

Cultivating Leadership:
Taking a Deeper Look at One Midwestern School District's
Leadership Preparation Program

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By

Kevin James Chick

Approved by:

Dr. Barbara Sunderman (Chair)

Dr. Ron Bork

Dr. Julie Kozisek

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CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP:
TAKING A DEEPER LOOK AT ONE MIDWESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT'S
LEADERSHIP PREPARATION PROGRAM

Kevin Chick, EdD

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Supervisor: Dr. Barbara Sunderman

Across the country, school districts are finding ways to recruit and maintain highly skilled and effective leaders. Most leadership preparation programs are taking place at the university level while many school districts are lacking leadership frameworks and programs to grow and provide learning opportunities and experiences for aspiring leaders. The purpose of this study is to examine how aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district described their experiences and how those experiences prepared them for leadership roles.

The focus of this District leadership program is to develop leadership capacity in staff throughout the district. Participants in the study included staff who aspire to become principals and/or building/district teacher leaders.

The design of the study focuses on qualitative data collection through interviews during the first semester of the 2017-2018 school year. Ten current or aspiring educational leaders from multiple locations within one suburban Midwestern school district were interviewed during this case study. During the interviews, educational

leadership preparation was discussed incorporating topics such as district leadership frameworks, leadership preparation, and district supports impacting leadership.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my amazing wife, Julie, and our three children, Colin, Ashley, and Lauren Chick. You have all been patient and supportive during this educational journey. I would not have completed this dissertation without your love and support. It is my hope that this serves as an example that you can accomplish anything through hard work and perseverance.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Patrick and Judy Chick. Your love, support, and encouragement throughout my educational career has made this possible.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Over the course of the past two decades, the responsibilities of school leaders have increased dramatically. School leaders are expected to provide a safe environment for students, increase achievement annually, maintain and increase the morale of the staff, as well as be responsive and available to parents and the district office (Fullan, 2014). The roles of the building principal to the superintendent include working with many stakeholders as well as being responsible for the educational welfare of the community. Educational leaders do not just have employees and/or customers like business leaders; they are responsible for educating the future leaders of society. Few leadership positions have this level of responsibility.

Fullan (2014) stated school leaders are typically held solely responsible for the morale of their staff because of their role in choosing the teaching staff.

Ask teachers what school they would most like to teach in, or whether they want to stay in teaching at all, and you will hear of two criteria that top their lists, the quality of their colleagues and the quality of school leadership. (p. 5)

The pressure of school accountability today has required school districts to invest more time, energy, and money into developing and retaining aspiring leaders. A culture of educational reform places educational leaders under intense scrutiny as they are expected to continually adapt and change to measure what defines their success as school leaders (Quaglia & Quay, 2003). If schools do not have knowledgeable, competent, and relationship-oriented principals, the goals of increased student achievement may not be realized.

School districts across the country want to ensure quality leadership occurs in schools. Graduate level preparation programs alone have left educational leaders ill-equipped for the rigors of the job. School leaders are calling for states to play a more aggressive role in ensuring principals are ready for the demands of the job. Some of this pressure is coming from “longtime education professors, philanthropic foundations, and school district leaders who say too many graduates of traditional programs are not qualified to lead schools” (Superville, 2017, p. 1).

School districts are filling this void by developing “grow your own” programs to supplement what educators learn in educational leadership graduate programs. Superintendents are opting for these programs to acclimate new administrators into their leadership roles and the communities they will serve. Typically, these programs form cohort groups where participants apply and complete the program together as a group. Teitel (1997) identified the merits of a cohort design and noted the organizational benefits and stronger bonds formed among the students led to higher retention. Participants of these cohort groups are provided ongoing support and counseling from mentor principals or district administrators to keep them in the program (Lindsay, 2008). These programs also provide leadership preparation opportunities like shadowing experiences, mock interviews, and even internships. District personnel are also collaborating with each other to create programs suited to the needs of each district. Districts with high student poverty, shifting demographics, or schools in need of comprehensive intervention, may need to develop programs suited to meet these challenges (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district described their experiences and how those experiences prepared them for leadership roles. This study interviewed past participants in one Midwestern school district's leadership preparation program to identify the experiences provided that fostered the most growth in leadership skills for participants as well as those not valued.

Research Questions

The following central research questions guided this study:

1. How do aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district describe their key experiences in the program?

Sub Questions:

- 1A. How do aspiring leaders describe the structures, experiences, and frameworks in place for the leadership preparation program?
 - 1B. What experiences described in a leadership preparation program were not meaningful to aspiring leaders' development?
2. How do aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district explain how their experiences in the program prepared them for leadership roles?

Sub Questions:

- 2A. How do aspiring leaders describe the experiences of the leadership preparation program which best prepared them to be effective leaders?

- 2B. How do aspiring leaders describe the ways their experiences fostered their growth in leadership skills?

Definition of Terms

Leadership—Leadership is defined as the art and science of inspiring others toward a common mission and shared vision through collaborative relationships characterized by integrity, humility, resiliency, and commitment to empowering others to reach their highest potential.

Midwestern—States in the center of the United States including Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota.

Leadership Preparation Program—One or two year training program for aspiring leaders in K-12 education in one Midwestern school district. Training can be taken for university credit and offers opportunities such as leadership shadowing, mock interviews, and a culminating leadership project.

Aspiring Leaders—teachers in one Midwestern school district who are enrolled or completed the Leadership Preparation Program and aspire to or have attained leadership positions in education.

Instructional Leaders—Leaders in an educational setting who have a clear vision for their school and create effective environments that support teaching and learning as top priorities.

Leadership Framework—A leadership framework is a set of principles school leaders must know and do to perform their jobs at a high level. Most frameworks help

leaders align professional development, self-assess and develop specific leadership skills, improve staff performance and increase student achievement.

“Grow your Own”—Leadership development program that is derived and taught by a school district to develop aspiring leaders.

Fierce Leadership—a book by Susan Scott, was the basis for an administrative training attended by participants in the leadership development program.

Servant Leadership—A leadership philosophy in which the main goal of the leader is to serve.

Equity Leadership—The equity leadership model provides leaders a framework for creating a learning environment where students, across their many differences, engage deeply and achieve at higher levels while staying true to their cultural identity.

Relational Leadership—Relational Leadership refers to a model or perspective on leadership that focuses on the idea that leadership effectiveness has to do with the ability of the leader to create positive relationships within the organization.

Collaborative Leadership—Collaborative leadership is a management practice which is focused on the leadership skills across functional and organizational boundaries.

Systems Leadership—Systems Leadership enables the leaders in an organization to create the conditions where people at all levels can work productively to their potential.

Personal Leadership—Personal leadership is the leadership of the self. It is the ability to define a direction for your leadership and life, and to move in that direction with consistency and clarity.

Methodology

A qualitative case study research approach was used to study the leadership development program within one Midwestern school district. Interviews were conducted to bring common themes to light. The sample consisted of ten participants chosen from a total of 113 participants in the program ($n = 113$) since 2012. There were 60 participants in the one year program and 53 in the two year program. The sampling included at least two participants from each group listed below that met each of the following criteria:

- currently teachers who aspire to leadership positions,
- currently in teacher leadership positions,
- currently in building-level administration jobs in their current district, and
- currently in building-level administrator/ leadership jobs in other districts.

The leadership development program in this study has been in existence for over 20 years, preparing leaders for all aspects of leadership at varying levels. The purpose of the program is to develop leadership capacity in staff throughout the District. Participants include leaders who aspire to become principals, district teacher leaders or a building teacher leader. The program changed from a two year program to a one year program in 2015 because of a budgetary need, condensing the content of the two year program into a one year program, and retaining much of the same philosophy and experiences.

Because of the researcher's position in the district, he was unable to conduct the interviews to avoid coercion. The researcher utilized an experienced qualitative interviewer to conduct the interviews for this study. By examining resulting themes from interviews, the researcher was able to better understand the qualities and components of

what was deemed as successful or unsuccessful leadership preparation in this Midwestern school district.

Delimitations

Delimitations are used to address how the study will be focused and narrowed in scope (Creswell, 1994). This study was focused in a number of ways. Rather than exploring components of leadership development in multiple school districts, this study focused on one specific district.

This study also could have focused on multiple groups (teachers, students, community members) to get their thoughts and ideas regarding school leadership development, but the focus for this study was solely on the participants in a leadership development program and their experiences.

Lastly, the study focused on a small number of participants (n). Some of the possible participants for the study completed this leadership preparation program as a two year program and some completed this program as a one year program.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The first limitation of this study is the researcher not being able to conduct the interviews because of his connection to the program. Qualitative researchers study their own programs all the time. In this case all participants are aspiring to leadership positions and the researcher is responsible for hiring all administrators in the district. The researcher relied on an experienced qualitative interviewer to keep the interviews focused on the research questions and to avoid coercion. A second limitation that could weaken the study is the possibility of

participants not fully disclosing their thoughts and feelings regarding the program due to the researcher's leadership role in the district and involvement with the program being studied. A final limitation is when one program is being studied, the uniqueness of the program limits the scope of the research.

Significance of the Study

Public demands for more effective schools have placed increased attention on school leaders. Studies have shown there is a positive relationship between principal performance and a variety of school outcomes (Orr & Orphanos, 2011). Since principal performance does have an effect on school outcomes, district leaders need to ensure school leaders feel supported. A Texas study (Fuller & Young, 2009) found only 39% of elementary principals and even less middle school and high school principals remained in the same school for at least 5 years. Supporting aspiring administrators in a leadership preparation program could help these numbers.

The findings reveal current best practice identified through the literature review in addition to participant feedback in the interviews conducted for this study. The study also identified elements of leadership development that were not seen as quality.

There are three primary audiences for this study: aspiring leaders in K-12 education, university personnel in educational leadership, and human resources personnel in K-12 education. Each of these audiences will find a variety of significant information for their own use and potential future study.

Aspiring leaders in K-12 education will be able to focus on the experiences mentioned by study participants as most meaningful, or those not deemed as valuable, to

their leadership development. The study of literature will also be beneficial as K-12 districts can compare their leadership development programs with those discussed in the literature review.

University personnel will be able to compare/contrast the successful experiences mentioned by participants to the themes and activities in their own leadership preparation program. University personnel will also be able to utilize the summary of programs to see what components are in common with their own program, as well as see how districts across the country are collaborating with colleges and universities to develop future leaders.

Human resources personnel and/or district administrators may use this study to build their own leadership development program, or to compare their program against the findings in this study. They could also choose to replicate this study for their own individual program findings.

School districts looking to implement or revamp their leadership development program will find many examples of best practice as well as descriptions of several programs from across the country. Those already in leadership positions and those with responsibilities related to the development of leaders will find value because the study will shed light on those practices deemed important and successful in leadership preparation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature related to the different aspects of effective leadership and effective leadership development programs. This review is divided into six parts: (a) educational leadership preparation; (b) preparation frameworks and standards for leadership; (c) quality components of teacher leadership programs; (d) quality components of leadership preparation; (e) a summary of leadership development programs from some of the largest districts in the Midwest and from districts across the country; and (f) a summary of recommendations based on the literature and program reviews.

Educational Leadership Preparation

There is a continual focus on the need to provide schools with well-prepared and competent principals. There are ample critics of public education and all of them are looking to point out ways schools are failing. Former Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, stated, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, has “created a thousand ways for schools to fail and very few to help them succeed” (Duncan, 2011). If schools are seen as failing, this inevitably leads to criticism at the top. This has caused harsh perceptions of many university programs that prepare aspiring administrators, as this is the predominant means most states use to train and certify public school administrators (Roberts, 2009). Most of these programs tend to be classroom-based with training occurring before the participants are practicing administrators (Nelson, de la Colina, & Boone, 2008).

Schools of education are in denial about the state of their preparation programs. Most notably Arthur Levine, President of Teacher's College at Columbia University, conducted a study of United States principal preparation programs and concluded the quality of these programs ranged "from inadequate to appalling" (Levine, 2005, p. 28). In particular, Levine pointed to curricular disarray, low admission and graduate standards, weak faculty and inappropriate clinical instruction. Levine also noted most university programs were lowering their standards for admission and completion, as well as making the courses easier for completion and making the degrees less demanding.

While many universities strive to get better by revamping antiquated programs, school districts across the country are putting more time and effort into training their own future leaders. Superintendents are concerned about the lack of quality candidates for their leadership positions. The pools are limited for important leadership positions (Williams & Szal, 2011). Even some of the best and brightest candidates in those limited pools still feel overwhelmed, when faced with the realities of the job. Support and ongoing training is essential because high student achievement is dependent upon having strong leadership in the school. According to Searby (2010), virtually all superintendents believed behind every great school is a great principal. Schools that produce strong results, have an effective principal.

The majority of preparation programs are university-based because certification from a state entity is typically tied to the degree from the program. Hale and Moorman (2003) noted "the general consensus in most quarters is that principal preparation programs are too theoretical and totally unrelated to the daily demands on contemporary

principals” (p. 5). Butler (2008) argued school systems need to do more to adequately prepare their own aspiring leaders for leadership positions in local school districts. He also noted according to a 2006 survey by a non-profit organization, Public Agenda, nearly two-thirds of principals felt graduate level preparation programs were ill-equipped to prepare today’s administrators for the challenges of the job. Another survey (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno, & Foley, 2001) found 69% of principals and 80% of superintendents felt typical (university) programs are not in line to prepare leaders for the realities of being a building administrator. The vast majority of both groups (85%) felt an overhaul of leadership programs would improve future leaders.

One of the main issues that creates challenges for new principals or teacher leaders is maintaining or improving student achievement. A study by Pounder (2010) illustrated how principal preparation and their background can influence their likelihood of creating conditions that enhance student learning. Pounder stated principals from exemplary preparation programs were more likely to learn about instructional and organizational leadership and to engage in these leadership practices in their schools. The relationship between leadership preparation and leadership practices were even stronger when several specific program quality features and internship quality features were included. Frequent use of effective leadership practices resulted in greater school improvement progress and improved school effectiveness learning climate. Pounder also added that challenging school conditions (e.g., student poverty and other challenges) moderated school improvement progress of leaders. Pounder’s study highlighted that a quality internship embedded in a program with a successful leader will enhance any

leadership preparation program. The study also noted school conditions can have an impact on the perceived quality of a leader regardless of the preparation program.

Certification requirements are also a consideration in principal preparation. The requirements for certification to be a building or district administrator are similar across the United States.

Essentially all states require that public school principals meet certification requirements. Furthermore, almost all states require candidates for principal certification to be eligible for a teaching certificate, currently hold a valid teaching certificate, or have held one in the past. (Roberts, 2009, p. 6)

Roberts (2009) also noted the vast majority of states also require principal candidates pass a content test before they receive certification as a school leader.

One Midwestern state has required a content test since September 1, 2015. The full list of requirements to qualify for a Standard Administrative Certificate in that state are as follows: (a) completion of baccalaureate degree; (b) completion of a teacher education program at a state approved college or university; (c) completion of a master's degree and an education administration program at a state approved college; (d) have taught for two years; (e) completion of human relations training requirement; (f) completion of the special education training requirement; (g) Praxis-Core Academic Skills (Basic Skills); (h) Praxis-Subject Assessments (Content Test); and (i) recent college credits or employment experience within the past immediate 5 years. The requirements identified are similar across the states for administrator certification. While these are necessary for licensure, they do little to prepare a principal for the rigors of the job. Hale and Moorman (2003) noted schools of today require a new kind of principal who can fulfill multiple roles in the school. Skills such as being a strong instructional

leader while having an awareness of the bigger community to forge partnerships with parents and business is essential. The principal of today must be a visionary leader to ensure all children, regardless of background or experience, will achieve at high levels.

A final issue is that of entrance requirements for leadership preparation programs. Hanover (2012b) noted in the majority of programs, admission is based on GRE scores and GPA, missing important fundamental aspects like talent and a disposition to do the job. Universities are graduating large numbers of students with school administration credentials. When the entrance requirements do not encompass some of the expectations placed on individuals as principals, and some programs do not even require teaching experience (Hanover, 2012a), university programs are training some people who ultimately will not be successful in the job.

Preparation Frameworks and Standards for Leadership

Many states across the country adopted The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards for school leadership (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). While this is widely known to be a quality list of standards for effective leadership, Lynch (2012) suggested solely adopting the ISLLC standards alone is an ineffective step towards effectively changing principal preparation programs. Lynch goes on to state:

The responsibility of reforming principal preparation programs lies with the state certification policies, as well as with institutions granting the degrees or certifications. Requiring every institution of higher education with a program that leads to a degree or certification for principals to change their program requirements without changes in state certification requirements is unrealistic. It is within the policies of state boards of education that the change must occur.
(p. 46)

It is clear Lynch (2012) feels a valuable asset of quality leadership preparation programs includes coordination between state boards of education as well as institutions of higher education.

The Kentucky State Board is taking steps to improve principal preparation through frameworks and standards linked to certification requirements. All Kentucky school principal preparation programs (PPPs) require a field experience which is also a requirement from the Educational Professional Standards Board (EPS), that issues and renews certificates for all Kentucky administrators and teachers. Essentially, each PPP must have an agreement between the university and school districts to provide quality field experiences for participants (Dodson, 2014).

Cowie and Crawford (2007) looked at programs and certification requirements both in the United States and abroad. They found examples where universities were working directly with local school districts or professional organizations for training or certification requirements. In some cases the program providers delivered coursework aimed at helping aspiring administrators to attain a national or state standard, such as becoming a certified mentor through the National Association of Elementary Principals or a certification in Human Resources through the American Association of School Personnel Administrators. In comparison, England developed a national qualification which could be counted as 30 credit hours toward a postgraduate qualification.

