

== Mid-Western Educational Researcher ==

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*The University of Missouri-St. Louis welcomes MWERA to
St. Louis, home of the Gateway Arch*

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On the Cover

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The *Mid-Western Educational Researcher* is a scholarly journal that publishes research-based articles addressing a full range of educational issues. The journal also publishes literature reviews, theoretical and methodological discussions that make an original contribution to the research literature, and feature columns. There are four issues of the journal published annually.

Beginning 01 November 2007, the journal is accepting manuscripts for review and possible publication. Manuscripts are submitted to blind reviews by three researchers with knowledge of the literature in the appropriate area. The editors will review the manuscript and make the final decision. The review process requires approximately four months.

Manuscripts are accepted from faculty, students, and professionals working in educational or non-educational settings. Membership in the MWERA is not required in order to submit a manuscript for review. The editors encourage the submission of revised papers that have been presented at the annual meetings of the MWERA, AERA, and other professional organizations.

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Using Research to Inform Fledgling Professional Development Schools: Data-Driven Decision Making

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Abstract

The Urban Professional Development School (PDS) Network represents a group of professional educators from a large, urban university and six public and private schools in the same metropolitan area committed to providing progressive models of professional development for teachers across the lifespan. This paper demonstrates how participants in this initiative have used existing research literature and their initial research to inform their PDS work and create a sustainable and informative research agenda that can inform the work of all PDS participants.

Introduction

Within the current national climate of standardization, accountability, and increased pressures on P-12 schools and schools of education, Professional Development School (PDS) partnerships continue to be recognized as vehicles for improving the integration of theory and practice in schools of education, while at the same time enhancing the quality of P-12 educators and increasing student achievement. The PDS model of teacher education for preservice teachers, novices, and veterans has received support from the Holmes Group (1990, 1995, 1997), the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (Teitel & Abdal-Haqq, 2000), the Carnegie Foundation (2001), and the American Federation of Teachers (Levine, 1992). This emphasis on PDS partnerships has led educators to reconsider the existing literature that chronicles the successes and challenges of hundreds of professional development schools and for leading educators (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005) to author literature reviews in an attempt to synthesize the impacts of these models on teacher learning across the lifespan and student achievement.

The Urban Professional Development School Network represents a group of professional educators from a large, urban university and six public and private schools in the same metropolitan area committed to providing progressive models of professional development for teachers across the lifespan. This paper examines how this fledgling PDS network is using research to inform its decision making as it attempts to achieve the three goals of improved P-12 education for students, enhanced educator capabilities, and the creation of an exemplary teacher preparation program. In order to demonstrate how existing research guides the systematic data-driven decision making of the Urban PDS Network and informs the work of other PDS partnerships, the authors reviewed evaluation methods, findings, and subsequent changes related to PDS models in the past decade.

Additionally, the authors describe their own first-year data and its influences on decision making. This combination of a review of literature and research results can serve to inform the decision-making processes of all PDS educators, including how to best make use of finite resources and how to develop a thoughtful, comprehensive research agenda for their PDS models.

Urban PDS Network Background

As part of the university's mission, the School of Education (SOE) provides expertise and service to the greater metropolitan area, including assistance to local schools. As with other urban areas, a primary focus for local P-12 schools is school improvement. Numerous initiatives and university-school partnerships have been developed to help address this focus with the assumption that as local schools improve through the involvement of university faculty, so too will the preparation of preservice students.

The partnership initiative described here was conceptualized in 2003, and in June 2005 the network was inaugurated with a summer institute for teachers, administrators, and university faculty. Key components include a leadership team for the initiative, professional development at summer institutes, core teams comprised of P-12 teacher leaders and SOE faculty, collaboration with other university colleges (Liberal Arts and Sciences (LA & S), Theatre, Music), and curricular study and inquiry teams (within the university, within P-12 schools, and across the network of schools).

Six urban public and private P-12 schools, within a five mile radius of the university, participate in the partnership. The total number of students in the six partner schools is approximately 2,000. The percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch at the schools ranges from approximately 50-80 percent. The partnership includes over 200 teachers, seven SOE faculty and four College of LA & S faculty who receive one course reduction from their teaching load for work with the Urban PDS Network.

The guiding principle of this network is inquiry-based professional development, with schools defining their own path toward school improvement, with assistance from the university, through focus areas such as teacher leadership, teaching and learning improvements, integrated arts, technology, and multiple literacies. According to the guiding principles for Urban PDS, collaborative inquiry is an identified strategy for involving all of the PDS partners. Inquiry is actionable, relevant and participatory. Establishing the habit of scholarly inquiry is a promising means to realize the design principles of effective PDS relationships.

This model allows for unique opportunities that accommodate the individual contexts and characteristics of each school. Because of this emphasis on individual contexts, the PDS network, which supports both the improvement of P-12 educational practices and teacher preparation programs, is laden with complexity and opportunity. The mutual benefits are endless and include opportunities for teacher leadership, expanding resources, reflective practice, high quality professional development and preservice education, and systemic school reform.

Literature Review

The emphasis on using data to guide decision making in education is well documented in the literature (Senge, 1990). Picciano (2006), for example, states: "The simplest definition of data-driven decision making is the use of data analysis when determining courses of action involving policy and practice" (p. 6). This simple definition, however, does little to illustrate the complexities of using data to inform decision-making in multifaceted educational models, such as professional development school networks, which are laden with structural nuances and, as a result, filled with distractions and cultural and political agendas that make accountability, goal setting, and decision making ambiguous.

To improve the knowledge base on evaluation, findings, and decisions related to PDS effectiveness, the authors began with the PDS literature cited in the recent seminal report, *Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education* (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). This body of research, with most of the studies conducted in the 1990s, was augmented with literature found through extensive reviews of educational databases such as Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and ProQuest. This search resulted in studies published in key educational journals (e.g., *Action in Teacher Education*, *Journal of Teacher Education*, *Teacher Education Quarterly*), papers presented at national conferences (e.g., Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Silva, 1999), external evaluations and reports (e.g., Gill & Hove, 2000) and key books (e.g., Byrd & McIntyre, 1999).

The literature review of PDS evaluation and findings is organized under headings that align with the goals of the Urban PDS Network model as well as areas of accountability identified by the Holmes Group (1997), Carnegie Founda-

tion (2001), Pritchard and Ancess (1999), and Tietel and Abdal-Haqq (2000): impact on preservice teachers, impact on practicing educators, and impact on P-12 student learning. This literature review was limited to the past ten years, although a few earlier sources are referenced to provide context for understanding the origins of university-school partnerships efforts.

Impact on Preservice Teachers

A comprehensive review of the literature on the overall effectiveness of PDS partnerships demonstrates that the majority of work to-date focuses on the impact on the preparation of preservice teachers. In both qualitative and quantitative studies, investigators examined preservice teachers' self-perceptions and others' perceptions of the preservice teachers' self-confidence, teaching expertise, ability to collaborate with teaching faculty, professional maturity, ability to impact the in-service teacher, and contributions to student learning. In comparison studies, utilizing cohorts in PDS and traditional teacher education programs, the PDS preservice teacher was rated superior on numerous factors in comparison to those in the control group (Blocker & Mantle-Bromley, 1997; Castle, Fox, & O'Hanlan Souder, 2006; Connor & Kilmer, 2001; Gill & Hove, 2000; Mantle-Bromley, Gould, McWhort, & Whaley, 2000; Sanholtz & Wasserman, 2001; Walling & Lewis, 2000). These authors described and attributed positive results to PDS models that utilized cohorts, specialized curriculum for PDS preservice teachers, careful selection of school sites and cooperating teachers, commitment to documenting outcomes, and an intention to improve preservice teacher education.

Researchers who studied preservice teacher graduates concluded that the PDS trained teachers were more instructionally effective as well as more likely to remain in the teaching field (Latham & Vogt, 2007; Ridley, Hurwitz, Hackett & Miller, 2005; Van Zandt, 1998). Describing a PDS student teaching experience through vignettes, Zeichner & Miller (1997) reported that by articulating clearly the characteristics of a PDS (increased time spent by student teachers in schools, placements with several teachers, a peer supervision component, increased decision making roles for the school faculty such as placement decisions and methods course content, a university seminar with team teaching), the model resulted in increases in learner-centered teaching, collegiality, reflection, and inquiry by preservice teachers.

The research is not without negative findings, which are generally presented as opportunities for improvement. Most conclusions were not criticisms of the PDS model, but rather commentaries on the discontinuities and slow response to change in universities and P-12 settings. One study, however, did report that PDS preservice teachers experienced additional issues with stress (Hopkins, Hoffman & Moss, 1997), leading to the conclusion that preservice teachers need to be better prepared for constant evaluation and the myriad tasks of practicing teachers.

In addition to considering impacts on teacher candidates, this subsection of literature on preservice teacher preparation also included findings on teacher education program and university infrastructure variables. For example, some studies examined perceptions of the quality of training of and supervision by both university and school-based faculty. Sanholtz and Wasserman (2001), in a longitudinal evaluation of 200 participants in four cohorts, concluded that a one-year practicum length and careful selection of PDS school sites and cooperating teachers are critical for successful preparation of preservice teachers. With regard to the complexities of school-university partnerships, numerous investigators appeared dismayed at the university and schools' political, philosophical, and cultural tensions, and argued that these tensions must be addressed in order to sustain the PDS model (Bullough, R. V., Jr., Hobbs, S. F., Kauchak, D. P., Crow, N. A., & Stokes, D., 1997; Bullough, R. V., Jr., Kauchak, D. P., Crow, N. A., Hobbs, S. F., & Stokes, D., 1997; Gill & Hove, 1997; Hopkins et al., 1997). Bullough, Hobbs, et al. (1997) and Bullough, Kauchak, et al. (1997), for example, in their research on a long established PDS model with over 18 sites, still reported concerns with philosophical commitments, university tenure/clinical class systems, and the continuity of personnel needed to support change.

Impact on Practicing Teachers

Numerous studies suggested that the PDS model has positive impacts on practicing teachers. Findings generally concentrated on preservice teachers' effects on practicing teachers (Brink, Grisham, Laguardia, Grandby, & Peck, 2001; Cobb, 2000; Gill & Hove, 2000; Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2001). For example, in a study examining the impact of mediated collaborative work in a PDS, teachers reported positive benefits such as increased professional development and enhanced self-image (Brink et al., 2001). Cobb (2000) reported positive impacts on teachers in the 3rd–4th years of PDS implementation including positive attitudes, personal and professional gratification, and willingness to innovate in the classroom. In a four-year longitudinal evaluation of four professional development schools and participating teachers, Sanholtz and Wasserman (2001) reported PDS teachers as experiencing a more positive atmosphere and work environment. Looking at teacher preparation, this cohort-based model yielded increased awareness of a revised role for the practicing teacher where several teachers shared responsibility for one preservice teacher, compared to the traditional apprenticeship model of one teacher paired with one student teacher.

Other studies, however, found minimal positive effects on practicing teachers. A University of Utah study of long-term PDS relationships (existing since 1978) with forty-nine interviews with practicing teachers and principals, reported moderate changes with teachers and their practice (Bullough, Hobbs, et al., 1997). Similar findings were reported in Cobb's (2000) analysis of the self-reporting of 3rd–4th year PDS teachers in Texas, where despite some positive changes, the

author noted that substantive change in instructional practices occurred slowly. Van Zandt (1998) reported minimal positive impacts on practicing teachers' ability to serve as mentor teachers, agreeing with other authors (Daane, 2000; Kent, 2001) that practicing teachers require comprehensive preparation for their work in mentoring preservice teachers.

The existing research literature also demonstrates discrepancies in how teachers perceive two often-cited components of PDS models, collaboration and teacher-driven research. In Sanholtz and Wasserman (2001), the teachers reported positive effects of university faculty collaboration. Although this finding was not a direct focus of the study, data revealed that teachers recognized that research is related to educational practice. Through a study utilizing teacher action research, Poetter, McKamey, Ritter, and Tisdell (1999) concluded that practicing teachers are emerging as researchers while conducting research concurrently with preservice teachers. Conversely, one extensive evaluation of numerous PDS sites in West Virginia (Gill & Hove, 2000) reported that collaborative inquiry falls short of expectations. Snow-Geroni (2005) reported the need for two important shifts in traditional teacher cultures in order for collaborative inquiry to be successful: a shift to sense of community and a shift to acceptance of uncertainty. A common recommendation within the literature regarding both collaboration and teacher-driven research was the reaffirmation of one of the fundamental principles of PDS relationships: teachers participating as active and equal partners (e.g., Cobb, 2000; Connor & Kilmer, 2001).

