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Notes from the Editors

In this issue of the *Southeast Journal of Educational Administration*, an emphasis on the importance of the school leader and leadership preparation in various settings is shown by each author. Whether to ensure retention of high-quality teachers from traditionally underserved populations, building partnerships within the community, or serving in the vital role of instructional leader to meet accountability requirements, having the proper individual in the position as school leader is of paramount importance. Thank you to all of the peer reviewers who took the time to evaluate and provide feedback for manuscripts for this issue.

Through a narrative inquiry, Debra Wright provided insight into why Black teachers remained in the education profession after five years despite the myriad challenges they face. Although each participant was focused on providing opportunities for students, several were actively seeking employment outside of education. Principals need to address issues with retention, organizational structure, and culture actively to ensure qualified teachers remain in the profession.

William Bergeron provided insight into the historical focus of school accountability and why understanding the roots of accountability are vital to understanding the current foci today. The *Elementary and Secondary Schools Act* was passed into law 55 years ago, and although many aspects have changed, accountability concerns are prominent for any school leader. Unfortunately, there has not been accountability for those policy makers who implement accountability requirements. As philosopher George Santayana (1905, p. 284) stated over a century ago, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

T. C. Chan and Andrea Ridley used a case-study approach to examine the perceptions of 22 high school principals from the greater Atlanta area. The major themes included: curriculum development, organization, implementation, evaluation, and improvement. Some of the key findings included: ensuring curriculum meets the needs of individual students, providing appropriate feedback to teachers, ensuring vertical and testing alignment, and having a vision to address future needs.

Using a community of inquiry lens, Dawn Pearce and Jackie Mania-Singer examined the social interactions of graduate students enrolled in a blended learning cohort model. While peer, instructor, and external networks were evident, they found the existence to be one way and transactional with minimal value beyond the program. Formal structures intended to foster collaboration among participants were effective than informal opportunities. Those preparing future leaders should use the findings to structure opportunities to achieve desired results.

Through a mixed-methods approach, Samantha Junkin and Amanda Rose researched understanding of the use of story in teaching high school mathematics. The use of story provides deeper understanding and emotional connections to the content. Interviewed school leaders recognized the beneficial role of story in teaching mathematical, as well as cross-curricular concepts; however, numerous challenges and barriers were also identified. Practical recommendations and advice were provided so school leaders can help mathematics teachers implement the use of story and thereby increase student achievement.

In closing, we thank all who submitted manuscripts for consideration. Although the structure and format have adapted over the past 20 years, the scope and purpose have not. We look forward to the next 20 years of practical scholarship. As intended by the editorial review board, the *Southeast Journal of Educational Administration* serves to provide a forum for professors, graduates students, and educational leadership practitioners to exchange scholarly ideas and foster practical research.

Sincerely,

Dana M. Griggs Christopher M. Parfitt
Editors, *Southeast Journal of Educational Administration*

Black Teachers in Urban Schools: Why Do They Stay?

Debra Wright
Auburn University

Abstract

Academic achievement for students, specifically students of color, is negatively affected when teacher turnover in urban schools continue to rise. The goal of this research was to investigate the experiences of Black teachers in predominantly Black population, urban schools who remain in the profession beyond five years. Through this research, I revealed insight into the experiences of Black teachers using critical race theory as a framework and using narrative inquiry as the methodology. As reflected in current research for the retention of teachers, a greater number of Black individuals are choosing teaching as a profession. However, these teachers have not remained in the profession. Prior to the study, more than half of the teachers decided to transition from the classroom and had made preparations by actively seeking other employment opportunities. All of the participants, at the time of publication, remained as classroom teachers. In response to the overarching question, and as indicated the findings that despite institutional barriers found in organizational structures that devalue their contributions, social alienation and marginalization in policy/curricular discussions and decisions, they remained for their students; to make a difference. The implications of this study include the growing concerns for educational administrators to address issues supporting social justice practices and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Keywords: teachers of color, urban schools, retention, black teachers, culturally responsive pedagogy, critical race theory

Black Teachers in Urban Schools

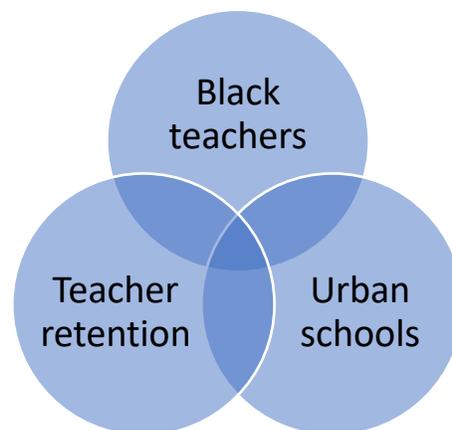
Teachers enter the profession of education, seeking to make a difference in the lives of children, particularly those with whom they can closely identify. In this research, I attempted to investigate the experiences of Black teachers in urban schools who have remained in the profession beyond five years. Those teachers who remained in the profession and in urban schools have found ways to be successful in their professional practices. To make this connection and ensure success in education for all students, teachers have sought through various strategies to support culturally responsive curriculum that offer opportunities for social justice in the communities they serve (Borrero et al., 2016; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). They champion social justice through their pedagogy practices, their classroom management (not just the behavioral discipline but also the academic discipline), and through their personal experiences embedded in their instructional practices (Borrero et al., 2016).

This research was guided by critical race theory (CRT). By focusing on the framework of CRT, specifically the tenets of race matters and storytelling/counter storytelling and through a narrative inquiry approach to garner the experiences of Black teachers, the research attempted to address the challenge as Ladson-Billings (1998) cautioned, “[a]dopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education *and* propose radical solutions for addressing it” (p. 22). Through a narrative inquiry approach, Black teachers, through their experiences, spoke to their realities of racism in education with the hope of leading to changes in educational practices. CRT provided the undergirding needed for focus in addressing experiences of Black teachers as they relate to racism and inequitable practices in education.

As noted in Figure 1, the intersection of Black teachers, urban schools, and teacher retention are interdependent and serve as a model for the quest to find reasons for retaining Black teachers in urban schools. Because of this interdependence, the impact of the experiences of Black teachers is essential in challenging the established educational story of the dominant race.

Figure 1

Model of Convergence of Factors Overlapping Retention of Black Teachers



In addition, this model represented the current trend in research into teacher retention. As reflected in the model, as a visual display, the convergence of factors that overlap to pinpoint focal idea for perspectives of Black teachers. Specifically, the model details gleaned from the three different areas of research (i.e., Black teachers, teacher retention, and urban schools) to determine reasons for Black teachers' interest in public, predominantly Black population, urban schools.

Problem Statement

Black teachers in urban schools are underrepresented in school systems (Achinstein et al., 2010; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Research on the need for more teachers of color in schools is a recurring theme among educational researchers (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ahmad & Boser, 2014). High-poverty schools in challenging urban areas continue to have teacher turnover (Amrein-Beardsley, 2007; Clotfelter et al., 2010; Guin, 2004; Jacob, 2007; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Petty et al., 2012). Teachers in general, are leaving the profession. Recently, researchers in retention identified that Black teachers are leaving the profession at higher rates than White teachers, particularly in public, predominantly Black population, urban schools (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Addressing the reasons for leaving is paramount to “stem the tide” of turnover particularly in predominantly Black population, urban schools. A gap in the research with reference to understanding reasons for retention for Black teachers was identified. My research delved into the experiences of Black teachers who chose to remain in the profession and in urban schools. Experiences of Black teachers told through their own voices support the tenet of race matters (i.e., issues of race) through the lens of CRT. In an effort to address the challenge of how education should address racism set forth by Ladson-Billings (1998), I attempted to explain the need for understanding the culture and climate of the evolution of schools and schooling in America.

Since the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) included public education in its legalization for the “separate but equal” policy, public education for Black students became accessible but within limits as described by local school boards and agents of state education departments. Within these mandates, officials provided a complete separation in educational practices and offerings for students of color. Equal access became the terminology for students of all races in obtaining the opportunity to an education. However, with the undertaking of the members of the NAACP and through the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court overturned the “separate but equal” policy and required immediate desegregation of public schools “with all deliberate speed” (1954). The task of integration met with many upheavals and blatant violence, public outcry, and extreme hostility toward people of color. This court decision changed the “fabric” of public education for students of color. The decision also had a tremendous impact on the way education was perceived, delivered, and accepted by Black teachers. According to Bell (1980), considered a pioneer in the field of Critical Legal Studies, this decision by the Supreme Court had far greater impact on the educational system for Black teachers than first realized. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) explained Derrick Bell's argument that the gains of the Brown decision created a halt in advances for Black teachers. Educators of color faced a backlash from this decision directly in economic, social, and political standing. Black teachers were unemployed as students integrated into public schools in which White children attended, and White educators presided. The culture and climate for

education for students of color changed as fewer Black teachers were employed in the integrated schools. These teachers had minimal influence on the curriculum, delivery of instruction, or financial decisions in public education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Yet, there are Black teachers who chose to remain with students in the field despite challenges outlined by Bell. This research sought to explore and report their stories, their experiences. Through the lens of CRT, I sought to identify how race matters to Black teachers in urban schools, and chose to seek out Black teachers' stories to determine whether their stories were reflective of the challenges of teaching in city schools by all teachers or was their story unique to Black teachers. I wanted to know if their experiences were a recurring theme of marginalization and alienation; if they experienced opportunities for professional growth in a safe space for addressing race-related concerns in educational practices or were there institutional practices that impeded them in a social justice quest.

Research Questions

The questions were delineated in the categories commonly assigned to the framework of CRT. With the guiding tenets of race matters, storytelling, and counter storytelling, three specific research questions were investigated:

- How do Black teachers see themselves in the role of education?
- What specific practices told through their stories support them in remaining in urban schools?
- How do organizational contexts show up in the stories of Black teachers choosing to remain in high-poverty, urban schools?

In the first research question, I sought to understand the viewpoint of Black teachers as to what they perceived was their value as an educator in predominately Black urban schools. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) argued for the need to address race as it is interwoven into social structures and its impact on educational reform through uncovering and analyzing its cultural significance. Our educational system is permeated with an underlying supposition of low expectations (Matias, 2015) for nondominant groups of students or as Delpit (1988) defined it, the culture of power and hidden codes. This same supposition is accepted based on factors of socioeconomic status, race relations, and geographic locations. Black teachers may have indeed embarked upon this continual argument that race does have an impact on the educational system outcomes for all students (Collins, 1992; Huber et al, 2006).

With the second research question, I explored storytelling and counter storytelling as a form of pedagogy. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) explained the use of storytelling as a starting point for conversations that can lead to policy changes and corrections to belief systems through the use of stories not part of the dominant culture and also redirect focus from one-sidedness to a collective society approach. Marginalized groups continue to compete with the dominant beliefs and structures for educational goals and outcomes. Lipman (1985) found, the restructure of a school and school system that culturally responsive teachers' input is crucial to the success of students of color due to their unique expertise in cultural knowledge, as well as submitting a different perspective from the dominant cultures' perspective and practices. However, in her assessment of the outcome of the efforts to readdress the educational needs of this one school

system, she reflected on the loss of opportunity for students and teachers in the conversation when their stories held no influence on the decisions for restructuring. Crenshaw (1995) explained that experiences in race-related issues cannot be told from an outsider point of view and neither can educational reform be implemented from distance and objectivity but must be inclusive of cultural responsiveness. A dominant culture's viewpoint should never be considered as the only viewpoint in educational decisions either locally, state, or nationally. Therefore, the importance of storytelling and counter storytelling (as a tenet of CRT) is an integral part of creating a culturally inclusive educational system.

Finally, in the third research question, I addressed Bell's (1992) idea in CRT of interest convergence and property rights. Black teachers identify with students of color based on personal experiences and the desire to create a greater number of positive educational experiences or provide culturally inclusive opportunities. In an ever-evolving world, educational initiatives and political agendas more often than not determine areas of interest and focus both for curriculum and financial distribution. To be able to address curricular issues that affect student achievement, Black teachers face an adverse situation that requires them to address their ideologies and that of the institution. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) expressed Derrick Bell's argument concerning the perceived "tug of war" between civil rights advances and political agendas of the dominant race that placed Black people in the middle (p. 22). As education historically is situated in political discussions based on economic laws that fund these services through property taxes, the argument for curriculum and resource allocations continue to be an issue "hotly" debated. The question of whose rights have more value is often a dilemma when financial resources are scarce. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) discussed property rights and interest convergence by stating, "In the simplest of equations, those with "better" property are entitled to "better schools" (p. 54). They further explained that the need for material resources to support educational opportunities such as required tools for advanced learning found in affluent communities often do not exist in impoverished communities due to lack of resources.

Literature Review

Dixson et al. (2006) stated, "... the stories of people of color are hopeful, even when our circumstances are not" (p. 82). My intent in utilizing CRT as a framework for this study is to draw attention to the historical trend in ways racism is intertwined in the organizational structures of the educational system. Specifically, I wanted to address the adverse effect of institutional barriers based on racist practices that undermine retention efforts for Black teachers in the profession through a focus on the tenets of CRT (i.e., race matters, the permanence of race, interest convergence and Whiteness as property rights and storytelling/counter storytelling). In addition, I wanted to focus on the critique of liberalism in relation to the impact of internalized racism (Huber et al., 2006; Kohli, 2014), the notion of colorblindness (Delpit, 1988; Matias, 2015), and the crippling effect of incremental change (Dixson et al., 2006).

There remains a pressing problem of teacher retention in public education and specifically Black teachers in urban schools. Researchers support the fact that Black teachers were committed to assignments in low performing urban schools and had higher retention rates than their White peers (Achinstein et al., 2010). However, as reflected in current research, a greater number of Black teachers are leaving at faster rates than their White counterparts (Ahmad

& Boser, 2014). Understanding the need to challenge the status quo continues to be a goal in understanding “why” Black teachers remain in teaching mainly in public urban schools. Through their pedagogy, their experiences as they perceive themselves as champions for social justice within the framework of culturally responsive teaching, Black teachers challenged the racist system that catches us in a double bind (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012).

CRT offers a framework for researchers to continue to engage in discussions about teacher retention and the growing concerns with recruitment, countering the dominant cultural perspective of educational equity for the purpose of soliciting an understanding of the impact of institutional barriers of racism experienced by teachers of color. A number of research initiatives were focusing on Black teachers in their pedagogical practices, particularly with students of color (Borrero et al., 2016; Nuri-Robins et al., 2011). Researchers sought to gain insight into patterns for successful teaching strategies. A recurring theme among these teachers was the need for connectedness. Teachers saw their role as connecting with their students with apparent reasons, such as typical race and relating students to people of success within their race. The teachers saw themselves as defenders of their race and protectors for their students against prejudices and inequalities.

Milner and Hoy (2003) found a focus on the successes and struggles of a Black teacher (Participant) as a recurring theme of the need for connectedness and that of modeling for students the determination and pride in her race as well as combating negative stereotypes. These attributes had become part of participants’ definition of the teaching task, and thus an element in her self-efficacy judgments. In her words, she recounted her reasons for teaching in her specific school district. She stated that she wanted her students to see a Black female whose skin pigmentation identified her as a black person who was proud to be of the Black race. In her remarks, this participant felt her responsibility in her current teaching position was to dispel negative stereotypes regarding black people.

Black teachers’ stories offered another viewpoint in countering ideologies and misconceptions of Black students in teaching and learning. As noted by Solorzano and Yosso (2002), U.S. history told through the context of the privileged dominant culture revealed a one-sided story; whereas, people of color stories are omitted or misconstrued (p. 36). Counter storytelling allowed for the silenced voices of nondominant groups to be heard. Through this tenet of CRT, challenges to the status quo in revealing inequities in educational practices became cornerstones for addressing racism and its impact in academic achievement for all students. As marginalized people began to tell their viewpoints of the story, greater insight is possible to support academically low-achieving students and challenge low expectations for these students. The continual cycle of poverty, marginalization, and cultural dominance that clouds education became evident to a greater extent through the stories of teachers whose experiences and perspectives differ from the dominant culture. The richness and cultural support of these experiences were needed to develop safe spaces for intuitiveness and resourcefulness in educating the whole child. However, historically, safe spaces for professional discourse in gaining understanding and insightfulness into teaching and learning through cultural responsiveness have not always been available or celebrated.

In fact, Delpit (1988) discovered in her research, the discontent felt by Black teachers in education conversations evolved into silenced dialogue. In reporting her findings, she reflected upon the frustrations of Black teachers. Through her findings revealed that Black teachers noted that "...they stop talking because white people don't listen" (p. 280). It was because of this silenced dialogue that the need for counter storytelling is essential to addressing the dominant middle-class European curriculum that marginalizes students of color. Milner and Hoy (2003) concluded from the words of their participants that educators share a common desire to make a difference in the lives of students through teaching and that was the basis for why individuals are working in the educational profession.