Cowie and Crawford (2007) argued higher standards were needed and pointed to information from Western Australia where the professional association of school administrators pressed the state department to “develop a leadership centre for the

preparation of principals following concern the demands of operational management were overshadowing the development of leadership potential in schools. There are no formal academic requirements for the principalship, nor are there any formal preparation programmes” (p. 136). The authors also noted how participation in a Master’s or Doctoral degree program in leadership gained no advantage over others who may have participated in the program the state educational authority set up for aspiring leaders.

Cowie and Crawford (2007) and Dodson (2014) pointed toward leadership preparation programs and standards that are vastly different in size, scope, and sequence. Some administrative certification programs are directly linked to state standards, some to state run programs, while others rely mainly on completion of a degree program from an accredited university program. They also noted states even provide leadership standards and/or frameworks for school districts to use, but have no requirements for its use by local districts.

In one Midwestern state, standards were developed to define effective practices in order to improve teaching and learning. In 2011, The State Board of Education of this Midwestern state authorized the drafting of performance standards for both teachers and principals. Since then the draft has been adopted as standards in this state. The standards are meant to serve as a guide for many districts who already have a firm system in place for principal and teacher evaluation. For some districts, these standards served as the foundation of a teacher and administrator evaluation system to improve and enhance student learning. The standards served as a working model for school districts to design

and implement a leadership preparation program. The components of the principal standards from this Midwestern state are as follows:

1. Standard 1: Vision for Learning—The Principal establishes and communicates a vision for teaching and learning that results in improved student performance.
2. Standard 2: Continuous School Improvement—The Principal leads a continuous school improvement process that results in improved student performance and school effectiveness.
3. Standard 3: Instructional Leadership—The Principal provides leadership to ensure the implementation of a rigorous curriculum, the use of effective teaching practices, and accountability for results.
4. Standard 4: Culture for Learning—The Principal creates a school culture that enhances the academic, social, physical, and emotional development of all students.
5. Standard 5: Systems Management—The Principal manages the organization, operations, and resources of the school to provide a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment for all students and staff.
6. Standard 6: Staff Leadership—The Principal uses effective practices to select, develop, support, and lead high quality teachers and other staff.
7. Standard 7: Developing Relationships—The Principal promotes and supports productive relationships with students, staff, families, and the community.

8. Standard 8: Professional Ethics and Advocacy—The Principal advocates for policies of equity and excellence in support of the vision of the school, and acts with fairness, integrity, and a high level of professional ethics.

Even though these standards were drafted by request of the State Board of Education, the standards were not directly tied to certification requirements to become an administrator. They were drafted to provide a leadership framework that could be available for any district in the state to utilize. Many districts did not have any leadership framework or standards. Since 2011, additional certification requirements have been implemented that include a content standards test to gain certification as an administrator. Many Midwest school districts have adopted standards to build their administrative evaluation program or to use as a guide to build a leadership preparation program or administrator induction program. The standards listed above serve as an example of what states across the country have provided to their local school districts.

The Framework for School Leadership Accomplishments (FLSA) is another example of a leadership framework (Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, & Muth, 2003). This framework, like many, begins with the premise schools are only as successful as the leaders running the school and by linking practical knowledge to the problems faced by principals, successful outcomes can occur. The FSLA is comprised of nine accomplishments that reflect a principal's level of responsibility. The nine accomplishments are learning goals, instruction, student climate, related services, resources, school operations, staff support, renewal, and family community partnerships. These accomplishments were designed to serve as a mental model for understanding the

main components of leadership and how they interact with student learning. This model also includes what is under the control of the school and emphasizes the role of the principal focusing on teaching and learning and stresses how a principal's responsibility can be focused on student learning (Bellamy et al., 2003).

Bellamy et al. (2003) discussed the organization of leadership preparation around student learning when he further stated:

The accomplishments perspectives of the FSLA offers potential for developing improvements in preparation programs and for structuring them as well. The same accomplishments that serve to organize professional knowledge and to analyze the local contexts of practice can also help organize preparation programs and develop and assess prospective principal's expertise and support their performance across context...A fundamental challenge for principal preparation programs is to help candidates develop knowledge, skills, and disposition that are later applied consciously in professional practice (p. 254).

Frameworks like the ones referenced provide a roadmap for training programs or school districts to produce competent administrators with the right temperament, disposition, and practical knowledge to handle the rigors of the job.

Teacher Leadership

Another aspect of leadership is teacher leadership. Teacher leadership is essential for any successful school or system. Teachers have long served as team leaders, committee chairs, department chairs, strategic planning action team leaders, and curriculum leaders. Often, these leadership positions are more about coordinating and arranging, rather than carrying out their own leadership plan or initiatives.

All aspiring educational leaders do not want to be a building or district administrator. Teacher leadership is vital to any successful school and district. In today's educational world, the principal alone cannot run a school in isolation. Principals need to provide leadership opportunities for teachers to become invested in the goals and the mission of the school (Barth, 2013).

Fostering teacher leadership is not easy. Teachers already have a huge amount of responsibility and little time to spare to develop their own leadership skills. Barth (2013) discussed how opportunities for teacher leadership need to be carefully crafted so as not to deflect time from the main responsibility of ensuring student achievement. If developing leadership skills is seen as an add-on responsibility, there will not be a high level of engagement.

Miller (2009) discussed the challenges principals face by having to accept leadership should be spread throughout the building. "Principals realize that redefining the traditional links between their power and the power of teacher leaders means changing beliefs, attitudes, and ways of thinking about roles, accountability, and roles" (p. 12). Effective principals have learned to harness the culture of promoting teacher leadership within their building. Teachers learning from other teachers is one of the most powerful tools to promote educational change and improve student achievement.

Formative coaching, discussed by Nidus and Sadler (2011), is another way to promote instructional leadership across the building, rather than only being the responsibility of the building principal. Formative coaching involves all educators in a building who collaboratively reflect on and improve their practice.

In formative coaching, teachers, and administrators analyze student work to determine next steps for instruction. Formative coaching is built on deep analysis of teaching and learning - and on the assumption that the ultimate purpose of improving instructional practice is to improve student achievement. (p. 31)

Nidus and Sadler (2011) noted teacher leaders need to develop their skills in coaching teachers to improve instruction. Working with teachers to develop a deep understanding of teaching and learning is beneficial to those aspiring to be leaders in their school.

Creating a culture centered on a deep understanding of teaching and learning can help retain the most talented teachers and keep them in the classroom. Often, those identified as teacher leaders are quickly groomed to become administrators. Having a culture of teacher leadership in a building can help the best teachers grow and develop and stave off the desire to become administrators or fight off mid-year frustration or boredom (Doan & Peters, 2009). At some point, teachers will question their longevity in the classroom. Instilling a culture of teacher leadership can help retain more teachers in the classroom. Creating positions like instructional coaches, or department heads can also keep our best teachers working directly with teachers and students.

The need for greater teacher leadership is evident. If teachers are developed and given leadership responsibilities this can help to transform a school. Giving teachers access to school or district-based decision making can help break the mold that the principal is the sole leader in a school building. Coggins and Diffenbaugh (2013) argued it is important not to get stuck in the old paradigm of command and control with top down leadership. New frameworks that incorporate increased motivation and performance could have a lasting effect on developing great teacher leaders and keeping them in the classroom.

Quality Components of Leadership Preparation Programs

Leadership preparation programs in the K-12 settings are wide and varied. Some districts may have a two year program with college credit offered, while other districts may not have any program. The goal of these programs is to prepare aspiring leaders for the rigors of the job and bring quality candidates in an interview pool. This section will explore some of the common components seen in several leadership programs that were deemed quality.

Some school districts across the country are turning to “*Grow your own programs*,” where the initiative is taken by individual school systems to build upon the training of their aspiring administrator’s university-based training. These district led programs that help to prepare competitive internal pools of candidates for open building administrator or teacher leader positions (Williams & Szal, 2011). “*Grow your own*” programs encompass quality components such as field experiences, instructional leadership, and internships which are detailed below.

Field experiences are a mainstay component in many of the leadership preparation programs researched. In a recent Kentucky study by Dodson (2014), 91.4% of participants believed field experiences were an important part of their leadership program. The vast majority of participants who responded did not complete a field experiences and stated they thought their overall program would have been better with a field experience of some kind. Dodson shared field experiences can vary from shadowing a current principal, serving as a leader of a Strategic Planning Committee, conducting instructional coaching, working on an instructional or discipline committee,

analyzing student data, or participating on school improvement planning. The use of field experiences lends itself to an environment where aspiring leaders are learning in a real-world setting. This type of training can certainly validate and complement any time spent on leadership theory.

Instructional leadership is another area mentioned frequently in leadership preparation program research (Gulcan, 2012). Accountability for student achievement puts a bigger focus on school principals needing to be instructional leaders, not just building managers. Instructional leadership has been defined as a “function within management and actions directly related with teacher and learning” (Gulcan, 2012, p. 627). According to Gulcan, preparation programs can focus on developing instructional leaders by implementing activities dealing with instructional coaching, staff development, monitoring and assessing the curriculum, as well as identifying and developing a vision, and mission for the school as it relates to the overall mission of the district.

Providing internships has been another popular component of leadership preparation programs. Clayton (2012) noted internships can appear across many different organizations and they are aimed to provide hands-on experience for the participants. Internships also provide the sponsoring organization the ability to evaluate the performance of the intern which can be used for future hiring decisions. An internship is tied to a specific district or school, whereas field experiences can take place anywhere and do not necessarily have a direct tie to a school. In education, most interns are currently teachers seeking to experience the role of the principal. They are usually seen

as “quasi” administrators in the building on a teacher’s contract and are not allowed to formally evaluate teachers. An internship provides an aspiring administrator the realities of the principalship and builds greater confidence in the interns to be competent administrator candidates.

Developing partnerships between colleges, universities and school districts is another quality component for leadership development programs. By creating these partnerships, schools and universities can work together to recruit and prepare cohorts of aspiring leaders centered on a curriculum that contains the proper amount of theory with real-life embedded practice. Additionally, these partnerships can develop classroom laboratories where aspiring principals can get real-life practice to learn and develop. Cambron-McCabe and Cunningham (2002) provided a fitting summary when they stated, “the need for change in leadership preparation is not an issue. Rather, the possible approaches that can be taken to strengthen our field are the subject of debate” (p. 4). Collaborative partnerships between school districts and universities is an approach that can strengthen leadership development.

Partnerships between school districts and universities can be a quality component of a strong leadership development program, but admission requirements for graduate leadership programs do need to be explored. Many programs still rely on the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) or Grade Point Average (GPA). Creighton and Jones (2001) looked at 450 principal certification programs and found the majority relied on GRE and GPA. More emphasis needs to be placed on talent and disposition (Hanover, 2012b). Many school districts have a test or inventory that measures talent or disposition when

hiring future leaders. Hanover stated principal certification programs, graduate programs and leadership development programs need to utilize these measures as well.

Sanzo, Myran, and Clayton (2011) noted the importance of a learning cohort that develops relationships, coordinates professional development, and provides more meaningful and realistic experiences through coordination with district personnel. This cohort formed between a partnership of a school district and a university program can articulate meaningful ties between theory and practice.

Much of the research on leadership preparation has involved case studies of program models as well as survey-based investigations revolving around certain aspects and components of already developed district leadership preparation programs (Orr, 2006). Orr and Orphanos (2011) in their review of research on exemplary leadership preparation programs and quality program features showed successful programs contain elements, such as (a) a well-defined theory of leadership for school improvement that frames and integrates the program features around a set of shared values, beliefs, and knowledge; (b) a coherent curriculum that addresses effective instructional leadership, organizational development, and change management that aligns with state and professional standards; (c) active learning strategies that integrate theory and practice and stimulate reflection; (d) quality internships that provide intensive developmental opportunities to apply leadership knowledge and skills under the guidance of an expert practitioner-mentor; (e) a knowledgeable (about their subject matter) faculty; (f) social and professional support, including organizing students into cohorts that take common courses together in a prescribed sequence, formalizing mentoring, and advising from

expert principals; and, (g) the use of standards-based assessments for candidate and program feedback and continuous improvement that are tied to the program vision and objectives.

There are not many leadership preparation programs that encompass everything Orr and Orphanos identified. The components listed speak to the items within a program that make it successful. The issue of entrance into a leadership preparation program is not addressed other than mentioning that a cohort approach has proven to be successful. Many programs do not involve recruitment and selection because candidates are self-selected with little effort toward attracting talent (Orr & Orphanos, 2011).

A study by Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, and Cohen (2007) highlighted characteristics of exemplary leadership preparation programs. The most important components were (a) research-based content; (b) curricular coherence; (c) field based internships; (d) problem-based learning strategies; (e) cohort structures; (f) mentoring or coaching; and (g) collaboration between universities and local school districts. The components provide experiences noted in several studies highlighted previously in this chapter. Two items that are unique to the leadership program noted above are curricular coherence and problem-based learning strategies. These two items are aimed directly at the curriculum and/or strategies of the leadership program and are essentially speaking to the scope and sequence of the program.

The literature on leadership development illustrates a relationship between leaders' preparation programs as related to their success. "The quality of a preparation program can positively influence leaders' work and their schools' efforts to improve

student achievement” (Orr & Orphanos, 2011, p. 20). A school district’s own investment into their future leaders could create a more dramatic effect if it builds on the proven attributes of university-based preparation program.

Quality components of leadership preparation programs were identified in the above section. Table 1 summarizes the quality components identified in the research. After discussing the leadership development programs in the next section, this table will be updated to identify each program and which quality components are encompassed in their program.

Preparation programs that focus on the realities of the job, grounded in firm contexts of practice seem to complement existing university-based programs. It may be necessary to have a mixture of theory and practice when it comes to administrator preparation and training.

Leadership Preparation Programs from Midwestern Districts

This section provides a summary of leadership preparation programs including the program being studied, as well as some of the larger school districts in the Midwest (school district names have been changed). By looking at ten existing school districts’ leadership programs as well as the program that was the focus of the study, personnel from school districts can identify possible strategies useful in refining or improving their current program. This will help school districts to grow leaders in their district and meet the need of having competitive candidate pools.

Table 1

Quality Components of Leadership Development Programs

Component	District				
	Alpha	Beta	Delta	Gamma	Epsilon
Internship					
Field Exp.					
Univ. Partner					
Cohort					
Books/Curr.					
Framework					
Teacher lead.					

Component	District				
	Zeta	Theta	Kappa	Lambda	Sigma
Internship					
Field Exp.					
Univ. Partner					
Cohort					
Books/Curr.					
Framework					
Teacher lead.					

Leadership Development Program from this Study

The purpose of this leadership preparation program is to develop leadership capacity in staff throughout the district. Participants include leaders who aspire to become principals, district teacher leaders, or grow as a building teacher leader.

Participants of this leadership preparation program use the leadership framework (a) to develop specific leadership skills that improve staff performance and increase student achievement; (b) relate theory to operational practice; (c) reflect on personal

strengths and leadership styles; (d) engage in practicum and shadowing experiences throughout the district; (e) build lateral capacity of leadership throughout the district; and (f) have the opportunity to have 50% tuition paid-3 hours of graduate credit. Resources for the program include Gallup Strengths materials, the district leadership framework, and Fierce Leadership Workshop.

Expectations for the program include attendance and active participation in class, homework, and leadership opportunities. All participants are expected to display professionalism as they attend at least one board meeting, participate in two, four hour shadowing experiences, and participate in a minimum of sixteen hours of leadership experiences.

Leadership Development Programs from Midwestern Districts

School District Alpha

School District Alpha has two leadership development programs. The first program is called Launch and it serves as an introduction to leadership. The program focuses on personal leadership, servant leadership, and school leadership as a means of support and the program helps participants assess personal strengths and growth areas. Alpha currently takes about 25 potential leaders who receive college credit and release time to participate in Launch. There is an application process requiring a recommendation from their current supervisor. Meetings are held monthly and participants are given time with district high performers, given focused projects/assignments, and take part in planned school visits.

The second program is called the Principal Preparation Program. The program is designed for rigorous principal preparation where future principals are prepared to become building level administrators upon completion of the program. The program is for individuals one year away from a principalship. The focus of the program centers on vision, high expectations, accountability, equity leadership, instructional leadership, as well as school culture and relationships. Participants meet weekly or two times a month, become a summer school principal, and participate in focused internships.

School District Beta

The purpose of the Beta School District's Leadership Preparation Program is to increase the capacity of each participant to support and initiate transformational and sustainable system change at the classroom, school, and district level and help participants develop an understanding of the entire district organizational structure. Participants in the program focus on the following concepts: (a) characteristics and habits of effective educational leaders; (b) building trust and transparency as an educational leader; (c) diagnosing organizational conditions and creating solutions for change; and (d) understanding the various departments and functions of the Beta Public Schools.

Program activities include, the study of Covey's book *The 7 Habits of Highly-Effective People* through the lens of educational leadership. Guest presentations and conversations with Beta District directors are held to better understand the functions of each department. Participant problem-solving teams identify and study an organizational issue, collect and study data on the issue, develop plans of action for the identified issue, and present findings to the district's Leadership Collaboration Team. Participants engage

in a variety of educational conversations designed to stimulate and challenge thinking about education. There is also a requirement for a one day group visit to an elementary, middle, and high school. The Program is designed for any certified staff member wishing to lead at the classroom, building, or district level.