Impact on Student Learning

Despite an emphasis on improved P-12 student achievement in university school partnerships (e.g., Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Holmes, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Levine, 1992; Teitel, 2001), existing research literature, with only a handful of studies that begin to measure PDS impact on student learning, yields little evidence of the attainment of this goal, and, more problematically, little emphasis on measuring the impacts of PDS partnerships on P-12 student learning (Saab, Steel, & Shive, 1997; Valli, Cooper, & Franke, 1997).

Knight, Wiseman, and Cooner (2000) used student interviews, writing rubrics, and math tests to monitor student achievement and were able to report positive effects of PDS partnerships on student learning. The authors highlighted that future researchers need to heed the importance of this critical measure of success with university-school partnerships. Gill and Hove (2000), in their external evaluation of PDS efficacy in West Virginia, using standardized test scores as measures, reported that PDS models had a positive impact on students' math scores. Houston, Hollis, Clay, Ligons, and Roff, (1999) concluded that P-12 students' scores on the state-mandated achievement tests increased after their schools became PDS sites. Brink et al. (2001), in a qualitative study using observations, interviews, and work samples, reported that PDS

student teachers positively impacted P-12 students' academic and social learning.

Several authors, however, noted the limitations of using standardized test scores to measure the impacts of PDS partnerships on P-12 student learning. Gill and Hove (2000), for example, concluded that standardized testing does not appear to align well with overarching PDS goals. Similarly, Cobb (2000) examined teachers' perceptions of the use of test scores to judge impact on student learning and detailed their uncertainty about the ability of PDS networks to increase student test scores.

Impact of Research on PDS Decision Making

Because existing research literature is used throughout PDS partnerships as an essential component of data-driven decision making, it is important that each study is considered for its applicability to the myriad decisions that are made in the process of developing PDS models. Existing literature points to the preponderance of identified obstacles, with few solutions. For example, numerous authors (Bullough, Hobbs, et al., 1997; Gill & Hove, 2000; Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2000) identified tensions among university faculty, yet few provided suggestions for how a university could use these findings to inform decision making in order to strengthen PDS partnerships. While several authors did make recommendations for improvement, there were few specifics and little emphasis on how to achieve these changes. Button, Ponticello, and Johnson (1996), for example, stated there is a need to overhaul the two systems (university and P-12 schools) to support restructuring and innovation. Additionally, Sanholtz and Wasserman (2001) reported that supervision of preservice teachers needs attention and that the issue of clinical versus tenured faculty needs to be addressed within the PDS model.

While lack of specificity is a problem in much of the literature on PDS partnerships, several authors identified how their findings would be used to inform decision making in the studied PDS partnerships. Blocker and Mantle-Bromley (1997) identified changes in curriculum including increased instructor influence in practicum placements, additional class discussions on practicum experiences, more emphasis on practical application of educational theories, and changes in coursework for preservice teachers. Connor and Kilmer (2001) stated that in addition to validating their current PDS model and constructs, their data resulted in internal and external changes such as a commitment to involve public school faculty more actively. Sanholtz and Wasserman (2001), as a result of their longitudinal study with PDS preservice teacher graduates, indicated they were attempting to better define PDS critical program features. In Cobb's (2000) study, significant changes were made, such as restructuring the model to relieve practicing teachers of pressures related to too many preservice teachers and a responsibility load that interfered with instructional responsibilities. In another study, Van Zandt (1998) reported that findings helped to identify program strengths and weaknesses for guiding future revi-

sions, including mentor teacher development and curricular additions such as working with diverse learners. Through their work, these authors have demonstrated a commitment to data-driven decision making, and present the research needed to guide PDS improvement in areas such as university structural changes, P-12 teachers' involvement in the education of preservice teachers, and curricular changes in preservice teacher preparation programs.

Despite the wealth of PDS literature, many studies recommended that more systematic research is needed to guide the decision making as PDS partnerships work to attain the lofty results often attributed to these networks (Abdal - Haqq, 1998; Brink et al., 2001). For example, Bullough, Kauchak, et al. (1997) concluded that although University of Utah had PDS sites since the 1970s, too much decision making was based on intuitions and hunches, and they designed a study intended to guide systematic data collection and guide program efforts. Additionally, as a result of their inability to provide evidence of the attainment of numerous PDS goals, Gill and Hove (2000) indicated concerns about a comprehensive research effort. They stated they were only able to evaluate a small subset of the wide variety of goals associated with the University of West Virginia's PDS program.

Methods

In 2006, a small inquiry team of Urban PDS Network faculty began to outline a research agenda designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the current PDS model in order to supply the data needed to inform the ongoing decision making processes as the PDS network proceeded beyond initial implementation. Two essential steps in this process were reviewing existing literature on professional development schools and obtaining base-line data detailing participating educators' views at the end of the first year of implementation. The researchers decided this could best be accomplished through a detailed survey using Likert-scale and open-ended questions designed to address three guiding questions:

1. How does participation in the PDS network influence teaching, learning and leading at P-12 schools?
2. How does participation in the PDS network influence preparation of preservice teachers?
3. How do PDS partner institutions collaborate to support the work of the professional development school partnership?

Survey Overview

The resulting survey reflected a careful consideration of the initial proposal that articulated key goals for Urban PDS and an analysis of the NCATE PDS standards (NCATE, 2001). It was titled "Critical Changes Survey" in order to emphasize the authors' dedication to using research to inform decisions about necessary changes.

The survey was organized into three sections. The first section requested demographic data, such as the participant's

place of employment, number of years teaching, grade levels taught, and subjects taught. The second section was organized around the three research questions listed above. For each of the research questions, there were 8-17 Likert-scale questions. Respondents were given the option of marking strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree, or no opinion. For each of the three research questions, there were also 2-3 open-ended questions. The third section of the survey had three general open-ended questions: (1) What about the PDS network has been most beneficial to you? (2) What about the PDS network has challenged you? (3) What suggestions to you have for improving the PDS network?

The survey was then entered into a simple on-line collection tool and piloted with several PDS network participants. As a result of the pilot, minor changes were made, and all participating educators (excluding the pilot participants) were asked to complete the survey.

Sample

Out of seventy PDS participants, fifty-one, including practicing teachers, school administrators, university faculty, and a graduate assistant completed the survey. All six P-12 schools were represented, as well as university faculty from the SOE and the College of LA&S (see Table 1). All grade levels and content areas were represented and the years of teaching experience ranged from 0-46.¹

Table 1
Survey Respondents

Respondent category	Number of respondents
University Graduate Assistant	1
University Faculty	14
P-8 Public School #1	3
P-8 Public School #2	5
P-8 Public School #3	6
P-8 Private School #1	6
P-8 Private School #2	11
9-12 Private School #1	5
Total	51

Once all participants had ample opportunities to complete the survey, the data was imported into a spreadsheet. From there, the researchers used descriptive statistics to consider the respondents views. A chart was created that listed each Likert-scale statement and the percentage of survey participants that marked each response option (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). From there the researchers grouped the strongly agree and agree statements, so that they could analyze what percentage of the survey participants responded positively to the statements. Next, the researchers used the research questions as a guide for looking at patterns and themes in the qualitative data. The

¹ The graduate assistant for Urban PDS, who worked closely with each of the network schools had zero years of teaching experience. A Catholic nun at one of the private schools had 46 years teaching experience.

goal was to identify key trends that would be useful in making decisions about the second year of Urban PDS. Additionally, all network participants were given an opportunity to respond to the data at a summer institute at which they were asked to describe their initial thoughts upon reviewing the data, as well as detail any topics or issues from their experiences that they believed were not represented in the data.

Limitations

There are two primary limitations associated with the methodology described above. First, this survey was designed by the researchers for use within their particular context. While providing valuable data to the researchers and network participants, it has not been subject to the validity and reliability tests expected with standardized instruments. Also, as is common with any survey, its artificial nature makes validity difficult. Respondents' true beliefs about the statements presented may be hard to measure with the Likert-scale items. It can be assumed, however, that the reliability of the survey is somewhat stronger because each respondent was presented with the same instrument. A second limitation is the sole use of descriptive statistics. Because the subgroups of respondents were small and statistically significant differences in these subgroups would have been difficult to document with inferential statistics, the researchers decided to leave the data aggregated.

Results

Drawing upon the categories commonly used in existing literature, the authors analyzed the data within each of the initial research questions to identify specific Likert-scale statements and responses to open-ended questions that addressed the three key areas of PDS impact: (1) P-12 practicing educators, (2) P-12 student learning, and (3) preservice teachers.

Influence on Teaching, Leading and Learning at Network Schools

Within this broad research question on teaching, leading, and learning, participants addressed impacts on both P-12 teachers and student learning (see Figure 1). With regard to impacts on P-12 educators, respondents were largely in agreement that Urban PDS Network led to a greater understanding of the connections between educational theories/research and practice, encouraged the improvement of teaching practices, and provided increased opportunities for teacher leadership.

A closer look at the data, however, reveals that while respondents were willing to agree to general statements about positive changes in teacher practice and understanding of the theory/practice connection, they were much less willing to agree to statements that listed specifics about teacher practice or educational theories such as multiple literacies, integrated arts, addressing learning gaps, or technology integration. Narrative questions further supported these findings about the impacts on P-12 teachers. When asked, "How has in-

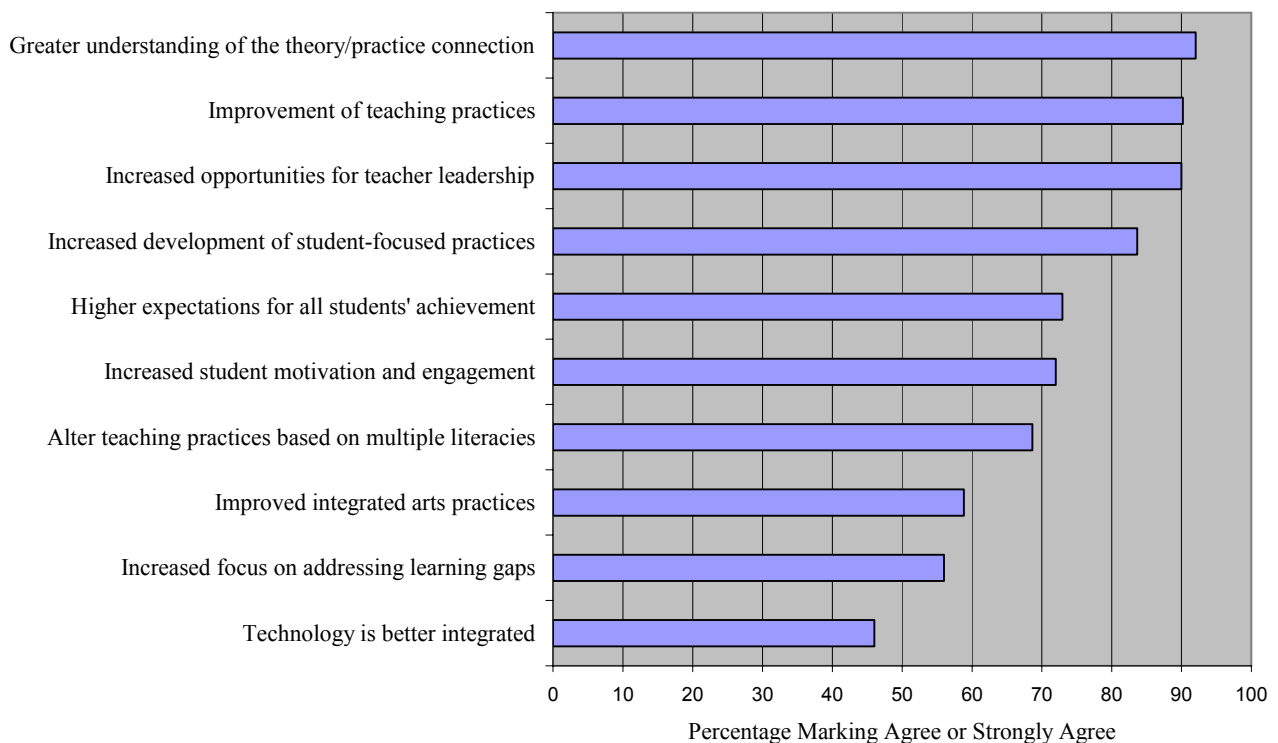


Figure 1. Influence on Teaching, Leading, and Learning

involvement in the PDS network contributed to curricular and pedagogical changes?”, one teacher commented: “Teachers discussing best practices. Teachers articulating best practices. Teachers thinking about how professional development informs best practices.” This quotation reflects the focus on general changes in teacher practice, not the adoption of specific pedagogical practices, which was also demonstrated by the responses to the Likert-scale statements.