Through counter storytelling, Black teachers presented a different perspective than that of the dominant culture. The research literature on the retention of teachers focused on issues of external or extrinsic motivators. Black teachers' experiences revealed a challenge to the current, predominant research with regard to inequitable teaching assignments, curriculum, and resources in which diversity, with respect for cultural nuances, are often lacking. Delpit (1988) revealed from the perspective of a participant, a challenge to the idea of colorblindness as a failure to see students as they are, their unique abilities they bring to learning. The challenge to this notion revealed the impact of counter storytelling to the dominant cultural values embedded in the educational system. Told from the perspective of those who have experienced alienation and marginalization, the narrative changed. The idea of colorblindness, as stated by this participant, created a sense of inadequacy in students of color. The concept perpetuated the idea of cultural dominance rather than cultural respect. According to Matias (2015), the idea of teaching preservice teachers to be blind to color led them to be blind to race and race-related issues that undergird low expectations and low achievement in students of color. Teachers who do not see color ultimately denied the existence of diversity rather than celebrating the richness of differences in culture. This blindness undergirded negative perceptions in educational policies and contributed to the lack of success for students of color in poverty in public urban schools. Matias (2015) further stated that through their continual access to students daily, teachers have the responsibility for shaping and growing children's identities. What message was taught to students of color when attempting to be blind to color, race, identity, cultural nuances that make up their existence. Teacher preparation programs should engage preservice teachers in addressing race and its impact on educating students in high-poverty, students of color, urban schools. This call from the voices of Black teachers spelled out explicitly the misconceived conceptions of dominant cultural ideologies that are detrimental to the development of equity in education. The wealth of counter storytelling found in the voices of experience, the voices of exasperation, and the voices of excitement as educators drawn from Black teachers supported their desire to remain with their students. The use of counter storytelling was essential to gaining insight into the reasons for the retention of Black teachers in urban, hard-to-staff schools. Only through their stories and with their own words, researchers identify themes and motifs that direct the discourse in educating Black students, respect for culturally diverse curriculum, and the understanding that everyone has a story to tell that will enrich our world rather than separate groups within this society.

Methods

I chose to utilize a narrative inquiry approach in qualitative research for this study to provide a personalized response to the research questions. I sought to listen to and learn from Black teachers who “defied the statistics” and remained in the profession, specifically in urban schools. Through individual interviews, I reflect upon the story of teachers, their experiences, and their insights into their attempts to educate the whole child. Guided through the lens of CRT and precisely the tenets of race matters; storytelling and counter storytelling, this qualitative narrative inquiry study told their stories, in their own words, of why Black teachers remain at public, urban, hard-to-staff schools in Southeast Alabama, specifically within a city school district. Furthermore, this study should help guide a focus for further studies on retention strategies that support retaining high-quality educators, particularly Black teachers, in challenging schools.

The context of experience was a major element of the narrative inquiry; the task was to identify the conditions under which a certain relationship or condition or response holds. The editors of *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God’s Children Got a Song* (2006) declared that critical race theorists challenge the story of white dominance in American education. The theme taken from the song “All God’s Children Got a Song,” presented the backdrop for narrative inquiry. I determined that hearing the stories of Black teachers in their own words and inquiring into their experiences is a critical component in understanding the importance for Black teachers to remain in urban schools with students of color. Their individual experiences as Black teachers were at least partly the product of individual interpretation. Based on these individual stories, a combined story of their experiences emerged, with the untold or unrevealed nuances or reflections of a broader experience by each individual collectively. Therefore, qualitative research, specifically the use of narrative inquiry, was necessary to hear their truths.

Using purposive sampling, the subject of the design was Black teachers in public, urban schools. The demographic population was similar in each school regarding the socioeconomic status. Volunteers for the study were solicited through a Facebook posting which proved to yield minimal responses. However, those volunteers who did respond helped recruitment by word of mouth. Of the volunteers to participate, all were Black women with more than 5 years of experience in teaching. Only one participant had less than 10 years’ experience in teaching. The ages of participants range from the early 30s to the late 50s. Each of the participants lives in the community, participates in local church assemblies, and have extended families in the same neighborhoods as the students served. Table 1 shows the general makeup of the participants as identified by minimum requirements sought.

Table 1*Data Summary: Teachers of Color – Demographics of Participants*

	Years of Experience	School Experiences	Highest Degree Earned	Age Ranges
Ann	13	Public	Master's	Early 30s
Barbara	13	Public/Private	Master's	Late 30s
Clarise	18	Public	Master's	Late 40s
Denise	13	Public/Private	Master's	Late 30s
Essie	18	Public	Master's	Late 30s
Freda	9	Public	Bachelor's	Early 30s
Gwen	16	Public	Education Specialist	Late 50s

I used a priori coding to guide me with a structured interview protocol and remained open to possible themes discovered in the data (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Gilgun, 2013; Shenton, 2004). The codes helped me to organize the interview protocol and guided my expectations of finding similar responses in the data. Table 2 reflects the emergent codes and themes developed from the participants' responses to the interview questions, and provides a visual representation of the processes I used in analyzing the data.

Table 2*Data Analysis Process: Codes and Themes*

Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3
	Emergent Codes	
Perception of education as a "calling"	Make connections to content and the world around them	Tenacity to overcome obstacles
Identify with students- serve as role models	Struggles with education	Optimistic for change in support of equity
Management of behaviors	Drive to provide better experiences for students	Supportive environment-mentoring
Uniqueness of their perspectives	Build relationships- Connectedness	Dedication to students
Connected by race, culture, shared experiences		Build relationships- Connectedness
Build relationships- Connectedness		Challenge misconceptions/ judgmental attitudes
Depth of commitment		
Support of community – legacy		
	Themes	
Teacher as Disciplinarian	Organization and building relationships as a key practice	Social Alienation and marginalization
Advocacy/ Self Identify	Ability to make instruction relevant to cultural nuances	Stereotype Threats
Destiny by design		

The design of the interview questions was to solicit responses from participants to glean an understanding related to the research questions supported by the tenets of race matters and

storytelling/counter storytelling found in the CRT. The themes developed from the participants' stories of why they remained in predominantly Black, urban schools are summarized as (a) seeing their role as one of disciplinarian, advocate and self-identify, destiny by design; (b) specific practices such as organization and building relationships, ability to make instruction relevant to cultural nuances; and (c) organizational contexts of alienation and to dispel misconceptions or judgmental attitudes. In conclusion, despite experiencing obstacles related to race or race-related issues, only three of the seven participants were willing to remain with their students. Their challenges with alienation, marginalization, and lack of a safe space to discuss race-related issues were minimal in their optimistic effort to serve as role models for students of color, champion social justice, and provide opportunities for advancement for all students, specifically students of color.

Findings

In this research, I sought to hear from Black teachers, specifically those who desired to remain in city schools with a predominantly Black population, to ascertain whether their experiences were one of many stories told or was there one story; one experience told by many participants? I utilized CRT as the theoretical framework to guide my exploration in explaining how race matters. Through this exploration, I discovered that the stories told by each, is one story with varying experiences but similar conclusions.

Seven participants were interviewed for this study. Through the responses of the participants to the research question, I sought to reveal their experiences pertaining to the impact of how race matters in their decisions for remaining with their students. The findings of this study align with current research in this area, as expressed by Kraft et al. (2012), who noted that teachers of color expressed their intentions to remain in urban schools due to their positive relationships with their students but also reflect a deeper challenge for Black teachers in the need to articulate specific protocols that will support their retention (i.e. removal of institutional barriers that devalue their contributions and create hostile environments through racist practices and policies).

However, two participants did state that they would take a break from teaching and were actively looking into other options at this point in their careers. Break was defined as leaving the classroom as a teacher but keeping the possibility of returning at some future date. The reasons given for a break were "burnout" in teaching due to the challenges with educational mandates, a scripted curriculum that deprives them of the real work of teaching, struggles with marginalization, and more demands on teachers but little financial compensation for the additional demands. These concerns, if adequately and effectively addressed and supported by policies governing education, form the basis in supporting retention. While expressing these concerns with what they stated as a continuous negative trend in education, these teachers were equally adamant in their support for the need for education and the need for someone to teach students. As Essie stated,

I think as a teacher a lot of times that comes across your mind of taking a break. You continue to push through. And what keeps you continuing to push through is the children. You see where you are needed or where they need you. So that does come across your

mind, then once you get through that day, you know you want to take that break; it always brings you back to wanting to stay.

In the third question of my research inquiry, I addressed directly the idea of institutionalized racism. Historical accounts of race relations have created a system of hierarchy that support a glass ceiling of equity. Through organizational structures that promote the power of privilege (i.e., the dominance of educational practices rooted in policy that fail students of color as evidenced by poor academic performance and low expectations for achievement), Black teachers are granted observation but reach a level in which their contributions in cultural understanding and experiences are devalued (Achinstein et al., 2010). Through what Bell (1980) identified as interest convergence, institutional barriers to equitable educational practices are addressed only when the interest of the dominant culture collides with social justice reform. Consequently, teachers whose beliefs for social justice to reveal cultural bias in system policies and practices positioned them as outliers to the educational flow of academic accountability.

In discussing organizational structures, the participants raised several concerns about the need for professional development in diversity as it relates to teaching and learning. All the participants stated that they had not received any training pre-service or professional training in cultural responsiveness but would undoubtedly be willing to learn. As noted through the work of West (2017), conversations regarding race matters must begin with addressing crippling cultural stereotypes that create barriers to meaningful conversations about the impact of race relations in America. Even though only two of the seven expressed incidents that reaffirmed to them the need to challenge misconceptions, it is important to note that their experiences are aligned with the research and support the historically identified challenges of peoples of color in dispelling negative stereotypes. One participant in the study summed up her response to the misconceptions when asked about the importance of training in diversity:

...they will understand, we will understand, even though I am Black, I don't always understand Caucasian culture either...And the kids won't feel like they don't like us anymore, they don't understand us anymore.

However, it would seem that the desire to prove a point to the dominant culture that students of color have value perpetuates the idea of internalized racism; embedded in belief that Black people should prove themselves worthy of recognition and understanding. Each of the participants has referenced personal experiences with racism within their practice, among their peers, and with their institutions of learning. Yet, assimilation to the dominant, middle class, white educational system appears to be the forefront of the challenges Black teachers face.

The voices of teachers of color in retention in education speak to a central focal point— institutional barriers of racism, whether overt or covert, in a Eurocentric educational system continue to be a major challenge in retention of Black teachers. Experiences of Black teachers are very similar in the oppressive practices of an educational system in which the dominant culture's values and beliefs define teaching and learning for all students. With a greater number of public schools becoming predominantly enrolled with students of color, it is imperative that districts become more openminded to the reported experiences of Black teachers serving in predominately Black, urban schools. As noted in the research, reasons for retention and possible solutions are policy amendable. Therefore, educational systems must pay closer attention to

policies that have historically been unsuccessful in retaining teachers of color and by extension have supported poor academic performance for students of color.

Discussions and Implications

In this study, CRT served as a framework for gaining an understanding of the experiences of Black teachers. From this study, I identified commonalities among Black teachers' experiences in public education that must be addressed by educational systems. Participants noted that the lack of a safe space for professional discourse in gaining understanding and insightfulness into teaching and learning through cultural responsiveness have not always been available or celebrated. Silenced dialogue (Delpit, 1988) and marginalization with alienation have served only to "push out" (Collins, 1992; Kohli and Pizzaro, 2016) both students of color and teachers of color. Educational systems would better serve students of color when changes to policies allow safe spaces for discussions of race-related issues.

The following recommendations are offered based upon the stories told by the participants in the study. Schools and school districts have a professional responsibility for growing and developing the craft of teaching through support for teachers. There is a desire for professional development in cultural responsiveness. In this training, there is a need for safe spaces to discuss race and race-related issues as professionals. Race matters and cultural responsiveness in pedagogy and curriculum are necessary to address the continual marginalization of nondominant groups. I recommend district officials address the need for policy changes such as flexibility in accountability mandates that fail to address the widening gap in academic performance of students of color (i.e., standardized test instruments that devalue or exclude communities of color, standardized content with expectations of "common" knowledge and does not address cultural knowledge). In addition, I propose a focus on inclusion of culturally responsive ideas that allow teachers of color to address district policies that marginalize students of color (i.e. discipline policies, response to instruction policies, local culturally responsive curriculum decisions—community projects initiatives in communities of color).

District-level educators should pay attention to the call for respected and meaningful collaboration in curriculum and pedagogical experiences of Black teachers. Educators are asking for respect in dialogue in curriculum issues, in value as a colleague in the profession, in recognition of the differences in practice that have proven successful for student achievement and growth.

Future studies should focus on the differences in experiences (i.e., isolation, alienation, and marginalization) of Black males and their reasons for remaining in the profession. Comparison of differences in gender and perceptions of responses to experiences by gender are areas not explored with reference to teachers of color remaining in the profession. As reflected in current research, many Black teachers are leaving the profession faster than their White peers especially Black males (Ahmad & Boser 2014; Pabon 2016). Additional research is needed to address the concerns of Black teachers (i.e., feelings of being devalued, experiencing hostile working conditions, and a lack of respect for the profession specifically as it relates to Black male teachers).

In addition, the need for further research to understand the intrinsic factors that undergird Black teachers' desire to remain in predominately Black urban schools is pressing. As identified in the findings of this research study, there are extrinsic factors that support retention; however, an in-depth study of motivation as a theoretical framework would possibly outline additional intrinsic factors that could support policy amendments.

Research should focus on whether teachers of color who do not identify as Black have similar experiences and express similar challenges as professionals (i.e., with the curriculum, decision making in curricular choices, delivery of instruction, overt racism or internalized racism/assimilation).

In response to the research questions, the following conclusions were drawn from the participants' responses to interview questions designed to support a narrative inquiry of their experiences. They remain as advocates for students of color. Race does matter. By identifying with their students of color, they report a connection of culture and identity that motivates them to strive for excellence and expect no less from themselves and their students. All of the participants in the study referenced the importance of building relationships with students, support for teaching the whole child, and building upon the sense of community that undergirds Black culture.

From these findings, Black teachers remain because of destiny by design. They genuinely believe and are supported by their successes that their purpose in life is to teach. In doing so, their desires, despite obstacles, is to fulfill this call to service. As noted by participants, relating content to students' experiences, identifying cultural nuances that enhance teaching and learning are skills embedded in Black teachers' practices. These nuances evolve from experiences and identity that support their belief in destiny by design.

Participants from this study also recognized the value in serving as role models to students of color. They determined that students of color must see someone who looks like them serving as a positive role model. They also remain to be that catalyst for change as they challenge the status quo of a middle class, white educational system that has historically marginalized people of color. They have a story to tell and their story can be vastly different from the dominant culture's story and has value to students, as well as the educational system when they are heard.

Black teachers' contributions to the educational profession are vast and deeply rooted in struggle but optimistically administered for the next generation of students to have more significant opportunities for success both academically, as well as socially. Because of the experiences shared by these participants, educational institutions must seek to be more inclusive, reflect greater respect for cultural responsiveness in all aspects of the educational system, and systematically search to eliminate racist practices that drive out rather than draw in teachers of color.

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The Historical Foundations of Accountability and Federal Intervention in American Education

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Abstract

As the nation is rapidly approaching the 40th anniversary of the release of *A Nation at Risk* (1983). A national discussion needs to be started to evaluate what if anything has changed as a result of the increasing levels of federal intervention. Accountability has been a part of the American education deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) from the very beginning of this nation's early settlers, dating back to the *Old Deluder Satan Act* of 1647 (Carleton, 2002). While the federal government's intervention began when the Continental Congress passed the *Northwest Ordinance Act* of 1785. However, all the accountability requirements and intervention strategies have not made the significant increases in student achievement especially for the most at risk students in schools. Yet school leaders continue to do the same things expecting better results. In this article, I outline the history of accountability and federal interventions. But who is holding accountability accountable? Therefore, it is of value to review the historical foundations of accountability and federal intervention of the *Elementary and Secondary Act* of 1965 (P.L. 89-10) and its reauthorizations over the past 55 years.

Keywords: federal intervention, accountability, achievement gap, school improvement, standards movement

The Historical Foundations of Accountability and Federal Intervention in American Education

“An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people.”

~ Thomas Jefferson

Some form of accountability has always been present in the American educational system. Larry Cuban (2004) wrote, “car drivers habitually look through the rearview mirror to negotiate traffic safely; perhaps a pause to look into the past to grasp why accountability structures with personal and collective consequences are so pervasive now may render valuable insights and inform future policy making” (Cuban, 2004, p.18). Despite all the efforts and resources invested in the American Education System since *A Nation at Risk* (1983), students in the United States still lag behind the rest of the industrialized world (Okes et al., 2004). Researchers have indicated that there is evidence of an identifiable achievement gap when students enter kindergarten (Williams, 2011) and this achievement gap continues to grow throughout the students' school years (Williams, 2011). According to Noguera (2004), the achievement gap is one of the significant challenges facing school teachers and leaders today. Unfortunately, today schools “fail one in four students” (Sirotnik, 2004, p. 148).