School District Delta

Delta Public Schools Program (DPS) is intended to provide an opportunity to expand leadership theory and practice to enhance building and district level improvement. The focus of Leadership Delta is: personnel leadership strategies, leadership within internal change, leadership within external reforms, and leadership within the AdvancED Standards of Quality and systems thinking. Leadership Delta is specifically designed to bridge leadership and management theory to the practical operations of schools, especially focused on DPS. This program allows participants the opportunity to examine and discuss topics such as: Internal Change; Emotional Intelligence; Hope; Strengthsfinder 2.0; Core Standards; Accountability; AdvancED School Improvement and Systems Thinking; Research Based Instructional Design, Delivery, and Evaluation (Curriculum); Diversity; Staff Development; 21st Century Learning; Community Outreach; Personalized Learning; Fierce Conversations; and Technology, Integration and Literacy. By focusing on these topics as well as providing practical leadership experience through job shadowing, mock interviews, and a cumulative leadership project of their choosing, DPS provides an opportunity to expand leadership theory and practice to enhance building and district level improvement.

School District Gamma

The purpose of Gamma Leadership Preparation Program is to help aspiring administrators in the Gamma Public Schools (GPS) to further develop their leadership potential and prepare for the principalship through a variety of quality leadership activities focusing on the Gamma Public Schools. The rationale includes the fact that a number of administrative staff will soon meet criteria for state retirement benefits. Gamma Public Schools is a large, complex system that takes time to navigate and there is an ongoing need to develop skills, knowledge, and strengths in potential leaders' thus increasing ability to meet administrative needs. Strong leaders are also more likely to have a significant impact on student learning.

Leadership GPS is a group of individuals who are aspiring to be principals in the Gamma Public Schools. During an eighteen-month cycle in the program, candidates participate in an internship, shadow an administrator, as well as personalized leadership development in their home school that promotes the vision of Gamma Public Schools and prepares participants to serve as principals within the district.

Consortium of Leadership Preparation Programs from Across the Country

The Consortium is a group of similar-sized and like-minded school districts from across the Midwestern and Western states. The group formed in the early 2000's to exchange data, share best practices and serve as a problem solving resource for fellow school districts. Currently, the Consortium meets annually to share ideas and collaborate (school district names have been changed). Summaries of the leadership preparation programs of the schools in the consortium are listed below.

Epsilon Public Schools

Epsilon Public Schools (EPS) has a Leadership Development Academy (LDA) I & II. LDA I provides a general overview of district operations for individuals interested in future leadership positions within the district. A large emphasis is placed on the district's mission and vision along with the Fundamentals of Leadership. District leaders from the various departments/functions share information about their areas and what it takes to lead from their perspectives. The presentation includes specific questions and items the participants gather feedback on during campus visits.

LDA II was designed for employees who are seeking campus leadership opportunities. A key focus for this group is a book by Lawrence W. Lezotte and Kathleen McKee Snyder titled, *What Effective Schools Do*. The project for the year requires participants to identify an opportunity for improvement on their campus where they are coached through the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) model of continuous improvement. In the past they have used other books to guide the work of this group including *The Leader's Handbook* by Peter Scholtes and *The Leadership Challenge* by James Kouzes and Barry Posner. EPS is in the process of revising the curriculum for LDA II.

Zeta Public Schools

Zeta Public Schools (ZPS) does not have a leadership preparation program that is conducted by the district. As a part of this program, principal candidates are required to do a yearlong internship with a local university, under the supervision of a principal mentor. The Zeta District supports these candidates by providing an overall principal

mentor, with other principal mentors for specific projects they need to do in early childhood, special education, and with English language learners. Zeta Public Schools currently has 15 educators in principal prep programs and they fill approximately 50% of their administrative positions internally.

Theta Public Schools

Theta Public School's (TPS) Leadership Development program is called the L.E.A.D. (Leadership, Experience, Advancement, and Development) Academy. The L.E.A.D. Academy provides opportunity for potential building administrators to develop skills in various aspects of building leadership and interact with current building and district leaders on topics related to leadership strengths, personnel matters, budget and finance, instructional leadership and more. Each participant in the Academy has the opportunity to engage in a full week internship with a current building principal and a mock principal interview.

The district places ten certified staff in the Academy and meets with them monthly for two hour sessions. Participants must have a strong desire to be a building administrator, be currently enrolled in their final year of their Master's Program in School Leadership, or completed the program and have strong support and recognized leadership potential from their past and current building administrators, and have taken on a variety of building-level leadership roles in their career.

Kappa Public Schools

In the Kappa Public School (KPS) District staff can apply to fill a position called an Administrative Intern. This position is a training ground for potential building administrators, especially for elementary and middle schools.

Once hired, the intern can be a full time administrative intern for three years. At the end of each year the administrative intern is evaluated to either stay in the position or be returned to the classroom. If the administrative intern starts year number four, he/she is considered a dean of students. Deans of Students are evaluated for years four and five, continue on the track, or return back to the classroom. If they are maintained in the position for year six, they will become an Assistant Principal. At any time an administrative intern or dean of students can apply for administrative openings and most of the elementary and middle school openings are filled by individuals in the administrative intern program.

Lambda Public Schools

The Lambda School District has a two year leadership development program called LEAP I & LEAP II. Leap I offers an opportunity to participants to develop their skills as a building leader. Monthly meetings provide opportunities for participants to deepen their knowledge of school management. In addition to the group meetings, there are required experiences such as attending district level meetings, as well as completing an in-building leadership experience such as chairing a building committee, serving on an intervention team or participation on a district level committee.

To enhance their skills as a building leader, the same cohort of aspiring leaders advances to LEAP II. This experience offers participants an opportunity to develop their skills as an instructional leader. In addition to group meetings, there are required experiences such as attending collaborative instructional walk-throughs with current building administrators, as well as attending a strategic committee meeting.

Sigma School District

The leadership preparation program for the Sigma School District focuses on the following themes of leadership: relational leadership, collaborative leadership, systems leadership, visionary leadership, and instructional leadership. The program is five sessions that run from January through May. Participants must have already worked in their system for three years and either have their administrative licensure or will have it by the upcoming summer. Potential candidates also must have a recommendation from a principal. The number of participants runs from 10-25.

In addition to the sessions, the cohort is asked to attend one board work session for two hours and reflect on what they saw and heard. There is also a half-day shadowing of a principal who may have a different style or different strengths than their own principal, who they observe more often. Lastly, participants are provided with books each year on leadership to use in a book study group. These books vary each year and are picked by the presenters.

Summary of Leadership Development Programs

The ten school districts summarized above had similarities in that most programs relied on research-based content such as books and frameworks. Many of the programs

tied instruction back to district programming and curricular ties, and relied on an internship of some type. These internships ranged from multiple years down to a few weeks. Almost all of the programs relied on a cohort approach and involved a mentoring or coaching relationship with a current building administrator. Lastly, several of the districts did have a tie to a university program. These relationships ranged from a university offering college credit and districts providing tuition breaks to participate, to a detailed program with collaborative training, recruitment, and induction.

Table 2 is a visual summary of each program discussed and which quality components are encompassed in each leadership development program.

Field experiences were the most common component seen across all districts. The Sigma School District possessed the most quality components according to the review of literature on the topic. The Kappa and Zeta school districts contained the least components. The Kappa school district just provides on the job training for aspiring administrators, while the Zeta district does not have a program, but partners with a university. All programs contained at least two quality components of a leadership development program identified in this chapter. Later in this study, these quality components will be compared to the program being researched and the findings that emerged.

Table 2

Quality Components of Leadership Development Programs

Component	District				
	Alpha	Beta	Delta	Gamma	Epsilon
Internship				X	
Field Exp.	X	X	X	X	X
Univ. Partner	X				
Cohort				X	
Books/Curr.	X	X	X		X
Framework			X		
Teacher lead.		X			X

Component	District				
	Zeta	Theta	Kappa	Lambda	Sigma
Internship	X	X	X		
Field Exp.				X	X
Univ. Partner	X	X			X
Cohort		X		X	X
Books/Curr.					X
Framework					X
Teacher lead.				X	

This chapter focused on current university-based leadership development programs as well as individual district “grow your own” programs, where the research is more limited. Certification requirements for administrative certificates vary across the country which makes it more difficult to measure the effectiveness of leadership preparation programs. Many of the programs and research highlighted contained components such as internships and field experiences. The internships and field experiences include activities like shadowing another administrator, serving as a leader of

a Strategic Planning Committee, conducting instructional coaching, working on an instructional or discipline committee, analyzing student data, or participating in school improvement planning.

The programs from across the country that were detailed in this literature review lend a solid perspective of what many districts are trying to do to develop and maintain quality candidate pools for administrative jobs. All of the programs highlighted possessed at least some of the quality components of effective leadership preparation programs highlighted in this chapter.

Recommendations Based on Literature Review and Program Summaries

This literature review and program summaries have shown many educational leadership programs in the United States and the world have been studied for their quality and most school districts that started an educational leadership program did so because they felt traditional university based programs were narrowly focused in scope. Overall consideration given to the full literature review points to the importance school districts should create their own leadership preparation programs. Levine (2005), Williams and Szal (2011), and Hale and Moorman (2003) all noted the quality of University-based programs were lacking and could benefit by being supplemented with district programs. It was also noted some of the best qualified graduates of university programs felt overwhelmed with the realities of the job. These program were too theoretical and not enough time was spent on the realities of the job.

Frameworks and standards vary across the country, but several programs reviewed in this study based their leadership preparation programs on well-established

leadership frameworks or standards. Many universities tied themselves to standards mentioned earlier like the ISLLC standards and some states developed their own standards based on models like the ISLLC. Norton (2002) noted standards alone can still get lost in theory and not practice. Standards should lead to critical thinking which in turn can lead school leaders to assess their current realities and push for continuous improvement.

Williams and Szal (2011) noted quality components of leadership preparation programs include field experiences that might involve shadowing a leader to get a feel for the day-to-day work he/she accomplishes. Developing instructional leaders by implementing activities dealing with instructional coaching, staff development, monitoring and assessing the curriculum, as well as identifying a vision and mission for the school as it relates to the overall mission of the district is another quality component of leadership preparation programs .

Creating a partnership between universities and school districts is seen as valuable because the two entities can work together to recruit and prepare cohorts of aspiring leaders centered on a curriculum that contains the proper amount of theory with real-life embedded practice. Leadership frameworks from districts and college curriculum can be aligned to forge valuable partnerships where candidates can be identified and recruited for mutual benefit. It is time to look at different ways to change how to prepare future leaders (Cambron-McCabe & Cunningham, 2002). Working partnerships between universities and school districts allow two vested entities to share and utilize resources to attract, train, develop, hire and retain, great future leaders.

Thought also needs to be given to the admission requirements of graduate leadership programs. Many of these programs base admission on Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores or Grade Point Average (GPA). One study looked at 450 principal-certification programs from across the country and found almost all of them have admission criteria that centers on GRE scores and GPA (Creighton & Jones, 2001). However, Hanover (2012a) shared talent or disposition to do the job are often overlooked.

Meaningful opportunities can be created for teachers that build leadership capacity without detracting from instructional obligations with students. Examples include serving on a school improvement team which oversees the building's improvement and growth plan, or leading a professional learning community team that works together to oversee student achievement on a grade level team. Providing opportunities for peer coaching and instructional walk-throughs can also empower teachers to take control of their own development which will help them gain leadership perspectives (Barth, 2013).

CHAPTER 3: PROCEDURES

Introduction

This chapter will familiarize the reader with the study's methodological design. Included in this chapter are discussions of the research design, rationale for using a qualitative case study approach, role of the researcher, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, verification procedures and ethical considerations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to examine how aspiring leaders, who completed a leadership preparation program provided by one Midwestern school district, described their experiences and how those experiences prepared them for leadership roles.

This study interviewed current and past participants in one Midwestern school district's leadership preparation program. The purpose of this leadership program is to develop leadership capacity in staff throughout the district. Participants include staff who aspire to become principals and/or building/district teacher leaders. The study explored the different structures and frameworks offered in a leadership preparation program, discovered the experiences that fostered growth in participants' leadership skills and identified the experiences that were not seen as meaningful.

Research Questions

The following central research questions guided this study:

1. How do aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district describe their key experiences in the program?

Sub Questions:

- 1A. How do aspiring leaders describe the structures, experiences, and frameworks in place for the leadership preparation program?
- 1B. What experiences described in a leadership preparation program were not meaningful to aspiring leaders' development?
2. How do aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district explain how their experiences in the program prepared them for leadership roles?

Sub Questions:

- 2A. How do aspiring leaders describe the experiences of the leadership preparation program which best prepared them to be effective leaders?
- 2B. How do aspiring leaders describe the ways their experiences fostered their growth in leadership skills?

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Merriam (1998) defined a qualitative case study as “an intensive holistic description and analysis of a single entity, or social unit” (p. 34). Case studies are typically anchored in real-life situations. The reader of a case study can gain insight and meaning into the case which expands the reader’s knowledge base. Case study is often used for studying educational programs or innovations (Merriam, 1998).

A qualitative case study was used to study the leadership preparation program of one Midwestern school district. The advantage of conducting research within an educational setting is that most researchers have experience within a school setting.

Merriam (2001) noted having experience and personal knowledge about an area that is being researched leads to researchable questions and lays the groundwork for a qualitative research design.

Qualitative research is not easily defined. Creswell (2013) used words like naturalistic and interpretive when describing qualitative research because the research is done in a natural setting where the researcher studies subjects or programs, and attempts to make sense of, or interpret the data to bring meaning for the reader. Creswell further noted (2013):

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that informs the study of the research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. (p. 44)

Researchers will interpret and explain the results of their studies, providing recommendations for improvement or future study.

Morse and Richards (2007) identified several purposes for qualitative research:

1. to learn from participants in a setting or process the way they experience it;
2. to learn how participants interpret what they experience;
3. to construct a theory or theoretical framework that reflects reality rather than perspective or prior research results; and
4. to understand phenomena deeply and in detail.

Morse and Richards (2007) believed it was important for researchers to become a part of the group or participants they are studying. By doing so, they seek to understand the world from the perspectives of those being studied.

Qualitative research was best suited for this study. This researcher was interested in the insight, discovery, and interpretation of those who participated in the leadership preparation program. The experiences of the participants were detailed in the interviews which informed the researcher which components of the program were deemed as valuable. Learning about what participants valued in the experiences, interactions with others, along with what they did not value are the real characteristics that contribute to the value of approaching this research qualitatively.

Case Study Approach

“A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 2001, p. 19). Case studies differ from other types of qualitative research because they tend to focus on a single unit or a bounded system and they contain intense descriptions and analysis (Merriam, 2001). Wolcott (1992) defined a case study as “an end-product of field-oriented research” (p. 36).

According to Yin (2013), case study evidence can come from six sources: (a) documents; (b) archival records; (c) interviews; (d) direct observation; (e) participant observation; and (f) physical artifacts. A case study could incorporate several sources or it could focus on just one. For the purposes of this study, the researcher focused on the interview to gain an in-depth knowledge of the participants’ experiences to explore the

different structures and frameworks offered in a leadership preparation program. The interviewer identified the experiences that fostered the most growth in leadership skills for participants and areas for possible changes and improvements.

A case study was used in this study because the researcher was looking to define a case that can be bounded or described. A case can be an individual, small group, or as in this study a program. “Typically, case study researchers study real-life cases that are in progress, so that they can gather accurate information not lost by time” (Creswell, 2013, p. 98). The bounded case study of participants in the leadership preparation program from the past two years gave effective insight to evaluate a leadership preparation program. This study was an intrinsic case study because it focused on the case itself (e.g., evaluating a program), as the case presents a unique situation or program (Creswell, 2013).

Role of the Researcher

In any qualitative study, the role of the researcher must be explored. In a qualitative study, the researcher is considered an instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Consumers of the research need to know about the instrument which means the researcher needs to describe relevant aspects of self, including any biases or assumptions.

I have been an administrator in the district for 19 years, both as a building principal and district administrator. My role in this research is emic because I am an insider, who is a full participant in this program as an instructor.

As a district level administrator in charge of the human resources department for a Midwestern school district, which has a leadership development program, I oversee and coordinate the hiring of all administrators in the district and supervise all aspects of the human resources department. Furthermore, I take part in the district leadership preparation program being studied and currently co-teach the program with another district administrator.

Because of my connection to the program and being in a position of authority, another experienced qualitative interviewer conducted the interviews to prevent bias and/or coercion to ensure the data was valid and reliable. Biases originate from my involvement in the program and from hiring administrators where many of the new principals come from this program. The interviewer used was an experienced building level administrator with knowledge of the leadership preparation program. He was an elementary principal with 18 years of experience in the district and 28 total years of experience. He has his Education Doctorate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His dissertation was also a qualitative case-study.

Research Questions and Links to Interview Questions

This section will detail how the research questions and sub questions relate to the interview questions asked of all participants. Interview questions were determined by looking at quality components of leadership preparation programs found in the literature review combined with questions that would get participants to explain what was beneficial or not beneficial in the program.

Research Question 1

How do aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district describe their key experiences in the program?

Sub Question 1A: How do aspiring leaders describe the structures, experiences, and frameworks in place for the leadership preparation program?

Sub Question 1B: What experiences described in a leadership preparation program were not meaningful to a participant's development as a leader?