This year-one survey included relatively few statements that asked respondents to consider the impacts on student achievement because the researchers believed it was too early within the school improvement process to expect many noticeable changes. However, the survey did include statements about higher expectations for all students and increased student motivation and engagement and received moderate agreement (73% and 72% respectively). The narrative responses reflected this moderate agreement, with respondents noting some increases in student engagement and motivation and preservice teachers providing support for differentiated, individual or small group learning. Others, however, wrote that they had not seen measurable changes yet.

Influence on Preparation of Preservice Teachers

The final area of impact expected by PDS partnerships is on the preparation of preservice teachers (see Figure 2). When compared to the first set of responses, there was a notable, although not surprising, reduction in the number of respondents willing to agree or strongly agree with the statements presented. Because the focus during the initial year of this PDS network was on helping the P-12 schools engage

in inquiry around school improvement, not on making substantive changes to the university preservice program, these results were to be expected. They also provided an important baseline for future surveys that ideally will document noteworthy changes in the preparation of preservice teachers.

Even within the overall moderate levels of agreement to statements related to preparation of preservice teachers, there were several notable results: More than 75% of respondents agreed that field experience students and student teachers had increased opportunities in P-12 classrooms as a result of the PDS network and that there were more opportunities for P-12 practicing teachers to work with the field experience students and student teachers. Also remarkable was the fact that fewer than 60% of respondents agreed with the statements that there was improved supervision of students by university personnel and that there was improved mentoring of preservice teachers by P-12 faculty.

Again, the narrative responses closely paralleled the data from the Likert-scale questions. When asked to comment on the involvement, preparation, or interaction with field experience students and student teachers, respondents commented on higher expectations for university students, improved structures and communication between the university and the P-12 schools, and a willingness to allow university students more responsibility in the classrooms, but several also commented that they had not noticed any changes yet.

Collaboration to Support the Work of PDS Partners

While the question of collaboration (see Figure 3) does not address a particular area of impact noted in most PDS

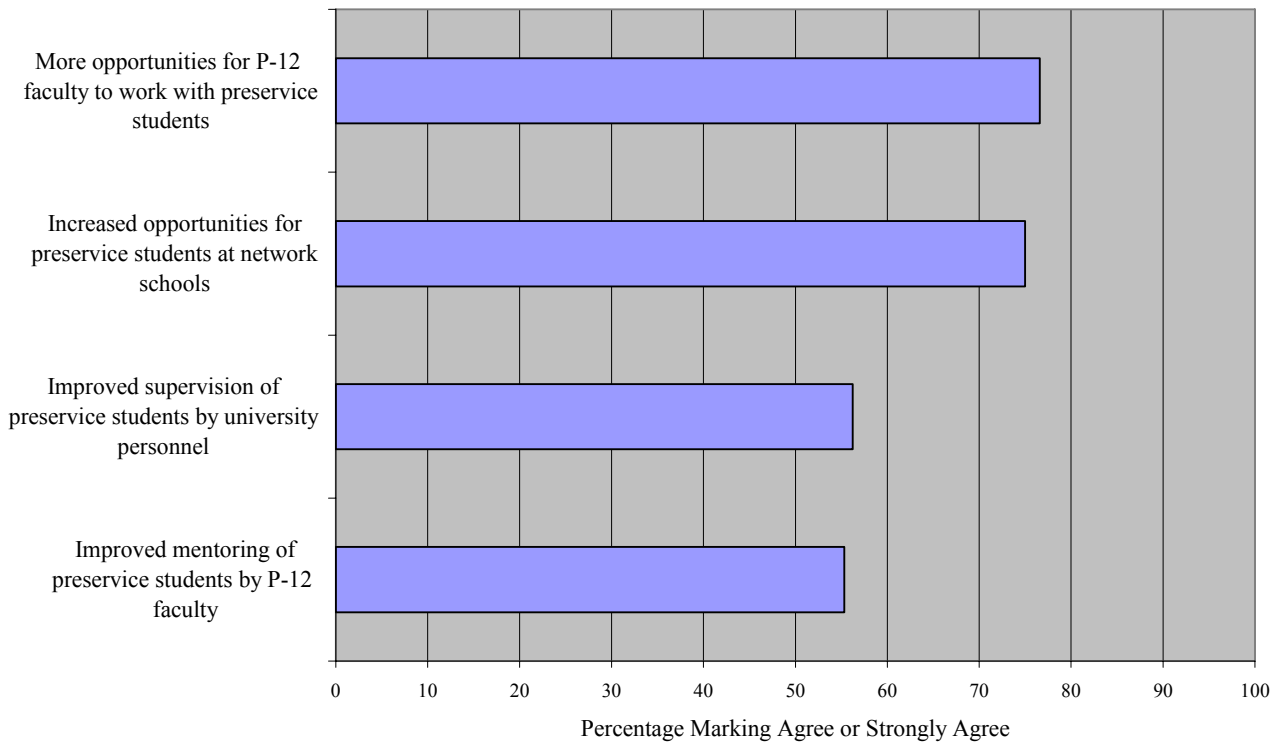


Figure 2. Influence on Preservice Preparation of Teachers

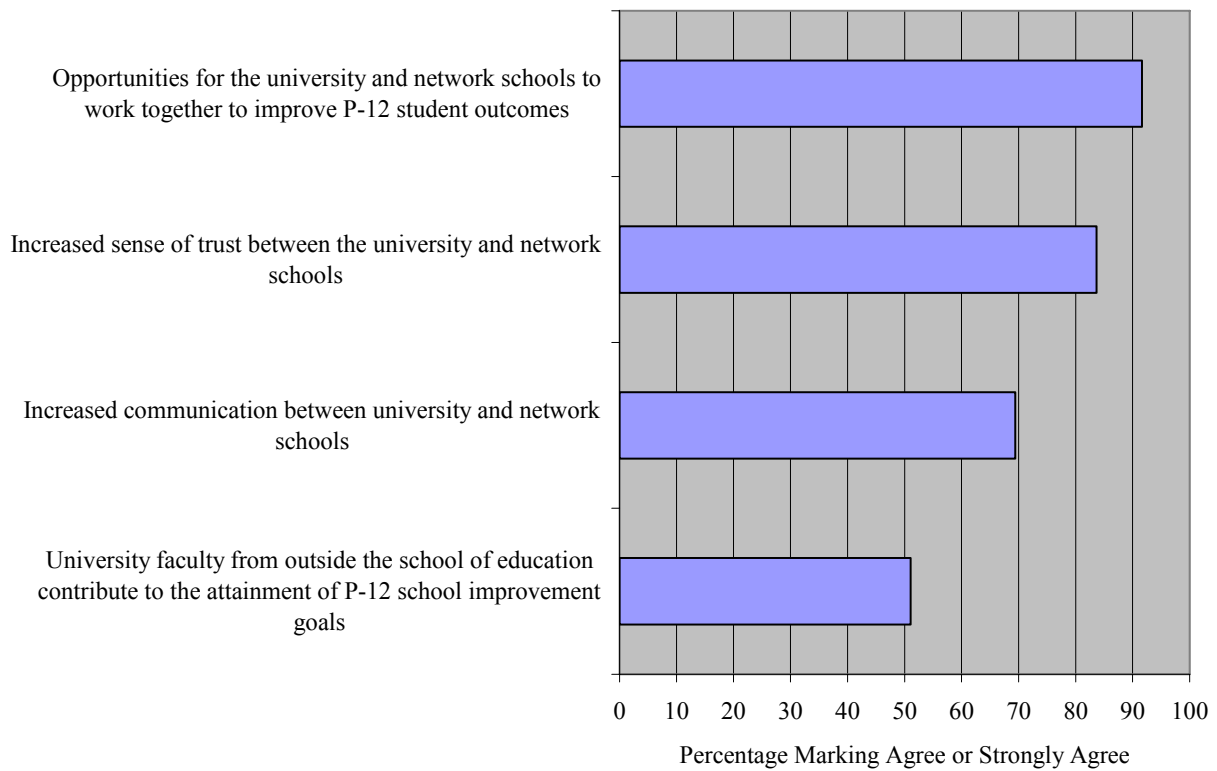


Figure 3. Collaboration to Support the Work of PDS Partners

literature, it is a clear area of focus in the NCATE standards (NCATE, 2001), and participants in this network believe is essential to achieving the three areas of impact identified previously.

There was wide variety in responses to the statements designed to address issues of collaboration. Of note within this set of data is that while participants largely agreed to statements about opportunities for the university and network schools to work together and an increased sense of trust between the university and network schools (92% and 84% respectively), only 70% agreed there was increased communication between the university and partner schools. Also notable was the fact that only 51% of respondents felt that faculty from outside the School of Education contributed to the attainment of the P-12 school improvement goals. Once again, narrative responses to the open-ended questions about collaboration supported the numerical data, with respondents emphasizing the importance of the interactions between the university and network schools with statements such as “it has allowed me to interact with experts and improve my teaching practices and goals” and “it makes me aware of an obligation to the community as well as to individual students” but others noted that the collaboration has not altered how they do their jobs.

Data-Driven Decision Making in the Urban PDS Network

While the findings from this survey are site-specific and thus not generalizable to other PDS models, the information gained from the analysis and supported by the wealth of research literature is important both for this particular PDS network and also for the understanding of how data-driven decision making can be used in all PDS relationships.

In May 2006 the inquiry team met to review simultaneously the survey data and the findings of an external evaluator that presented findings and recommendations based on data collected during the first year of the network’s existence. Both the survey results and the external evaluator’s report showed substantial differences in the experiences of all network participants, but particularly between the six network schools. While some schools embraced wholeheartedly both the inquiry orientation and the emphasis on teacher leadership in creating the conditions necessary for school improvement and enhanced student achievement, others struggled. Additionally, the data demonstrated that while P-12 school participants had begun to see initial, general impacts at their schools, they had not experienced the collaboration needed to engage in joint work focused on implementing the three PDS goals of increased student achievement, enhanced performance by P-12 educators, and improved preservice teacher preparation.

The findings resulted in a variety of changes in Urban PDS, including a refocused summer institute, a cohort model designed by both faculty and educators from P-12 schools, and a more clearly defined research agenda.

A Refocused Summer Institute

The survey findings guided the inquiry team to revisit the goals defined in the initial proposal as they planned the annual summer institute. One finding was that many participants were struggling with the idea of collaborative inquiry as a way to address school improvement goals, and it became clear that collaboration, collaborative inquiry, and teacher research would need to be integral parts of the summer institute.

Participants in the summer institute revisited and discussed collaborative inquiry with an emphasis on authentic connections to school improvement and the creation of an “action plan” that would guide the work of the core teams from the six network schools during the 2006-2007 school year. Also, as a result of these findings, the institute included specific events to address areas of concern. For example, attendees participated in an integrative arts and collaboration activity complete with a night at the theatre and follow-up discussion on critical response.

Additionally, during planning time for core teams, university faculty from both the SOE and the College of LA&S were stationed around the room to consult with school teams on such topics as teacher action research, school leadership, integrated arts, curriculum and pedagogy in specific content areas, technology, field experiences and student teaching. These stations were a direct result of the data that informed the inquiry team of the voids in professional development of the participants. But true to the focus on the unique nature of each school, core teams were invited to visit with those university faculty that informed their work. They were not forced to listen to “experts” who did not address their specific issues or concerns. Later in the summer institute, many of these same university faculty served as “critical friends,” or peer reviewers, for the core teams as they worked extensively on their action plans. This activity, in addition to two working lunches where P-12 educators were able to meet with content area faculty from the College of LA&S, also helped develop relationships between core teams and faculty from outside the SOE.