As it became obvious that the requirements of the Bush era *No Child Left Behind Act* were increasingly unobtainable, the Obama administration and other key stakeholders worked to develop legislation designed to prepare America’s students for success in post-secondary education and the nation’s workforce better. On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) (P.L. 114-95). ESSA is the most current reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965 (P.L. 89-10), and replaced the Bush Era *No Child Left Behind* reauthorization. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* maintained the expectation of academic accountability, and continued efforts to close the achievement gap and improve graduation rates. This act also included provisions to ensure all students received an education based on high academic standards, allowing states to choose their unique academic goals, implementing identification and intervention requirement for the lowest performing 5% of schools, and identifying schools/districts in which subgroups are struggling (Klein, 2016). This desire to improve education through legislation has a long history and has impacted millions of students, schools, and communities. Therefore, it is of value to examine the historical foundations of accountability and federal intervention of the *Elementary and Secondary Act* of 1965 (P.L. 89-10) and its reauthorizations over the past 55 years.

History of Accountability and Federal Involvement in Education

The development of the American educational system is steeped in traditions, culture, and character of America’s founding and development. The uniquely American educational system’s roots extend all the way back to Plato, Aristotle, and even Saint Thomas Aquinas (McNergney & Herber, 2001). The founding fathers believed that education was essential for the Republic; they understood that freedom had to be tempered by the need to maintain social order; therefore, education was seen as a means to produce “good citizens.” For the founding fathers, “education meant socialization” (McNergney & Herber, 2001, p. 47).

Although the initial structures establishing public schools in America gave the primary control to local districts, the states have always had authority over these schools. But who actually controls the curriculum and establishes the standards has been a point of disagreement from the early years of their inception and is something that has continued to be an issue. As an example, in 1647, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed the *Old Deluder Satan Act*. The Old Satan Deluder Act received its name from the first line in the law, “It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures” the law was to ensure every town of over 100 families had a grammar school to teach reading and writing (Shurtleff, 1853). Although the communities may have established the schools, the state was setting guidelines as to what they needed to do and what the purposes would be. The primary role of the federal government was providing land on which schools could be built.

With a steady flow of new immigrants entering the new nation, many of our founding fathers took an active role in the development of an educational system in the newly created nation as a means of educating workers who would help build a strong economy (Hirschland & Steinmo, 2003). The founding fathers were concerned with creating an educational system that would help instill a sense of nationalism in the multitude of individual nationalities that comprised the population of the United States at the time of the American Revolution. Benjamin Franklin and James Madison were early supporters of a publicly funded educational system in the new nation (Hirschland & Steinmo, 2003). During the Constitutional Convention in 1787, there was a belief by many of the founding fathers, that “...only an informed, alert, intelligent, and uncorrupted electorate would preserve the freedoms of a republican state” (Hirschland & Steinmo, 2003, p. 347).

The *Northwest Ordinance* of 1785 passed by the Continental Congress. During this period of time, the nation was under the Articles of Confederation that divided the Northwest Territory into townships of six square miles. Each town was subdivided into 36 squares of 640 acres that were to be sold. The proceeds from the 16th square were designated to support education. This transfer of land continued throughout the history of the United States until the end of the 19th century. There had been more than 77 million acres of land given to the states to support education (Hirschland & Steinmo, 2003). The law was further expanded as new territories were added to the United States. In 1841, Congress mandated that the 36th square would also be added to the 16th square. For example, by 1854, the State of Alabama had earned \$902,774.00 through the sale of the 16th square. This amount is equivalent to about \$23,000,000.00 today (Hirschland & Steinmo, 2003). During the mid-1800s, the migration of settlers westward resulted in the sale of land in the west resulting in a surplus of funds in the national treasury that were sent to the states in the form of loans that were never repaid, for use in improving education (Hirschland & Steinmo, 2003).

During the Civil War, federal land was available for K-12 education. In 1862, Congress passed the *Morrill Land Grant Act*. This Act granted 30,000 acres of land for each senator and representative. This land was to be sold and the proceeds were to be endowed and used to support higher education in each state. In 1890, a second Morrill Act was passed to include the recently freed slaves in higher education. Once the distribution of land for public education was ended, the federal government’s involvement in education was minimal and occurred for

“...relatively short periods of time and in times of crisis...” (Hirschland & Steinmo, 2003, p. 343).

The next major federal educational policy was the *Smith-Hughes Act* of 1917, which focused on fostering and supporting vocational-technical education. The Act provided for the federal government to pay for the administrative staff, teachers, supervisors, and directors of agricultural, trade, home economics, and industrial subjects at the secondary school level. Additionally, the federal government obligated monies to pay for the cost of preparing teachers for these subjects at the secondary school level (P.L. 64-347; 39 Stat. 929). Although the government provided funding and guidelines for using these monies, the federal government was not deeply involved in the functions of schooling until October 4, 1957, when the launch of the Soviet Spacecraft Sputnik brought increased focus and attention on the science education in the United States and resulted in the passage of the *National Defense Education Act* (NDEA) in 1958. The law was passed because of the perceived failure of the United States educational system to maintain pace with the Soviets (P.L. 85-864; 72 Stat. 1580). The purpose of this Act was to refocus educational policy on mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, and increase the number of scientists and mathematicians available for the military-industrial complex. The major funding mechanism was the *National Defense Student Loan Program* (P.L. 85-864; 72 Stat. 1580). This law, enacted in 1958, resulted in the federal government taking a lead role in educational reform and the start of a pattern of federal leadership in education that continues today. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson established an initiative known as the “War on Poverty.” Johnson believed that a major component of a program to end poverty was providing a quality education for all students (Groen, 2012). President Johnson’s initiative influenced educational policy for two reasons. First, desegregation had become a federal court issue, and second, the money sent to the states for public education had limited “strings attached,” initially (Groen, 2012). In 1965, President Johnson signed the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* into law. This Act included the Title I program that was designed to address the needs of disadvantaged children, children of low-income families, children of migratory agricultural workers, handicapped, neglected, and delinquent children (Groen, 2012). The Act represented a major investment of federal dollars in public education and brought with it requirements, mandates, and a new era of federal involvement in and control over public schools.

Since the passage of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* in 1965, there have been several actions at the federal government level that affected education. In 1979, President Carter split the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and created the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Education. In 1983, President Reagan moved to reduce the federal government’s role in education. He depended primarily on the concept of block grants, with President George H. W. Bush continuing this trend. In spite of these changes in approach, education remained a strategic cornerstone of the national security of the United States and continued to gain national attention from presidents and Congress. President George H. W. Bush created *America 2000*, President Bill Clinton created *Goals 2000*, and President George W. Bush Passed *No Child Left Behind*, a revision of the Title I program in 2002. Finally, in 2010, President Barack Obama released his *Race to the Top* grant program (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

President Bush announced his educational goals during his State of the Union speech, January 31, 1990. These goals were developed in conjunction with the National Governors Association. The six goals were: (a) by the year 2000, every child start school ready to learn; (b) increase the high school graduation rate to no less than 90%; (c) ensure diplomas have value and students in grades 4, 8, and 12 are assessed in the critical subjects; (d) by the year 2000 the United States will be first in the world in math and science; (e) every citizen will be skilled and literate; and (f) every school will provide a “disciplined environment” to ensure students can learn and all schools will be drug free. These goals were never enacted into law or made part of a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965. These were the goals and policy of the Bush White House and his Department of Education. President Bush’s *America 2000* goals were replaced by President Bill Clinton’s *Goals 2000* in 1994.

President Clinton’s *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (P.L. 103-227) was a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965 and was signed into law in March 1994. President Clinton’s *Goals 2000: Educate America* provided resources to ensure students had the opportunity to reach their full potential and contained many of President Bush’s *America 2000* Goals. The Act required that by the year 2000: (a) all students will start school ready to learn; (b) increase high school graduation rate to 90%; (c) all students in grades 4, 8, and 12 demonstrate competency in challenging subject matter; (d) the United States will be first in the world in math and science; (e) every citizen will be literate and have the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy; (f) all schools will be free of drugs, violence, alcohol, and provide a disciplined safe learning environment; (g) teachers will have access to quality professional development to help them prepare students for the twenty-first century; and (h) schools will partner with parents to increase involvement and ensure the social, emotional and academic growth of all students.

President Clinton’s *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (P.L. 103-227) was replaced with President Bush’s *No Child Left Behind* (P.L. 107-110). This was President George W. Bush’s signature education law and the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965. While a bi-partisan piece of legislation, *No Child Left Behind* was controversial due to the consequences to schools and school systems that did not meet their average yearly progress goals. This law included a list of sanctions when schools and school systems failed to improve student achievement. The four main goals of this act were (a) Accountability and testing, (b) Flexibility in the use of federal resources, (c) School choice, and (d) Quality Teaching.

No Child Left Behind was replaced by President Barack Obama’s *Every Student Succeeds Act* (P.L. 114-95), the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965. This act essentially restricted the federal governments’ intrusion into education by shifting the accountability piece to the states. The major provisions of the law are (a) accountability will require students to be tested annually from 3rd to 8th grade and once in high school; (b) states will choose their goals and standards with approval from the Department of Education; (c) goals must be bold yet feasible; (d) states are free to decide on the consequences of low performing school, which are the bottom 10% of the state’s schools based on their graduation rate and percentage of students testing proficient in reading and math; and (e) percentage of student who are college and career ready.

Thus, this reauthorization and refinement is evidence that the initial desire to provide a quality education for every child, expressed by Lyndon Johnson, has expanded over the years and moved the nation to comprehensive educational accountability in public schooling at both the national and state levels.

Ushering in Accountability

Ronald Reagan's first Secretary of Education, T. H. Bell, established the National Commission in Excellence in Education in early 1981. This Commission on Education was charged with examining the quality of education in the United States. Secretary Bell directed the commission to identify issues, recommend solutions, and not to search for scapegoats in the process. The modern era standards movement was prompted by the release of the Department of Education Report, *A Nation at Risk*, in 1983 (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

In *A Nation at Risk*, the authors of the report addressed five areas within education, "...curriculum content standards, expectations of students, time devoted to education, teacher quality, and educational leadership" (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, p. 3). A key recommendation of this report was to focus education on the four-core subjects—math, English, history, and science—what the report calls the "...very stuff..." of education (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, p. 2). Another major recommendation of the report was a significant increase in the number of hours of instruction in both subject content and effective teaching. Margaret Spellings, the second Secretary of Education for President George W. Bush, wrote that this particular provision of the recommendations resulted in focusing a greater number of hours on teaching philosophies and not content knowledge (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Secretary of Education, Dr. William Bennett pushed the nation into the "back to the basics" movement in an effort to stem declining test scores on high stakes standardized test in relation to other industrialized nations in the world. This push intensified during the late 20th and early 21st centuries as globalization of the world economies and global competition increased. This globalization was often referred to as the driving force of standardized testing and educational reform; a global movement that was being initiated in many developed countries around the world (Sahlberg, 2010).

President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* into law, commonly known as *No Child Left Behind* in January 2002. During the signing ceremony, President Bush stated, "The new role of the federal government is to set high standards, provide resources, hold people accountable, and liberate school districts to meet the standards" (Hirschland & Steinmo, 2003, p. 344). This act was the greatest intrusion of the federal government into public education in the history of the United States in what is commonly referred to as the "accountability movement" (Richburg, 1971). A major policy shift created by this act was the focus on the "...underserved minority and low socio-economic populations or sub-groups assured that schools would more effectively serve those students" (Groen, 2012, p. 6). This was the first time that schools were accountable for the learning and achievement of each sub-group within the school. These sub-groups included all students, special education, free/reduced price lunch, Black, Hispanic, White, limited-English proficient, and others depending on the school and school system. The goal of this legislation was to ensure equality in

educational opportunities and to eliminate low expectations for all student. However, although lofty goals were set, the Federal government has never fully funded this act (Federal Education Budget Project, 2014).

The *No Child Left Behind Act* focused on the elementary and middle schools, which was a dramatic shift from previous educational reform acts that had concentrated on improving education within the high school setting (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The emphasis of the act was focused on math and reading, which has resulted in a substantial decrease in the amount of time that students are participating in classes such as art and music. Additionally, there has been a reduction in the number of hours elementary students are participating in history and science instruction to enable the focus on math and reading (Groen, 2012). One final change, in the federal government funding of education, was a shift in the way Title I funds were spent in schools. The Bush Administration decided that rather than casting a wide net and spending money over a wide number of schools, the spending should be shifted to target the areas of greatest need. *No Child Left Behind* focused on the underserved populations, minority and low socioeconomic groups and subgroups, the intention was to ensure schools effectively served all students (Groen, 2012). The objective of *No Child Left Behind* was for every student in public schools in the United States to perform at the proficient level or higher no later than 2014. The act established objectives for continuous improvement that schools were required to meet each year. Additionally, there were consequences for schools and systems that failed to make the required Adequate Annual Progress (Groen, 2012). The focus of Adequate Annual Progress was reading and math scores in grades three through eight and once in high school. The annual measurable objective increased yearly with the goal of all students being proficient or above in reading and math by the year 2014.

Recent Trends

As the annual measurable objectives of *No Child Left Behind* increased and obtaining and maintaining the required adequate annual progress became more difficult, even for some of the best school systems in the nation, President Obama's administration began granting waivers for the requirements of *No Child Left Behind*. On September 23, 2011, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, "...States are developing next-generation accountability and support systems, guided by principles developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers..." (Duncan, 2011), that were not anticipated by the authors of the *Elementary and Secondary Act* of 2001 (i.e., *No Child Left Behind*).

President Obama's major educational policy was a \$4 billion dollar grant program known as *Race To The Top*, which one part of the \$100 billion dollars for education contained in the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* of 2009 (*ARRA*). This program is the largest "...competitive education grant program in U.S. History..." (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). This policy was President Obama's administration's commitment to education that "...stresses standards and assessment, recruitment and retention of effective teachers, improvement of low-performing schools and the establishment of viable data systems for tracking student achievement and teacher effectiveness" (Nicholson-Crotty & Staley, 2012, p. 161). Nicholson-Crotty and Staley (2012) further wrote that the *Race To The Top* grant program was developed to encourage and reward states for developing innovative reforms and achieving

significant improvement in student outcomes. Many states changed their educational laws and programs to become eligible for these grants (Nicholson-Crotty & Staley, 2012). To be eligible to apply and be considered for a *Race To The Top* grant each state had to agree to,

... (1) Adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments, (2) Recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective teachers and leaders, (3) Create data systems that measure student achievement and provide actual data for leader/schools to improve practice, and (4) Turn around the lowest performing schools. (Martin & Lazaro, 2011, p. 842)

Race To The Top is one of the most aggressive and ambitious educational grant programs ever attempted (Martin & Lazaro, 2011).

President Obama's *Race To The Top* education initiative used many of the same measures that were included in *No Child Left Behind* to evaluate schools and school districts, and further expands their use to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers, as well (Gottlieb, 2013). Some of the problems with the *Race To The Top* grant program included an emphasis on charter schools, is unresponsive to rural states issues, it is not based in research or science, and it is inconsistent and often contradictory of other educational grant programs (Nicholson-Crotty and Staley 2012). Additionally, *Race To The Top* cannot fix the problem of the gap between "... (quantitative) teacher effectiveness rating and the (nonquantitative) concept of great teaching..." (Gottlieb, 2013, p. 12).

Impact and Concerns

The standards movement has shifted the focus of educational reform away from educational inputs to achievement outcomes (Kuel, 2012). The enormous increase in federal spending on education since the *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983, an increase from \$246 billion to \$499 billion, after adjustments for inflation with a corresponding increase of per student spending from \$5,691 to \$9,288, have failed to increase the United States standing in the world (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Many critics of the standards movement are concerned that instead of increasing the critical thinking, problem solving and dialectal reasoning skills necessary for the United States to be competitive in the increasing global economy, teachers are "...teaching the test" (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 47).

A major issue for teachers is the pressure to raise the students' scores on the standardized examinations, while at the same time reducing the number of failures in their class; these are working against each other. The paradox is a question of rigor and high expectations, "...you can't raise standards and lower the number of students who fail" (Anagnostopoulos, 2003, p. 312). A real danger in pushing teachers to lower their failure rate is the chance of also lowering their expectations and rigor of the content taught in their class, which could result in a lowering of the standardized test scores. Additionally, often a teacher's effort to reduce a high failure rate only increases the student's behavior that lead to the failures in the first place (Anagnostopoulos, 2003). Finally, many teachers blame the students and their environment for low achievement, only about 12% of the teachers in one study identified instructional practice as a factor in student failure and lack of achievement (Anagnostopoulos, 2003).

Looking Ahead

Sahlberg (2010), recommended three steps to improve student achievement, (a) focusing the change effort on developing a trusting and collaborative relationship with the community, (b) use more “...intelligent forms of school accountability and match them to external accountability needs” (p. 58), and (c) “...leadership should encourage cooperation among teachers and networking among schools” (p. 61).