Corresponding Interview Questions to Research Questions 1, 1A, 1B.

- Please describe the organization of the leadership preparation program.
- What experiences did you participate in within the leadership preparation program?
- Describe the experiences within the leadership preparation program that helped you grow as a leader? Content Probes: Guest Speakers, Shadowing Experiences, Mock Interview, Capstone Project, Leadership Experience, Board Meeting, Gallup Strengths Coaching, Fierce Training.
- What experiences in the leadership program did not enhance your skill or understanding in leadership?
- What are the changes you would suggest to the program?
- Now that you have experienced the leadership preparation program, what additional suggestions and recommendations do you have to make the program more effective?

Research Question 2

How do aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district explain how their experiences in the program prepared them for leadership roles?

Sub Question 2A: How do aspiring leaders describe the experiences of the leadership preparation program which best prepared them to be effective leaders?

Sub Question 2B: How do aspiring leaders describe the ways their experiences fostered their growth in leadership skills?

Corresponding Interview Questions to Research Questions 2, 2A, 2B.

- How are you applying your learning in the leadership preparation to your current role?
- How would you describe the most valuable skills you learned in the leadership preparation program?
- How do you believe your leadership has changed as a result of your participation in the leadership preparation program?
- Describe the experiences within the leadership preparation program that helped you grow as a leader? Content Probes: Guest Speakers, Shadowing Experiences, Mock Interview, Capstone Project, Leadership Experience, Board Meeting, Gallup Strengths Coaching, Fierce Training.
- How does the leadership preparation program help prepare leaders? How did it help you?

- How has the leadership preparation program helped you increase your system's knowledge in the district?
- How has your experiences in the leadership preparation program enhanced your personal professional development?
- What future leadership position do you aspire to in the next 5 years?

Data Collection Procedures

Sampling

Purposeful sampling is when a researcher selects individuals because they purposefully inform an understanding of a research problem (Creswell, 2013). Members are chosen to represent a type in relation to criterion. This is to ensure all backgrounds are represented as well as to account for the diversity of experience within each group (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

One purposeful sampling technique is maximum variation. This method of sampling is used to document diverse variations of individuals based on specific characteristics. Maximum variation consists of determining criteria that differentiate the participants in the study. This approach is often used to increase the likelihood the findings will reflect differences or variations, which would be insightful for the study (Creswell, 2013). The criteria for maximum variation in this study is concerned with the current occupation of those in the sample, such as teacher, teacher leader, or administrator. Purposeful sampling with maximum variation was utilized for this study because participants bring varied backgrounds and experiences to this program.

The sample for this study consisted of ten participants. All ten participants completed the leadership preparation program within the last two years. Both male and female participants were asked to participate in the study. The sampling included at least two participants from each group listed below that met each of the following criteria:

- currently teachers aspiring for leadership positions,
- currently in teacher leadership positions,
- currently in building-level administration jobs in their current district, and
- currently in building-level administrator jobs in other districts.

Participant information is detailed further in Table 3 (names are pseudonyms):

Table 3

Participant Information

Name	Position	1 or 2 yr. Program	Desired Position
Alice	Teacher	1 year	SPED Director
Bill	Admin Intern	1 year	Building Principal
Claire	Admin Intern	1 year	Building Principal
Anna	Literacy teacher	2 year	Dir. of Curriculum
Adam	Social Studies teacher	2 year	Human Resources
Stan	Elem. Principal	1 year	Elem. Principal
Laura	Assistant Principal	2 year	Building Principal
Jack	Assistant Principal	2 year	Building Principal
Ryan	SPED Teacher	2 year	Assistant Principal/ Athletic Director
Cindy	Business teacher	2 year	Assistant Principal

Qualitative interviewing can vary in approach. Many interviews employ open-ended questions that allow for individual variations. These interviews may be used in isolation in qualitative research or in conjunction with other methods such as document analysis, observation or other techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). For the purposes of this study, only data from the interviews was utilized.

Data Collection Steps

Conducting personal interviews was the data collection strategy. An interview protocol with two research questions and multiple sub questions was developed and then the researcher refined interview questions and procedures through pilot testing. This took place four weeks before interviews were conducted. The researcher also conducted two trial interviews, which enabled the identification of any concerns or issues regarding the wording of questions, organization and order of the interview, as well as appropriate allotment of time. The trial interviews were conducted with two former members of the program that no longer work for the school district. One trial interview participant was a principal in another district and the other trial participant was a teacher in another district. They were chosen because coercion would not be an issue, because they no longer worked for the school district. The trial interviews allowed the researcher to remove a repetitive question and add a question that was needed to successfully answer the research questions posed by this study.

The researcher then designed the following data collection steps as recommended by Creswell and Clark (2007). The researcher identified the interviewees based on purposeful sampling. A place for conducting the interviews that was conducive for audio

recording and limited distractions was determined. An interviewer was selected to complete the interviews planned for October and November, 2017 with approximately one hour to complete, and no advice to be given. A digital audio-recording device was determined for use as well as a transcriptionist to transcribe all interviews verbatim.

After participants were identified, they were invited to participate through a letter of invitation. Once they agreed to participate, the interviewer asked interviewees to complete a consent form from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A), and reviewed with participants the purpose of the study, the amount of time needed for the interviews and plans for using the results of the interview. Next a document to schedule the time and location for interviews to be conducted was sent.

The approved interviews began with background questions that allowed the interviewees to share familiar information and allowed them to get used to the format of the interview and the audio recording device. Interview protocols (see Appendix E) were used to guide the interviews for the leadership preparation program participants. The interview protocols ensured all participants answered basic questions to help establish data trends, such as: (a) length in program (1 or 2 years); (b) gender; (c) position upon entering program; (d) current position; and (e) desired position. All questions were also listed on the interview protocols along with possible content probes.

Data Analysis Procedures

The gathering of data is only the first step in a research project as the data needs to be interpreted and analyzed. If interviews are to be utilized, then the data must be

coded, categorized and sometimes even reworked by the researcher (Weller & Romney, 1988).

Evaluating and analyzing data from qualitative case studies can be a difficult task. “It is difficult to report the findings in a concise manner, and yet it is the researcher’s responsibility to convert a complex phenomenon into a format that is readily understood by the reader” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 555). The ultimate goal with the data analysis of a qualitative case study is to allow readers to feel as if they have been a participant in the study and can draw their own conclusions and apply them to their own knowledge base of the subject matter (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Essentially, researchers want to tell a story regarding the phenomenon they are studying.

After the interviews were transcribed by a transcriptionist, the researcher examined all of the data utilizing thematic analysis. This was an initial review of the interview transcript. The review included reading the transcript several times to get a general sense of the data. This step gave the researcher a holistic view of the data prior to applying codes for deeper analysis. The transcripts were coded using NVivo coding software. NVivo allowed the researcher to organize and manage the transcripts from the interviews so the researcher could start to find insights into the data. The software allowed the researcher to analyze the data in a more efficient way.

The researcher identified themes by coding text segments and looking for patterns across the data or clustering codes that were similar. Participants’ quotes were also used as evidence of the themes that emerged during analysis. The data was also formatted to allow the researcher to view all participants’ answers for each question. For

example, when the researcher looked at question #1, he was able to look at all participants' responses to question #1 at the same time. Overall, common words, text segments or elements that were found in the data began to emerge (ex: Systems Leadership). Several of the words and text segments in the data ultimately became central themes based on frequency. The more frequently coded segments were each explored for relevant information based on participant responses to include in the findings of this study. The way the data were organized in NVivo allowed the researcher to look at each participant's transcript and see exactly what he/she had to say about each theme. Once the data was organized, an audit trail was created of all NVivo codes which were structured around the central themes that were identified as a result of the audit. This audit trail of all codes can be found in Appendix G.

Verification Procedures

In qualitative research, verification refers to the procedures used during the process of research to gradually contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and ultimately the rigor of the study (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

Data are systematically checked, focus is maintained, and the fit of data and the conceptual work of analysis and interpretation are monitored and confirmed constantly. Verification strategies help the researcher identify when to continue, stop or modify the research process in order to achieve reliability and validity and ensure rigor. (Morse et al., 2002, p. 17)

Reliability also refers to the extent to which a study can be replicated. In a qualitative study such as this, human behavior will not remain constant across another study because the human subjects will more than likely describe different experiences which makes replication virtually impossible (Merriam, 2001).

To ensure validity of the data analyzed, all interviews were recorded with an electronic recording device and transcribed verbatim. These steps ensured the data were accurate prior to analysis. To further ensure reliability from the perspectives of the participants and for the study itself, participant checks were conducted. Transcripts from the interviews were sent to participants for review. This allowed the participants to expand on ideas or experiences if they felt they were not represented by reviewing transcripts. Conducting participant checks ensured the data accurately reflected the participants' realities. All participants reviewed the transcripts of their interview and confirmed with the interviewer the transcripts accurately described their responses to the interview questions.

One form of triangulation was used to provide a holistic view of the topic because multiple sources of information were utilized (i.e., participants). A clear audit trail (Appendix G) was used to help other researchers understand how data were collected, categories derived, and how decisions were made throughout the study. Also included is a Data Collection Matrix (appendix H), that details the interview information (Date, time) and number of transcript pages for each interview.

Ethical Considerations

Because of the researcher's relationship to the program being studied and the role the researcher has in the district hiring administrators, there were certain expectations of relationship, based on familiarity with people in the setting and past interactions. These potential relationships can "constrain effective data collection" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 22) and possibly be influenced by coercion. In order to relieve the possibility of

coercion another administrator in the district, not involved with the leadership preparation program, conducted the qualitative case study interviews. The administrator used to conduct the interviews was an experienced and published qualitative researcher.

Ethically, human participants need to be protected from any possible psychological or physical harm resulting from participation in a research study. Participation in research studies must be voluntary, rather than coerced in any way. Participants of this study were fully informed of the purpose and procedures and any potential risks of the research prior to agreeing to participate by signing an informed consent form. Furthermore, participants were assured of confidentiality regarding any identifying information that might reveal their role in the study.

The University's IRB monitors compliance with federal regulations designed to protect human subjects from harmful or undignified treatment. Researchers must complete an on-line training and receive certification upon completion of that training. Official IRB approval must be secured prior to undertaking any research.

For the purpose of this research study, the following actions were taken:

1. Participants were informed of the purpose and procedures of the study and of the provisions for confidentiality and anonymity via an e-mail message and through the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B).
2. The Informed Consent Form was provided to participants for their review and signature, indicating their approval/agreement to participate in the study prior to the interview process. Teachers/Administrators were asked to sign the

Informed Consent Form on the date of, and immediately prior to, the interview.

3. Participants were informed of the necessity for audio-recording the interviews and had the opportunity to give permission to do so during the recruitment and acceptance process. Their acceptance of the audio-recording provision was authorized by their consent on the Informed Consent Form.
4. Research materials were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office and only viewed by the researcher and transcriptionist throughout the transcription and member-checking processes prior to being destroyed which will ensure confidentiality was maintained. The materials will be destroyed after one year.
5. Lastly, the researcher employed fundamental ethical behaviors during the research process such as minimization of researcher bias and participant check. For the participant check, all participants were given their interview transcripts to verify before they were destroyed.

Summary

The case study approach was used to study a leadership preparation program in one Midwestern school district. The study focused on participants' responses about key practices, structures and frameworks offered in the leadership preparation program and the value or detriment placed on these practices by participants.

Characteristics of qualitative research were explored in this chapter, as well as a detailed explanation of the case study approach. The research questions used to guide the

study were illustrated and linked to the interview questions used with participants.

Additionally, the role of the researcher was explored to give relevant background and to note any biases that might have been present. Data collection procedures were reviewed as well as some detail about the participants who took part in the study. Data collection steps and procedures were detailed. Verification procedures were identified to ensure reliability and validity to the study, and lastly, ethical considerations were specified to ensure all participants who took part in the study were protected.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to examine how aspiring leaders, who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district, described their experiences and how those experiences prepared them for leadership roles. A qualitative case study research approach was used to study the leadership development program within one Midwestern school district. Interviews were conducted to bring common themes to light. The sample consisted of ten participants chosen from a total of 113 participants in the program (n = 113) since 2012. Of the total participants considered, 60 participants were in the one year program and 53 were in the two year program. The sampling included at least two participants from each group listed below that met each of the following criteria:

- currently teachers aspiring for leadership positions,
- currently in teacher leadership positions,
- currently in building-level administration jobs in their current district, and
- currently in building-level administrator/leadership jobs in other districts.

After the interviews were transcribed by a transcriptionist, the researcher examined all of the data utilizing thematic analysis. The transcripts were coded using NVivo coding software. NVivo allowed the researcher to organize and manage the transcripts from the interviews so the researcher could start to find insights into the data. The software allowed the researcher to organize the data to identify central themes in the findings. The researcher imported and analyzed the transcriptions by coding the documents and utilizing the software to help organize the qualitative data into themes to

further analyze the information collected. Once the data was organized, an audit trail was created of all NVivo codes which were structured around the central themes that were identified as a result of the audit.

The remainder of this chapter will explore the findings in this research study, giving specific information regarding the participants and their responses as well as themes identified. The information garnered from the interviews is also linked back to the information in the literature review found in chapter two, as well as the original research questions of the study.

Participants

The ten former leadership preparation program participants interviewed for this study provided valuable insight into the programmatic structure and experiences offered in this program in one Midwestern school district. Additional information regarding the ten participants is provided in the next section. The participant information listed on Table 3 (see p. 59) as well as the participant vignettes listed below are limited because the researcher did not conduct the interviews. Information is limited to what the interviewer listed on the interview sheet.

Vignettes

Interview #1—Alice. Alice participated in the one year leadership preparation program. She was a district program facilitator upon entering the program and is still a district program facilitator today. A district program facilitator works exclusively with one or two areas of curriculum and provides direct support to teachers in those content

areas. She is currently on a teaching contract in a teacher-leader role. Her desired position is a special education director.

Interview #2—Bill. Bill participated in the one year leadership preparation program. He was a 5th grade teacher upon entering the program and is now an administrative intern. An administrative intern is essentially an assistant elementary principal without teacher evaluation responsibilities. Bill is currently on a teacher's contract in a leadership role. Administrative interns are the internal candidate pool for elementary principal positions. His desired position is an elementary principal.

Interview #3—Claire. Claire participated in the one year leadership preparation program. She was an administrative intern upon entering the program and is still an administrative intern. She is currently on a teacher's contract in a leadership position. Her desired position is a building principal.

Interview #4—Anna. Anna participated in the two year leadership preparation program. She was an administrative intern/literacy interventionist upon entering the program. In this position she assisted the building principal with certain administrative tasks and worked with struggling readers. She is currently an elementary building principal. Her eventual desired position is a Director of Curriculum and Instruction at the District level.

Interview #5—Adam. Adam participated in the two year leadership preparation program. He was a high school social studies teacher/dean upon entering the program. A dean is a pre-administrative position that primarily deals with student discipline. Some districts employ deans to cut down on administrative costs as deans are typically on a

teacher's contract. He is currently a Pre K-8 building principal in another district. His desired position is to be a human resources administrator.

Interview #6—Stan. Stan participated in the one year leadership development program. He was a classroom teacher upon entering the program and is currently an elementary principal in another school district. He is currently in his desired position.

Interview #7—Laura. Laura participated in the two year leadership development program. She was a classroom teacher upon entering the program and is currently a building level assistant principal. Her desired position is to be a building principal.

Interview #8—Jack. Jack participated in the two year leadership preparation program. He was a classroom teacher upon entering the program and is currently a middle level assistant principal. His desired position is to be a building principal.

Interview #9—Ryan. Ryan participated in the two year leadership preparation program. He was a special education teacher upon entering the program and is currently a special education teacher and assistant athletic director. He is currently on a teacher contract in a teaching role. His desired position is to be an assistant principal and/or athletic director.

Interview #10—Cindy. Cindy participated in the two year leadership preparation program. She was a business teacher upon entering the program and is still a business teacher with some administrative duties. She is currently on a teaching contract and in a teaching role. Her desired position is to be a building level assistant principal.

Major Themes

Participants shared what experiences were valuable to them during this leadership preparation program. Six major themes emerged as a result of the interviews conducted. The six themes were: Guest Speakers, Systems Knowledge, Leadership Experiences, Networking & Collaboration, Shadowing, and Leadership Framework.

“Guest Speakers” was the most mentioned theme by participants. Throughout the course of the program, guest speakers are utilized to share their experiences and to explain how their role fits into the overall structure of the school district. Participants appreciated hearing insight from guest speakers on leadership as well as their journey to their current position.

“Systems Knowledge” was a primary theme mentioned by all participants. The majority of comments related to the systematic overview participants received from participating in the program. Being able to see how all of the different parts of the district interconnect to form a large system was deemed most valuable by participants.

The “Leadership Experiences” theme centered around three main experiences: attendance at a board meeting, attending the *Fierce Conversations* training, and taking part in the *Gallup StrengthsFinder* Survey and related activities. While there are other leadership activities in the program, these three activities were mentioned by participants as being the most significant.

“Networking & Collaboration” was referenced many times during the interviews. The cohort structure of the program, as well as being given access to guest speakers and district leaders, was deemed very valuable to program participants and their development

as leaders. The program also created strong relationships and prospects for future leadership positions.

“Shadowing” is when one professional spends a day or part of a day with another professional to gain insight into what he/she does on a daily basis. Shadowing allows access into a position that would not normally occur. It was deemed as a very valuable experience by participants.