A Collaboratively Created Cohort Model

The survey data makes clear a powerful weakness in the current organization of the Urban PDS Network. Participants do not feel that the network has had an impact on the preservice preparation of university students. While NCATE (2001), the Holmes Group (1990, 1995, 1997), and the preponderance of research literature clearly place an emphasis on the improvement of preservice teacher preparation, the overarching desire of the university faculty to assist schools as they worked to attain their improvement goals diminished the amount of time and resources that were dedicated to this goal.

While a cohort model had already been in the initial stages of design, the survey research invigorated the plan to have a cohort option for initial certification master’s degree students in September 2007. In this cohort program, elemen-

tary education preservice candidates will enter the program together, take all required courses on the same schedule, and be placed in the five network P-8 schools for their pre-student teaching field experiences and student teaching experience. The survey also reinforced the importance of involving all stakeholders, especially the P-12 school partners, in the design of this new program. This involvement began in earnest at the summer institute where participants were asked to consider impacts on preservice teachers as part of their schools' action plans.

A Clearly Defined Research Agenda

This cohort model also adds the benefit of allowing for powerful comparison studies. Because some of the SOE's preservice teachers will participate in the PDS cohort while others will continue in the traditional model, qualitative and quantitative measures can be used to carefully document all three areas of impact: preservice teachers, P-12 school educators, and P-12 student achievement, thus addressing the need for research using experimental and quasi-experimental designs. While preservice teachers are common subjects for research on professional development school partnerships, the researchers' dedication to their students, as well as accreditation pressures, provide compelling reasons to continue to document impacts on preservice teacher preparation.

After reviewing the survey data, the external evaluator's report, and the relevant literature, it became clear to the authors that it is essential to share the data from this research with all educators, as well as the findings from PDS literature, in order to make the best decisions possible based on all of the data. For example, while survey statements about preservice teacher preparation received relatively little agreement from respondents, studies documenting impacts on preservice teachers represent the broadest area of study within PDS literature. The Urban PDS thus appears to be somewhat dissimilar to other models in the attention paid to enhancing preservice teacher preparation. This finding has led the authors to the conclusion that future research on the Urban PDS Network must have an equal focus on all three areas of impact.

The results have also led the researchers to consider other participants who will need to play a role in the evaluation of the PDS initiative in subsequent years. In 2007, the authors plan to create a survey that can be distributed to additional stakeholders in P-12 and university education, including preservice teachers and members of local school boards. These survey questions will allow the researchers to consider the impacts on the PDS network in the areas of student teaching and field experiences, as well as the opinions of additional stakeholders. It is also clear that this research agenda will need to utilize research designs that include triangulation with direct observations, field notes, and additional quantitative and qualitative measures.

Conclusion

As student populations in P-16 schools become increasingly diverse, teachers need to be equipped with not only knowledge of pedagogy and curriculum, but also habits of mind that allow them to inquire into and manage the complexities of their everyday teaching lives. Although much of current educational practice does not focus on the craft of teaching, it is imperative that teacher educators and teacher leaders play a role in designing models for professional development that "help teachers maintain, or in some cases rediscover, the enthusiasm, hopefulness, and commitment they have for teaching" (Guskey, 1995, p. 116). The contribution of this paper, therefore, is the emphasis on using data for decision making, based within a professional development school network, which helps all participants systematically consider the impacts this partnership is having on P-12 student learning, preservice teacher preparation, and the professional growth of P-12 educators.

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The CLEP Program: An Evaluation and Assessment at a Small Private University

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Abstract

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) created the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) in 1965 and over the years it has become a staple of American higher education. In order to better understand the ramifications of the CLEP program, this article provides a brief history of CLEP and reexamines some of the findings of earlier research. The present study investigates new areas by addressing several research questions. For instance, what are the impacts of a student's age, academic ability, gender, and previous learning experiences in regard to passing a CLEP exam? How much time do students spend in preparing for CLEP, and how much do they learn compared to regular college course? The major findings of the study are that grade point average (GPA) and time spent in preparation were associated with success on the CLEP, while age and gender were not. In addition, previous learning experiences were also related to a successful CLEP exam. However, the exact nature of the previous learning is unclear, since having a high school course in the specific subject area was not related to CLEP success.

The College Level Examination Program or CLEP has become a staple of American higher education. Over 2900 colleges and universities participate in the program developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). Each year approximately 200,000 CLEP exams are administered at 1,300 testing centers across the nation. Most exams consist of 100 multiple-choice questions that correspond to an introductory-level course in 34 disciplines (The College Board, 2006). If a student gets half or more of the questions correct, they have successfully "CLEPped" a course, which means that they will receive credit for the course that coincides with the appropriate exam (see Table 1 for the most current list of CLEP exams available).

Despite the popularity and widespread use of CLEP in higher education, research examining the CLEP program has been sparse. Most of the studies were conducted in the 1970s when CLEP was gaining in popularity. Many of these early studies (Cashin 1974; Enger & Whitney, 1974; Losak & Lin, 1973; Stetson, 1971; Tittle, Weiner, & Phelps, 1975) focused on two basic questions: First, are CLEP exams valid measures of the courses they are supposed to represent? Second, how had students who received college credit by passing CLEP exams fared academically thereafter?

Although the issues examined by these early studies are obviously important, the continued widespread use of CLEP raises other areas of concern for educators and raises several research questions. For instance, what are the potential impacts of such variables as academic ability, age, gender, and prior learning experiences in regard to passing a CLEP exam? We also wanted to investigate the amount of time students spend studying for CLEP, as well as how much students learn while preparing for a CLEP exam compared with traditional college courses. To answer these questions, we provide a brief history of the CLEP program and review the relevant literature. We then describe the current study and provide a discussion of the results and conclusions.

CLEP—A Brief History

The CLEP program began in 1965. ETS responded to the emerging idea that there should be some alternate mechanism for students to earn college credits apart from attending a class. With this idea in mind, the original CLEP program had three expressed purposes: (1) To allow students to convert life experiences into college credit; (2) To exempt students from basic college course requirements if they could demonstrate certain minimum levels of competence; and (3) To shorten the time period to obtain a degree. To accomplish all of these, the CLEP program utilized two levels of multiple-choice tests: A general examination covering five basic areas, including composition, humanities, math, natural science, and social science/history that represented typical courses taken by college freshman and sophomores; and an additional thirty (30) exams in specific subject areas, including psychology, biology, and other disciplines (Educational Testing Service, 1972).

At first it was believed that CLEP would be used largely by older, non-traditional students to demonstrate knowledge gained from life experiences but this was not the case. By the late 1960s, colleges had begun to use the general examination tests to exempt incoming freshman from general education requirements. For instance, at the University of Iowa 10 percent of the freshman received some CLEP credit (Enger & Whitney, 1974). At Utah State University, 25 percent of the freshman class opted to take the CLEP general exam and 80 percent earned college credit (Levin, 1984). Most interesting, however, was the experience of San Francisco State College. In 1971, the school decided to administer the CLEP general exams to all incoming freshman, and like many schools in those days, San Francisco State paid for and also administered the tests. Somewhat unexpectedly, 38 percent of the freshman class became instant sophomores. That is, they had fulfilled their general education requirements by passing the five CLEP general exams.

What was to account for this miraculous performance? The answer could be traced to the fact that each school was free to determine what courses they would accept for credit, the number of credits awarded, and most importantly, the scores deemed sufficient to pass each test. San Francisco State had decided that any score at or above the 25th percentile was adequate to be granted course-credit. The school estimated that had the 50th percentile been the cut-off, only 7 percent would have been instant sophomores. Research by Archer and Nickens (1977) indicated that the 25th percentile was not an appropriate level to award course credit. Perhaps not surprisingly, the following year for both educational and financial reasons, the school adopted the 50th percentile as the cut-off point (Whitaker, 1972).

What occurred at San Francisco State illustrates the major problem with early CLEP exams—without uniform standards, the credits awarded depended on each institution involved. This not only raised the question of fairness but also had the potential for abuse. For instance, schools began to use CLEP as a recruiting tool. In the mid-1970s, representatives of a new college in Texas traveled to local high schools to administer free CLEP exams, and then promptly awarded college credits on-the-spot in order to lure new students (Levin, 1984).

Despite these problems, it is fair to say that CLEP caught on quickly. By the early 1970s more than 1,000 colleges and universities were granting college-credit based on CLEP scores. During the 1975-76 school year alone, 220,000 CLEP general exams were administered (Stecher, 1977). In some ways, the rapid acceptance of CLEP is surprising. Certainly from any traditional point of view, CLEP was a radical change. The notion that a student could receive credit for a semester long course by simply passing a multiple-choice exam undoubtedly raised some eyebrows. Indeed, one early critic of CLEP called it “the great credit giveaway” (Stecher, 1977).

Nonetheless, there were larger social and demographic forces at work that would mitigate these concerns. First, the 1960s were a time of questioning societal traditions, and higher education was not excluded. Long-held beliefs came under scrutiny, including the assumption that attending classes was the only vehicle to obtain a college degree. It was argued that other options should be available to students with the equivalent experience or aptitude. These students should be allowed to advance directly into higher-level courses saving both time and money (Stetson, 1971). Secondly, the popularity of CLEP was tied to the fact that higher education was in the midst of the “baby boom.” Many schools had experienced large enrollment increases and resources were stretched thin. By allowing students to test out of introductory-level courses, classrooms and faculty would be freed-up for advanced curricular offerings (Tittle, et al., 1975).

Not only were colleges using CLEP, but high schools were using it as well. By the late 1970s high school students with good academic records were being encouraged to take CLEP exams and earn college credits. One high school on

Long Island began to use CLEP in a rather innovative way. Seniors with good academic records were encouraged to take a humanities course designed for them. Near the end of the course, the CLEP exam was given to these students in order to earn college-credit (Levin, 1984). Eventually, the Advanced Placement program (AP) would replace this rather unique use of CLEP. The AP program was more academically palatable: High school students would actually take something roughly equivalent to a college-level course and be tested on material actually covered in the course as opposed to simply passing a test.

By the mid-1980s however, the baby boom was over. To survive, many colleges needed all the tuition dollars they could procure. Hence, it made less and less financial sense to allow students to simply test out of freshman-level courses based on CLEP. In more recent years, the CLEP program has focused on exams in specific subjects. These exams cover over 30 different areas at the introductory-level.

Each exam is developed by a faculty committee that formulates a pool of multiple-choice questions. Another committee with faculty that teach the corresponding course at various institutions around the country reviews and selects the specific questions to be used for the exam. The basis for selecting a particular question is whether a typical B or C level student who completed an actual course in that topic would be expected to answer the question correctly. A student must get at least one-half of the one-hundred questions correct to receive credit for a course. According to *The College Board*, the pass rate is 50 percent or less (The College Board, 2003).

Each exam currently costs \$60 (although many colleges charge an additional administration fee) and can take up to 90 minutes to complete. The largest cohort taking CLEP exams are those aged 30 and older (34 percent), while traditional-aged students 19-22 make up the next largest group (24 percent). Individuals who register for a CLEP exam are encouraged to first contact their school to determine the CLEP policy there. Not all schools accept CLEP exam performance for course credit. Among the more than 2,800 colleges and universities that do grant CLEP credit, policies differ in terms of which CLEP exams will replace certain courses as well as what minimum scores on the exams are required (The College Board, 2006). The most recent innovation in the CLEP program is a computer-based format implemented in 2002. Taking an exam via computer allows students to receive immediate results, which ETS hopes will make the tests more popular (The College Board, 2002).

Literature Review

Most of the studies examining CLEP appeared in the 1970s. As the program grew in popularity, researchers were prompted to scrutinize the basic goals of the CLEP program. For instance, how had students who had passed all or part of the CLEP general exams fared academically compared to non-CLEP students? In general, the research indicates that CLEP students did as well or better than those students not

Table 1

Current listing of CLEP exams available within major areas (College Board, 2006).