To meet the needs and demands of improving educational outcomes, schools and school systems need to have the flexibility necessary to adapt to local circumstances, issues, and needs (Forner et al., 2012; Sahlberg, 2010). However, the requirements of the accountability reforms not only develop the goals and objectives of school improvement, but also dictate the methods to achieve the stated goals (Sahlberg, 2010). This approach has not been the resounding success many expected. In comparison to other industrial nations, foreign exchange students find that schools in the United States are easier than those in their home country (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

The leading educational policy of the United States continues to be maintaining the current course and continuing to do more of the same (Sahlberg, 2010). A review by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development—Program for International Student assessment methods (2008) found that those nations establishing test-based accountability systems have “...experienced stagnation or decline in student learning, often accompanied by increased dropouts when compared to nations that...created favorable conditions for teaching and learning...” (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 52). As Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2009) stated, “...data can’t tell the whole truth” (p. 2).

In the United States, the educational policy is the result of debate and compromise that is necessary to meet the demands of a democratic system, which is the strength of this nation. The standards-based movement leads to the belief that educational outcomes can be measured like any other manufactured product. The dependence on statistical measures to determine the quality of education fails to measure those things that make great teachers such as, “...counsel troubled teens, take phone calls at night, and reach into their pocket for lunch money...” (Duncan, 2009, p. 1). Improving education should not depend solely on producing better learning outcomes or spending more money to educate students. Improving education should include “...learning that is worthwhile and valuable to their families, communities...” (Sahlberg, 2010, 46).

The educational system appears to be moving back to an industrial based model with “...productivity, efficiency...measurable outcomes, higher test scores...” (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 46). The drive for school improvement has focused on improving the basic skills and core content with common standards and measurable outcomes. However, a “[s]chool that does not stimulate desire to learn, need for learning, or curiosity to know more, is not able to generate productive learning...” (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 46). The establishment of statistical measures for school improvement does minimal to create lifelong learners and results in teachers teaching the test. Wei (2002) stated that high-stakes standardized tests limit pedagogy sound teaching strategies, further deskilling teachers and making teaching routine, boring, and test-like. Eisner (2004) stated that our reliance on standardized tests sends the message to our students that it is

the grade that counts, not the knowledge gained. This phenomenon leads our students to ask, “What do I need to know or is this on the test?” All students enter school with learning and achievement assets (Cooper, 2007); however, there is a disparity between the achievement of whites and most minority groups. The implementation of high-stakes testing has focused educators, as well as policymaker’s attention on the causes of the difference and strategies to close the gap.

Conclusion

Throughout the history of school accountability, especially over the past 40 years, there has been minimal movement in closing the achievement gap or improvement in the United States performance on nationally and internationally normed exams when compared to other industrialized nations. According to the United States Department of Education, the national average high school graduation rate, in 1965 was 75% and has only risen modestly to 85% in 2017. The key to fixing accountability systems across the nation rest with who is being held accountable!

While the tax-paying public does have the right to know how well public school are educating students, it is only the schools being held accountable. The politicians and policymakers who are creating these accountability systems are themselves not being held accountable (Sirotnik, 2004). Beanie adds, “[j]ust as educators need to be held accountable so do policy makers and the public as a whole...” (Beanie, 2004, p. 47). The current accountability systems hold schools accountable and for the first time threaten consequences for the schools, students, teachers and school-level administrators for failing to make their student achievement goals. The very schools that need the resources the most are in danger of losing those resources if they do not make their student achievement goals. The mentality of our current accountability systems is simply “poor academic performance is entirely a school-induced problem; the solution, then is school based” (Cuban, 2004, p. 31). Noguera (2004) asked, is labeling our schools as failing a reasonable way to encourage improvement and reform? Until the politicians and policy makers recognize the disparity in opportunity to obtain a quality education across all demographics and school systems, a reasonable accountability cannot just monitor what students have learned. One major benefit of the accountability and standards movement is the increase in research into what works to improve student achievement in American schools.

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Curriculum Leadership: High School Principals' Perception of Their Roles

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine high school principals' perceptions of their roles as curriculum leaders in school. In this study, we employed a qualitative design with the direct personal interview technique as the means for data collection. Twenty-two high school principals from five school districts in the Atlanta area participated in the study. The research instrument was researcher-constructed with reference to current literature on school curriculum leadership. Principals' responses were coded by categories of curriculum development, organization, implementation, evaluation, and improvement. General emerging themes and recurring patterns of principals' responses were carefully examined. The findings show that high school principals perceived their roles as curriculum leaders to be unique and significant in curriculum development, organization, implementation, evaluation, and improvement.

Keywords: school leadership, principal leadership, curriculum leadership

Curriculum Leadership: High School Principals' Perception of Their Roles

Finkel (2012) claimed that school principals' role as curriculum and instructional leader has been more and more prominent due to the principal accountability movement *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) in particular, and budget cuts at both the district and school levels. High schools, regardless of their sizes, face the challenge of designing and implementing curricula that engage students in the learning process and motivate them to meet high standards of academic achievement (Roelke, 1996). Curriculum standards used to design and implement curricula for high school students are originated from the state level then passed to the district level to add and use as appropriate according to the system needs. On top of that requirement, the high school curricula need to cover the contents of the mandated statewide testing at the high school level, as well as the requirements for graduation (Ediger, 2014). In developing and implementing school curricula, the principal plays a significant, supporting role to ensure that the curricula meet all the learning challenges students face. Weber (2010) stated, five reasons why schools need curriculum leaders: (a) Curriculum leadership provides clarity, (b) Curriculum leadership provides opportunities to develop and empower future leaders, (c) Curriculum leadership provides the opportunity for continuous improvement, (d) Curriculum leadership provides the opportunity to establish goals, and (e) Curriculum leadership provides the opportunity for improved alignment. In playing a supporting role within these five areas of curriculum leadership, finding curricula that meets the needs of the students is a high priority for principals. Wiles (2009) claimed that curriculum development is the essential function of school leadership. He further elaborated that whether this role is carried out by a principal, an assistant principal for curriculum, a team leader, a department head, or by leading classroom teachers, the curriculum defines all other roles in a school.

Glasper (2018) declared that school principals as curriculum leaders need to be knowledgeable about past and present curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. Glatthorn and Jailall (2009) addressed the curriculum leadership roles that a building principal must play. They stated, "Strong, intentional leadership in curriculum development is a necessity for strong instructional leadership" (p. 188). Adkins-Sharif (2019) also suggested that learning from other school leaders and peers, making time for classroom observations, and creating open dialogues with parents and staff are the three essential ways to become an effective curriculum and instructional leader. Principals must take a first-hand responsibility for these aspects to be able to develop curricula that best fits the needs of the school community.

Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of the high school principals concerning development and implementation of curriculum relating to their roles as curriculum leaders in school. The entire research project was intended to cover high school, middle school, and elementary school levels. In this article, we only report on the findings of the research at the high school level.

Review of Related Literature

School Principal and Curriculum Leadership

McDermott (1984) and Ediger (2002) have confirmed that a school principal's significant role is to serve as a curriculum and instructional leader. Shellard (2002) has further elaborated that a principal must have skills in observation, analysis, improvement of teaching, learning theory, and approaches to instructional planning. A principal serving as a curriculum leader must exert strong, direct influence on the quality of teaching and learning within the school (Ediger, 2014; Lee & Dimmock, 1999). He or she must understand the job in promoting student learning and teacher instruction (Dufour, 2002). A dynamic principal will support the school's dynamic curriculum by helping staff and any curriculum workers contemplate and select a curricular design (Garner & Bradley, 1991). The Wallace Foundation (2013) has also identified the five key responsibilities of a school principal as a curriculum leader: (a) shape a vision of academic success for all students; (b) create a climate hospitable to education; (c) cultivate leadership in others; (d) improve instruction; and (e) manage people, data and processes. In the study conducted by Cardno (2003), principals saw themselves primarily as curriculum leaders. She identified the factors that militate against the role were those of high administrative workloads and external agency demands. These hamper the principal's abilities to play an essential role in developing and implementing curricula keeping them from being able to devote enough time to this essential need. Alsaleh (2019) also disclosed that school principals' curriculum leadership role was hampered by centralized government structure. Factors that supported the principals in performing this role were quality of teaching and management staff and school systems that enabled communication and distribution of responsibility for curriculum leadership.

Glatthorn (1987) asserted, "One of the tasks of curriculum leadership is to use the right methods to bring the written, the taught, the supported, and the tested curriculums into closer alignment, so that the learned curriculum is maximized" (p. 4). Cole-Foppe (2016) studied the professional devotion of principals as curriculum leaders. Through the findings of the study, Cole-Foppe indicated that teachers perceived principals to have devoted insufficient amount of time in school curriculum matters and principals perceived themselves the same.

However, in the study of Naidoo and Petersen (2015), not all principals were fully conversant with their roles and responsibilities as instructional leaders. They mainly interpreted their functions to be purely managerial. In Sasson's study (2016), school principals were only moderately involved in instructional leadership activities, and not to the degree prescribed by other literature. Shaked (2019) also reported that despite the top-down pressures to assume an instructional leadership role, school principals demonstrated limited direct involvement in such leadership. Ng et al. (2015) found how principals' preparation and professional development informed their conceptions and practices. The findings from this study revealed that principals did not believe that they were prepared to carry out their roles as curriculum and instructional leadership. Kleidon's study (2018) was aimed at gaining insight from principals about instructional leadership in Title I schools. The principals in this study reported positive experiences from their leadership preparation programs and school districts professional development. However, they claimed that neither was sufficient to prepare them fully to be instructional leaders in Title I schools.

Townsend et al. (2018) reported on their Australian case study research in schools in which principals completed the Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) program. They indicated that PALL made a difference in the principals' practice as curriculum and instructional leaders and provided a framework to lead their teachers to improve teaching practice, student engagement, and learning. Additionally, Boston et al. (2017) engaged principals in professional development and assessed principals' ability to identify aspects of high-quality mathematical tasks and instruction. Findings of the study showed principals, after professional development, significantly improved in their curriculum and instructional leadership skills in the identification of high-quality mathematics tasks and instruction, student thinking, and teacher actions.

Principal's Role in Developing Curriculum

Beach and Reinhartz (2000) described curriculum development as "the careful planning with the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement...outlining the contents, learning experiences, and results" (p. 187). Principals need to develop school curriculum based on data and resources to set the direction of their schools and improve instruction (Louisiana Department of Education, 2016). Most school principals are given the Quality Core Curriculum as standards. However, they do not need to be curriculum experts. Instead, they need to lead their schools with full knowledge of the Common Core State Standards and the assessments tied to those standards (Jenkins & Pfeifer, 2012). Principals must be attentive to the unique needs of the local school, grade level, classroom, and individual student. Beach and Reihartz (2000) stated that principals play a key role in curriculum development as they prompt teachers to reflect on key questions and select appropriate activities for individual student needs. The principals can also help teachers develop curriculum guides (Beach & Reihartz, 2000). Oliva (2001) claimed that the school statements of aims and philosophy actually point to the common needs of students, which help to frame the unique curriculum for the school. He listed the five types of needs as: the needs of the students in general, the needs of the society, the needs of special students, the needs of particular communities, and the needs derived from the subject matter (Oliva, 2001). McTighe and Wiggins (2003) promoted a three-stage backward design curriculum model with the principal leadership. The three stages include identifying desired results, analyzing multiple sources of data, and determining appropriate action plans for student achievement (McTighe & Wiggins, 2003). This model of principal leadership is in direct relation to the need for curricula understanding by principals and their duties as school curriculum leaders.

Principal's Role in Implementing Curriculum

In implementing school curriculum, George (2001) recommended the exercise of shared leadership to secure a buy-in of the teachers through study groups, action-research teams, vertical-learning committees, and leadership teams. The principal should use his or her authority as an encourager and facilitator to promote a cooperative, collegial working atmosphere (Gaustad, 1995). Collaborative planning effort is also supported by Frait (2002) to put traditional and nontraditional teachers together as a team in implementing the curriculum. However, Gideon (2002) cautioned that teacher collaboration needed to be developed over time for effective implementation of the curriculum. Zhang and Henderson (2018) also found that most principals were exercising their power "through" their teacher leaders who in turn were

working in alignment with their principals to achieve the desired outcomes in schools. Mayfield (2018) also provided evidence that the principals' collaborative and coordinated efforts empower teacher leaders to co-lead the instructional program at their schools. When these partnership efforts were present, principals and curriculum supervisors engaged in joint work, leading to robust changes in principals' instructional leadership practices (Thessin, 2019). Sowell's study (2018) found that school principals as instructional leaders adhered to the following practices: prioritizing classroom visits, helping teachers use data, acknowledging teachers' work, providing for teachers' professional development, working collaboratively with teachers, and distributing leadership to teachers. School principals must encourage teachers to constructively use their team planning efforts to renew or revise strategies consistently over the course of the academic year. Hoyte-Igbokwe (2018) also found that principals supported teachers to participate in professional development to facilitate curriculum implementation and evaluation.

Principal's Role in Evaluating Curriculum

Garner and Bradley (1991) stated that “[t]he main purpose of evaluation is to collect data to assist in the determination of meeting goals and to assist individuals in making logical and defensible decisions regarding curricula” (p. 421). Oliva (2001) also added that curriculum evaluation will determine changes that need to be made in the curriculum. Garner and Bradley (1991) identified six requirements for principals who want to maintain dynamic curricula: (a) convey to others what has been accomplished, (b) formulate an evaluation plan, (c) use multiple criteria for evaluation, (d) use evaluation to improve curriculum, (e) ask for teacher and student feedback, and (f) use the evaluation results to make modifications or adaptations in the curriculum. Yearly evaluation of curriculum is an essential piece to improving student achievement across each grade level within the school. Ittner et al. (2019) studied Swiss school principals' readiness for change during curriculum reform. Through the results of the study, they indicated that principals were more open towards the curriculum implementation when they evaluate the usability of the curriculum positively. Furthermore, it was found that change-related governance policies supporting social relatedness could foster principals' readiness for change and their evaluation of the school curriculum.

Significance of The Study

Through the findings of this study, we will disclose the self-perceptions of high school principals in their roles as curriculum leaders. Through the findings of this study, high school principals' roles as curriculum leaders will be better clarified with reference to their current practices. The findings of this study will also assist educational leadership preparation programs in examining the strength of components on curriculum leadership within their programs.

Research Question

The following research question served as a guide to the development of the study: How do high school principals perceive their roles as curriculum leaders in curriculum development, organization, implementation, evaluation, and improvement?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative design of case study by taking advantage of the direct personal interview technique as a means of data collection. Creswell (2005) defined case study as “a variation of ethnography in that the researcher provides an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an event, a process, or an individual) based on extensive data collection” (p. 439). Qualitative researchers investigate research issues of how, what, and why in situations calling for in-depth exploration to provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2005). These research procedures create descriptive data through individuals who express themselves in written or spoken words and observable behaviors (Hatch, 2002). In this study, we solicited the high school principals’ perceptions on curriculum matters as they voluntarily participated to express their feelings and thoughts toward curriculum leadership. The interview technique (the careful asking of relevant questions) is the most important data collection technique a qualitative researcher possesses (Fetterman, 1998). As it has been remarked by Patton (2002), researchers interview people to find out those things they cannot directly obtain through their personal observations. Through interviews, the researchers will have first-hand information about the feelings, thoughts, and intentions of the interviewees.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in high schools of five school districts (four county districts and one city district) in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The city district has a student population of 8,624; whereas, the student population of the four county districts ranges from 96,133 to 176,527. The average percentage of white students in all the school districts is approximately 25. Black, Hispanic, Asian and students of other races comprise the other 75 percent. (See Table 1 for School District Demographic Information.) High schools in the study are departmentalized from Grade 9 to Grade 12. They belong to different schools with sizes ranging from 1,800 students to 3,200 students. (See Table 2 for School Demographic Information.) In addition to the school principal, an assistant principal, academic coaches, and department heads in each high school have shared responsibility in developing and implementing the school curriculum.

Table 1

School District Demographics

District	Student Population	Race by Percentage				
		White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Others
City	8,624	20	37	38	2	3
County 1	178,527	22	32	31	11	4
County 2	96,133	11	62	18	7	2
County 3	110,878	37	31	22	6	4
County 4	92,334	28	42	15	12	3

Source. Governor’s Office of Student Achievement – Georgia School Grades Reports (2019)

Table 2
School Demographic Information

School	Number of Students	Race by Percentage					% of F & RP
		White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other	
1	2,080	28	34	26	5	7	72
2	2,798	23	29	36	6	6	68
3	1,954	35	31	24	6	4	59
4	2,856	28	46	18	5	3	56
5	1,807	32	32	25	5	6	69
6	2,487	27	45	21	4	3	73
7	2,365	36	35	26	2	1	74
8	3,023	27	39	31	2	1	78
9	2,362	18	56	20	3	3	66
10	2,075	30	42	22	4	2	71
11	1,794	28	43	16	11	2	62
12	2,554	33	29	23	9	6	54
13	3,102	22	60	12	4	2	83
14	2,078	23	53	18	3	3	75
15	2,003	39	28	24	5	4	56
16	3,213	26	52	21	1	0	66
17	2,768	33	42	20	3	2	63
18	2,653	38	32	25	4	1	65
19	2,548	42	33	21	3	1	57
20	1,973	12	65	15	6	2	86
21	2,792	14	60	18	6	2	86
22	2,643	25	46	20	5	4	67

Note. % of F & RP = Percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch

Source. Governor's Office of Student Achievement – Georgia School Grades Reports (2019)

Participants

Thirty high school principals were randomly selected from five school districts in the Atlanta area and were invited to participate in the study. Twenty-two of them agreed to participate in the study by face-to-face personal interviews. Of all the 22 principals, 12 of them (54.5%) were males and 10 (45.5%) females. Fourteen of them (63.6%) were White and eight of them (36.4%) were Black. Sixteen school principals (72.7%) have had one to 10 years of experience as principal and six (27.3%) have had more than 10 years as principal. Most of them (77.3%) have earned their Education Specialist degree in educational administration (See Table 3: School Principal Demographic Information.).