Using the district “Leadership Framework” was also a major theme to participants. The district’s Leadership Framework has five domains: Relational, Instructional, Visionary, Collaborative, and Systems. Participants appreciated the formal structure of the framework to ensure they were focusing on all aspects of leadership development to provide a well-rounded experience. Participants were asked to rate themselves and reflect on their growth in the five leadership domains in the framework.

Central Themes Found in the Research

Theme 1: Guest Speakers. All interview participants referenced guest speakers (34 references, 10 sources) during their interviews. This was the most referenced theme across all interviews. Guest speakers invited to speak included the superintendent, associate superintendents, as well as multiple directors covering curriculum, special education, student services, assessment, and human resources. Guest speakers talked about their journey as a leader as well as their overall leadership philosophy. Guest speakers also gave participants tips on how get a leadership position; whether it was sharing their insights on good leadership activities in which they should participate, or tips on how to interview for a leadership position. Participants used the information

gained from guest speakers to apply toward their overall understanding of systems leadership as well as learning more about several positions in which they were interested.

Guest speakers were deemed a valuable part of the program. Laura shared a great example that referenced the guest speakers in relation to systems knowledge, which ties the first two themes together,

I also think by them sharing their stories, in addition to their roles and responsibilities, their path taken to get there, you can connect with that too. They were part of that system going through to get to where they were now. And I would say that was true with the administrators that came in and shared their stories too. What was the catalyst that helped them through the system as far as, the leadership system specifically?

Guest speakers were deemed valuable for systems knowledge, exposure, as well as sharing their path traveled for their leadership position. Many noted without the leadership preparation experience, they would not have met the district leaders or spent time with them. Being able to hear about the path traveled to their leadership position was also referenced multiple times as a valuable experience. Alice spoke of the value of guest speakers when she said,

I think one of the biggest pieces that I enjoyed was the opportunity to spend time with other leaders in the district, and kind of glean their wisdom in some ways. If I could do that again I would keep taking that opportunity because I grew a lot just from having those conversations and the push and the challenge that they gave in those conversations.

When Bill was asked about the most valuable part of the program, he also referenced guest speakers when he said,

The guest speakers. Those guest speakers are there to build some sort of individual connection. I think in a district our size, I think that personal connection is huge, especially to people that are aspiring to be in those positions. I felt like far and away the guest speakers were probably the part that was most critical to me.

Claire mentioned a specific guest speaker who was a Student Services Director when she noted,

He shared with us some fantastic student services examples, he also asked us to reflect on scenarios that were real world, real life, had happened in the last couple of weeks and months. And it gave us a better perspective of some of the pieces that needed to happen in our buildings, or bigger, coming from the elementary level, bigger perspective of what it means to live in the middle and high school world. Especially in regards to discipline and behavior.

Anna added,

So each month there was a different speaker from a different department who came in to kind of share a little bit about who they are, their journey and of how they got to where they are at. They shared some of their beliefs and their philosophy, just kind of imparting some of their knowledge about being a leader, what does it take.

Some of the guest speakers were individual, like an Associate Superintendent or Director, and some were part of a panel. The panel would typically be comprised of a variety of building level administrators that were early in their administrative careers. Stan spoke specifically about one of the panels when he said,

I think some of the best experiences I had, came from the panels that came in and talked. Our district, as big as it is, I got to hear from each one of the leaders of departments, so I remember HR, I remember student services, just getting a broader perspective on all of the different things that the district goes through in planning and preparations, and then getting to listen to some of the leaders on the more personal level.

Stan went on to describe the panels and he noted,

They shared stories of things that had gone on, experiences that they had had and we were able to ask questions associated with it. It really helped me just form my own type of understanding of the type of leader that I wanted to be, what I wanted to be viewed as, um, and then just getting to know people on more of a personal level.

Guest speakers and panels were referenced the most by participants. Every class would have at least one guest speaker. Sometimes there would be two speakers and sometimes there would be a panel. This feature was a much valued aspect of this leadership preparation program.

Theme 2: Systems knowledge. Systems knowledge was a major theme referenced (26 references, 9 sources) in the interviews. Participants gained systems knowledge through shadowing leaders, guest speakers, as well as through discussion during each class. It is a major component of the leadership preparation program and it was clearly impactful to participants. Systems knowledge helps participants see the complexities of an organization and how all of the pieces work together to form a large organization. Most of the activities in this leadership development program are designed to add to participants overall knowledge of the bigger system at work.

Laura shared a strong example of how she gained systems knowledge as a result of the leadership development program:

So connect back to the bigger picture, before the leadership preparation program there weren't a lot of opportunities... to learn from first-hand sources, from the people in the role, how the organizational system of the district works, besides inquiring and asking questions on your own. It was devoting a chunk of time to hearing from their perspective.

Jack also shared systems knowledge was one of his biggest takeaways from the program:

And I think that, systems leadership maybe was the strength of the program for me. And it's something that I'm still working on, systems leadership is not my greatest strength...I think the systems piece of it, and understanding the district system and the district organization was maybe one of my greatest takeaways.

Ryan added,

I think the beneficial thing for me, during the leadership thing, during my leadership program, was I was around at a time where the district was doing a lot of renovations, through a lot of different schools, and seeing how that was all being put together through bond issues and through certain situations and trying to find out how to budget money as far as we can do this to a certain school this year, but we're going to have to wait next year to do what we need to do at the high school level, because we just don't have the monies allocated at that time, to do all of it all at once. I think that was beneficial to see, it's, you understand, like when you go through a leadership academy, especially within the district, I think the little pieces of the puzzle are put together to create a whole. I think that what was interesting to me, to see that everything that's happening has a reason to it, and it's all going to come together all at once, at some point in time.

Ryan's reflection speaks to the depth this program goes to teach systems knowledge.

Participants made many connections, but Ryan's comments make a very solid connection to systems knowledge. Through the guest speakers, panels, job shadowing, mock interviews, and attendance at a board meeting, all of these pointed to systems leadership for participants.

Another aspect of participants' views on systems knowledge was their own ability to spend some time with guest speakers and panel participants. Participants noted the experience gave them positive exposure to many members of the systems leadership in the district. Alice stated,

I think the biggest thing for me in the program was other leaders in the district getting to know who I am and what I do. I have a unique role in the district so a lot of people don't really understand, from a systems perspective, what it is I do on a day-to-day basis. So that was nice to be able to have those conversations. I think I keep going back to in a system this large an opportunity to meet people I wouldn't get to meet on a regular basis, and build those collaborative relationships that have led to some work that I'm doing now. So a perfect example is through this I have been working with our Math MEP on a Tier 3 process, and really what does that RTI + I for Mathematics look like at the elementary level. I don't know that that partnership would have happened prior to that connection that was made there.

Alice touched on a broader topic explored later in the networking and collaboration section of results. This was an important point to make because the heavy emphasis on systems knowledge in this program benefits all participants as a result of the exposure participants get with many district leaders. Prior to this program, all aspiring administrators had to make their own time with district leaders which is not always easy to do. Program participants would do this by serving on district committees and/or scheduling individual appointments to meet with the district leaders.

Participants appreciated the large overview perspective of how the district operates and functions. Claire appreciated getting “that 10,000 foot view from being a leader in the building to being a leader at the district level and the decisions that they need to make within those settings.” So many of the experiences designed for this leadership preparation program are aimed at giving participants a different view than the walls of their classroom or of their building. They were not only given the perspective of building leadership in the district, but district leadership as well. Anna spoke to this in her comment,

I think it helped me by knowing who were the people that you could reach out to if you needed support or if you had questions. But also kind of seeing how everything is really connected and that there is a process in place, there are policies and procedures that you can always go back and refer to if you are needing help with something or if you are wanting to understand why something came about.

Seeing the speakers from different departments and from various buildings, enabled Anna to see how everything works in concert and is driven by policy and procedure. Requiring participants to attend a board meeting allowed them to see the governing body of a school district and the role the board plays in the system.

In Stan's interview he synthesized the systems knowledge information in the leadership development program when he stated,

I would say it's important having that understanding of the system that is in place, and I rely a lot on policy and procedure right now, and so if I ever have a question about something I'm always going on the internet and looking at policy and procedure first before I make the phone call. So that way I know, ok, if I can't figure out the answer here then I'm going to go in person to contact who I need to contact.

Systems knowledge was the second most referenced theme (26 references) in the interviews. All school districts, large or small, have a variety of systems in place. The larger the district, the more systems. Jack noted, "from a classroom perspective, when I was a teacher, I had individual systems in our classroom, but again, no real view of what systems looked like beyond my classroom walls." All participants in the interviews made the connection of the importance of systems knowledge as a leader in any school district. They also noted it was one of the biggest benefits of the program.

Theme 3: Leadership experiences. Leadership experiences are an integral part of the leadership development program. The overall term of leadership experiences was referenced 17 times by 9 participants. The experiences are designed to give participants solid experience to allow them to be more familiar with the leadership roles they one day hope to attain. These experiences varied with all participants as they each picked a leadership experience relevant for them in the job in which they currently held, or to which they aspired. Some participants created introductory letters to give to their staff and community in preparation for their first leadership role. Other participants created a presentation for parents attending a new school or crafted a presentation around their

Gallup strengths to use for a faculty presentation. Participants were encouraged to create an experience or project that was meaningful to them and their development as a leader.

Three specific leadership experiences were detailed in participant responses. These included participation in a workshop called “Fierce Conversations,” involvement and activities with their *Gallup Signature Strengths*, and attending a school board meeting. Each will be detailed below.

Fierce conversations training (15 references, 9 sources). *Fierce Leadership*, a book by Susan Scott (2009), was the basis for an administrative training attended by participants in the leadership development program. The training was called, Fierce Conversations and participants believed it was a very effective and popular training. Participants learned the principles of Fierce Conversations in the two day training and were given opportunities to practice the conversation models. Whether it was learning how to confront someone with an issue, or talking with someone regarding an issue they are struggling with, the models and resources provided to participants were valued. All interviewees that attended the training thought it was one of the more valuable pieces of the overall program. Alice reflected on one of the more popular quotes in the book that states “The conversation is the relationship, and while no single conversation is guaranteed to change the trajectory of a career, a company, a relationship, or a life, any single conversation can” (Scott, 2009, p. 15). With this passage in mind, Alice noted,

Before (Fierce training) I would have been a person that maybe would have not honored the other person by addressing the issue but maybe avoided the issue or brushed over it rather than addressing it head-on, because I do care about that person and want to make sure that that relationship is there and founded because it’s important to the work that we do.

Claire added,

It's really hard to have those conversations, so, I'm still going back and reflecting on how I need to use that in our building. But the idea of it has stuck with me since, and I think it comes up so frequently in the work that we do, um, that I'm glad that I had the actual training to fall back on.

Stan summed up most of the feelings regarding this training when he stated,

Fierce training is probably one of the things that stayed with me the most, is how to frame a conversation in a way that gets to the heart of the issue at hand, or helps you learn more about a situation to make an informed decision...on my desk right now I've got my Fierce, what do you call it, beach ball. I always like to reference that for the different perspectives that everybody brings, so, what I learned in that very first Fierce training is, you know, you want to get to know, or get to find out as many perspectives as you can before making a decision, and I keep it on my desk as a reminder that everybody's got a different piece of the picture and, and to make the best decisions you have to investigate what all of those perspectives are....

Stan continued with a powerful statement regarding how often he uses this training,

Well I think I apply it every single day. One of the things that stands out to me, and this is from Fierce, that the conversation is the relationship, so every interaction that I have, every time people see me or view what I'm doing, and living what I want people to model in my schools, so I would say that leadership, a piece of that for me was what do you really want to show as a leader? And in that preparation in the program is really what I live out every day.

Fierce Conversations training was consistently mentioned as a powerful professional development for participants. Some mentioned they use this training every day. It was seen as a valuable tool to handle the difficult conversations an educational leader will need to conduct.

Strengthsfinder by Gallup (12 references, 9 sources). Over the course of Gallup's 40-year study of human strengths, Gallup developed a list of 34 of the most common talents and developed a comprehensive assessment. This assessment identifies five signature strengths for participants. The overall premise is to focus on people's

strengths, rather than their weaknesses (Rath, 2007). All participants in the leadership development program took the *Gallup StrengthsFinder Assessment*.

One of the more notable differences regarding the one year program versus the two year program was the focus on Gallup Strengths. The two-year participants mentioned the work on the Gallup Strengths more than the one year participants. Some one year participants could not recall specific work on Gallup Strengths. Laura shared the group “had our strengths on our name tags, but I don’t remember doing any specific activities around them.” Ryan had a more vivid memory of his Gallup activities,

Yes, we actually took the Gallup surveys, and then gave us the results back. And we did it, actually, usually it’s worked, you’re charged to do that, but we got it for free. And then it gave us our five leadership qualities. We were told that if you took it again those leadership qualities could potentially change, but yeah, I took it and it was very interesting. I think it was, it kind of shows you what type of leadership, or what ways you lean to certain things.

The incorporation of Gallup Strengths in both the one year and the two year program were less noted because they were infused in most all activities in one way or another according to some participants. Participants were often asked to focus on their strengths or discuss which strengths they would leverage given a particular scenario. Other activities included describing a difficult conversation with a partner and highlighting the strengths they used to get through it. Another Gallup activity involved discussing how they utilized their strengths to get through a difficult situation with a parent or student.

Focusing on people’s strengths rather than their weaknesses is a premise of the *Gallup StrengthsFinders* program. Participants found it useful to be able to identify and learn about their own strengths as well as those they collaborate with and supervise.

Board meetings (11 references, 9 sources). Responses were varied when it came to attending a school board meeting and writing a reflection. Some thought the experience was valuable, while some did not think it was as valuable. Participants had a variety of board meetings to choose from so some of the experiences may have been more valuable than others, depending on what was on the board agenda the night a participant attended. Cindy made mention of this when she stated,

Depending on the topic at hand, yes, it really depended on what was going on at the moment. Some (board meetings) were drier than others, but some were really informative. I feel like we had a lot of great inside information. We knew what was going on in the district, we were probably really close to the pulse of what was going on, throughout the program.

Bill noted the value of attending a board meeting when he stated,

Yes, yeah, I attended one board meeting which was the first board meeting that I had attended. Since then I have attended a couple more, as a result of that I felt like it was kind of a nice way to get involved in that and feel like you had a kind of purpose, I guess, to be there. And then since then I think I've definitely have paid more attention to the board briefs and things like that, and not to everything, but I think I definitely have been more cognizant of what's being discussed and the impact that it has on our daily lives, so. Yeah, no that was a nice way to kind of start that process.

One of the major differences between participants in the one year leadership preparation program versus the two year program was attendance at board meetings. Those in the two year program had to attend a board meeting both years of the program. This allowed them to attend a regular board meeting as well as a committee meeting. A committee meeting was typically the second meeting of the month and dealt with two or three specific topics. An example of a committee topic might have been the board learning about the administrative evaluation model. Ryan, who participated in the two year program made the following comment regarding the board meetings,

Yes, actually two, cause I had, like I said, mine was a 2-year program. Now it's currently a 1-year program. So the first year we were required to attend a board meeting and also a committee of a whole meeting. There's two different types. So we had to attend one of those each of that year, and then the 2nd year we had to attend a board meeting as well. Yes, and the reason being is because by attending a board meeting you get an idea of what's happening within the district, not only from an administrative superintendent point of view, but you also get a viewpoint of, because they were open meetings, from the public. So parents, students that type of thing. So that was eye-opening to me. And then on the flip side of that, you can bring back to your building things that you've experienced that might be in question, like faculty would say "Why are we doing this? Why are we doing that?" And one thing you could say is "Hey, you know, the board meetings are open to the public. If you want to know why this is this or that is being done, I highly recommend that you go to a board meeting cause you're going to find out why these things are being done." A lot of times in a building you hear a lot of negative type things, and I think that was eye-opening to me, going to a board meeting, cause then you could relate and explain to the people within your building, "This is why these things are taking place. And this is what I learned from that. And this is what you could learn from then as well. If you attend one of those meetings."

Ryan really spoke to the purpose of attendance at a board meeting for this class.

Participants mentioned seeing the connection between policy, the public, and the School Board. The meetings explained some of "the why" behind why we do things. Many people that work for a school system never go to a school board meeting. It was noted as a valuable experience from the majority of participants in the program.

Attending the board meetings did not make a positive impact on all participants as Bill stated "the board meeting, that was another thing I was kind of not really sure the connection." Stan continued that attendance at a board meeting was "beneficial from a big picture aspect, but no, it didn't change really anything on the day-to-day level for me."

Board Meetings were valued by some participants and not as valued by others. Meetings helped some participants with systems leadership and helped with the process

of how school districts conduct business. There is also the visibility piece of being seen at a school board meeting with all District administrators and School Board members present.

Theme 4: Networking & collaboration (16 references, 7 sources). Networking is described as interacting with other people to exchange information and develop contacts, especially to further one's career. This is a central theme of this leadership development program. These classes are a cohort that establishes relationships that ultimately will benefit them down the road. Many participants, as noted in the guest speaker section, mentioned how valuable it was to meet and collaborate with District leaders. The same could be said for the networking and collaboration among participants.

When Alice was asked about the key components of the program to keep, she stated, "I think the natural opportunities to collaborate with others and gain others' perspectives is really valuable, and I think that opportunity to shadow and be with other district leaders was very valuable. I would definitely keep those." Bill mentioned the opportunity to build his professional network and felt that was a huge asset to being in this program.