Major Area (and specific examinations within area)	
Composition and Literature	
• American Literature	• English Literature
• Analyzing and Interpreting Literature	• Freshman College Composition
• English Composition	• Humanities
Foreign Languages	
• French Language (Levels 1 & 2)	• Spanish Language (Levels 1 & 2)
• German Language (Levels 1 & 2)	
History and Social Sciences	
• American Government	• Western Civilization I: Ancient Near East to 1648
• Human Growth and Development	• Western Civilization II: 1648 to the Present
• Introduction to Educational Psychology	• Science and Mathematics
• Introductory Psychology	• Biology
• Introductory Sociology	• Calculus
• Principles of Macroeconomics	• Chemistry
• Principles of Microeconomics	• College Algebra
• Social Sciences and History	• College Mathematics
• U.S. History I: Early Colonizations to 1877	• Natural Sciences
• U.S. History II: 1865 to the Present	• Precalculus
Business	
• Financial Accounting	
• Introductory Business Law	
• Information Systems and Computer Applications	
• Principles of Management	
• Principles of Marketing	

taking the exams. For instance, Losak and Lin (1973), after examining the academic records of junior college students, found that those who had received CLEP credit did as well academically as non-CLEP students. Enger and Whitney (1974) reported that students earning CLEP credit had higher graduation rates than non-CLEP students, while Stetson (1971) discovered that CLEP students earned higher GPAs than non-CLEP students. These findings seem to confirm the notion that students who tested out of basic courses were successful in upper-division courses while expediting their progress toward a degree. All of this suggests that two goals of the CLEP program appear to have been achieved: To exempt certain students from basic courses, and in the process, to allow them to graduate sooner.

Perhaps more importantly, these studies indicate that it is the better students who succeed with the CLEP exams in the first place; students who would have performed well in college with or without the CLEP. Indeed, Sharon (1970) found moderate and positive correlations between those students who took and passed the CLEP general exams and their grades in college. Other research also supports this hypothesis. For example, students who scored well on the SAT achievement tests also did well on the corresponding CLEP tests (Cashin, 1974). Similarly, Johnson and Thomas (1973) discovered that students who had high scores on college placement tests were more likely to pass CLEP exams.

Although better students tend to do well on CLEP exams, there is little evidence to suggest that prior learning experience other than the academic variety had much impact. For instance, research indicates that students who had taken coursework in a given area had better results on the cor-

responding CLEP exam (Gussett, 1980). Gussett also found that students planning to major in a subject area had higher scores on the appropriate CLEP test than those not planning to major in the area. Obviously, students planning to major in a discipline are more likely to have taken coursework on the subject and have more interest in it than non-majors or students in outside majors.

Finally, if so-called life experiences were related to CLEP, it is logical to assume that older students would tend to have an advantage. Fagin (1971), however, was unable to find an association between performance on CLEP tests and age of the test taker. Despite a lack of supporting evidence, ETS maintains that prior learning is important with regard to CLEP success, particularly for non-traditional students (Educational Testing Service, 2002).

The other question most often investigated in these early studies was: Is CLEP a valid measure of college-level courses? In other words, if a student passes a CLEP exam, does that student have roughly the equivalent knowledge of students who would have taken the actual course? Tittle, et al. (1975) examined data from 246 students and discovered that CLEP scores were positively correlated ($r = .62$) with scores on a final math exam. Conversely, weak correlations ($r = .26$) were obtained between the CLEP English composition exam and a final essay in freshman composition, which the authors attributed to more subjective grading of essays. Cashin (1974) concluded that the CLEP general exams were reasonably valid measures of college achievement. He compared CLEP General Exam scores of 216 sophomores to their GPA in the corresponding subject matter area. In general, modest positive correlations were discovered between subject GPA and CLEP

scores ($r = .51$). In short, the research suggests that CLEP exams, other than those involving writing, are somewhat valid measures of college-level courses.

Present Study

In order to increase our understanding of CLEP, the present study was designed to survey students who had just taken a CLEP exam. Our goals were to replicate some earlier research findings and also to investigate new areas. For example, previous research indicated that it is the better students (students with higher GPAs) who benefit most from CLEP. In fact, ETS advises colleges to treat CLEP as a type of scholarship for their better students (The College Board, 2002). To examine this issue, we planned to ask students their current grade point average (GPA) and how many courses they had successfully CLEPed, along with how many they planned to CLEP. We also believed that gender is a variable that needs to be examined. Studies indicate that females earn higher grades in college and work harder in their careers than males (Luzzo, 1994; Neville & Super, 1988; Wei & Lynn, 2001). Such commitment suggests that more females might take CLEP exams and also experience more success than males; a prediction that we examined in this study. In addition, research suggests that adult learners may be more self-directed, motivated, and have benefited from previous learning experiences (Draper, 1998; Tice, 1997; Titmus, 1999). Therefore, a goal of this research is to examine the possible differences between traditional students (18-22 years old) and non-traditional students (23 and older).

We were also curious about some pedagogical issues that CLEP raises. Therefore, this study includes questions regarding the amount of time students spent studying for a CLEP exam as well as the amount of time spent studying for a regular college course. Additionally, questions were asked concerning the students' perceptions of how much they learned studying for the CLEP exam compared with how much they learned in a traditional college course. We felt that these issues were very important when one considers that students are receiving credit for a college course without being in a classroom, the very foundation of the academic experience. Finally, because previous research (Gussett, 1980) indicated that prior learning experiences help with CLEP performance, a reasonable hypothesis is that students who had taken a high school course in the content of the CLEP exam may have some advantage on the CLEP compared with those who did not have that previous learning experience.

Methods

Participants

The participants were 227 students who enrolled in CLEP exams administered at the Robert Morris University (RMU) campus test center over approximately 14 months, mainly during the 2003-2004 academic year. Due to incomplete surveys, an actual count of non-RMU students cannot

be determined. However, 3 of the 227 respondents specifically indicated that they were not RMU students. Because 26 surveys were incomplete (e.g., only side one was completed), data from these surveys were not included in our analyses. Our final sample consisted of 201 participants (81 males and 120 females) of which approximately 99% were RMU students. No incentives were provided to the test takers for completing the survey.

Materials

The present survey consisted of thirteen questions (see Table 2). Most questions were written as forced choice alternatives with the exception of self reported GPA, number of CLEP exams taken, number of CLEP exams expected to be taken, and a question asking participants about their primary motivations for taking the CLEP exam.

Procedure

In order to protect the privacy of the participants, surveys were given to representatives at the campus test center to distribute to potential participants subsequent to the completion of each CLEP exam. This was somewhat of an imposition for the test center staff due to staffing difficulties. In fact, due to staffing changes, our survey was not distributed to CLEP takers for about two months during the academic year. Therefore, we did not additionally request the staff to track data concerning the number of missed opportunities to distribute the present survey, nor the number of participants who refused to complete the survey. It is known, however, that historically the RMU test center administers approximately 500 CLEP exams a year with an approximate pass rate of 60 percent. As the anonymous surveys were completed, the test center staff mailed them in batches to our address about once a week.

Results and Discussion

The results are shown in Tables 3 through 6. These results confirm the findings of earlier studies that above average students are more likely to attempt to CLEP a course. In our sample ($n = 201$), the average GPA was 3.37 on a 4-point scale. Moreover, a statistically significant correlation, $r(199) = .23, p < .05$, was found between GPA and the number of courses a student planned to CLEP, indicating that GPA appears to be related to one's confidence in academic abilities.

We speculate that instructors and academic advisors are more likely to suggest a CLEP exam to above average students if the need arises. Also, informal communications among students in regard to course selections and instructors is quite common. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that information concerning the difficulty of CLEP might also be passed-on informally. This would have the effect of discouraging some students from considering CLEP, particularly if they are average or below average students. As it turns out, our sample clearly indicated that CLEP was

Table 2
Survey used in this study.

CLEP SURVEY				
Please circle or write-in your response to each question.				
1	Your gender is:	Female	Male	
2	Your age is:	A) under 19	B) 19-22	C) 23-29 D) 30 or older
3	What is your current grade point average?	_____		
4	Approximately how much time did you spend studying for the CLEP test?			
		A) 1-5 hours	B) 6-10 hours	C) 11-15 hours D) 16-20 E) 20+ hours
5	Compared to a regular college course, did you spend _____ time studying for the CLEP?			
		A) more	B) about the same	C) less
6	Compared to a regular college course, have you learned _____?			
		A) more	B) about the same	C) less
7	How difficult did you consider this CLEP test?			
		A) very difficult	B) average difficulty	C) not very difficult
8	To what extent did your previous learning experiences help you with this CLEP test?			
		A) a great deal	B) somewhat	C) a little D) not at all
9	Have you had a similar course in high school to this CLEP test?	Yes	No	
10	What was your primary motivation for taking this CLEP test?			
11	How many courses have you successfully CLEP'ed?	_____		
12	How many courses do you plan to CLEP?	_____		
13	Are you currently a student at Robert Morris:	Yes	No	

challenging. Indeed, 48.3 percent indicated that the CLEP exam was very difficult while only 2.5 percent thought the exam was not very difficult (49.2 percent indicated that the exam was of average difficulty).

The study also revealed a small but statistically significant correlation between time spent studying for the CLEP exam and GPA, $r(199) = .14, p < .05$ (see Table 3). It should not be surprising that students with higher grades study more, since time and effort are related to success in college. Indeed, an increasing number of studies (Jansen & Bruinsma, 2005; Rau & Durand 2000; Ridgell & Lounsbury, 2004) point to the fact that students who study in a regular, intense, and disciplined fashion achieve higher GPAs. The researchers hypothesize that such behaviors are even more important for CLEP exams, since students generally receive very little outside help in terms of preparation and must be motivated to learn the material on their own. This usually means obtaining a textbook and then attempting to learn the material. Along these lines, there was also a significant correlation, $r(199) = .41, p < .05$, between GPA and passing CLEP exams. Not surprisingly, students with higher GPAs study longer and are more likely to achieve passing scores.

How much time do students spend studying for CLEP? The results make generalizations somewhat difficult. For instance, the most common amount of time spent studying was between 1 and 5 hours, which represented 30.3 percent of the sample. At the other range 20.4 percent studied 20 hours or more. Overall, 51.3 percent of the sample studied 10 hours or less, while 48.7 percent studied 11 hours or more. Taking into account the ETS data, which indicate that the pass rate is 50 percent or less for any given exam, and also taking into account that GPA, study time, and success on CLEP are related, time spent in preparation is crucial.

In terms of credit hours earned, CLEP is equivalent to a regular college course. Therefore, the present researchers

Table 3
GPA as a function of time spent preparing for the CLEP exam; $r(199) = .14, p < .05$.

	Time Spent Preparing for the CLEP Exam				
	1-5 Hrs	6-10 Hrs	11-15 Hrs	16-20 Hrs	20+ Hrs
GPA	3.34	3.34	3.30	3.35	3.54
<i>n</i>	61	42	35	22	41
Percentage	30.3%	20.9%	17.4%	11.0%	20.4%

Table 4
Average number of CLEP exams successfully completed as a function of age group; $F(3, 197) = 8.0, p < .01$ ($\eta^2 = 0.11$).

	Age Groups			
	Under 19	19-22	23-29	30 and Older
CLEP'ed	0.50	1.98	1.73	2.93
<i>n</i>	1	86	61	53

Table 5
Average number of CLEPs passed as a function of whether previous learning helped; $F(3, 197) = 6.09, p < .01$ ($\eta^2 = 0.09$).

	How much did previous learning help?			
	A great deal	Somewhat	A little	Not at all
CLEP'ed	2.69	2.34	1.77	1.36
<i>n</i>	41	81	55	24

were also interested in knowing how much time students spent studying for CLEP exams compared with traditional college courses. The results indicate that 54.7 percent of our sample studied less time for the CLEP exam. This finding is understandable since a traditional college course lasts about 15 weeks (one semester). In our experiences as college

Table 6

Percentage of students who did and who did not have a similar course in high school as a function of the amount of study time invested in the CLEP exam; $\chi^2(1, n = 201) = 6.18, p < .05 (\Phi = 0.18)$.

High School Course?	How much time did it take you to prepare for the CLEP?	
	15 Hours or Less	16 Hours or More
YES	77.4% (n = 72)	22.6% (n = 21)
NO	61.1% (n = 66)	38.9% (n = 42)

instructors and academic advisors, students do not typically spend an entire semester preparing for a CLEP exam—just part of one.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that 45.3 percent of the sample reported studying more (18.9%) or about the same (26.4%) amount of time for the CLEP exam as they do for a traditional college course. These results are somewhat perplexing considering that 51.3 percent of the sample reported studying a total of ten hours or less. Nonetheless, these findings are consistent with the *National Survey of Student Engagement* (2006), which reports that on average, undergraduates study about 13.5 hours per week for all their courses. Moreover, it should be noted that other studies indicate that study time is highly skewed, depending on the type of school involved. For instance, at highly selective schools like the University of Michigan, students report studying an average of 25 hours a week, while at less selective schools, students typically study less than one-half this amount (Rau & Durand, 2000). Students from the present study attended Robert Morris University, which is a less selective institution, where one would expect fewer hours of study.