Table 3
School Principals' Demographic Information

Principal	Gender	Race	Degree Earned	Years as Principal
1	Female	Black	Ed.S.	16
2	Female	White	M.Ed.	5
3	Male	White	Ed.S.	4
4	Male	Black	Ed.S.	8
5	Male	White	Ed.S.	19
6	Female	White	M.Ed.	10
7	Male	White	M.Ed.	8
8	Female	White	Ed.S.	17
9	Male	Black	Ed.S.	10
10	Male	Black	Ed.S.	7
11	Male	White	M.Ed.	1
12	Female	White	Ed.S.	9
13	Male	Black	Ed.S.	12
14	Female	White	Ed.S.	2
15	Female	White	Ed.S.	7
16	Male	Black	M.Ed.	2
17	Female	White	M.Ed.	5
18	Male	White	Ed.S.	20
19	Male	Black	Ed.S.	10
20	Female	White	Ed.S.	14
21	Female	White	Ed.S.	6
22	Male	Black	Ed.S.	15

Source. Governor's Office of Student Achievement – Georgia School Grades Reports (2019)

Research Instrument

The data collection instrument is a self-constructed questionnaire designed by the researchers. The questionnaire was made for direct, personal interviews with the school principals. The contents of the questionnaire were constructed by referencing the updated literature on school curriculum leadership. The questionnaire includes a demographic data section of school principals. Nine open-ended questions concern the principals' roles in different aspects of curriculum leadership. Three other open-ended questions consider the principals' viewpoints on current curriculum issues. The first draft of the instrument was sent to a panel of five high school principals who served as a panel of judges. The panel was asked to review the instrument against the purpose of the study and provide recommendations for improvement with particular attention to the contents, the language, and the format of the instrument. As a result of the panel review, the original 16 questions were reduced to 12. Some wording and language of the questions were revised per recommendations of the panel (see Figure 1). School principals who served on the panel did not participate in the study.

Figure 1*School Principal Interview Questionnaire*

Gender: _____

School Level: _____

Highest Degree Earned: _____

Years as School Principal: _____

Interview Questions:

- A. How do you perceive as principal your role in the following curriculum activities?
1. Developing the curriculum
 2. Organizing the curriculum
 3. Implementing the curriculum
 4. Evaluating the curriculum
 5. Improving the curriculum
 6. Supporting the faculty
 7. Planning for professional development
 8. Acquiring resources in support of curriculum
 9. Involving the community
- B. What are the characteristics of an outstanding curriculum?
- C. How do you go about initiating curriculum changes in your school?
- D. As a curriculum leader, how do you react to the pressure of producing test results?

Data Collection

The researchers scheduled appointments to interview the school principals relating to their curriculum leadership in school. A copy of the questionnaire was sent to the principals before the appointments to allow the principals time to look up information and prepare the answers for the researchers during the interview. The hour-long interviews were audio-recorded except for four principals who preferred not to be recorded. Detailed note taking of the principals' responses was completed in all interviews so that the four interviews with no audio-recording would not affect the validity of the data collection. All the audio-recordings were transcribed by hand into written passages for review. The transcripts were cross-examined by the researchers. All hand-taken notes were properly written into passages for use.

Data Analysis

All the principals' responses were examined by the types of questions asked and were coded by categories of curriculum development, organization, implementation, evaluation, and improvement. Open coding was used to examine, compare, break down, conceptualize, and categorize the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The coding process assists in breaking down the data or reducing it to manageable segments to generate themes and categories (Schwandt, 2007). At the completion of the interviews, codes were developed from that data that was collected. The categories of codes were carefully examined to gain general emerging themes and recurring response patterns of the school principals. For the purpose of reporting, all the school principals were identified by number from Principal 1 to Principal 22.

Results

The qualitative data collected in this study were systematically analyzed. As a result, themes from the qualitative data emerged to provide answers to the research question of the study. The major findings of this study are presented in the following:

Principal's Role in Developing the Curriculum

All the principals indicated that the school curriculum in Georgia is developed by the Georgia State Department of Education and passed to the school district for implementation. The school district offices map the curriculum before forwarding it to the schools. School principals usually play a supervisory and supportive role to make sure that the curriculum committees with all the department heads implement the curriculum by following the state and district guidelines. The principal's role is to check that the curriculum contents cover all the subject areas required for high school graduation (Principal 11) while meeting individual student needs (Principal 19).

Principal's Role in Organizing the Curriculum

The principal's role in organizing the curriculum is "to support head teachers in scheduling, pacing, matrix, mapping, and assessment issues of curriculum implementation" (Principal 14). School curriculum organization also includes "revising the curriculum areas for vertical and horizontal alignments to meet the student needs" (Principal 13). Principals urge the teachers to work with the state and district level specialists to seek for approval of curriculum organization (Principal 4 and Principal 7).

Principal's Role in Implementing the Curriculum

School principals hold their teachers accountable for their instructional approaches while giving them leeway in achieving their goals (Principal 8). As stated by Principal 1, the three school curriculum implementation approaches are "expectation, pressure, and support." Principal 7 also indicated focusing on the alignment of the school mission and vision statements as an effective approach to implementing the curriculum.

Principal's Role in Evaluating the Curriculum

Several principals believed that a part of curriculum evaluation is actually reviewing how curriculum supports the goals and objectives of the school (Principal 1, Principal 2, Principal 8, and Principal 19). All the principals examine end-of-year state testing data for their schools to assess the achievement of curriculum goals and objectives and state standards mastery. Principal 7 also suggested the need for class observations to verify constructive classroom activities. The principals will provide feedback to the teachers after the observations along with recommendations for improvement if needed (Principal 4 and Principal 7).

Principal's Role in Improving the Curriculum

Principals have indicated that they do not have the authority to improve the curriculum forwarded to them from the state and the district. As stated by Principal 13, his role is “to ensure that curriculum is implemented effectively and to voice their recommendations to the decision-making body.” Principal 15 agreed to it. Principals help collect data to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and make recommendations for improvement (Principal 18 and Principal 19).

Principal's Role in Supporting the Faculty

Many school principals have made it clear that they support the faculty by making themselves accessible in responding to faculty requests. They visit classrooms and attend department meetings to provide feedback (Principal 4 and 19). They also offer professional development opportunities to teachers for their pedagogical advancement to align with the school goals and objectives (Principal 1 and Principal 14). Principal 7 also insinuates the need “to introduce innovative strategies to support teachers to refresh classroom instruction.”

Principal's Role in Acquiring Curriculum Resources

School principals support their teachers by acquiring resources they need for instructional activities. They encourage their teachers to use the state and district appropriations plus the local school activity funds (Principal 7 and Principal 9). They also look at grants for funding student activities (Principal 11 and Principal 14). Principal 2, Principal 3, and Principal 4 also “acquire curriculum resources to match with the curriculum priorities of the school.”

Principal's Indication of an Outstanding Curriculum

Principals consistently look for curricula that meet the students' individual needs (Principal 13, Principal 14, Principal 15, and Principal 20). Principal 16 held that an outstanding curriculum needs “to cover the goals, the objectives, the implementation, and the evaluation processes.” As claimed by Principal 6, two of the significant elements of an outstanding curriculum are “relevance and rigor.” Some principals also indicate that an outstanding curriculum should consider the inclusion of global perspectives and the use of technology in all disciplines (Principal 2 and Principal 7).

Principal's Reaction to Pressure to Produce Test Results

Many school principals considered test results as indications of teaching performance in class. They would like to examine the data for school improvement carefully and work with teachers to ensure that teaching is in alignment with state standards. However, Principal 9, Principal 12, and Principal 16 believed that “test results do not always tell everything about the school” and they work hard with teachers “to ensure student success which can be measured in perspectives other than test scores, such as behaviors, attendance, and community comments.” Principal 7 stated they also ask teachers “to look beyond the test score to teach students a life of high character.”

Involving the Community in Curriculum Issues

In general, school principals are devoted to promoting school and community relationship. However, in matters of curriculum, they do not seem to work very actively with the community. Principal 9 proposed a survey to parents relating to curriculum issues. Principal 22 stated that he invites parents to serve on curriculum committees. Principal 4 stated that parents are more interested in classroom instruction than school curriculum.

Initiating Changes in Curriculum

At the school level, school principals have no authority to change the state core curriculum or the school district directions (Principal 1 and Principal 4). Changes to the existing curriculum can be initiated by the teachers and the community but need to be proposed to the school district for approval (Principal 7, Principal 9, and Principal 15). Principal 19 recommended the need for research on the proposed changes to see how other school districts are adjusting to the changes if/as they are implemented.

Discussion

School principals in this study were very responsive to the interview questions and generated rich data for the study. The findings of the study were interesting and significant and are worthy of discussion as follows:

First, Principal 19 stated that curriculum development has to achieve the goal of meeting student needs. This special comment reflects the same viewpoints of Beach and Reihartz (2000) and Oliva (2001). Most principals in this study also claimed that an outstanding curriculum has to engage the students and meet their individual needs. Garner and Bradley (1991) stated that school curriculum needs to be evaluated to determine if the goal of meeting student needs is to be attained. Several principals in this study also agreed with Garner and Bradley.

Second, in curriculum organization, Principal 13 recommended “revising the curriculum areas for vertical and horizontal alignments to meet the student needs.” Glatthorn, as early as 1987, asserted that the principal as the curriculum leader could bring the written, the taught, the supported, and the tested curriculums into closer alignment to maximize learning. Weber (2010) also identified the opportunity for improved curriculum alignment as one of the five reasons that schools need curriculum leaders. Principal 13 proposed what Glatthorn and Weber advocated.

Third, as indicated in the findings of this study, principals strongly support their teachers in curriculum implementation. They hold their teachers accountable for their instructional approaches while giving them the leeway to achieve their goals. The three curriculum implementation approaches of “expectation, pressure, and support” by Principal 1 are unique. In the literature, several researchers asserted the collaborative effort between principals and teachers for successful implementation of school curriculum (Gaustad, 1995; George, 2001; Mayfield, 2018; Sowell, 2018; Thessin, 2019), which is in direct connection with Principal 1’s statement. The principals in this study promise to provide feedback to the teachers after

classroom observations are completed. Oliva (2001) also urged principals to serve as mentors to the teachers. School principals support their teachers in searching for external resources for curriculum activities. They encourage their teachers to take advantage of the state appropriations, as well as apply for other state, federal, and private foundation grants.

Fourth, with reference to an outstanding school curriculum, Principal 9 in this study makes a strong point that the two significant elements of an outstanding curriculum are “relevance and rigor”. In addition, many school principals in this study have expressed their far-sightedness in looking beyond test results as indications of curricular success. They even explore the inclusion of student character, behavior, and life attitude development as the outstanding features of a school curriculum.

Fifth, school principals’ enthusiasm to serve as school curriculum leaders in this study is demonstrated in their exerted effort in supporting their faculty in developing, implementing, and evaluating curriculum. They are quite contrary to school principals of limited curriculum involvement in the studies of Naidoo and Petersen (2015), Sasson (2016), and Shaked (2019).

Future Research

Future studies could involve a quantitative approach to include wider geographical areas. Besides, consideration can be made to compare school principals’ perception of their curriculum leadership role at the high school, middle school, and elementary school levels. Furthermore, the relationship of school leadership and community involvement in curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation need to be studied to assist in a wider view of how development and implementation of curriculum affect areas in and outside of the classroom.

Conclusion

The findings in this study have shown that school principals put individual student needs first in developing the school curriculum. They recognize that they need to follow the state core curriculum and the school district directions in curriculum implementation. However, the principals also know that there are windows for continued curriculum improvement through evaluation. Principals in this study have identified their strategies in working in partnership with their teachers for curriculum implementation and development. Through the findings of this study, we have further confirmed the different roles of the principal as a curriculum leader in the school. Ultimately, we also verified what Weber (2010) said about the specific needs of curriculum leadership in school, which include providing the following: (a) clarity within curriculum, (b) opportunities to develop and empower future leaders, (c) opportunities for continuous improvement, (d) opportunities to establish goals, and (e) opportunities for improved alignment.

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The Role of Community in Blended Learning Environments

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the social networks of a cohort of students who participated in a blended learning cohort (BLC) and to explore how the students perceived these networks influenced their academic success. Participants in this study were members of an educational leadership master's cohort enrolled at a regional university. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document review. As indicated in the findings, the presence of peer networks, student-instructor networks, and student-external networks were evident. These networks, however, were most often one-way, transactional relationships. Factors of trust, as defined by competence and in some cases, vulnerability, time, and digital communications influenced the development of these relationships. Further, as indicated in the findings there was very little perceived utility for social interaction outside of class, and there was a sentiment among cohort members interviewed that the relationships built during this BLC were not sustainable beyond graduation. Though formal structures built into the BLC were intended to encourage student community and collaboration, students reported that these tools were limited in their ability to build relationships. Students interviewed credited more informal methods of relationship building for the few relationships that they have built with peer BLC members. Community of Inquiry was used as a lens and applied to describe the educational experience of these students.

Keywords: educational leadership, social networks, online learning, Community of Inquiry

The Role of Community in Blended Learning Environments

The advent of cloud-based applications and the element of convenience and online access to information have created the catalyst for change within higher education. These technological advancements have introduced alternative formats of learning that include both "face-to-face and online approaches and technologies" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 148), often referred to as blended learning environments. These new types of blended learning environments have become widespread in higher education learning institutions, and with the increased adoption, have also encouraged an increase in the number of students enrolling in these types of courses and programs (Kuruçay & Inan, 2017; Winn et al., 2014). Researchers point to the benefits gained through blended learning course models, including the advantages of both traditional teaching methods and technology supported content and assignment delivery (Baker, 2010). However, there is limited research on the social connections among students who engage in these blended learning experiences and the impact these connections may have on their perceived success.

Problem Statement

For graduate students, the search for degree programs designed around blended learning environments seems to be more critical than in previous years. Researchers indicate that prospective students are increasingly seeking programs of study and classes based on a few important factors: (a) delivery of content, (b) convenience, (c) tuition cost, and (d) reputation (Winn et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2010). As a result, many university officials are taking steps to develop and redesign much of their course content and program offerings to meet the demands of these students (Holmes et al., 2014).

However, for some university programs, though the need is there, the choice to adopt these programs has been with great hesitation (Torrissi-Steele & Drew, 2013), and of those courses and programs that are offered, many lack the characteristics of effective teaching that result in student learning and success (Manning-Ouellette & Black, 2017). Researchers indicate there are a number of reasons that online courses do not lead to positive student outcomes, such as the level of technical familiarity and access to the learning environment (Afip, 2014; Erichsen et al., 2013; Torrissi-Steele et al., 2013; Van Laer & Elen, 2017), as well as the lack of student motivation and persistence (Dechacht & Goeman, 2015). The instructor's expertise in blended course instruction (Paechter et al., 2010) can also influence the success of students enrolled.

Researchers indicate that the social network of students may also be one additional reason for the difference in success rates in blended learning environments. Garrison (2017) stressed the necessity for "community identity and collaboration, risk-free learning environment, and projected emotion or expression" (p. 28) as part of group cohesion. He posited these elements in a blended learning environment influence a students' sense of connection, identity, and purpose (Garrison, 2017). Daly (2010) discussed the constructs of social networks in similar educational systems of practice and surmised that these ecosystems can serve as more than channels of communication, but potentially as a means to individual improvement. The connection among members of a learning community has also been shown to increase student engagement and can be a factor in their retention in an online course (Garrison, 2017).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the social networks of a cohort of students who were participating in a blended learning cohort (BLC) within an educational leadership graduate program. Community of Inquiry theory was used as a lens to understand better how these social networks may contribute to student success. The following questions were used to guide the research:

1. What are the underlying social networks of students participating in a blended learning cohort (BLC)?
2. In what ways do these social networks contribute to a Community of Inquiry?