Anna reflected on the relationships she created with the group and how they were learners and pushed one another,

I think when you surround yourself with a group of people who are learners, and they are doers, and they inspire, inspire you and make you want to be better or learn more or they might tell you "Hey, have you ever gone to this?" or "Have you ever heard about this?" Well there's reading a book, attending a training, people nudge you in a direction to be better or to do more every day, and so I think that's a big piece of it.

Stan also discussed the networking and collaboration piece when asked about the strongest components of the program he stated, “the collaboration piece, so just knowing that you have colleagues that you can reach out to and trust.” Claire also liked the collaborative nature of the program. She had a powerful quote that mentioned collaboration, networking, Fierce Conversations, as well as reflection,

that networking piece and getting to know other folks in the district and getting to know, you know, who do I ask for help if I need something or, who can collaborate with me on a project that’s going to be useful and helpful. Who do I call if I have a question about something? Those pieces have been extremely helpful as well as the just day-to-day reflection of “Is this the time I need to have a fierce conversation?” and then how do I do that and who are some people who could help script that conversation out of me so that I’m successful in it. I think that reflection is probably the, the reflection and the networking are the most important parts.

Some of the participants indicated their needed to be more time devoted to collaboration and networking. Several mentioned the guest speakers usually took up most of the time and they would have appreciated more time to collaborate and discuss the thoughts and ideas presented by the guest speakers. Specifically Claire mentioned,

I think if we could find ways to have more conversations in the room, I know we had quite a few and times always limited, so I don’t know how much you can flex that, but I felt like we were always wanting to talk to each other more and get to know each other more and figure out where each person is coming from and get their perspective and their experience more.

Theme 5: Shadowing. Most of the participants interviewed were given an opportunity to shadow (13 references, 7 sources) two different leaders. This means they spent a morning or afternoon with someone in a leadership position to witness what he/she does in his/her job and also have the opportunity to ask questions. Some of the participants from the two year program stated they did not get an opportunity to shadow

leaders in the district. Of those that did shadow leaders in the district, it was seen as a worthwhile experience.

Cindy did not remember shadowing another leader in the district, but she still commented on it when she stated,

I would almost suggest that, the shadowing, and I don't recall shadowing, but I think that would be great. If you think you want to be a curriculum facilitator, as an example, spend an hour, hour and a half, with a curriculum facilitator during one of their busier times, so you can see what's happening. You want to be an AP, spend an hour, hour and a half, watching what they do. You might have made assumptions that are not realistic.

Jack also did not participate in shadowing but added,

And I think that's really, the opportunities I've had to talk to other people, and now my role, and to shadow other administrators or to see what they are doing, or just talk about how they handled situations, is really where I grow the most, because I realize that there's maybe a better way than the way that I would always approach things. Um, so I wish I would have had that shadowing experience.

When Ryan was commenting on quality components of the program, he voiced, "I think I'd go back to the job shadow experience, and then bringing that, what you've experienced back to your whole group and kind of talking those out and being coached through them." He went on to relate the job showing experience to student teaching when he added,

I think having that opportunity to go in is, is really beneficial. I think the more chances, to me a lot of, what I hear often from the shadow, people shadowing is "Do I really want to be an administrator? What do you like? What don't you like?" And to me it's much like student teaching, like until you get into the classroom, you don't know.

Ryan's comments speak to the power of the shadowing activity. This experience gives participants perspective about whether they are on the right leadership track or not. This experience provided participants clarity on their leadership aspirations.

Stan described the shadowing experiences as "priceless." He was able to shadow two very diverse administrators he admired and he felt it was crucial in learning more about elementary leadership.

Shadowing was seen as a valuable activity. Several participants even recommended the shadowing activities should be expanded, so participants can shadow leaders from multiple levels. This would allow participants at the elementary level (kindergarten through fifth grade) to shadow administrators or leaders from secondary schools (grade 6-12). A third experience would allow participants to shadow at elementary, secondary, and district administration.

Theme 6: Leadership framework. Many states and school districts have developed a leadership framework (10 references, 5 sources) with links to which evaluations are structured. Sometimes the leadership framework is also the bedrock of a leadership development program. It is clear educators are continually trying to define leadership and what makes a leader successful. In the leadership development program studied, the district framework was created to (a) align leadership professional development; (b) to help leaders self-assess and develop specific leadership skills; (c) to improve staff performance; and (d) increase student achievement.

Participants were asked to self-assess at the beginning of the program and each class or session was linked to one of the leadership framework domains which were:

Relational Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Systems Leadership, Visionary Leadership, and Instructional Leadership.

Alice mentioned how she is still using the Leadership Framework in her current role,

since I have the opportunity to serve as a district leader, I go back to the leadership framework often and use it as a gauge of, for my own professional growth in learning. So this year I'm really focusing, well last year I focused a lot of building that relational piece and now I'm really kind of pushing myself to that next level of the systems piece and becoming a, helping support a system-at-large rather than just building those positive relationships.

She continued,

I think it kind of goes back to that framework piece, if I utilized that to identify where I need to grow and take myself to that next level. So when I think of the framework, you know, there's some things I'm like, I'm kind of right in the middle, I'm ok, but I could really push it to the next level by developing a deeper systems knowledge or capitalizing on my strengths in particular areas and growing further in that way.

Bill related his graduate coursework to the leadership framework when he stated, "I think going through graduate work at the same time was, I felt like I was getting a lot of like, reflection on my leadership capabilities through the framework."

Anna, mentioned an emphasis on the leadership framework during her second year in the two-year program,

Year two was kind of digging into a little bit more about who you are, what you want to do, and kind of more the leadership framework came into play at that time, cause I think it had just been developed. And so we kind of looked at that a little bit more, doing a self-rating of where we are and where we wanted to be.

Not all participants found value with the leadership framework activities. Bill mentioned he felt at times the work around the leadership framework felt forced. He felt going back to it three or four times in isolation was too much. He suggested, "I think

finding ways to take that framework and then apply into pieces as opposed to thinking conceptually about it.”

Overall Themes and Relationship to Research Questions & Literature Review

Summary of themes. The themes discovered through the research have solid connections back to the information found in the literature review as well as the research questions designed for this study. The six themes had high connection with one another. For example “Guest Speakers” has a high connection with “Systems Knowledge” because most of the learning that took place around “Systems Knowledge” was a direct result of time spent with the “Guest Speakers.” “Systems Knowledge,” also connected to “Shadowing” because participants mentioned much discussion centered on “Systems Knowledge” when they spent time shadowing an administrator or teacher leader. “Leadership Experiences” correlated with “Field Experiences,” and “Shadowing” because many participants discussed experiences such as attendance at a board meeting, Fierce Conversations, and *Gallup StrengthsFinders* activities to name a few. “Networking and Collaboration,” connects to the cohort structure Orr and Orphanos (2011) referenced in the literature review stating a cohort structure for a leadership development program was seen as beneficial. The benefits of a cohort structure for a leadership development program was also referenced by Darling-Hammond et al., (2007). Lastly, “Leadership Framework,” connects to “Standards” information referenced in the literature review because the leadership framework utilized in this leadership development program was developed using state standards for leadership.

These standards were formed for districts to use at their discretion to develop their own leadership framework.

The information garnered from the research questions led the researcher to discover the central themes. By asking participants about the components of the leadership development program, as well as what they felt fostered leadership growth, themes started to emerge which also led to connections to the literature review. The connections between the central themes and the literature review are explored in the next section.

Connections between central themes and literature review. In Chapter 2, quality components of leadership development programs were identified. Many of those components listed are similar to those identified in the research of this study. The section below will detail connections between the central themes in this study and those components identified in the literature review.

Guest speakers. While guest speakers were the most identified activity by participants of this study, it was not specifically identified in the literature. It could be categorized in some of the themes from the literature review, but not directly.

Systems knowledge. This is a very broad theme so several connections can be made to the literature review. Systems knowledge could be tied to “Internships,” “Field Experiences,” “Books, Curriculum,” “Framework,” and “Teacher Leadership.” Systems knowledge is an encompassing theme that is the fiber of any educational leadership scenario, so naturally, it can be explored and revealed in many ways.

Many teacher leaders take part in book studies and rely on instructional frameworks to coach teachers as well as students. All aspiring leaders do not want to be a building or district administrators. As mentioned earlier, Barth (2013) noted opportunities need to be provided for teachers to become invested in the goals and mission of the school. Learning more about systems can help with this by ensuring teacher leaders have a bigger understanding of the mission of the district.

Leadership experiences. Leadership experiences can be tied to almost every quality component identified in the literature review. Internships, field experiences, university partner, cohort, books/curriculum, framework, and teacher leadership can all be quality leadership experiences. Specifically, field experiences has the strongest tie. In this study, participants shadowed a leader, attended a board meeting (some attended two meetings), took part in Gallup and Fierce training, completed a leadership project of their choosing, and some took part in a mock interview. These can all be listed as “Leadership Experiences.”

The literature review focuses on “grow your own” programs in the section devoted to quality components of leadership preparation programs. These programs attempted to build off of the traditional university-based program to train their aspiring leaders. This section detailed field experiences that were seen across several programs studied. Dodson (2014) shared field experiences can vary from shadowing a current principal to working on an instructional improvement team. Other leadership experiences mentioned in this section were instructional leadership with a focus on coaching teachers

and providing internships where a teacher take the role of an intern to experience various roles of the building leader.

Networking & collaboration. A cohort approach has the strongest tie to networking & collaboration. Utilizing a cohort approach was seen as a strong component of leadership development programs and was utilized in several of the programs highlighted in Chapter 2. The program being studied also used a cohort approach. Participants in the program being studied identified several leadership experiences that allowed for networking & collaboration, but some felt the strongest networks were formed from those in their cohort. Even though a cohort is limited to the people participating in the program at the time, the relationships were deemed as valuable to their leadership development.

In the literature review, Sanzo et al. (2011) noted the importance of a learning cohort that develops relationships, coordinates professional development, and provides more meaningful and realistic experiences through coordination with district personnel. This cohort formed between a partnership of a school district and a university program can articulate meaningful ties between theory and practice.

In relation to cohorts, several participants mentioned being able to take this program as a class (as a cohort) and that they can use the credit towards their Master's program in educational administration. Participants also mentioned that it was appreciated when the district picked up the cost or partial cost of the tuition. When districts can work with universities to offer credit, it is seen as a major benefit to participants.

Shadowing. The shadowing experience detailed in this study can best be described as a field experience. Dodson was referenced in the “Leadership Experiences” section above because he mentioned the value of a shadowing experience. Participants in the program being studied were asked to shadow two leaders to gain a better understanding of their job. Throughout the literature review and interview results from this study, spending time with leaders was seen as a valuable and quality experience. Some participants mentioned this experience made them realize whether they actually wanted the job they were shadowing or not. Getting a first-hand look at what a job is actually like was a worthwhile endeavor for those aspiring to be leaders.

Leadership framework. Utilization of a leadership framework was also an area that had a strong tie to the findings in the literature review. Many districts and states around the country rely on a leadership framework as the basis for their leadership development program. In the program being studied, participants were asked to reflect and assess themselves on the different aspects of the leadership framework being utilized. The ISLLC standards were also explored in the literature review as well as the framework used in Kentucky which is linked to administrative certification requirements. Leadership Frameworks are often tied to standards and some have argued standards need to be higher (Cowie & Crawford, 2007). Several examples were given in the literature review regarding the different size and scope of standards tied to leadership development programs. Cowie and Crawford (2007), and Dodson (2014) referenced programs tied to state standards, while others were tied to state run programs or the completion of a degree program from an accredited university.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question #1

1. How do aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district describe their key experiences in the program?

Sub Questions:

- 1A. How do aspiring leaders describe the structures, experiences, and frameworks in place for the leadership preparation program?
- 1B. What experiences described in a leadership preparation program were not meaningful to aspiring leaders' development?

The experiences described by participants mainly centered on the central themes discussed in this chapter. Guest speakers allowed participants to gain key insight to the systems that run the district. Guest speakers gave insight on how to get a leadership position and were deemed valuable for systems knowledge, exposure to district leadership, as well as sharing their path for leadership. Many noted without the leadership preparation experience, they would not have met the district leaders or spent time with them. Overall the knowledge gained regarding systems leadership was a direct result of having guest speakers as a part of this program.

Alice mentioned that one of the biggest pieces that she enjoyed was listening to the guest speakers. She appreciated being able to learn from their wisdom and to get their perspective on a variety of issues they discussed during their presentation. Bill appreciated the opportunity to make an individual connection with the guest speakers.

He felt the guest speakers were the most critical aspect of the program for his leadership development.

Participants also discussed the leadership experiences provided as a key experience from this program. In the literature review, some of these experiences would have been called “Field Experiences.” Participants mentioned the value of attending a board meeting and completion of the *Fierce Conversations* training, the work with *Gallup StrengthFinders* and the shadowing experience.

Having the ability to shadow an administrator gave participants insight into their role and how that role functioned within the entire structure of the organization. Jack specifically mentioned the value of being able to spend meaningful time (shadow) with a leader in the district. What benefitted him the most was it helped to determine whether he actually wanted to be an administrator or not. Beneficial to others was listening to a panel of administrators who provided multiple views of the school system. Giving participants time to collaborate with fellow participants and completing the program as a cohort gave them the time needed to reflect on their learning and possess a deeper knowledge of what it takes to prepare themselves to take a leadership position (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Orr & Orphanos, 2011).

Networking and collaboration was identified as a key experience of the program. Since the class is set up as a cohort, they were able to establish working relationships and strong connections with classmates. In particular, Alice mentioned the collaboration with others as a valuable component of the program. She felt the natural opportunities to collaborate with others and to gain their perspectives was really valuable.

Overall, when asked about the structures, experiences, and frameworks in place for the program, participants again kept most comments revolving around the six main themes. The sub questions did allow for more in-depth information on leadership frameworks as one example. These comments related to information discussed by Dodson (2014) and Bellamy et al. (2003), when they referenced the usage of leadership and state frameworks to develop leadership development programs. The program in this study was developed around a leadership framework and participants were asked to rate themselves along the five leadership domains multiple times throughout the program. These activities were described as valuable to their leadership growth by participants.

Feedback from participants regarding activities not deemed meaningful and possible changes to the program were varied. Participants mentioned not having enough time to have meaningful discussions, while others lamented attendance at a school board meeting. Overall when describing features of the program that were not meaningful, participants mentioned the program needs more differentiation to allow more collaborative discussions amongst like-minded participants. More time could have been allocated for aspiring administrators to have their own discussions, while aspiring teacher leaders do the same. Some mentioned books that were required reading did not lead to meaningful development. Others mentioned a one year only program did not foster their growth as much as they felt a two year program could.

Lack of individualization was seen as something that could be improved in this program. Giving participants more opportunities to talk and discuss topics with like-minded colleagues who aspired to the same leadership roles was suggested by

participants. Another limited factor of the program identified was that it was only a 1 year program. Several thought an expansion to a two-year program would allow for a deeper look at content with a better opportunity for comprehension.

Spending some time with culturally responsive teaching principles in the program was identified as a possible addition to the program. This could be a part of an expanded two year program that would build on the principles taught to teachers in the district in prior years.

Another participant stated it would be valuable for members of this cohort to have an assigned mentor to debrief with their mentee on elements presented in the program. Some of these mentors could be past participants of the program and could also serve as a member of a panel that shares their journey since being in the program.

Lastly, a few participants mentioned assigning a group leadership project that could be worked on throughout the project and present the findings to the whole cohort. These findings and suggestions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Research Question #2

2. How do aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district explain how their experiences in the program prepared them for leadership roles?

Sub Questions:

- 2A. How do aspiring leaders describe the experiences of the leadership preparation program which best prepared them to be effective leaders?

2B. How do aspiring leaders describe the ways their experiences fostered their growth in leadership skills?

When reflecting on what aspects of the program prepared participants for leadership roles, the answers did tend to center around the main themes identified earlier in this chapter. Bill mentioned that “far and away the guest speakers were probably the most critical” (to my leadership development). Listening to the guest speakers or panels was also something mentioned as strong preparation for leadership roles by several participants.

Fierce Conversations was noted as a strong preparation tool for the aspiring administrators in the program. The training provided some foundational support to have the tough conversations with staff. Several participants noted they were glad they had training for future use. Several mentioned using the *Fierce Training* every day in their leadership roles. In particular, Claire stated she still goes back and reflects on this training as it is so critical to what we do every day and it is so frequent in the work we do every day. Claire shared how the collaborative nature of the program, the networking piece, as well as *Fierce training* all had the most impact on her development as a leader through participation in this program. The *Fierce training* was noted as providing growth in leadership skills by several participants. The collaborative nature of the program, while being good for networking, also allowed participants to reflect on their own preparation to become an effective leader.

The leadership framework was another piece explained by participants as a critical experience that helped develop them as leaders. Specifically Alice mentioned

how she still uses the leadership framework in her current leadership role. She mentioned how she uses the framework to gauge her own professional growth in learning. The program in this study was developed around a leadership framework and participants were asked to rate themselves along the five leadership domains multiple times throughout the program. These activities were described as valuable to their leadership growth by participants.

Seeing district leadership in action at a board meeting or spending a day with a leader in a position the participant aspires to, fostered growth in the leadership development of participants. Participants also indicated the benefit of the two year program because of the ability to attend more board meetings and the opportunity for richer and deeper discussions on topics.