In terms of learning, when comparing CLEP to a regular college course, the majority of the sample (54.2%) reported learning about the same amount, while 15.4 percent reported learning more and 30.3 percent reported learning less. Considering the paucity of time many students reported studying for CLEP, these results are problematic and would suggest that students do not learn a great deal in introductory-level courses. Again, this assumption is supported by other research. For example, the *National Survey of Student Engagement* (2005) found that 30 percent of first year students (those most likely to take introductory-level course) report studying just enough to pass. More telling is the research conducted by Osterlind et al. (1997), which summarized data from 70,000 achievement test scores and concluded that college students' knowledge in subjects such as geography, economics, and social science was minimal. Clearly, then, students as a group appear to be more likely to under-prepare (under-achieve) than to over-prepare (over-achieve) whether they are taking a course, or, studying for the CLEP exam.

The findings concerning gender reveal few variations. The only significant difference found was that females ($m = 2.71$) planned to CLEP more courses than males ($m = 2.11$), $t(199) = 3.08, p < .05$. It should also be pointed out that 59.7

percent of the sample was female, which might indicate that women have more confidence in their academic abilities. However, on all other comparisons (GPA, study time, learning reported) there were no statistically significant differences. These results are somewhat surprising, given the fact that women earn higher grades than men (Luzzo, 1994; Wei & Lynn, 2001). In part, these findings could be explained by research that indicates that males score higher on multiple-choice exams like CLEP. For instance, Bridgeman and Lewis (1994) discovered that on the AP multiple-choice exams, males scored one-half standard deviation higher on multiple-choice items than females. Similar findings have been reported in other studies (Bolger & Kellaghan, 1990; Murphy, 1982). Of course, in college courses, grades are often determined by using a variety of assessment techniques beyond objective tests, including various writing assignments where women may have some advantage (Hyde & Linn, 1988). It has also been suggested that women may tend to comply more with other course requirements such as submitting assignments and attending on a more regular basis (Kleinfeld, 1999).

The results concerning age also provided few statistically significant relationships. Only the fact that students over 30 CLEP'd more subjects was significant, $F(3, 197) = 8.00, p < .01$ (see Table 4). This finding is not unexpected. Older students often attempt to juggle family, school, and work commitments. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that they would seek the most expeditious path to a degree. Time-saving was one of the original goals of the CLEP program. Beyond this finding, however, the study negates the notion that older students would tend to have some advantage on CLEP and is consistent with earlier research that also found few, if any, variations based on age (Fagin, 1971).

Although age was not related to success on CLEP ($p > .10$), there was a significant relationship between extent of previous learning and CLEP success, $F(3, 197) = 6.09, p < .01$ (see Table 5). This is not surprising, as students would be more likely to pass a CLEP exam if they had taken a course on that topic. Interestingly, though, students who had taken a high school course tended to study fewer hours for CLEP, $\chi^2(1, N = 201) = 6.18, p < .05$ (see Table 6), assuming perhaps that less study time was needed. However, having taken a similar high school course was not significantly related to passing a CLEP exam ($p > .05$). This finding contradicts an earlier study that found that those students who had similar coursework did have more success on CLEP (Gussett, 1980). The results of the present study raise the question; if having high school coursework in a specific subject area is not related to success on CLEP, what type of previous learning is? This begs some discussion of what "previous learning" meant to students taking the present survey. There are two broad possibilities. On one hand, previous learning may reflect required exposure to the material (e.g., either as high school or college level courses or even preparation for the CLEP exam). On the other hand, previous learning may reflect an intrinsic interest in the topic which resulted

in voluntary (non-academic) exposure to the material such as through leisure reading. Therefore, a possible explanation of the findings is that the previous learning that helped students was in addition to having had a relevant course. This repetition of ideas is what benefited students taking the CLEP relative to those who did not receive such additional previous learning. Students whose previous learning was intrinsically motivated or the result of more recent college level exposure would be expected to outperform those not so exposed. At any rate, the types of previous learning experiences and exactly how they might benefit students is clearly an area worthy of further study.

Finally, Table 7 contains a summary of the responses to our open-ended question (*What was your primary motivation for taking this CLEP test?*).

Table 7
Summary of responses to the open-ended question: What was your primary motivation for taking this CLEP test?

Motivation	Overall (n = 201)	Males (n = 81)	Females (n = 120)
Save time	40.3%	42.0%	39.2%
Save money	36.8%	35.8%	37.5%
Graduate (on time)	23.9%	22.2%	25.0%
Graduate early	8.5%	11.1%	6.7%
Skip a course	7.0%	6.2%	7.5%
Skip a required course	6.0%	1.2%	9.2%
For the credits	4.5%	4.9%	4.2%
Eliminate an open elective	4.0%	3.7%	4.2%
Why not?	0.5%	1.2%	0.0%
Needed for graduate school	0.5%	1.2%	0.0%
Get credit for previous learning	0.5%	0.0%	0.8%
Schedule	0.5%	0.0%	0.8%

Note: Some participants listed multiple motivations.

Two findings stand out from these responses. First, responses were remarkably similar between males and females (all $p > .05$). Second, although ETS advises colleges to treat CLEP as a scholarship (The College Board, 2002), the idea of saving money (which we equate to the scholarship aspect of CLEP) comes second to students' desire to save time. Of the twelve categories of responses we obtained, nearly half dealt with time saving of one sort or another: save time (40.3%); graduate on time (23.9%); skip a (required or elective) course (13.0%); and graduate early (8.5%). The remaining motivations to take the CLEP were relatively negligible representing responses from fewer than 10 or so participants each.

Conclusions

The major focus of this study has been to reexamine some earlier findings concerning CLEP and also to investigate some new areas that merit examination. In this regard, our study reinforces earlier research that indicates that it is the above average performing students who benefit most from CLEP. Along these lines, success on the CLEP exam is significantly related to GPA and the amount of time spent in preparation. The study also found that a majority of the

sample devoted 10 hours or less preparing for CLEP, which perhaps explains why nearly one-half of the sample thought that CLEP was very difficult. In addition, slightly more than one-half the sample reported that their learning from CLEP was about the same as in a traditional college course. At least with regard to those students who take the CLEP exams, when one takes into account preparation time, the present research suggests that many introductory-level students do not learn a great deal either from CLEP or from a regular college course.

Somewhat surprisingly, gender and age were not found to be significant variables, beyond finding that females and those over 30 planned to CLEP more courses. Based on these outcomes, the present researchers conclude that GPA and time spent studying are more important variables than either gender or age in predicting CLEP success. Finally, the most curious result of this study was that previous learning experience was related to success on CLEP, but that having a high school course in the same subject area was not significant, contradicting earlier research. Perhaps students have forgotten much of what they have learned, or having taken a high school course gives students a sense of false security, and as the results indicate they study less for the exam. On the other hand, it is possible that previous learning experiences provide some pedagogical benefits (e.g., repetition of material or intrinsic motivation) that serve students well on CLEP. At the very least, this finding warrants closer examination and is an area that future studies could investigate.

Limitations

There are some aspects of the present research that serve to limit the generalizability of our findings. First, because the methodology used relied on self-reports, there is some likelihood that participants' recollections of certain facts (e.g., GPA, number of courses successfully CLEPed) may be biased. Also, because the majority of participants were RMU students, these results may not accurately reflect the performance and reports of students from other institutions. Finally, this study was designed to explore possible relationships among variables that seem relevant to CLEP exams using a survey instrument. Because the researchers had no opportunity to interact directly with participants in order to assess comprehension of or to clarify survey questions, it is possible that terms and phrases used in the questionnaire were interpreted differently among participants. Therefore, although significant relationships were identified, it may be that significant relationships were missed due to the potential for increased variability in responding. Future research is needed to more fully examine these concerns.

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Mentoring for Beginning Principals: Revisiting the Past or Preparing for the Future?

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Abstract

This paper describes a study of mentoring programs for beginning principals in two different urban school districts. In both settings, the goal of mentoring was said to be support for instructional leadership behaviors by novice principals. This represents an alternative to traditional mentoring schemes designed solely to ensure that first year principals “survive” their first year of service by demonstrating mastery of managerial skills.

Interviews of twenty mentor principals were carried out on location in two school districts. All mentors were selected by their districts because they had demonstrated strong instructional leadership skills while serving as campus administrators. All individuals were asked to describe the ways in which they believed they had or had not achieved success in working with newly appointed colleagues who were acquiring skills related to instructional improvement.

The goals of the two mentoring programs clearly noted that mentoring was directed mostly toward helping inexperienced administrators develop skills associated with instructional improvement. It was also noted that, for the most part, new principals were mostly focused on the need to gain confidence and a personal sense of competence related to their abilities to perform managerial duties before devoting time and energy toward instructional goals.

The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings as a way to promote further investigation of issues that need to be understood about the career development of school principals as the foundation for further efforts to improve the value found in mentoring activity.

For the past twenty years, there has been a belief that an important form of professional development and assistance for school principals is through the involvement of experienced administrators who can serve as mentors to their colleagues (Daresh, 2004; Crow & Matthews, 1998; Walker & Stott, 1991; Walker, 1989). For the most part, these mentoring programs have focused on assisting newly appointed principals who are taking on their first assignments. This approach to mentoring suggests that when an individual first assumes the role of a campus leader, he or she should be assigned to work with a colleague who can provide ongoing information so that the new principal can face the realities of a first job with some degree of confidence and competence.

More often than not, the information provided by a mentor was assumed to be practical advice regarding how a new principal could deal with procedural, managerial, or technical duties such as budgeting, scheduling, using technology, evaluating teachers, working effectively with parents, and many other similar administrative tasks. It was believed these tasks would make a beginning principal feel insecure during the first few years of service. The assumption had often been that an experienced administrator would possess the craft knowledge and experience that is needed to offer a new colleague advice and “tips” that enable a smooth transition into a new professional role. Without doubt, the emphasis in this type of mentoring has traditionally been that it to be a type of insurance policy to guard against an unsuccessful launch of a new career.

No doubt, beginning principals who have contact with mentors who are willing and able to teach “the ropes” have been able to enjoy greater confidence related to their ability to do their jobs. Traditional fears about not surviving as a principal have been greatly reduced by having access to caring colleagues who are willing to share their expertise. These colleagues are able to respond to a myriad of “how to” questions that always accompany a new placement. Despite the value found in this perspective on mentoring support, however, there have always been serious reservations about the effectiveness of this approach to professional development as a way to assist individuals at the beginning stages of their careers as school leaders.

The Problem

As the notion of providing mentors to support the work of beginning principals across the nation has gained momentum during the past twenty years, it has been clear that the prevailing conceptual framework guiding these efforts has been one that suggests that the primary (or perhaps only) goal of mentoring should be one of assisting individuals in their socialization to the role of school administrator. Thus, the driving assumption has been that the most important goal of any principal mentoring program must be the assurance that the person being mentored (or “novice principal,” “protégé,” or “mentee”) will survive the first year or two on the job. In turn, survival tends to be defined largely in terms

of a newly-appointed administrator's ability to successfully carry out assigned administrative duties. Thus, the mentor principal "teaches" his or her protégé how to complete the district's (and state education agency's) requirements associated with budgeting and accounting procedures, how to comply with state mandated teacher evaluation techniques, and many other similar tasks. Scheduling, coordinating, directing, and all other traditional tasks associated with efficient administrative performance serve as the foci of the relationship between the novice administrator and the experienced colleague. Conversations become discussions of "beans, busses, and budgets," or "what it takes to make sure you can cover your ass...ets."

There is little question that such forms of support are extremely welcome and of great value to a person who suddenly finds—or will soon find—themselves "dunked" into the world of service as a school principal. Regardless of the quality of a person's prior experiences, the vast majority of people who walk into an office and find themselves sitting in the principal's hot seat for the first time find their duties and responsibilities of managing a school each day to be a daunting adventure. It is important that some strategies be developed to ensure that newcomers do not face the prospect of "sink or swim" induction that has been part of the tradition of welcoming new principals to their jobs for many years. (Hart, 1992).

