristics.

The key to understanding Sargent's use of androgynous in relation to managerial leadership is balanced coexistence, as in the Chinese concept of yin and yang: male and female forces acting equally within nature to build and sustain the world around us. Transformational leaders and managers need to use both logic and intuition, recognize both facts and feelings, and be both technically competent and emotionally caring.

Traditionally, the definition of managerial competence excluded most feminine characteristics. According to Maccoby (1976), who like Sargent studied personality traits influencing leadership, the respected leader in business and industry was seen as a highly competitive, power-driven person whose personal feelings were systematically submerged. Maccoby believed most corporate leaders were yang-driven and contended that managerial leadership, deprived of feminine character traits such as compassion and caring, was destructive to the human values that undergird successful corporations.

Remembering our years as classroom teachers, as well as our years as school administrators, helps us to better understand Sargent's principle of balanced coexistence in regard to examples highlighting masculine and feminine perspectives.

We recall times when a conflict occurred while supervising girls at play. The girls stopped the game and did not proceed until the relationships were mended. If the conflict was too deep, the game was abandoned. It seemed that girls were more concerned about maintaining the relationships they had with one another than about playing the game. On the other hand, the boys we observed at play were more concerned about winning or losing. Their way of managing conflict was to have rules. If someone broke a rule, the game would be stopped, an appropriate

judgment would be rendered, and the game would then continue. They appeared to have respected the rules more than they did their relationships.

Boys continue on to become adults and some become leaders in business, industry, government, education, and so forth. Their preference for reliance on rules in the form of developing policies and regulations, sometimes to the detriment of nourishing relationships, also continues on.

Corporate policies and government regulations, formal equivalents of children's rules, certainly have their place in organization (e.g., school districts). Chaos would surely ensue if we abandoned all policies or regulations and adjudicated every conflict in the context of the existing situation.

But proliferation of policy making in public education today has resulted in obsession with standardized achievement testing as the primary means of measuring student learning. Does this not suggest we are experiencing runaway yang (maleness preoccupation with rule making) in an attempt to solve educational problems (e.g., graduation rates) and make decisions? Equally, perhaps, taking a yin (feminine) approach calling for more thoughtfully examining the complex underlying relationships that hinder student progress in school might serve us better.

Sargent challenged us to look beyond our limitation as either male or female educational leaders, to break away from subconscious conditioning behaviors established during the childhood years, and to take an androgynous, more balanced, approach to leading and managing. Increased awareness that male and female educational leaders can come to better appreciate each other's personality characteristics and one another represents what her seminal work conveys.

Movement toward understanding the benefits of androgyny in educational leadership cannot come too soon. The androgynous approach holds significant promise for redressing the imbalance between aggressiveness and sensitivity to others' needs that marks our present approach to improving education in the 21st Century.

Leaders who care about improving schooling also need to care about the needs of those—male and female colleagues—who work in educational environments. Balances need to be struck so that harmony can be maintained.

Conclusion: The Androgynous Message

In the introduction to this article, we called attention to *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams: a story about a stuffed toy rabbit that comes to life in the timeless tale of the transformative power generated by a positive relationship built on understanding and compassion. The story's message is that relationship building is important.

In keeping with *the Velveteen Rabbit's* message, Sargent proposed a definition of relationship-driven leadership, drawing on the best in both men and women: an approach she called androgynous. The androgynous message tells us to look beyond our limitation as either male or female educational leaders, to break away from subconscious conditioning behaviors

established during the childhood years, and to take an androgynous, more balanced, approach to leading and managing.

We believe that every leader, male or female, can become more androgynous. Androgyny requires us to unlearn our negative behaviors and start learning how to become equally contributing human beings. In the last analysis, it means coming of age, shedding the excesses of both male and female child-like behaviors that in the past have limited our human experience.

So how does one start the first toward taking an androgynous approach to educational leadership? You start by getting to know yourself better taking the Androgynous Quotient (AQ) measurement instrument that follows the reference section. Personality traits identified by Sandra Bem (1977), a psychology professor at Stanford University who extensively explored gender-related behavior in the 1970s, provide the foundational material for our instrument.

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