Participants described their best experiences focused around the shadowing and leadership experiences provided by this program. Whether it was being provided a quality field study or internship type of experiences as Pounder (2010), Clayton (2012), and Orr and Orphanos (2011) discussed, or having a meaningful and collaborative discussion on instructional leadership or teacher leadership that was referenced by Gulcan (2012), Barth (2013), and Miller (2009), there was much to value in this leadership development program.

Overall, there is much crossover seen between how participants answered the central research questions and the sub-questions. When participants were describing the structure, experiences, and frameworks in place for the leadership preparation program, they invariably discussed the experiences they identified that best prepared them to be

effective leaders. In turn, they also mentioned the experiences that fostered the most growth in their leadership development. A final theme mentioned by participants centered on the partnership with districts and universities that provided the benefit of reduced tuition to take part in a leadership development partnership between the two entities.

Summary

In conclusion, six themes were identified in this research. All themes played key roles in the development of educational leaders who participated in this leadership development program. The themes of Guest Speakers, Systems Knowledge, Leadership Experiences, Networking & Collaboration, Shadowing, and Leadership Framework were discussed as participants shared experiences and examples of how this leadership development program has developed them in their journey to become educational leaders. It was evident these six themes provided all participants better clarity for their leadership journey, as well as aspirations. The comments and feedback from the participants, in addition to the information discovered in the literature review, and the summaries of programs from across the country provided a comprehensive look at the quality components of a leadership development program. Participant suggestions were also introduced in this chapter and will be formalized in the Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative case study sought to examine the participants' experiences in a leadership preparation program designed for aspiring leaders in one Midwestern school district. The study explored the different structures and frameworks offered in the leadership preparation program as well as identified the experiences provided that fostered the most growth in leadership skills for participants. The study also explored aspects of the program that were not deemed valuable to participants.

This chapter presents a summary of the study's purpose and research questions. The procedures for the study are explained, and the data collection and analysis techniques are detailed. The findings of the study will also be discussed in this chapter. Recommendations will be shared for the target audiences of this study along with possible ideas for future research.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine how aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district described their experiences and how those experiences prepared them for leadership roles. This study interviewed past participants in one Midwestern school district's leadership preparation program to identify the experiences provided that fostered the most growth in leadership skills for participants as well as those not valued.

Methodology

A qualitative case study research approach was used to study the leadership development program within one Midwestern school district. Interviews were conducted

to bring common themes to light. The sample consisted of ten participants chosen from a total of 113 participants in the program ($n = 113$) since 2012. There were 60 participants in the one year program and 53 in the two year program. The sampling included at least two participants from each group listed below that met each of the following criteria:

- currently teachers who aspire to leadership positions,
- currently in teacher leadership positions,
- currently in building-level administration jobs in their current district, and
- currently in building-level administrator/ leadership jobs in other districts.

The program changed from a two year program to a one year program in 2015 because of a budgetary need. The content of the two year program was condensed to a one year program and retained much of the same philosophy and experiences. By examining resulting themes from interviews, the researcher identified the qualities and components of what was deemed as successful or unsuccessful leadership preparation in this Midwestern school district.

Research Questions

The following central research questions guided this study:

1. How do aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district describe their key experiences in the program?

Sub Questions:

- 1A. How do aspiring leaders describe the structures, experiences, and frameworks in place for the leadership preparation program?

- 1B. What experiences described in a leadership preparation program were not meaningful to aspiring leaders' development?
2. How do aspiring leaders who completed a leadership program provided by one Midwestern school district explain how their experiences in the program prepared them for leadership roles?

Sub Questions:

- 2A. How do aspiring leaders describe the experiences of the leadership preparation program which best prepared them to be effective leaders?
- 2B. How do aspiring leaders describe the ways their experiences fostered their growth in leadership skills?

Discussion

Discussion of Results, Conclusions and Implications

Traditional leadership preparation programs have largely been university-based programs with limited options to give real-world experiences. Levine (2005) noted most university programs were lowering their standards for admission and completion making the degrees less demanding. Many school districts have gone to “grow your own” programs to create a competitive pool of candidates for building administration or teacher leadership jobs (Williams & Szal, 2011). Several of the programs detailed in Chapter 2 as well as the program being studied have a “grow your own” program that have partnered with a university-based program. Butler (2008) argued local school systems need to do more to adequately prepare their own aspiring leaders. He also noted nearly two-thirds of principals felt graduate level preparation programs were ill-equipped to

prepare today's administrators for the challenges of the job. Superintendents are implementing cohort programs to acclimate new administrators into their leadership roles and the communities they will serve. These cohort groups provide ongoing support and counseling from mentor principals or district administrators to keep participants in the program (Lindsay, 2008).

Six central themes emerged from the data: Guest Speakers, Systems Knowledge, Leadership Experiences, Networking & Collaboration, Shadowing, and Leadership Framework. In the following section, the central themes are discussed through the researcher's perspective as well as related literature on the subject.

Guest speakers. Much of the research noted in Chapter 2 is bolstered by the findings in this research study. This program provided cohort experiences in different facets of leadership and offered ongoing support and mentoring as participants pursued their leadership aspirations. Participants indicated the strengths of the experiences in the program as shadowing other leaders in the district, gaining system knowledge through guest speakers, panel discussions, and participation in *Fierce Leadership* training.

All interview participants referenced guest speakers (34 references) during their interviews. This was the most referenced theme across all interviews. Guest speakers invited to speak included the superintendent, associate superintendents, as well as multiple directors covering curriculum, special education, student services, assessment, and human resources. Participants used the information gained from guest speakers to apply toward their overall understanding of systems leadership as well as learning more about several positions in which they may be interested. These experiences with guest

speakers could possibly lead them toward a future job opportunity. Guest speakers were a vehicle for other learning that took place during this experience for participants.

Hearing the guest speakers gave participants insight to leadership, may have created an interest that led to their shadowing experience, and possibly created a new network for collaboration with other leaders.

Systems knowledge. Orr and Orphanos (2011) identified key components of quality leadership preparation programs that also entailed systems knowledge. These included items such as a coherent curriculum that includes instructional leadership, organizational development, and change management among other things. Other quality indicators were internships, a knowledgeable faculty, social and professional support and the use of standards-based assessments for candidate and program feedback.

A lack of systems knowledge could take some of the blame for ill equipped leaders. Systems knowledge was a major theme referenced in the interviews. It is a major component of the leadership preparation program and it was clearly impactful to participants. Systems knowledge helps participants see the complexities of an organization and how all of the pieces work together to form a large organization. Most of the activities in this leadership development program were designed to add to participants overall knowledge of the bigger system at work.

School districts want to ensure quality leadership occurs in schools. Graduate level preparation programs alone have left school leaders ill-equipped for the rigors of the job and states need to play a more aggressive role in ensuring principals are ready for the demands of the job. Some of this pressure is coming from “longtime education

professors, philanthropic foundations, and school district leaders who say too many graduates of traditional programs are not qualified to lead schools” (Superville, 2017, p. 1).

In the literature review, Butler (2008) argued school systems need to do more to adequately prepare their own aspiring leaders for leadership positions in local school districts. The leadership preparation program studied is preparing local leaders. All participants interviewed for this study discussed how this program expanded their leadership preparation and systems knowledge beyond what they had learned or were learning in their university-based preparation program.

Leadership experiences. Leadership experiences was a major theme and an integral part of the leadership development program. The experiences are designed to give participants solid involvement to allow them to be more familiar with the leadership roles they hope to attain. Specifically participant responses discussed attendance at a school board meeting, participation in a workshop called “Fierce Conversations,” as well as involvement with their *Gallup Signature Strengths*.

Dodson (2014) emphasized the importance of field experiences in leadership preparation programs. This was a central theme that emerged in the research and in this study (leadership experiences). Field experiences can be shadowing experiences, attendance at leadership experiences, mock interviews, or even leadership training such as (Gallup, Fierce, etc.). It is important for districts to provide release time for candidates in a program to complete these experiences.

Leadership preparation programs can be varied depending on the district or state. Components such as field experiences or internships are commonly seen in successful programs (Orr & Orphanos, 2011). Partnerships between university programs and school district have also been a common theme of successful programs. These partnerships can develop learning environments where aspiring principals can get real-life experiences.

Networking and collaboration. Networking and collaboration was seen as a valuable component to participants. Taking part in a district-based leadership preparation program with the opportunity for University credit was seen as an asset. A positive side effect was the opportunity to network and collaborate with only aspiring leaders in their district. Traditional leadership preparation programs have largely been university-based programs with limited options to give participants real-world experiences that included networking and collaboration.

Networking is described as interacting with other people to exchange information and develop contacts, especially to further one's career. This was a central theme of this leadership development program. These classes were seen as a cohort, which establish relationships that ultimately will benefit participants down the road. Many participants, as noted in the guest speaker section, mentioned how valuable it was to meet and collaborate with District leaders. The same could be said for the networking and collaboration among participants.

Shadowing. Orr and Orphanos (2011) discussed more quality components of successful leadership preparation programs. Items such as a standards-based curriculum, involvement of a mentor with a shadowing experience, and social and professional

support from a cohort environment. These are all pieces that can help aspiring administrators build on the university-based program and were found in one way or another in the program being studied.

Shadowing a leader is one of the best ways to truly get a sense of what a job is like. This was a central finding in this study. Most of the participants interviewed were given an opportunity to shadow two different leaders. This means they spent a morning or afternoon with someone in a leadership position to witness what the leader does in his/her job and also have the opportunity to ask questions. Some of the participants from the two year program stated they did not get an opportunity to shadow leaders in the district. For those that did shadow leaders in the district, it was seen as a worthwhile experience.

Shadowing another leader can also educate aspiring leaders to prepare them for an internship. Internships have been labeled as a strong component of successful leadership preparation programs (Clayton, 2012). Whether these are official positions within a school district or an added experience to a teaching job, this study speaks to the importance of an internship. Earlier, Pounder's study (2010) highlighted a quality internship embedded in a program with a successful leader will enhance any leadership preparation program.

Leadership framework. Many leadership development programs are based on some type of standards or framework. These documents guide the work of participants and keep the components of the program focused on skills of leadership. Cowie and Crawford (2007) argued standards were needed to keep a focus on true leadership

development and not allow the demands of operational management to overshadow development in leadership. Several programs detailed in the literature review as well as the program being studied relied on a leadership framework to guide their program.

Leadership Frameworks and Standards were the last of the six central themes. In the literature review as well as the findings, leadership frameworks were seen as an integral part of leadership development programs. Participants discussed self-assessing themselves on the different domains of the leadership framework. This was seen as a valuable experience for participants and they mentioned this helped them grow as a leader.

This program as well as other leadership development programs should be studied to determine if they are producing competent and qualified leaders. Those interviewed for this study were overwhelmingly positive about the experiences gained and connections made through their participation in this study.

Additional Participant Comments in Relation to Literature Review

Several candidates mentioned being able to take this program as a class and they can use the credit towards their Master's program in educational administration. Participants also mentioned it was appreciated when the district picked up the cost or partial cost of the tuition. When districts can work with universities to offer credit, it is a major benefit to participants.

Certification requirements for administrators vary from state to state. Most require a graduate degree, completion of a human relations course, passage of a content test, prior teaching experience, and other measures. While all of these things are

important for licensure, they have done little to prepare a principal for the rigors of the job (Hale & Moorman, 2003). Partnerships with local universities have helped because the contributions of the school district have created more meaningful content for the successful completion of a leadership development program. Components identified in the study such as shadowing another administrator, interacting with and listening to guest speakers and participating in other leadership experiences such as completing an internship or serving on a district strategic planning team have been noted as improving upon traditional university-based programs.

Teacher leadership was also explored in the literature review. Many leadership preparation programs focus on both administrative and teacher leadership. Effective principals have learned to harness the culture of promoting teacher leadership. Miller (2009) mentioned the challenges principals face by having to accept leadership should not just be housed in the principal's office. There is collective power in a school that develops teacher leadership. Participants in the study mentioned shadowing, guest speakers, and leadership experiences as an integral component in their development as a teacher leader.

Conclusions and Implications

Hearing the insight of ten educational leaders all in various stages of their leadership development was insightful to the ongoing refinement and development of the leadership preparation program. Themes were identified in the study and all participants felt these were areas that were important pieces of the program, as well as pivotal to their growth as a leader.

All participants were able to discuss some recommendations for the program to make it better. Some mentioned removing the requirement to attend a board meeting, while others had many suggestions to keep current practices in the program, such as the shadowing experience and bringing in guest speakers.

While there were differences found between the quality components in some of the programs detailed in the literature review versus the program studied, there were also some significant similarities. Overall, there is ample evidence in this study to suggest it is worthwhile for school districts to invest in a leadership development program. School districts that have a leadership development program are more likely to have qualified leadership candidates when a teacher leader, building administration, or district administration job comes available.

The need for leadership frameworks developed around a set of standards became apparent through the research in the literature review and information gleaned from the interviews from this study. Participants discussed the growth they achieved through rating themselves on the leadership framework multiple times throughout the program. Cowie and Crawford (2007) mentioned the importance of linking these frameworks to certification requirements. Some states require this link, while others suggest they be linked.

There were differences noted between the one-year program versus the two-year program. In the original two-year program, activities were longer and occurred over a two-year period. This time frame allowed participants to attend more board meetings in the two-year program, as well as more access to guest speakers and time for discussion.

Some of these activities had to be modified in the one year program such as attendance at only one board meeting and fewer guest speakers. Another difference mentioned was the ability to spend more time with the program topics in the two-year program versus the one-year program

The themes discovered in this study played key roles in the development of educational leaders who participated in the leadership development program. It was evident these six themes provided all participants better clarity for their leadership journey as well as aspirations.

Potential Limitations of the Study

While this study provides many examples of quality leadership development programs, several potential limitations exist. The researcher not being able to conduct the interviews because of his connection to the program is the first limitation of this study. Qualitative researchers study their own programs all the time. In this case all participants in the program studied are aspiring to leadership positions and the researcher is responsible for hiring all administrators in the district. The researcher relied on an experienced qualitative interviewer to keep the interviews focused on the research questions and topic to avoid coercion. A second limitation that could weaken the study is the possibility of participants not fully disclosing their thoughts and feelings regarding the program due to the researcher's leadership role in the district and involvement with the program being studied. A final limitation is one program was studied, thus the uniqueness of the program limits the scope of the research.

Recommendations

There are three primary audiences for this study: aspiring leaders in K-12 education, university personnel in educational leadership, and human resources personnel in K-12 education. Each of these audiences will find a variety of important information for their own use and potential future study.

Aspiring leaders in K-12 education will be able to focus on the experiences mentioned by study participants as most meaningful to their leadership development. University personnel will be able to compare/contrast the successful experiences mentioned by participants to the themes and activities in their own leadership preparation program. Lastly, human resources personnel and/or district administrators may use this study to potentially build their own leadership development program, or to compare their program against the findings in this study. They could also choose to replicate the study for their own individual program findings.

Recommendations from Study Participants

Several participants mentioned increasing the requirements for job shadowing as well as debriefing the experience with other participants. Currently participants get one release day to participate in two job shadowing experiences. This should be expanded to two days to give the participants the opportunity to shadow leaders at multiple levels to allow a greater exposure to leadership at multiple levels across the district.

One participant suggested all participants in the program be assigned a mentor while in the program. The mentor would be a current leader in the district. The purpose of the mentor would be to debrief with participants on experiences, as well as provide

leadership coaching. Mentors could be current principals, administrative interns, or teacher leaders.

Another suggestion was to include culturally responsive teaching principles in the program. This has been a part of a program with all teachers in the district and one participant believed it should be a component of the leadership preparation program as well. This would need to be infused into the current structure of the program and would most likely need to be an entire class taught by trained and qualified instructors.

A suggestion was made to assign a group leadership project. The project would be worked on throughout the program and the findings would be presented to the whole cohort. This would allow participants to take a closer look at a leadership topic of interest to share with the group.

Several participants commented on learning from past participants in the program. One way to do this would be to bring in former participants to share their journey since being in the program. Each year there could be a panel of former participants to talk about the components of the program they got the most out of, as well as how the program helped them in their leadership journey.

Multiple participants discussed the length of the program. All comments regarding the length of the program suggested the program be a two year program. They felt the topics and content are easily deep enough to be covered over two years. This would allow for attendance at multiple board meetings, expanded shadowing experiences, multiple mock interviews, and deeper interactions between participants on relevant leadership topics

Individualization was a recurrent theme with several participants. This program is designed for all leaders, not just administrative. Several felt certain activities and experiences could be differentiated to provide more opportunity for meaningful discussion and dialogue. Divide cohort into like groups for certain discussions so they will be with common aspiring leaders. More overall time for discussions and reflection was mentioned several times. Allow time to work through scenarios and provide some problem-solving activities in different leadership areas (teacher, administrative, curricular, human resources, etc.).

Overall Recommendations for Practice

Leadership preparation is not a one-size model that will meet the needs of everyone. It is actually a diverse experience comprised of multiple experiences such as college level classes, combined with real-world experiences provided by individual school districts who have taken the initiative to develop leaders from within the system. Based on findings from this research, the following suggestions are recommended for all groups mentioned as a target audience:

- Make the program a two year program. Given the scope of the program and varied experiences offered, this lends itself to a longer program. Both one year and two year program participants suggested a two year program.
- Find ways to collaborate with other leadership preparation programs in the area. Cooperation between programs could lead to broader shadowing experiences as well as collaboration on joint initiatives and leadership development. Topics could include panel discussions with leaders across

Districts as well as providing opportunities for brief internships in other districts to broaden leadership experiences.