The problem that now exists, however, is that principals of today face many new challenges that their predecessors did not necessarily face in the past. Community demands for involvement in educational decision making were never at the level that they are today. Societal changes generally call for principals to be much more aware of social, economic, and political issues that form the environment of each school. Above all, the expectation that principals would focus nearly all of their attention on improving student learning and achievement, and also demonstrate greater fiscal and educational accountability, make the principalship of the 21st Century a vastly different job than the one veteran principals undertook when they were rookies (Neuman & Simmons, 2000; Fink & Resnick, 2001).

There are really two problems that now face principal professional preparation and development. First, the stress and challenges that exist along with the need to operate safe, efficient, and secure school buildings today create a vision of the principalship that makes it less appealing than ever for many educators who now stay away from opportunities to pursue administrative careers. At the same time, when programs offering mentoring schemes are launched as a way to help newcomers address the technical aspects of their jobs, they often are found to be inadequate in terms of assisting new school leaders to focus their attention on "what really counts"—higher test scores indicating increased student learning and achievement.

The focus of the research described here is to assist in the understanding of how seemingly competitive visions of the principal's job (i.e., successful educational manager versus effective instructional leader) can be brought together effectively to support the work of new and future principals. An additional focus of this research is to examine how the blending of two alternative sets of job-related skills (socialization to a current and past role while simultaneously fulfilling a visualization of new leadership opportunities for leaders facing the future) can be addressed in a district mentoring program for principals.

The underlying conceptual framework that guided this research was derived from the work of numerous researchers (Fuller, 1969; Hall & Loucks, 1978; Gregorc, 1973; Katz, 1972; Invarson & Greenway, 1981; Burden, 1982) who saw that entry into professional educational roles is not a single, discrete event, but rather a gradual transitional process. In this perspective, new teachers and principals do not simply go through a short-term "treatment" that will enable them to proceed with effective careers. Instead, efforts to assist newcomers in professional roles must be ongoing with a focus on guiding rather than simply intervening on a short-term basis.

Another framework that appeared to hold some promise for helping understand the ways in which people move through the beginning stages of their careers was developed by Huberman (1989). Huberman's work was selected for use on this study because its stages seemed best to parallel the goals of mentoring schemes that are designed to assist beginning principals in proceeding purposefully in the first stages of their new roles. In the case of school principals, mentoring has typically been described as an activity designed to assist newly appointed individuals proceed effectively through the first stages of their transition from non-administrator to administrator (Daresh, 2004). In most cases, this is defined as the first year of service.

Although Huberman's (1989) work focused on the professional life cycle of teachers, I will focus on 3 stages of development that I think describe beginning principals:

1. **Initial career entry.** The beginner focuses mostly on the discovery of the realities associated with a new professional role, along with developing a sense of survival in the job. Here, the "rookie" is mostly interested in finding ways "not to fail" rather than succeed. Some individuals experience easy beginnings (comfortable initial adjustments), while others go through painful beginnings (feelings of being overwhelmed and anxious).
2. **Stabilization.** This period is characterized by a sense of personal satisfaction and confidence in one's ability to do the job. It is at this point where beginning principals become more relaxed in their roles and start to assume that they can actually "do the job." This occurs whether individuals had an easy beginning or a painful beginning.

3. **Risk Taking or Risk Avoidance.** The final period of personal and professional development includes several possibilities related to professional growth over most of a person's career. Some individuals move toward experimentation, diversification of activity, and risk-taking behavior. On the other hand, some educators may spend the majority of their professional lives responding to one crisis after another. They engage in what Huberman refers to as "interrogation," or personal "stock taking" about the wisdom of choosing a certain career in the first place, or perhaps altering professional job definitions regarding what was first assumed to represent the totality of a job. The outcomes of this type of reflection generally lead to either a long-term sense of serenity over the assumption of new professional risks, or conservatism based on the decision to avoid professional behaviors that appear to stray from traditional norms and traditional roles.

My use of Huberman's model suggests that the critical decision point in a new principal's career path would be at a time just before entry into the third phase. At this point, a novice may begin to assume the new conceptualization of the principal's role as an instructional leader (risk taker), or follow the conventional image of the school principal as primarily a building manager (risk avoider).

Sampling and Methodology

The sample for this study consisted of twenty experienced current and recently retired (within the past three years) principals in two large urban school districts. These individuals serve as part of much larger groups (a combined number of approximately 80 in the two districts) who work with first year principals in their districts. Each year, anywhere from 90 to 110 individuals begin as new principals in their districts. The large number of vacancies each year is the result of retirements, movement to other local school districts, and in some cases, non-renewal of contracts related to low performance in the area of student achievement.

The twenty responding mentors were deliberately selected by their school districts because of their positive reputations and records of accomplishment as strong instructional leaders throughout their careers. The mentors received a great deal of specialized training prior to beginning their work with their mentees. All principals (and retired principals) selected to serve as mentors were told that, while learning how to cope with management issues was an outcome that could be derived from mentoring programs, the primary objective of the interaction between mentors and inexperienced principals was the increase in the principal's ability to serve as an instructional leader. In other words, mere survival was subservient to performance and improvement of student learning.

Mentors were interviewed at least twice during the year of the study. Both one-to-one interviews and small focus groups were led by the researcher to learn more about rel-

evant perceptions and experiences related to the following research questions:

1. In what ways are you able to focus your mentoring activity on the development of instructional leadership skills by your mentees?
2. How did your school districts support you in preparing you to serve as mentors who were expected to assist new principals in becoming effective instructional leaders?

Findings

Enabling mentors to address both building management and instructional leadership concerns by new principals was not an easy assignment. For one thing, the majority of experienced principals in the two districts had been socialized throughout their careers to serve primarily as managers. In terms of the developmental model, most had found fulfillment and contentment through conservatism. Mentors reported that, despite the expectation that new principals would be more inclined to address instructional issues, they still wanted to use their interactive mentoring time with their assigned mentors as a way to learn more about some of the practical and technical aspects of their jobs. Since this was within the comfort zone of experienced principals who achieved success without a long history of risk taking, mentors reported that they believed that they were successful in what they did to assist newly appointed colleagues. This was also consistent with findings of research conducted by Daresh (1986), Weindling and Earley (1987), Alvy and Robbins (1998), and Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) which showed that until new leaders of organizations are comfortable with the mechanics of a new job, they are likely to be less inclined to worry about what they perceive as issues which need to be "fine tuned." In the world of schools, such "fine tuning" is often perceived as issues and concerns related to instructional improvement. As beginning principals become more comfortable in their understanding of the managerial issues they faced (and attained the second, or "Stabilization" phase in Huberman's model), some began gradually to engage in more conversations with their mentors concerning critical instructional issues. They were starting to break the mold that defined the previous principal's roles. In one of the districts, many beginning principals referred to their need to deal with the technical issue of learning how to master a new computer system to guide budget development in terms sounding like the arrival at a "rite of passage" in their jobs. The task of developing the budget was seen as such a daunting task that, after individuals had "passed the test" (usually with the help of their mentors), they began to express satisfaction that they had somehow "arrived" as real principals. After that boundary between "novice" and "experienced" was crossed, some principals clearly relaxed and began to focus on instructional improvement. On the other hand, others relaxed, but became comfortable with being principals "just like the mentors." By March 1, it became clear that there were two camps, almost equally divided. One included risk takers (leaders) and the other risk avoiders (managers).

No doubt due to the emphasis both locally and nationally on the importance of achieving high student test scores, discussions between mentors and mentees focused on the importance of achievement in all schools, whether they were led by “leaders” or “managers.” But the tone of discussions between mentors and mentees who had chosen the risk-taking path were quite different from discussions that took place with new principals who had adopted the more conservative risk avoidance stance. In the former case, discussions about testing tended to be directed to dealing with the ways that achievement test data could be used in proactively developing new instructional practices, staffing arrangements, inservice activity, and other strategies designed to enhance the future quality of student learning in schools. In the former case, mentors and principals spent a great deal of time discussing the ways in which low scores could somehow be explained successfully to community groups and district administrators. Excuses were sought. For example, in two specific cases, a great deal of time involved reviewing the past behaviors of previous principals as an explanation of how new principals could not “really deal with instruction until they got over the bad things that happened in the past.”

Mentors voiced suggestions for the ways in which new principals could be directed more quickly toward becoming instructional leaders. This in itself suggested that the majority of mentors did not seem aware of the natural evolution of their mentees through developmental phases such as those suggested in Huberman’s work. Instead, they viewed their duty as one of making certain that beginning principals spent as much time talking about and seemingly addressing instructional issues in their schools, almost as if the challenges associated with performing the technical “rites of passage” could be overlooked. At the same time, there was little evidence that the new principals were actively resisting the move toward leadership, but they had to go through the steps of learning how to manage a school before they would be comfortable and arrive at the stabilization phase.

Mentors often gave evidence that they saw issues in the ways in which the districts selected new principals in the first place as the “solution” to ensuring that instructional leadership would be the focus of future school leaders. For example:

- The suggestion was often made that the principal selection process in the future needed to be much more focused on finding new leaders who would be interested in and committed to serving as instructional leaders in the first place. Both districts had spent a considerable amount of time and other resources to search for principal candidates who were more aligned with expectations associated with instructional improvement rather than skills traditionally sought in past principal selection efforts.
- Mentors often indicated that they needed more inservice opportunities in their school systems both prior to the school year began and in the following school year. These sessions needed to be consistently focused on the

importance of mentors working with their principals to develop skills as instructional leaders above any other concerns. In fact, mentor principals stated that new principals had to be firmly dedicated to the improvement of student achievement in all aspects of school operations. In this regard, it would be hard to appreciate any principal associated with either district not having “heard the message” that principals were to lead instruction, not simply manage buildings. However, few indicated that mentors might only be invited to participate in the program only if they had distinguished themselves as risk taking instructional leaders throughout their careers.

- In one district, three leadership coaches were enlisted along with a senior external consultant who served as the director of mentoring programs for the beginning principals of the district. The purpose of these appointments was to ensure that mentors were exposed repeatedly to the expectation that they were to guide their mentees toward behaviors consistent with being an instructional leader.

Implications

Mentors in both districts were selected largely because they were recognized as individuals with a great deal of experience as principals in their school systems. They were also known as principals who led “effective schools.” In most cases, that designation was assigned because the schools led by the mentors had traditionally demonstrated high achievement by students. Therefore, it was assumed that effective schools were the product of effective leaders, and so they were selected to prepare a new generation of principals in the hope the new principals would also be effective. However, in addition to these reputations, it was also clear that the mentor principals were identified because they ran “tight ships.” They knew how to work with teacher unions, handle parents, manage budgets, and undertake a wide array of very important technical activities.

The effective principals-turned-mentors were given training in their districts to assist them in understanding not only the duties of administrative mentors, but also how to work effectively on a one-to-one basis with the mentees. Absent from the training, however, was any effort to sensitize the mentors to the realities of new expectations now being placed on principals as instructional leaders. Granted, mentors had been responsible for schools that demonstrated student achievement test scores that were commendable, but they did not necessarily understand that their mentees were selected to become “teachers of teachers” even more than they were. The new vision of instructional leadership was indeed a more proactive process.

Another part of the preparation of mentors that appeared absent from these mentorship initiatives was the development of sensitivity toward the developmental needs of the mentee as learner. Little attention was directed toward developing an appreciation of normal career stages that beginning colleagues were likely to follow. It may have been helpful for

the mentors to have an understanding of career stage or professional development stage theory as a way to undergird their work with mentees. It was commendable that the two school districts involved with this study had similar goals of ensuring that beginning principals would focus immediately on the improvement of student learning and achievement as immediate goals for new principals, but it was unlikely that first year principals would become enthusiastic about the same vision. It was predictable that new principals, like new teachers, would need a period of self-discovery and learning about technical tasks first before setting additional goals. It may be that little progress can be made in terms of promoting instructional leadership rather than survivorship until individual novice principals move more completely into the comfort zone of Huberman's stage of stabilization. Perhaps this must occur before beginning principals can decide whether they are risk takers or risk avoiders.