Literature Review

Effective blended learning provides a new way of educating students in a flexible and often more accessible environment as classroom interactions are not bound by location or space like many other learning experiences. The potential of this learning environment is genuinely endless (Garrison, 2017) and is only bound by the constraints of policy, ideas, and users. As a result, blended learning has opened a world of possibilities for higher education (Larsen, 2012). Researchers indicate that 31.6% of students enrolled in higher education are participating in some type of distance education course, which is up by 17.2% from 2012 reports (Seaman et al., 2018). Garrison and Vaughan (2012) theorized that blended learning can transform and innovate teaching and learning in higher education and that the flexible nature of blended learning has the opportunity to make higher education more attainable and achievable. This attainability can be especially true for adult learners that have full-time employment or family commitments (Deschacht et al., 2015). Researchers find that successful innovation in educational leadership programs that emphasizes a strong focus on inquiry and problem-solving based models that include collaboration, mentoring, and social capital may provide future leaders these skills (Crow & Whiteman, 2016; Hernandez et al., 2012).

According to Afip (2014), "Blended learning allows the learners to make choices about their learning on where and when they want to learn, what and how they want to learn and their goals in learning" (p. 5). Dziuban et al. (2013) indicated that some students feel that technology that provides advanced communication and interactions among students and peers provides them with some advantage and ownership in their learning. Enrichsen et al. (2017) found that students find course satisfaction when they perceive there is flexibility, engagement of the instructor, interactive communication, and varied assignments in a course. Baker (2010) found that students who indicated higher satisfaction with their courses indicated having positive relationships with their instructors. The way students interact with others in a learning environment is an essential element. Kurucay et al. (2017) stated that there are three types of interactions in blended learning environments: learner to content, learner to instructor, and learner to learner. These interactions are vital to the success and satisfaction of students in blended learning environments.

Owston et al. (2013) found that high-achieving students were more "satisfied with their blended course and preferred the blended format over fully face-to-face or online" (p. 41) coursework. Researchers (e.g., Erichsen et al., 2013; Owston et al., 2013; Paechter et al., 2010) also identified a correlation between student perceptions in blended learning environments and

their academic success. Student self-regulation, goal setting, and the interaction and expertise of the instructor also play a role in the perceived academic success of students (Owston et al., 2013; Paechter et al., 2010; Rubin et al., 2013). There are many factors that can contribute to a lack of success in blended learning environments (Afip, 2014). For some students and instructors, the lack of proper technical knowledge and access to technology can make blended learning difficult to manage (Afip, 2014; Erichsen et al., 2013; Torrisi-Steele & Drew, 2013; Van Laer & Elen, 2017). Dechacht and Goeman (2015) found that decreased involvement or achievement in blended learning may be due to lack of interest, inadequate goal matching to their future success, and lack of comfortability with technology in blended learning courses.

While many factors contribute to student barriers and disadvantages (Afip, 2014), the resulting dropout rates of students are a primary concern in institutions of higher education. Kurucay and Inan (2016) found that student dropout was influenced by the lack of personal interaction and this sense of isolation plays a major role in academic persistence. Additionally, Owston et al. (2013) found that students often identify external factors for their failure in blended learning. These external issues can be identified as a lack of family support, insufficient time to complete assignments, inadequate instructor support, and unclear assignment expectations (Owston et al., 2013). Rubin et al. (2013) stated that self-regulation is a student's ability to focus on assigned tasks, set academic goals, manage course assignments, and implore good study techniques. Deschacht and Goeman (2015) suggested that some adult learners lack the ability to take ownership of their learning and struggle to find ways to self-regulate.

Blended learning provides an avenue to build social connections through the means of both face-to-face and asynchronous learning by using discussion boards and collaborative activities. This mode of "dialogic pedagogical approach reflects a social constructivist epistemology" (Shea & Bidjerano, 2010, p. 1722), advocated by Vygotsky as a "means for collaborative knowledge construction" (Shea & Bidjerano, 2010, p. 1722). Knowles coined the term "andragogy," which means the "process of teaching and learning for adults" (Afip, 2014, p. 36). In Knowles' (1984) work, he identified five characteristics of adult learners, (a) self-concept, (b) experience, (c) readiness, (d) orientation, and (e) motivation. The activities that adult learners need to engage in must focus on relevance, authenticity, and real-world application. Researchers indicated that older adults have "a strong need for a sense of belonging and personal growth, and thus a heightened interest in learner control, whereas younger adults' motives for learning were more competition-related" (Torrisi-Steele & Drew, 2013, p. 1406), in their learning environment.

The concept of social presence has been defined in different ways in different research studies. Researchers point to "social interaction, immediacy, intimacy, emotion, and/or connectedness" (Lowenthal, 2009, p. 114) in a culture or learning environment when describing social presence. According to Baker (2010), "social presence is described as the feeling that group members communicate with people instead of impersonal objects." (p. 5), and Lee (2014) stated it is when group members project "their personal characteristics, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as real people" (p. 41). Researchers indicated when social presence is high, there is a feeling of cooperation and involvement (Baker, 2010). This connection in learning fosters the climate for social interaction and increases social presence among students (Weidlich, & Bastiaens, 2017). Understanding social presence's potential is very important to the process of building an online learning environment for students (Garrison, 2017;

Sung & Mayer, 2012). Educators have been slow to adopt strategies to research the relationships between individuals in a particular culture (Daly, 2010), known to many fields as Social Network Analysis (SNA). Social network research strives to understand the broader context of culture or environment, both informal and formal relationships in an organization, and to understand how these connections affect the culture or environment being studied (Daly, 2010). Social network analysis provides researchers with a visual representation, known as a sociogram, which provides an understanding as to the relationships and connections among individuals in a culture or environment. Daly (2010) suggested that informal and formal webs of interactions and relationships can determine how culture improvement and advancement is positively or negatively influenced. These participants or actors may have different roles in a network, such as, central actors, peripheral actors and isolated actors. It is through these connections that actors, which are known as nodes, exchange information, and knowledge. One of the primary elements in understanding social networks is understanding social capital. Social capital is built on the understanding that relationships provide a way of accessing, borrowing, and leveraging other resources in an environment (Daly, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The use of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model is a logical lens to apply when researching blended learning environments (Garrison et al., 2000). The CoI is a conceptual model that focuses on the integration of and engagements between the different individuals in a blended learning environment (Garrison, 2017). This model serves to provide focus on three important elements of this learning environment: the instructor, the student, and the learning. Garrison et al. (2000) theorized that this model represented the essential elements that provided students with an optimal educational experience.

The foundational element of this framework is built upon the "collaborative constructivist" (Garrison, 2017, p. 9) approach to teaching and learning. In this framework, construction of knowledge, social interaction, and teaching engagement are all honored as interacting ideas and concepts in a learning experience. This framework expands on the concepts of personal and interactive learning by recognizing that learning is a social experience interdependent on a "sense of purpose and belonging" (Garrison, 2017, p. 10) in a community. Therefore, the CoI framework emphasizes the "collaborative approach to thinking and learning" (Garrison, 2017, p. 11). The tenants of this framework include social presence, cognitive presence, and teacher presence, which all work congruently to provide a quality educational experience.

Social presence, as described by Garrison (2017), is the "ability of participants to identify with a group, communicate openly in a trusting environment, and develop personal and affective relationships" (p. 25) by projecting a sense of being real or human. Social presence is essential in creating strong networks of learners in an online learning environment. While the term 'social' may be misconstrued as recreational or entertaining activities, Garrison (2017) asserted that the more effective means of building social presence are to intentionally develop opportunities for students to interact with academic content in a collaborative manner during the lesson or course. In time, the interaction around content will build trust and a sense of shared purpose among group members leading to stronger interpersonal relationships.

Cognitive presence, which is derived from both Dewey's and Vygotsky's research on the construction of knowledge and inquiry, speaks to the "purpose, process, and product" (Garrison, 2017, p. 26) of a student's learning. This tenant focuses on the construction of knowledge that occurs through discourse and critical reflection and, moreover, represents the ability of students to "create meaning out of ideas and facts through the means of discussion, reflection, and application" (Rubin et al., 2013, p. 49). Cognitive presence is focused on encouraging inquiry of learners. "Inquiry is a self-correcting process where members of a community challenge beliefs, suggest alternative perspectives for exploration, and negotiate to understand content" (Garrison, 2017, p. 51).

Teaching presence can be described in many ways, but simply stated is "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes" (Garrison, 2017, p. 71). Teaching presence is found in the design of a course and emphasizes the facilitation of discourse between learners in which structures intentionally shape constructive conversations between students (Garrison, 2017). Teacher presence should not be confused with the action of teaching in a blended learning environment, but more as how an instructor serves as a guide and facilitator of both cognitive and social interactions with the purpose of meaning educational outcomes. The idea behind this tenant is to focus on the instructor as the facilitator of learning and his/her shared role in the community of inquiry.

Context for the Study

The selected case for this qualitative case study is situated at one regional college located in a midwestern state, called by the pseudonym, Middle University (MU). MU has an entire department focused on the online development of courses and support of instructors and students' success in these online and hybrid options. Faculty wishing to design or redesign a course, or a program of study, will do this in collaboration with MU's eLearning department. The students at MU have the opportunity to attend the classes in an online or blended learning environment. In order for this model to be successful, students access what is known as a learning management system (LMS). The LMS utilized by MU is a nationally known product that is designed to allow instructors to add content for student learning and engagement. The LMS is simply a "shell," empty until the instructor adds the content that they desire for their specific course. The educational leadership graduate program from MU was selected based on its long history of providing quality programming. Over the past several years, MU has implemented a cohort model for their program, allowing students to start and end their program with the same group of students. At the time of this research study, MU's educational leadership (EL) program was hosting three traditional cohort programs, each containing approximately 30 students from their three respective districts. During the course of this study, MU EL faculty also implemented a blended learning cohort option.

Methods

This newly established Blended Learning Cohort (BLC) was the focus of this study. The BLC included 15 students, all of whom started their graduate program together and enrolled in all the same courses during each semester. Out of the 15 students in the BLC cohort, 10 students

opted into the study. These 10 BLC members completed a preliminary survey, and five BLC members agreed to be interviewed.

Table 1

Aliases for Interviewed Participants

Name	Identified Gender	Age Range	Years Since Completion of Undergrad Program
Jessica	Female	30-39	11-15 years
Kim	Female	40-49	16-20 years
Kristen	Female	30-39	6-10 years
Cindy	Female	30-39	11-15 years
Chris	Male	20-29	3-5 years

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through survey, interviews, observations, and document review. All students in the BLC were provided a survey to identify relationships related to their success in the blended learning cohort. Semi-structured research interviews of approximately 60 minutes each were conducted with each of the five interview participants. Classroom environment observations were conducted in one course in which the research participants were enrolled. Observational protocols for the observation included a description of the setting, participants, activities and interactions, the time (both frequency and duration) and any other subtle factors related to the topic of this study. In addition to the interviews and observations, documents relevant to the scope of the study were collected from the study participants. Documents included student work, participant communications, images, course documents, syllabi, and evidence of interactions. The documents provided context for the study environment and contributed to the meaning making process of the study (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an iterative process that involved coding the data as it was collected, as well as a round of intensive coding after all data was collected. All data was first read for familiarity and organized for ease of analysis. The cycles of coding used in this study were based on Merriam's (2001) process for analyzing qualitative case studies and Saldaña's (2015) coding methods. Open coding was used in the first cycle, and axial coding was used as a second round. Codes were mapped, and the constant comparative method was used to categorize codes and identify emergent themes. The CoI framework was applied after initial data analysis with a focus on the three constructs of CoI: social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence.

Findings

The iterative qualitative analysis process used in this study led to the major themes presented in the following pages. Themes are organized by research question.

Underlying Social Networks

Using data from this study, we revealed the presence of peer networks, student-instructor networks, and student external networks. In each of these networks, there were major factors that facilitated or inhibited connection. Additionally, each network was perceived as playing a different role in the blended learning experience and success of the students enrolled in the BLC.

Peer Networks

Through interviews and observations, limited relationships between peer cohort members and social connections in real-life events were evident. Students interviewed reported that some of the BLC members were connected through social media and group text. Additionally, small groups of BLC members met infrequently and informally for coffee or to discuss classroom assignments. Most often, students interviewed referred to “relationships” through the lens of assistance with coursework. Students reported that they preferred to build relationships with other students who mirrored their own work ethic or demonstrated high performance in the class. These relationships, built on perceived competence, had the expressed goal of benefitting future assignments. Though all students interviewed did report that they did not feel strong personal connection with other cohort members outside of the BLC, their actions during one of the courses did demonstrate that they had, at minimum, respect and caring for one another. For example, when a cohort member was expecting a baby and the other cohort members heard that she was in need of baby items, the cohort members used the digital connections they had built (e.g., email, group text, and social media) to organize a baby shower to be held after a face-to-face class.

While students interviewed for this study reported peer connections, these same students did not report these connections as significant to the overall success in the degree program or their future professions. In fact, the majority of students interviewed considered success in the BLC a personal responsibility. Though students admitted to having one or more cohort members to text or turn to for course advice, they did not explicitly express utility of these networks beyond basic help with course assignments. These responses indicate that the relationships built with cohort-members within the BLC are time-bound; they may expire at the end of the degree program. Even the two students who were observed as more central to the peer connections in the BLC did not see their value in the group beyond the performance of the course. Though these two students appeared to play important roles in their BLC—setting up group text messaging, sending Facebook invitations, and planning baby showers—they did not refer to the development of these social connections as being important to the larger degree program. Overall, most peer relationships described by students interviewed for this study could be best described as transactional, meaning relationships used to transact information or knowledge.

Student Instructor Networks

As indicated in data from this study, there were few connections between BLC cohort members and the course instructors. Through interviews, students identified their instructors as someone they sought for assistance with basic course information such as clarification on assignments, schedules, or content. However, when referring to these student-instructor

relationships, students again described the relationships as transactional and based on one-way sharing of communication. Students also tended to speak of instructors in isolation—connecting the instructor with the specific course taught. Students did perceive or at least did not share information about instructors serving as continuous opportunities for support or resources. Interestingly, students also did not refer to the student-instructor relationships as critical to course success. In terms of success, students perceived that the instructor's competence and technological skills determined if the course was going to be "good or bad." Similar to peer relationships, no student interviewed shared the benefit of student-instructor networks outside of the course or in a future profession.

The study participants revealed one course instructor did make attempts at creating a welcoming atmosphere for the BLC. This instructor supplied the BLC with coffee and snacks during face-to-face class meetings and tried to engage students through various small-group learning activities instead of the traditional lecture. However, the students interviewed for this study did not perceive these actions as relationship building. Additionally, the students indicated these actions were more unintentional and, therefore, inadequate to meet the needs of the students in facilitating continued collaboration.

Student External Networks

All five students interviewed for this study did indicate one type of network that did seem to play an important role in student success: student external networks. These student external networks included relationships with spouses, families, children, and even a previous professor. Though these external relationships were not the focus of this study, students, particularly the female students, stressed the importance of these external relationships in their overall success.

The four women interviewed for the study all admitted that they had initial conversations about enrolling in graduate school with their spouses and/or families. They shared that they would not be able to be successful in the program without spousal and/or familial support. Two of the women directly stated that without the support of their husbands, they could not continue in the program. Interestingly, the male student in the study was also the only student in the study not to identify any peer relationships with fellow students in the BLC. This student stated that he did not need relationships with his cohort members to be successful. However, this same male student did identify one important relationship, an external relationship with a previous professor. Because of his previous relationship with this professor, the student still sought out this professor for questions about courses and general advice about the graduate program.

Factors that Influence Social Networks

Through data analysis, we revealed a number of factors that influenced the development of the underlying social networks. These factors included trust, time, digital networks, and perceived utility of online structures.

Trust

Trust is a major theme that emerged from the data analysis. Specifically, in this study, students interviewed placed importance on “competence” and “vulnerability” as the most important factors of trust and two of the major contributors to building relationships with peers. From the observations and interviews, it was apparent that students had high expectations for themselves and others within the BLC. Because students stressed personal competence so highly, it appeared that students' decisions to make connections and built networks were predicated on the perceived competence of others. For instance, Kim and Kristen directly stated that they fostered relationships with other BLC members in the class based on the perceived work ethic and values. Kristen even stated that she carefully chooses with whom to work and contact for course assignments and selected only those that closely resembled herself in “professional habits and traits.” In addition to competence, students interviewed often referred to “vulnerability” as both a facilitator and an inhibitor of building relationships with BLC members. Though Kristen did not explicitly use the word vulnerability, she did imply that she was open to vulnerability, not only in coursework, but in building relationships. She was the only student interviewed to comment on the cohort structure as a benefit of the BLC stating that she had an “opportunity to build relationships” in the smaller class size. She is also the only student to admit that she had not fully leveraged the possible connections with the group, but saw the benefit in doing so.

These concepts of competence and vulnerability were also evident in the student instructor networks. When speaking of negative experiences in the BLC, students often referred to the instructor's lack of technology skills, outdated coursework, or repetitive assignments. The students seemed to trust instructors and rate the course more highly if they sensed a high amount of competence from that instructor. According to the students in this study, vulnerability with the instructor was also a challenge. Showing vulnerability, according to these students, showed a lack of ability. If students did need to be vulnerable, Jessica reported, students often went to a small group of peers first. She explained that students in the BLC did not go directly to the instructor because you must, “admit that you don't know everything.”

Time

The theme of time manifested in multiple ways in this study. Interview participants not only indicated time was a major factor in selecting to become a member of the BLC at MU, they also expressed that time was a major factor in their ability to retain current relationships with external networks and to develop peer networks with other BLC members.