- Differentiate the content of the program to provide more individualized instruction to participants with different leadership aspirations. Several participants mentioned they aspire to be a teacher leader, but were frequently in discussion groups with participants only interested in administrative leadership.
- Bring in a panel of former leadership development participants to share their experiences since being in the program.
- Allow more time for reflection and discussion during each class. Guest speakers take much of the time and more time is needed to allow for discussion and reflection. Build in time during each class to allow for group discussions and reflections on related topics.
- Provide more release time for participants to job shadow at multiple levels (elementary, secondary, district, etc.).
- Explore the leadership of the districts' special programs and provide the participants in the leadership development program more exposure to working with these special programs.
- Strengthen partnerships with local universities to possibly start a joint program to combine current graduate programs with the district program. This could provide more real-world opportunities for the university-based program, as well as provide internship opportunities for district leaders in

training. Internships could lead to full-time leadership opportunities within the district. This partnership could provide more students for university classes and more candidates for the school district.

Future Research

As an extension to this study, a researcher could take a closer look at several leadership development programs from one metropolitan area. Even though summaries of multiple school district's leadership preparation program were provided as a part of this study, having the opportunity to conduct interviews with participants across several districts in the same metropolitan area would provide valuable information about leadership preparation programs.

Additionally, it would also be worthwhile to take a closer look at leadership development programs across the country. As noted above, this study gives summaries of programs from across the country, but better information could be cultivated from interviews with participants from each program. One could take a look at what themes emerged across all of the interviews to get a better idea of what components of each program are deemed essential by participants.

A further study could be to only focus on teacher leaders or only focus on administrative leaders to compare and contrast the differences. Valuable insight could be gained with a deeper look at either of these areas.

Summary

A comprehensive look at one Midwestern leadership development program provided valuable insight into the practices of developing future leaders. The views of

ten participants involved in two different programs (one year versus two year) was valuable to learn how they described their experiences and how those experiences prepared them for leadership roles.

The ten participants in the program were chosen through purposeful sampling that represented current teacher leaders, current building administrators working in the current (district being studied) district, and some working in other districts. Those ten current or aspiring leaders described the structures, experiences, and frameworks in place for the leadership preparation program. This resulted in six prevalent themes or areas the participants felt were valuable: guest speakers, systems knowledge, leadership experiences, networking & collaboration, shadowing, and leadership framework.

The information provided in this study will provide beneficial information to districts looking to start a leadership development program as well as to districts who already have an existing program and are looking to refine or add to their program. Having a system in place to ensure there are quality leaders being developed for future teacher leadership positions, building leadership positions, and district leadership positions, is vital for the future of developing educational leaders.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

TO: Kevin Chick, Barbara Sunderman (Faculty Sponsor)

FROM: Timothy Frey, IRB Chair

RE: APPROVAL of Project entitled "Cultivating Leadership: Taking a Deeper Look at One Midwestern School District's Leadership Preparation Program"

DATE: August 2, 2017

Your project, *Cultivating Leadership: Taking a Deeper Look at One Midwestern School District's Leadership Preparation Program*, has been approved via the expedited review process. You may begin data collection.

The approval code for this project is **F17 006 DC IRB HS** . Please use this code to indicate to participants that the project has been approved by the Doane University institutional review board. Any changes to the procedures, protocol, or instruments will require additional review.

The project is approved for one year from today's date, August 2, 2017. All recruitment and data collection must cease prior to August 3, 2018, unless a separate request for continuation has been approved by the Doane IRB prior to that date.

Please add the approval number and contact information for Doane IRB to your consent form. You may list the Doane IRB email contact: irb@doane.edu

This approval is based upon the assurance that you will:

- Make the minor additions to the consent form indicated above;
 - Protect the rights and welfare of research participants;
 - To the extent allowed by the protocol, select subjects equitably among the potential populations of participants
 - Adhere to all Doane University IRB Policies and Procedures Relating to Human Subjects, as written in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46);
 - Maintain copies of all pertinent information related to the research study including, but not limited to, video and audio tapes and other forms of image capture, instruments, copies of written consent agreements, and any other supportive documents in accordance with Doane University IRB Policies and Procedures Relating to Human Subjects.
-
- Report to the Doane University IRB immediately if any of the following occur:
 - Unanticipated problems
 - Unanticipated deviations from previously approved protocols
 - Any proposed changes from the previously approved research.

If you have any questions regarding the protection of human participants, or the IRB process for human subjects research, please do not hesitate to contact the Timothy Frey, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, at [\(402\) 826-8648](tel:4028268648) or irb@doane.edu.

Tim Frey
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Doane University

APPENDIX B: SCHOOL DISTRICT CONSENT



Don Stroh Administration Center · 5606 So. 147th Street · Omaha, NE 68137-2647 · (402) 715-8200 ·
(Fax) (402) 715-8409

To: Kevin Chick

From: Darin Kelberlau, Ph.D.
Department of Assessment, Research, and Evaluation

CC: Dr. Heather Phipps, Dr. Tony Weers, Andy DeFreece, Terry
Houlton, and Dr. Pat Crum Date:

October 2, 2017

Re: Request to conduct research in Millard Public Schools

In accordance with MPS Rule 6900.1, this notification qualifies as our approval for you to conduct research in Millard Public Schools **under the following provisions:**

- Your study follows the structure outlined in your request.
- Upon completion of your study be certain to destroy data.
- Please note conducting research does not override existing district or building rules and policies.
- Upon completion of the study, you will provide the principal and MPS Executive Director of Assessment, Research and Evaluation with a summary of findings and, if applicable, a complete report of procedures and findings.

Thank you for completing the application process. We look forward to reading your results.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Darin Kelberlau".

Darin Kelberlau, Ph.D.
Executive Director of Assessment, Research,
and Evaluation Millard Public Schools

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Good Morning,

I am contacting you to participate in a research study being conducted as a part of graduate coursework at Doane University in conjunction with Millard Public Schools. You have been selected because I believe your experiences and perspectives are especially valuable given the context of my research. Participation in this study will require approximately one hour of your time. You are under no obligation to participate and should you decide to forgo the opportunity, you may discard this e-mail. If you choose to participate, please read through the attached informed consent document that contains specific information regarding this study. If you agree to participate, please respond to this e-mail by October 19, 2017.

Purpose:

The study will explore the different structures and frameworks offered in a leadership preparation program as well as identify the experiences provided that fostered the most growth in leadership skills for participants.

Procedures:

An experienced qualitative researcher will conduct a personal interview that will last approximately 45-60 minutes at a mutually agreed upon location.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no known risks to your participation in this study. A benefit of participating in the study is that you will receive a copy of the report after submission.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in this study which could identify participants will be kept strictly confidential. I will use pseudonyms that are mutually agreed upon for participants. The interviews will be conducted in person and with participant permission, and will be digitally audio recorded. The recording will be erased after it has been transcribed. No personal identifying information will be used in any materials created from this interview. The information obtained in this study will be published in my dissertation.

This research study has been approved by Doane University and Millard Public Schools.

Thanks for your consideration,
Brad Sullivan, Ed. D.

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in Research Study

Title of Study: Cultivating Leadership: Taking a Deeper Look at One Midwestern School District's Leadership Preparation Program.

Researcher: Brad Sullivan

Purpose:

The study will explore the different structures and frameworks offered in leadership preparation program as well as identify the experiences provided that fostered the most growth in leadership skills for participants.

Procedures:

An experienced qualitative researcher will conduct one personal interview that will last approximately 45-60 minutes at a mutually agreed upon location.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no known risks to participants in this study. A benefit of participating in the study is you will receive a copy of the report after submission.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in this study that could identify participants will be kept strictly confidential. I will use pseudonyms that are mutually agreed upon for participants. The interviews will be conducted in person and with participant permission, and will be digitally audio recorded. The recording will be erased after it has been transcribed. No personal identifying information will be used in any materials created from these interviews. The information obtained in this study will be published in my dissertation.

Compensation:

There is no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

Your questions about the interview are welcome before, during, or after the time of participation. If you have any additional questions that have not been answered, you may contact the primary researcher, Brad Sullivan (402-504-0638), or Dr. Barbara Sunderman, Doctoral Advisor at Doane University in the department of Educational

Leadership. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Doane University Institutional Review Board.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw from Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You may also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researcher, Millard Public Schools, or Doane University.

Written Consent:

Your signature grants voluntary consent to participate in this study and attests that you understand your rights and the researcher's responsibilities. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records.

Your assistance with this study is greatly appreciated.

Name and Signature:

(Please Print)

(Signature)

(Researcher Signature)

Desired Location of Interview: _____

I agree to be audio taped.

___ **Yes** ___ **No**

Name and Phone Number of Investigator:

Brad Sullivan

Millard Public Schools

(402) 504-0638

bdsullivan@mpsomaha.org

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Leadership Preparation Program - Interview Protocol

Pseudonym: _____ Date: _____

Participant Name: _____ Location: _____

Date of Interview: _____ Time: _____ Length of Interview: _____

Length of program: 1 year _____, 2 year _____. Gender: M ____ F ____

Position upon entering program _____ Current Position: _____

Desired position _____

Introduction:

Review consent form and audio recording reminder

Questions:

Please describe the organization of the leadership preparation program? (SQ1)	Observer Comments:
What experiences did you participate in within the leadership preparation program? (SQ1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Probe: experiences unique to you? 	Observer Comments:

<p>Describe the experiences within the leadership preparation program that helped you grow as a leader? (SQ2)</p> <p>Content Probes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guest Speakers ● Shadowing Experience ● Mock Interview ● Capstone Project ● Leadership Experience ● Board Meeting ● Gallup Strengths Coaching ● Fierce Training 	Observer Comments:
<p>How does the leadership preparation program help prepare leaders?</p> <p>Possible probe - How did it help you as a leader? (SQ 2, 3)</p>	Observer Comments:
<p>How has the leadership preparation program helped you increase your system's knowledge in the District. (SQ2)</p>	Observer Comments
<p>How are you applying your learning in the leadership preparation program to your current role? (SQ1)</p>	Observer Comments
<p>How do you believe your leadership has changed as a result of your participation in the leadership preparation program? (SQ3)</p>	Observer Comments
<p>How has your experience in the leadership preparation program enhanced your personal professional development?(SQ3)</p>	Observer Comments
<p>How would you describe the most valuable skills you learned in the leadership preparation program? (RQ2,SQ2)</p>	Observer Comments
<p>What future leadership position do you aspire to in the next 5 years? (SQ3)</p>	Observer Comments

What experiences in the leadership program did not enhance your skill or understanding in leadership? (SQ4)	Observer Comments
What are the changes you would suggest to the program? <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Probe: What about structure of program? (eg: evening class time, summer workshop, etc.)	Observer Comments
What elements would you suggest not be changed?	Observer Comments
Now that you have experienced the leadership preparation program, what additional suggestions and recommendations do you have to make the program more effective? (RQ 2, SQ 4)	Observer Comments

APPENDIX F: FINAL THEMES & CODING FREQUENCY

Final Themes & Coding Frequency

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Sources</u>	<u>References</u>
Guest Speakers	10	34
Systems Knowledge	9	26
Program Suggestions	8	18
Leadership Experiences	7	17
Network & Collaborate	7	16
Fierce Conversations	9	15
Shadowing Experience	6	13
Gallup	9	12
Board Meetings	9	11
Leadership Framework	7	10
Mock Interviews	4	6
Reflection	3	6
Capstone Project	5	5
Graduate Credit	4	5
Program Structure	5	5
Readings	3	4
Policy & Procedure	2	3
Staff Development	3	3

APPENDIX G: AUDIT TRAIL: LIST OF CATEGORIZED CODES

Audit Trail: List of Categorized Codes

Theme	In Vivo Codes
Guest Speakers	Appreciated Asking right questions Aspire to be in position Awareness Beliefs and philosophies Beneficial Bigger perspective Biggest piece Communication Conversations Different departments Different personalities and leadership Do that again Don't have to have all the answers Enjoyed Exposure to different viewpoints Favorite Fill in gaps Finding the answers Frequency Glean their wisdom Grew a lot How it runs Individual connection Information about their department Large district Leaders More aware Most critical to me Networking Nice to hear Opportunity Panel Path taken to get there

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal connection Perspective Program Push and Challenge Question and answer Real world, real life Share who they are Skills Spend time Student service examples Style Timelines Understand the why Valuable What does it take Wide variety
Systems Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interaction Perspective Unique role Understanding Day-to-day basis Collaborative relationships Connections Cogs in the system Fit together Whole system Better meet our needs Future leadership Roles Knowledgeable Who to contact Vast knowledge Certain topics Huge Asset Seeking information 10,000 foot view Exposure Personal experiences Community

	<p>Working together Cohesive unit Holistic Finding out who people are Different departments Reach out Support Policy and procedure Person to contact Broader perspective Understanding reality Helpful Provide assistance Bigger picture Connections Context Big Rocks Understanding the history Connecting personally Beyond my classroom walls My greatest take-away Come together Synthesis</p>
Leadership Experiences	<p><u>Fierce Conversation</u> Challenging conversations Opportunity Fierce style conversation with people Grown me a lot Use to avoid the issue Brushed over issue Addressing the issue I do care about that person Want to make sure relationship is there Important to the work we do Reflect where I felt comfortable Fierce was fantastic Glad I had the opportunity Hard to have those conversations Going back and reflecting</p>

	<p> On how I need to use the tools The idea of it has stuck with me Glad I had the actual training Use my flip book anytime I have a tough conversation Training stayed with me the most Learned to frame a conversation to get to heart of issue Beach ball method Different perspectives everyone brings Get many perspectives Best decisions Practice in a safe environment I apply it everyday The conversation is the relationship Systems Hard conversations Mojito in the room We really pounded this home People shy away from the truth is Prepared me for really tough conversations Read the book and we would discuss in class </p> <p> <u>Gallup Strengthfinders</u> Top 5 Gallup Strengths Lots of different perspectives Powerful piece was Gallup Focused on every meeting How we use our strengths Leverage change Grow ourselves personally and professionally This was new I had not experienced prior Most valuable skill I hadn't reflected on my strengths It was interesting Mine changed My experiences had changed Reflected on how I leverage change Harmony is my number 3 strength We're not just making everyone happy Build capacity in others </p>
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	<p>Wasn't a large part of the program We were all made aware of strengths I would continue to do things with strengths Strengths were on our nametag We took Gallup Surveys Was very interesting Shows you what type of leadership</p> <p><u>Board Meetings</u> Interest depended on topic Some were dry Others were informative Great inside information We knew what was going on in district Close to the pulse Probably missed that the most Pre-budget meetings Some things were laid out and approved Interesting process Fun to watch First board meeting I had attended Nice way to get involved Purpose Paid more attention to the Board Briefs More cognizant of what's being discussed Authentic and real Wonderful experience Transparent Different experience for participants I attended 4 meetings over 2 years Big picture aspect Attended one board meeting and one committee meeting Education policy Highly recommend others attend a meeting The why behind what happens Understand what district is trying to accomplish</p>
Networking & Collaboration	<p>Biggest pieces Opportunity to spend time with other leaders Glean their wisdom</p>

	<p>Natural opportunity to collaborate Shadow Very valuable Definitely keep this experience Getting to know others Valuable Helpful Who can collaborate with me Extremely helpful Most beneficial Who can help find the answer Richness of conversations Diverse group Really important Importance of relationships Better understanding of relationships Surround yourself Learners Inspire Make me want to be better Great leadership Stolen Pieces from others Exposure Perspectives Leader Transforming myself Colleagues Talked to many of them recently Silos Conversations are richer Most used Making connections Reflecting Energizing Open doors Good interactions Responsibilities</p>
Shadowing	<p>Great experience Spend some time</p>

	<p>See what's happening Made assumptions about roles Opportunity Day-to-day experiences Behind the scenes Role-play Opportunity to differentiate who we shadow was key Phenomenal leaders Scope of different leaders Different buildings Priceless Philosophy Crucial learning Discover what I wanted Similar but different Personal reflection Build my philosophy Take notes Compile notes Putting together a picture Observations in learning My personal development Wider knowledge Greater experiences Handled situations Grow the most Better way Really beneficial Individualized experience Debriefing with colleagues after shadow experience</p>
Leadership Framework	<p>Opportunity Gauge Professional Growth Learning Focus Relational Piece Systems Positive relationships Identify where I need to grow</p>

	<p>Push myself to next level Deeper systems knowledge Growing further Various aspects of leadership Reflection Leadership capabilities Authentic Traditional leadership Huge Piece Emphasis Application Thinking conceptually Who you are What you want to do Developed Self-rating Where we want to be Where I think I am Information Better job Guide Who I am as a leader</p>
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APPENDIX H: AUDIT TRAIL: DATA COLLECTION MATRIX

Audit Trail: Data Collection Matrix

Interview Date	Time	Pseudonym	Number of Transcript Pages
11/8/2017	1:00 p.m.	Alice	13
11/9/2017	8:00 a.m.	Bill	9
11/9/2017	10:30 a.m.	Claire	10
11/10/2017	3:00 p.m.	Anna	7
11/13/2017	4:00 p.m.	Adam	10
11/20/2017	10:00 a.m.	Stan	11
11/22/2017	10:50 a.m.	Laura	8
11/22/2017	1:00 p.m.	Jack	9
11/22/2017	3:00 p.m.	Ryan	10
11/22/2017	4:30 p.m.	Cindy	10