All five students interviewed for this study mentioned the convenience and flexibility of the BLC at MU as one of the major contributing factors to their decision to enroll. For example, Jessica mentioned that the cohort schedule fit into her personal calendar, and Kim highlighted the time savings of online courses due to not having to drive to campus, park, and be in the classroom for a designated amount of time. Because these students stressed the value of time, students reported they did not appreciate assignments that they believed were a waste of time. Specifically, students interviewed expressed an aversion to group work assigned outside the formal classroom which most often involved scheduling meetings outside of class time on evenings and weekends. Students also expressed that the few face-to-face classes built into the

program were often collaborative, but the assignments were sometimes ill-prepared or designed for low-level thinking. Students interviewed believed there were other ways they could be spending their time during these sessions.

Although the interview questions for this study focused on relationships between BLC members, many of the interview participants referred to time in relation to other their external networks, such as marital relationships or parent/child relationships. Students interviewed reported being overwhelmed with responsibility. For instance, both Jessica and Kristen explicitly mentioned sacrifices they or their spouses had to make pertaining to time for them to participate in the BLC. Kristen even referred to her graduate program as a “season” that she had less time for her children and family, but that it would pass soon.

In terms of peer networks, time also played a role in the facilitation of relationships between BLC members. Students interviewed reported that most peer relationships were built around coursework because of the time it took to cultivate relationships as a graduate student. Kristen called her schedule “hectic” and admitted that time was a barrier in reaching out to her peers. Students also indicated that built-in coursework that should have provided time for BLC members to interact were not effective. Interview participants stated that projects and group work conducted outside of class lacked the flexibility they were seeking in the BLC. Instead of community building, assignments such as these set up students to view their peers' schedules as barriers that proved to be challenging in managing their own. Time, these interview respondents said, was a factor in this lack of connection.

Digital Connection

The students in this study admitted few peer relationships with other members of the BLC. This study showed trust and time to be two factors that inhibited relationships from developing despite students being enrolled as cohort members in the same classes throughout the program. However, also indicated in the data from this study, students connected with one another more often than they perceived or reported. These connections, however, were digital or virtual connections, and it was apparent from the data that students did not always consider these digital or virtual connections as relationships. Throughout the course of the study, students interviewed reported limited connection with peers. In the course of the interviews, though, students mentioned a group text for BLC cohort members where students asked questions about coursework, sought clarification, and sometimes shared frustrations about the courses and graduate programs. These texts were sent often and a majority of BLC members participated. Additionally, students in the study reported that they did not have personal relationships with other BLC members; that relationships were based on coursework. However, these same students reported social media connections (such as being Facebook friends) in which they portrayed themselves as people in their daily lives as opposed to as professionals or cohort members. As was clear during data collection and analysis that students in the BLC connected outside of class on multiple occasions and in both professional and personal ways. The students, however, did not define these digital or virtual connections as relationships and did not perceive them as important or integral to their connections as BLC members.

Underlying Networks and Community of Inquiry

CoI proved to be an appropriate theoretical lens for this study. Analysis through the elements of social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence provided additional language for the findings and structure for deeper analysis.

The authors of CoI posited that the three elements of social presence, cognitive presence, and teacher presence are equally important in an online learning environment (Garrison, 2017). At the intersection of these three elements, is the educational experience. Effective educational experiences in online learning, then, rely on all three elements being effective.

Social Presence

According to the authors of CoI, social presence is defined as the ability of learners to participate in an online learning experience as a real person. This experience means that as the students interact around the content of the course, they also project their personalities into the interactions (Garrison, 2017). Social presence also refers to levels of communication and group cohesion (Garrison, 2017). Ultimately, researchers show that learning experiences with increased social presence result in increased student satisfaction and retention (Garrison & Akyol, 2013).

In this study, there was minimal intentional social presence. Though MU did create a cohort structure to support students better as they progress through graduate work, only one of the students interviewed referred to the cohort structure as a benefit of the BLC. Students interviewed also did not display a high amount of group cohesion. Sparse, mostly transactional connections between students in the BLC through peer networks was evident in the data. Further, although there were structures in place in the learning experience designed to facilitate the growth of social presence, the perception of the students was that these structures were a waste of time or were not facilitated in a manner to encourage collaboration.

Cognitive Presence

Cognitive presence refers to the ability of students to engage in inquiry and critical discourse within and outside of the learning experience (Garrison, 2017). For cognitive presence to be fostered, there is a need for a facilitator to shape the opportunity for discourse and encourage learners to work together (Garrison, 2017). While cognitive presence may be established in an online course, there is often a need for students to collaborate in other spaces such as face-to-face environments (Garrison, 2017).

In this study, there was minimal evidence of facilitated cognitive presence. Students referred to online coursework as repetitive, following a similar structure from course to course. While students did report the use of discussion boards, students referred to these discussion boards as checklists or wastes of time. One student interviewed even stated that absent course requirements, students would not read discussion board responses. While discussion boards are web-based tools that can facilitate cognitive presence, there was no evidence in this study that course instructors took an active role in the discussion boards to encourage collaboration or explain to the students the purpose or relevance. In the face-to-face environments, the instructor

observed for this study did attempt to create a space for collaboration by setting the room up in tables, transitioning the students to groups, and assigning group work. However, the assignment observed was a recall assignment at the lowest level of Bloom's taxonomy. While Group One expanded the assignment to connect the recalled information to real-world application, this was an individual group decision, and the other groups in the course did not participate in the higher-order thinking activity.

Teaching Presence

Garrison (2017) referred to teaching presence as what the teacher does to create an effective and meaningful educational experience. Teaching experience includes course design, setting the climate and culture for the course, and selecting content (Garrison, 2017). Teaching presence also refers to the intentional action taken by the instructor to facilitate both social and cognitive presence in the learning environment (Garrison, 2017).

There is some evidence that the instructors of the BLC at MU are intentionally creating experiences for students to both interact as people (social presence) and grow as learners (cognitive presence). For instance, during the class observed, the instructor provided time for students to enjoy coffee and donuts while interacting socially before class. As mentioned previously, this instructor also designed a face-to-face class with group activities to facilitate collaboration among BLC members. This same instructor also allowed BLC members to host a baby shower for a student and even provided time at the break to decorate. Additionally, students interviewed reported that the instructors for the BLC used online discussion boards and group work to encourage students to discuss content and collaborative solve problems.

However, student perceptions of these strategies did not match teacher intention. As mentioned earlier in this section, students interviewed did not report that discussion boards or group work outside of class were effective collaboration strategies for them. There is also little evidence from the data in this study that instructors consistently take an active role in encouraging collaboration. No students reported instructors moderating discussion boards or monitoring group work. Students also reported that interaction with the instructor was usually via email and focused on basic course information. No student interviewed shared an experience of substantial interaction with an instructor or staff member of MU.

Central to CoI are also several pedagogical approaches that are necessary to develop a community of inquiry and meaningful educational experiences. These approaches include open communication and trust, sustain respect, and established community (Garrison, 2017). Through the themes of this study, we indicated that there have been little intentional attempts to build trust, respect, or community beyond the normal expectations of a graduate cohort. In absence of these approaches, there appeared to be a lack of trust and cohesion within the BLC that would allow social networks to develop and be sustained over time. Students in this study indicated that time is a major factor in their decision-making processes, and without intentional, appropriate structures built into the BLC and continuously fostered by instructors, it is unlikely that students will have the ability to develop social networks on their own. Without these social networks to support the social and cognitive presences, according to CoI, it is also unlikely that a community of inquiry or effective, meaningful learning experience will be established within the BLC.

Discussion

Researchers showed that learning is a social experience. Research on learning and social networks has been conducted in traditional classroom environments in which students and teachers are face to face the majority or entirety of the learning time. With the growth of online learning, however, traditional face-to-face methods of relationship building are not always effective. Additionally, online relationships often manifest differently than in-person relationships. If learning is social, but traditional methods will not always work, what then are online instructors to do to ensure an effective learning experience for virtual learners? Garrison (2017) proposed developing a CoI in which social presence, cognitive presence, and teacher presence intersect to create an effective educational experience. As part of this intersection, it is the responsibility of the instructor to set the climate, support discourse, and select content (Garrison, 2017).

Through the findings of this study, we indicated that there were few social connections between students in this blended cohort. Of those relationships that do exist, they were often one-way and transactional. These relationships were often built on trust as defined by competence and, in some cases, vulnerability. Because relationships were built on the perception that the other person can be of assistance in coursework, there was very minimal utility for social interaction outside of class, and there was a sentiment among cohort members interviewed that the relationships built during this BLC were not sustainable beyond graduation. Though formal structures built into the BLC were intended to encourage student community and collaboration, students report that these tools were limited in their ability to build relationships. Students interviewed credited more informal methods of relationship building for the few relationships that they have built with peer BLC members.

Through data analysis, we indicated that there was minimal to no intentional work in the areas of social presence, cognitive presence, or teaching presence. While MU has developed a cohort model to encourage relationship building, there does not appear to be any support from MU in fostering a cohort climate for the students. In each course, curricula appear to be developed in a prescribed pattern, a pattern recognized by the students as repetitive. While instructors are using discussion boards and group projects, teacher facilitation throughout the assignment appears to be lacking, resulting in student anxiety and, oftentimes, students assigning roles as a checklist instead of collaborating. Because social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence were not evident in this study, it may explain why students did not feel the need to build relationships or see the importance of networks beyond their coursework.

Implications

This study used the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2000) to explore the social networks between students in a blending learning environment. The lens of social, teaching, and cognitive presence was used to analyze the data collected. Though this framework has been used to analyze online learning environments previously, this study adds to the literature on this theory because it combines social network analysis and the CoI framework to attempt to understand better not only the connections between students but how those connections play a role in student

perceived success. The two appeared to work complimentarily in this study, but more research pairing the two is warranted.

The findings of this study shed light on the importance of the instructor in an online and hybrid course. The instructor in an online course is more than a moderator. The responsibility to design relevant, real-world, authentic experiences in which students can “wrestle” with the content and concepts and use the power of their community to help make collective decisions is vital to a healthy learning network. Course design for an online learning environment for educational leadership, then, should take into consideration what students need to build trust and build ongoing communities meaningful to adult learners. Additionally, K-12 environments should consider how this same type of course design and structure for building CoI can benefit professional development programs in schools.

As indicated in the findings of this study, there is a need for intentional course design that fosters a CoI. Through existing research, Knowles (1984) indicated that adults learn and work best in social networks and have higher satisfaction when their social needs are met. This research points to the importance of course design and instructor interaction (Teaching Presence), as it relates to both identity of self (Social Presence) and deeper learning experiences (Cognitive Presence). These types of socially connected environments do not naturally develop unless the students seek to foster these connections out of personal need. As such, it is not merely enough to develop a cohort model of learners. The *build it and they will come* approach is not supported by this study. Instead, university officials relying on a cohort model for graduate-level coursework should be mindful that the coordinator or instructor role may include fostering the development of professional relationships and assisting the students in seeing the value of these relationships both in coursework and in the larger professional world. Considering many of the students in this study did not see the connection of these collaborative relationships, learning, and future success, it is important for programs to leverage research of shared leadership to help design courses that meet the needs of this unique group of students.

Summary

This study represents the social network of graduate students enrolled in an educational leadership program with experience participating in blended learning environments. Through the results of this case study, we shed light on social networks of students, their perceptions of the learning environment, their connections with peers, and how they attribute this peer network to their course success.

This study is significant because the role of the instructor as an agent in the process of building a community of practice was a vital finding. This engagement goes beyond the creation of course materials and suggests that the intentional design focus on real-world application for students preparing for their future jobs is essential. These assignments and activities should be designed in a way that aids in building a community of inquiry among peers. The ongoing presence of the instructor in this engagement and experience appears necessary to help the learning community see connections between the groups, build on community strengths, and help students think more in-depth about the curriculum and the needed connections.

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Increasing Math Achievement Using Story: The School Leaders’ Call to Action

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Abstract

The importance of exemplary mathematics education is paramount, as student achievement in mathematics in some geographic locations has decreased while standardized testing accountability has increased. Ensuring teacher incorporation of beneficial instructional strategies should be a focus of school leaders who are supporting students in pursuit of a high school diploma. One such instructional strategy, story, is a way of learning based on formulaic prescription that assists students in making deep connection with the mathematical content through memory, engagement, and excitement, which ultimately supports increased achievement on standardized assessments. This explanatory-sequential, mixed-methods study explores school leader knowledge of story, its perceived value, barriers to implementation, and methods to increase implementation. Although participants had little knowledge of story, they recognized that use of story would be advantageous to student growth, as it would allow a deeper connection to and learning of the mathematical concept, and it would assist both teachers and students in making valuable cross-curricular connections. Despite barriers such as resistance, teacher rigidity, feelings of discomfort and fear, and creative alignment to state standards, participants said these could be overcome if the strategy was modeled and if prepared resources were readily available to participants.

Keywords: story, mathematics, instructional strategy, school leaders

Increasing Math Achievement Using Story: The School Leaders' Call to Action

Student achievement in math has declined, especially in economically disadvantaged areas with minority student populations since the “Great Recession” of 2007 (Shores & Steinberg, 2019). The relevance of mathematics is not clearly being relayed to students through current instructional methods, as evidenced through their lacking outcomes on the Florida Standardized Assessment (FSA) End-of-Course (EOC) examination (Ferguson, 2010). In Florida, high school students are unable to graduate without passing required standardized assessments, including the Algebra 1 FSA EOC (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2020). Without a high school diploma, students are unable to seek a degree or certificate and would only be eligible to earn their general education diploma (GED). The importance of earning the high school diploma is paramount, as it is statistically proven that students without a high school diploma earn significantly less than their counterparts with a high school diploma (Jones, 2018).

Furthermore, the mounting pressure of increasing proficiency on standardized assessments weighs heavily on school leaders, who are instrumental in influencing teacher practice, which ultimately and directly impacts student achievement (Brown & Militello, 2016). Moreover, student achievement is likely to increase in educational environments for which principals serve as instructional leaders (Goldring et al., 2018). Through the role of instructional leader, a school principal is responsible for establishing a culture among teachers that cultivates and encourages effective and innovative instructional practices that benefit student achievement (Hoy & Hoy, 2009).

One such innovative instructional practice is called *story*, which is a process; a way of thinking, internalizing, and learning that is based on a formulaic prescription. The formula for an effective story includes five essential elements, which is also a metaphor for a mathematical formula (Junkin, 2019). Incorporating story constructs into instruction can engage and help students make connections with mathematical concepts (Haven, 2007, 2014). The characters within the story are used to pose mathematical problems to engage students' imagination and create excitement (Casey, 2004; Skoumpourdi & Mpakopoulou, 2011). When mathematics is introduced in story format, the mathematical concepts are explained in a memorable fashion, and students are able to identify the mathematical operations in their memory (Sternberg, 2013).

However, there is limited research on why story is not widely implemented as an instructional strategy for teaching mathematical concepts in secondary education. Whether leaders of secondary mathematics teachers are aware of story as a pedagogical strategy is unclear or if teachers are simply encountering too many barriers with its implementation. Nonetheless, story enhances critical thinking and problem-solving skills while also expanding pedagogical repertoire. The use of story increases student awareness of the relationships between visual, auditory, and verbal representations, while critical thinking and problem-solving in mathematics (Walters et al., 2014). Story presents challenges for students to think and apply mathematical content in different situations that are not apparent, while providing a meaningful context for connecting mathematics and literature. Story also supports the conceptual understanding of mathematical problems, structures, and problem-solving skills, and increases mathematical

literacy for the interpretation of mathematics in various contexts (Albano & Pierri, 2014; Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002; Starcic et al., 2016; Wilburne & Napoli, 2008).

Literature Review

At a young age, the concept of story becomes familiar from movies and books, as well as life events that children conceptualize as stories. Five essential elements for an effective story include: (a) time and place, (b) cause and effect, (c) a central character who makes or passes judgement, (d) a predictable schema, and (e) a means to communicate the story credibly (Branigan, 1992; Gunter et al., 2018; Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978). Stories trigger memories and index labels in the mind of the listener (Schank, 1990). They are powerful tools to communicate information in a memorable form and shape the listener's feelings about the information being communicated, while also creating vivid and powerful image in the listener's mind (Egan, 1989; Haven, 2007; Skoumpourdi & Mpakopoulou, 2011).

In the classroom, students become emotionally invested in stories. Stories incorporate imagination and visualization. Tater (1992) found through the fantasy of stories, students learn and understand complex concepts they would normally struggle to grasp through logical, factual, or argumentative presentations, which is how most mathematical concepts are presented. Although, the integration of story into lessons can be an effective instructional strategy regardless of academic discipline (Haven, 2007). Frostick (2011) noted the effectiveness of story as means for students to grasp a deeper conceptual understanding. In addition, story can make the content relevant to students, assist with suspension of disbelief, engage and motivate them, and evoke prior knowledge (Dracup, 2012). Yet, it is not widely present in the literature as used in the classroom and especially not in secondary-level mathematics courses.

Trends in current mathematics instruction include traditional lecture style teaching (Balakrishnan, 2008). However, mathematics instruction should allow students to apply a variety of strategies for solving problems, while also allowing them to monitor and reflect on problem-solving methods. Students must reflect upon their mathematical steps, and the communication skills present through the story technique assist with the process. Students who have opportunities; encouragement; and support for speaking, writing, reading, and listening in mathematics classes reap benefits: they communicate to learn mathematics, and they learn to communicate mathematically (Ediger, 2013; National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000; Walters et al., 2014). In most cases, students only practice and use mathematics in a classroom setting and are often unaware of the purpose, meaning, and application of the mathematical concepts. Story links the mathematical concepts to the real-world, making mathematics relevant to students.

When using story to solve mathematical problems, story provides a semantic structure for the principles that are to be practiced in solving the problem (Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002; Starcic et al., 2016). If used enthusiastically and appropriately with the five elements of an effective story, this instructional method can assist mathematics educators in meeting the pressing educational need for learning and teaching mathematics in a way that allows students to process information critically, creatively, logically, and daily. Such a high level of mathematics comprehension will also provide students the necessary competence to perform on standardized

assessments (Walters et al., 2014). Hence the incorporation of story as an instructional strategy is essential to improving student mathematics achievement in Florida.

Methodology

This research study is an explanatory-sequential, mixed-method design in which the quantitative survey data were evaluated, and then follow-up interview questions were developed based on an analysis of the survey responses (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Creswell, 2012; Ivankova et al., 2006; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Watkins & Gioia, 2015). The data analyzed from the survey were used by the lead researcher to understand and put the answers of the interview into a holistic context. The results provide a general picture of the overall context of the entire set of research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The following research questions assisted in concluding the purpose of the study:

1. What degree of knowledge do leaders of mathematics teachers have about story?
2. To what extent do these same leaders perceive the value of story as an effective instructional strategy?
3. What barriers do these leaders describe as preventing them from adopting story as an instructional strategy?
4. What potential strategies do these leaders think could be useful in encouraging the use of story?

Sample Population

The diverse high school located in the Southern Florida region had 1,886 students. The racial demographics of the student population was 58.8% Hispanic, 20.0% African American, 15.3% White/Caucasian, 4.7% Multicultural, 1.1% Asian, and 0.1% Indian. Because a single high school was used, the number of school leaders responding to the survey was limited. This high school was chosen for its diverse population and struggling mathematics standardized test scores.

Algebra 1 is a required high school mathematics course for which students must pass the FSA EOC to receive a diploma. The Algebra 1 FSA EOC is a high-stakes standardized assessment. In Florida, FSA EOC results for mathematics are categorized within one of five levels, with Level 3 being satisfactory. At level 4, students are deemed proficient, while Level 5 is considered mastery. The Algebra 1 FSA EOC results for the school studied were 30% of student scored a Level 3, 3% obtained a Level 4, and 0% reached a Level 5 (FLDOE, 2020). Approximately 67% of the students scored below proficiency, which indicates that they did not pass the Algebra 1 FSA EOC, and they are ineligible to graduate with a high school diploma if their proficiency level does not increase to Level 3 on a future testing attempt.

Three leaders volunteered for the study, who each taught one section of Algebra 1 while also fulfilling leadership responsibilities due to the lack of teachers in the building. Leader demographics were as follows: two males and one female, ranging between 30-40 years old, of White/Caucasian ethnicity, each with a master's degree, and all with over 10 years of experience in education.

Quantitative Data

To collect quantitative data, a survey was sent to participants via email using Google Forms. The survey was derived from the Technology Acceptance Model 1 (TAM) (Davis, 1989). The TAM was chosen so the lead researcher could determine the perceptions and knowledge of story in a similar fashion to how it was originally utilized to capture potential objections and barriers of individuals adopting the technology. The assumption was that many of these ideas were similar in nature to what would be found when asking participants about their knowledge and experience with story.

Through the survey, participants were asked their knowledge of story and how useful they thought that story was to their teaching of mathematics. Quantitative analyses were conducted after the surveys were returned so the results from the survey could be analyzed and interpreted. Both item level and sub score level analysis were conducted for the Likert items, and frequency distributions were examined for the demographic section. For sections three through seven, each was scored with continuous scales. Each section had the same scoring scales, (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree* (Creswell, 2015). The data were analyzed for each section separately. The responses from the survey revealed and assisted the lead researcher in understanding the leaders' knowledge of story and how they perceived the usefulness of story as an instructional strategy. (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.)

Qualitative Data

Once the quantitative analysis was complete, the qualitative data were gathered. The leaders were interviewed to describe the barriers and strategies to encourage the use of story as an instructional strategy (Creswell, 2013; Husserl, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). This approach was chosen because it is centered on the sole concept of the lack of knowledge of story. Before the interview, the participants who lacked knowledge of story watched a short self-narrated PowerPoint about story and how to use it as an instructional strategy in secondary mathematics. The interviews consisted of the lead researcher asking open-ended questions, which produced candid information from participants (Allen, 2017). Themes from the interviews emerged and were analyzed separately. (See Appendix B for interview questions.)

Data Analysis and Validation

Before the interviews were conducted, an expert panel was used to analyze the interview questions. The expert panel consisted of Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) education doctoral students in cohort four. Cohort four consisted of 12 students. This panel was chosen as they each had expertise in implementing instructional strategies. The panel was given the opportunity to explain or express any concerns with the instruments.

While the interviews were being conducted, field notes were taken to confirm the accuracy and credibility of the result. In a mixed-methods design field notes are utilized to complete the triangulation needed to check for accuracy (Keeves, 1988). Field notes are those notes and comments collected by the researcher while in the field conducting interviews and are intended to be read by the researcher as evidence to produce meaning and an understanding of

what is being studied (Schwandt, 2015). These notes are descriptive and reflective information that includes actions, behaviors, and conversations that are observed while reflective information is the researcher's thoughts, ideas, questions, and concerns in the field. In this study, the field notes were collected as prescribed and validated in the research (Emerson et al., 2011).

Findings and Discussion

Through an analysis of the data, participant perspectives of story differed before learning about it and after. This section includes disaggregated data and a discussion of the relevant themes that emerged through interviews after participants learned about story.

Perspectives Before Learning about Story

The perspectives before learning about story include survey data collected by participants prior to their learning about story and how to use it. Section one of the survey captured the participants' demographical information. Section two included participant knowledge of story. Table 1 includes participant use of story as an instructional strategy. All participants responded they have never used story as an instructional strategy.

Table 1

Participant Responses: Have you ever used story as an instructional strategy?

	Answer	<i>n</i>	%
Valid	Yes	0	0.0
	No	3	100.0
	Total	3	100.0

The remainder of the section of the survey examined the recent usage of story, making that information invaluable since none of the participants had used story as an instructional strategy.

The next sections of the survey required participants to select from five different categories related to their perceptions of the usefulness of story. The survey included four sections: Perceived Ease of Use (PEU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), Attitude Toward Usage (ATU), and Behavioral Intention to Use (BIU). Each section consisted of six statements using a Likert scale of 1-7; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *moderately disagree*, 3 = *slightly disagree*, 4 = *neutral*, 5 = *slightly agree*, 6 = *moderately agree*, and 7 = *strongly agree*. These sections were adapted from the TAM (Davis, 1989).

Table 2 displays the participants' responses to section three, the Perceived Ease of Use (PEU). All participants agreed that the implementation of story would be clear and understandable. They all also agreed that story would be easy for students to understand and use.

Table 2
Participant Responses: Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)

Survey Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
I feel that using Story would be easy for me	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3
I feel that my implementation of Story would be clear and understandable	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
I feel that it would be easy to become skillful at using Story	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
I would find Story would be easy for students to understand and use	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3
It would be easy to use Story to teach	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
I feel that my ability to determine Story ease of use is limited by my lack of experience	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2

Section four of the survey examined the Perceived Usefulness (PU) of story. The results of this section can be found in Table 3. The participants disagreed that story would enable teaching standards quicker. However, all participants agreed that story would improve standardized testing results and be useful for teaching standards.

Table 3
Participant Responses: Perceived Usefulness (PU)

Survey Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Using Story would improve my standardized testing results	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
Using Story would enable me to teach the standards more quickly	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
Using Story would enhance student mastery of the standards	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3
Using Story would make it easier to teach the standards	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
I would find Story useful to teach standards	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	3
I feel that my ability to determine the usefulness of Story is limited by my lack of experience	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2

The results for section five Attitude Toward Usage (ATU) of story is displayed in Table 4. All participants agreed that implementing story was a positive idea and could improve student achievement.

Table 4
Participant Responses: Attitude Toward Usage (ATU)

Survey Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
I believe it is a good idea to implement Story	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
I like the idea of implementing Story	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3
Implementing Story is a positive idea	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
I believe implementing Story is a good idea to improve student's achievement	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3
I believe implementing Story is a good idea to improve mathematical achievement	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	3
I feel that my ability to determine my attitude toward implementing Story is limited by my lack of experience	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2

Section six of the survey measured participants' Behavioral Intention to Use (BIU) story. The responses are displayed in Table 5. The participants agreed they did not plan to implement; however, in previous sections, they stated it would improve student achievement, and it is was a positive idea to implement.

Table 5
Participant Responses: Behavioral Intention to Use (BIU)

Survey Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
I plan to implement Story in the future	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
Assuming I understand Story as an instructional strategy, I intend to use it	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3
I plan on implementing Story if the lesson plans are pre-made	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3
I intend to implement Story	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
I predict I would implement Story	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	3
I feel that my ability to determine my intent to implement Story is limited by my lack of experience	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2

After Learning about Story

A serious lack of knowledge surrounding story was revealed through analysis of the survey data. A short PowerPoint presentation that introduced the five key elements of story was created and presented to the interviewees just prior to the interview sessions. The format for the interview sessions was calculated and assessed using individual, semi-structured, two-way

interviews (Keller & Conradin, 2018). Some of the questions required specific responses such as those associated with identifying the barriers and strategies to overcome them. Others were open-ended and were used to collect information about participants' general knowledge of potential strategies that might encourage them to implement story more often and perceived barriers to a widespread usage of story. After the interviews were conducted, the data were then analyzed and three themes emerged: perspectives about story now, barriers preventing implementation, and strategies to increase implementation of story.

Perspectives About Story Now

Initially, participants thought of story similar to a word problem. However, after learning about it, their perspectives changed. One participant stated, "I had no idea what story was to begin with." A few participants clarified how learning about story opened their eyes to a new way of teaching mathematics. One participant noted, "I was not looking at math and math instruction from this angle." Others explained how story bridges the gap between interest and math, while making it relatable to the student's life. All participants stated how story can successfully connect mathematics to other subject area, making it a beneficial cross-curricular tool. One participant explained, "story could connect to [various] concepts in different ways."

Barriers Preventing Implementation

Participants shared their perspectives from a leadership standpoint, emphasizing the resistance from the other mathematics teachers in the school and how it was a constant struggle to influence any instructional strategies. A participant stated that "math teachers can be rigid;" and as such, they struggle to try new instructional methods. One participant explained how veteran teachers are resistant to change and feel discomfort in trying something new. Another participant stated,

The biggest barrier is fear, just that it is something new and different and not the typical 'I am going to give you a problem then we are going to go over it.' Teachers are comfortable with that structure, so it will require them to step outside of the box.

The last barrier found was aligning the story curriculum to state standards. Instruction needs to be standards-based and teachers are not familiar with the standards to identify quickly and associate them with curriculum.

Strategies to Increase Implementation of Story

Participants were eager to explain their ideas of how to overcome those barriers found in the previous theme. Ideas such as modeling story lessons and conducting professional development were explained. All participants stated that there needs to be an "increased awareness" for story in all subject areas because the emotional connection to story helps promote student interest to learn the required concepts. One participant specified, "If we could get them (students) emotionally invested into a math course, then they can latch onto the task they need to do in terms of math and might be invested in the math with the story that is behind the problem." In addition, some explained that provided story lessons and resources would increase the implementation. A participant commented, "the best way to increase use is having a set of prepared resources."

Conclusion

As a whole, participants shared a lack of knowledge about story and its beneficial role as a mathematics instructional strategy. School leaders recognized that use of story would be advantageous to student growth, as it would allow a deeper connection to and learning of the mathematical concept as it makes the emotional connection to the story. In addition, it would assist both teachers and students in making valuable cross-curricular connections. Such positive outcomes were supported by Walters et al. (2014), who also noted the high level of thinking that story could evoke in the mathematics classroom. Moreover, according to Barnes (2015), a cross-curricular approach is key to effective 21st century teaching and learning in which students are prepared for an ever evolving and uncertain future work force. Barnes (2015) argued the benefits of a cross-curricular approach, as the happenings of the world are experienced in a similar multi-disciplinary manner.

Unfortunately, despite such positive feedback, barriers preventing implementation were overwhelming. Resistance, teacher rigidity, feelings of discomfort and fear, and creative alignment to state standards seemed to outweigh leader plans of implementing story, despite the school's struggling math scores and its proven success for supporting student achievement (Balakrishnan, 2008). To increase implementation, leaders' suggestions included increasing awareness of the instructional strategy, modeling in classrooms, and providing prepared resources.

Nonetheless, use of story or other instructional strategies in a building resulting in increased achievement requires school leaders to be at the forefront of implementation. Principals are the intellectual leaders of a school building, establishing the expectations for teachers to develop their craft continuously with instructional strategies that are proven effective (Hoy & Hoy, 2009). To combat resistance and rigidity, a number of strategies can be incorporated including a shared leadership approach, teacher-administrator collaboration, and school leaders modeling the expectations (Glickman et al., 2015; Zimmerman, 2006). To impact positively the academic achievement of the student populations served, school leaders must (a) remain current with knowledge of a diverse range of beneficial instructional strategies such as story, (b) embody a shared leadership approach in which teachers play an active role in their professional development, and (c) promote a school climate that encourages teacher growth and incorporation of new and innovative teaching approaches. Story as an instructional strategy could make an impact on student achievement in mathematics and result in higher standardized assessment scores.

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Appendix A

Survey

Section 1: Demographic Characteristics Information

Gender:

- Male
- Female

Age:

- 21-25 years old
- 26-30 years old
- 31-35 years old
- 36-40 years old
- 41-45 years old
- 46-50 years old
- 51-55 years old
- 56-60 years old
- 61 plus years old

Ethnicity:

- White/Caucasian
- African American
- Asian American/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- Other

Education level:

- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Specialist
- Doctorate

Education Experience:

- 1-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-9 years
- 10-12 years
- 13-15 years
- 16 plus years

Course(s) Currently Teaching: _____

Section 2: Story

Story is defined as a narrative account of real or imagined event(s). To qualify as a story the elements are time and place, cause and effect, character judgement, and communication of the story.

Have you used Story as an instructional strategy?

- Yes
- No

Have you recently, within the most recent school year, used Story as an instructional strategy?

- Yes
- No

Approximately, how long have you been using Storying as an instructional strategy?

- Have not used Story as an instructional strategy
- Less than a year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- More than 5 years

Sections 3-7 uses 7-point Likert response scale where 1: *Strongly disagree*, 2: *Moderately disagree*, 3: *Slightly disagree*, 4: *Neutral*, 5: *Slightly agree*, 6: *Moderately agree*, and 7: *Strongly agree*.

Section 3: Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I feel that using Story would be easy for me							
I feel that my implementation of Story would be clear and understandable							
I feel that it would be easy to become skillful at using Story							
I would find Story would be easy for students to understand and use							
It would be easy for Story to teach							
I feel that my ability to determine Story ease of use is limited by my lack of experience							

Section 4: Perceived Usefulness (PU)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
Using Story would improve my standardized testing results							
Using Story would enable me to teach the standards more quickly							
Using Story would enhance student mastery of the standards							
Using Story would make it easier to teach the standards							
I would find Story useful for teaching standards							
I feel that my ability to determine the usefulness of Story is limited by my lack of experience							

Section 5: Attitude toward Usage (ATU)							
	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I believe it is a good idea to implement Story							
I like the idea of implementing Story							
Implementing Story is a positive idea							
I believe implementing Story is a good idea to improve student achievement							
I believe implementing Story can improve mathematical achievement							
I feel that my ability to determine my attitude toward implementing Story is limited by my lack of experience							

Section 6: Behavioral Intention to Use (BIU)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Slightly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I plan on implementing Story in the future							
Assuming I understand Story as an instructional strategy, I intend to use it							
I plan on implementing Story if the lesson plans are pre-made							
I intend to implement Story							
I predict I would implement Story							
I feel that my ability to determine my intent to implement Story is limited by my lack of experience							

Appendix B

Interview Questions:

1. How has the presentation change your idea about using story possibly changed?
2. How would you implement story or a new instructional strategy?
3. Can you describe some barriers for not implemented story or a new instructional strategy?
4. How are those barriers preventing you from implementing story or a new instructional strategy?
5. What are some ideas or methods to increase the usage of story or a new instructional strategy?
6. Do you have any other information you want to tell me?