Changing the role of mentors from "answer providers" to development guides is anything but a simple task. First, old habits (and visions of the principalship) are hard to change. Even with the resources that have been provided by the districts involved with this study, it was not surprising that new principals were still reticent about moving away from the traditionally-defined perceptions that principals "run schools." Because principals are seen as managers of buildings who take care of student discipline, scheduling, keeping the books, and many other similar details, there appears to be little room for principals as instructional leaders. Even the experienced principals who served as mentors tended to adopt this limited definition of their role. Consider, for example, the following comment made by an experienced high school principal as he explained what he did each day:

My job has always been to keep the school going. I don't interfere with teachers and their work. I'd be crazy to even try, particularly since my teaching area was physical education and I simply don't have the background to get involved with math teaching, or science. Hell, how can I tell a foreign language teacher how to teach if have trouble speaking English? The fact is, my secret as a principal is to trust my teachers and stay out of their way. If I hire good people, why would I do anything else?

This quote may not be reflective of most principals' serving as mentors in this study. But the perception that principals are primarily school managers is still alive and well in the United States. As a result, efforts to move away from this paradigm—either through formal mentoring programs or rewriting job descriptions—are difficult to carry out. As another example, think about yet another commonly heard statement by many: You can't lead instruction if you don't have a job. And you won't keep a job if you don't take care of important things first. Be a good manager, and then you can afford to be a great leader.

The problem frequently with "conventional wisdom" is often that it is neither conventional nor wise. The federal government and individual states are no longer accepting

promises from schools and principals that "things will get better." Demands for accountability in the area of student achievement make it clear that simply "trusting teachers to do their jobs" is not enough to satisfy parents, legislators, and other taxpayers in local communities. Principals now must become more actively involved with the improvement of instruction. They cannot afford to "fix roofs and mow the lawn out in front of the school" as their primary duties. A principal today must "hit the ground running" by leading the instructional program. If mentoring is to be used, it must focus on ways of helping principals contribute to the quality of student learning in a school or district. Having an experienced colleague show a newcomer the "tricks of the trade" that will lead to survival in a job as a sole objective will no longer be a sufficient form of support.

Noting that instructional leadership must be a priority for principals who wish to succeed may be important, but it cannot ignore another reality. Even the most dedicated beginning principals who envision their futures as instructional leaders and not building managers need to be mentored in a way that is sensitive to the developmental realities of becoming school principals. Studies of beginning principals (Daresh, 1986; Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Combs, Miser, & Whitaker, 1999; Guskey, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Hall & Hord, 2001) make it clear that, regardless of long-term hopes and aspirations, becoming a principal, teacher, or any other professional necessitates a developmental process. It is easy to realize that a new principal does not step in on the first day of a job with all the knowledge and skills of a seasoned veteran when it comes to understanding policies, practices, and other management issues. In the same vein, stepping in as a new instructional leader also requires a period of time for learning, growing, maturing, and developing. Again, consulting many of the suggested analytic frameworks found in the research on teacher induction may be of great benefit to those who would envision new principals immediately adopting the challenging roles of instructional leaders as they step into their offices for the first time.

The most effective mentors identified through this study had a clear understanding of how their mentees did not come "fully equipped" as either managers *or* leaders. And each new principal is different from all other principals who are just coming on board. In some cases, this difference was based on past experiences. For example, it was clear that those new principals who had prior experiences as assistant principals appeared to need less mentoring concerning the managerial side of their jobs. They certainly did not know every aspect of how to run a school building. But it was clear that those who had already walked alongside experienced principals had more confidence in what the job entailed in a practical way. In one of the two urban school districts involved with this research, it was a policy to require all applicants for principalships to have had at least three years of experience as assistant principals. Perhaps not surprisingly, the beginning principals in this district seemed to have fewer immediate needs to learn basic managerial skills. In the other district,

where most new principals had no prior experience as assistants, there appeared to be much more immediate anxiety concerning the performance of managerial tasks such as budgeting, use of technology, parent communication, and scheduling.

As suggestions for assisting mentors in leading their protégés toward service as instructional leaders or change agents, a few suggestions appeared as a result of the interviews that were conducted. For one thing, in one of the school districts mentoring was guided by a clear framework related to instructional improvement. This framework was neither a state nor national attempt to identify key leadership competencies needed by successful principals in that school system. Rather, the district had devised a rather simple set of essential skills, knowledge, and values that needed to be demonstrated by effective principals in schools. Since the list was simple and clearly focused on broad leadership skills, it served as a realistic guide for development. It was not a checklist of “learner-centered competencies” or attributes using language filled with concepts rather than actual behaviors and practices. The five essential competencies identified by the district to guide the ongoing professional development of all principals included:

1. Articulating a belief system through voice and action.
2. Assessing the quality of classroom instruction.
3. Engaging and developing faculty.
4. Facilitating and motivating change.
5. Balancing the demands for leadership with expectations for management.

Mentors reported that the review of individual progress in each of these competencies was an effective way of stimulating dialogue on mentee progress beyond attainment of management skills. They were also more helpful than other larger, more comprehensive and detailed lists of skills and objectives developed by agencies such as the Interstate Leadership Licensure Consortium Standards (ISLLC) or similar efforts to define skills developed by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). The real value of the concise statement of competencies was that it was sufficient to define leadership, but short enough to serve as an ongoing discussion guide.

Principals who served as mentors for instructional leadership development in both districts were not selected without rather extensive reviews of their performance as strong leaders in their own schools in the past. Simply volunteering to “work with new principals” was in no way viewed as the only qualification for service as a mentor. Mentors needed to provide evidence of their effectiveness, and references from teachers and colleague principals. Members of local school advisory groups were consulted as were administrative superiors in the districts which employed the mentors when they worked as principals.

In no way was there any sense that mentors were all equally satisfied that after one year of work with a mentee,

success had been achieved. In most cases, mentors indicated that, before the transition from competent manager to effective leader could take place, at least two or three years of mentoring support and careful guidance was necessary. Too often, the assumption seems to be made that mentoring, as a professional development activity, is an intervention lasting a year. While many of the new principals in this study approached their jobs with a strong commitment to becoming instructional leaders, learning about management responsibilities was still important as a necessary foundation for long-term success. It was frequently noted that, in many cases, the induction “year” would be better defined as an induction process lasting two or three years.

The use of the terms “change agents” or “instructional leaders” are often used to describe goals for new principals across the nation. What this study demonstrated clearly was that, while the goal of developing leaders may be quite commendable, it is not easily achieved through sharing a few “tips” or “tricks of the trade.” Instead, the type of mentoring promoted in the two districts reviewed in this study was marked by personal commitment guided by a vision. Both mentors and mentees had been selected because of strong evidence of at least the potential to succeed as instructional leaders. Bloom and his colleagues note that, as their vision of “Blended Coaching” moves through various stages of improved focus, “transformational coaching,” or coaching that achieves personal transformation through triple-loop learning (Argyris, 1971) is a goal that will be achieved only after “practitioners take responsibility for their own professional growth” (Bloom, et al., 2005, p. 89). It may well be that, given the fact that most conceptualizations of principal mentoring programs suggest that mentoring is an intervention limited to one or two years at most, the best that an effective mentoring program might be able to do in supporting a vision of instructional leadership is to keep talking about that goal, realizing that the pursuit of such a vision will only be accomplished if and when it is desired by the mentee.

In the final analysis, this study has provided insights into the establishment of a starting point for further investigations regarding mentoring. It is critical that those who would be mentors to newcomers are willing and able to guide colleagues toward making decisions based on what must be done in response to unseen challenges and realities. Such skill requires guidance to develop personal skill and not simply reliance on and search for immediate answers. It is indeed possible to provide pathways to the future, not simply repetition of the past. In short, what mentors must keep in mind is that they are not simply providers of information about “how to do” the tasks of administration; they must above all be guides to help newcomers learn how to think very differently about their roles.

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The Market-Driven Age of Education: Challenges of Urban School Leadership

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Abstract

The school choice movement has become a major focus for traditional public school leaders. Facing declining student population and millions of dollars in lost funding, superintendents are now focused on the creation of effective market competition strategies. This represents not only a shift in thinking but adds another dimension to their leadership responsibilities. This qualitative study queried Ohio's large city superintendents regarding the effect of the market ideology on their school districts. Superintendents are compelled to respond to market forces because school choice options, such as charter schools, have a tremendous impact on public schools.

The debate over school choice has deeply polarized school districts as millions of dollars are attached to students choosing to exit traditional public schools to attend alternative schools. Educational reform movements advancing school choice promote the ideology that market competition boosts the achievement of public schools by reducing bureaucratic control and encouraging innovation (Allen, 2001; Friedman, 1962; Hoxby, 2002; Kolderie, 1990; Nathan, 1996). The school choice movement moves away from "public policy based on democratic principles to public policy based on market assumptions" (Ridenour, Lasley, & Bainbridge, 2001, p. 67). Levin (2002) writes that democratic societies favor educational systems based on a common set of educational experiences that promote fairness and access based on effort and talent as opposed to privilege. Conversely, school choice initiatives based on the freedom of choice advocate a differentiated system of schools to meet the unique desires of parents (Levin). Traditionally, public schools seek to foster educational benefits for the common good; however, free market ideologies foster education as a private good or a self-interest endeavor (Labaree, 2000).

The underlying philosophy of the open market ideology is that competition will force improvement on the part of public schools (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000). The market theory is based on the interaction between supply and demand whereby in an ideal world, thoughtful, informed consumer parents demand the most advantageous educational placement for their child. In turn, public schools not only supply improved academic achievement, but they must intensify their efforts to retain and attract students or risk losing much-needed financial support from the state.

The thrust for market competition has compounded and modified the role of school leadership, especially in larger, more diverse districts. Recent practices promoting the market-based competition ideology represent a shift in thinking from the manner in which public schools have been traditionally viewed (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Public schools can no longer be viewed as monopolistic, state-governed institutions with a fail-safe customer pool. Widening the

availability of school choices increases the sphere of school leader responsibility to include attracting new customers and retaining existing ones. Over fifteen years ago, Kerchner (1988) accurately surmised that the proliferation of choice would fundamentally transform the disposition of school administration, altering the job demands dramatically from those duties that have previously been associated with the position. Traditional duties of district leadership include tasks such as maintaining fiscal stability, instructional leadership and collective bargaining. These often overwhelming duties are further compounded by the need to market their students as commodities. Succumbing to what Kerchner describes as the "Period of Choice" (p. 382), administrators have had to become bureaucratic entrepreneurs bowing to the inevitable pressure of creating, implementing and expanding new and innovative programs to improve school effectiveness. Changing the language of leadership, market forces impact the school administrators' role in particular ways (Crow, 1992), forcing leaders to become lobbyists and public relations specialists.

The growing battle for student dollars has indeed become a new challenge for educational leaders. The purpose of this qualitative investigation is to explore the perceptions and experiences reported by Ohio's large city superintendents as they face the challenges of the school choice movement. This research project is the outgrowth of a 2004 meeting of Ohio's eight largest school district superintendents, often referred to as Ohio's "Big 8." Unlike previous "Big 8" meetings where a variety of topics were discussed, the issue of school choice dominated the 2004 superintendent discussions so completely that this researcher felt their issues worthy of further investigation. This naturalistic inquiry presents the issue of school choice from several perspectives. The literature review discusses accountability issues and the changing roles of large district school leaders. I then present the interview responses from the leaders of the eight largest school districts in the state of Ohio relative to (a) how they perceive the market-based ideology is affecting their school districts, (b) which students have been most likely to take advantage of school choice options, (c) why schools of choice

are attracting public school students, and (d) how retention and recruitment strategies are being employed to compete with school choice.

Accountability and the Changing Roles of Urban Leaders

The issues of accountability and school choice are perhaps equally troubling to traditional school leaders. According to a United States Department of Education study authored by Hill, Lake, Celio, Campbell, Herman and Bulkley (2001), traditional schools are accountable to rules established by state and local boards, union contracts and other organizations. Charter schools on the other hand, are exempt from many of the same rules and are instead only accountable to demonstrate student learning (Hill, et al.). Charter school critics question the disparity in these accountability standards asserting that “charter schools are nominally accountable, but to whom they are accountable, for what, and with what consequences varies from place to place and time to time” (Hill, et al., p. 2). The accountability issue is complicated since most charter schools are typically overseen in accordance with state charter school law and not the local educational agency—the body to which the traditional schools in the same entity are ultimately responsible. Hill, et al. further note that the “accountability mechanisms created for charter schools is quite distinct from those of traditional schools” (p.4) and that the Department of Education has shown surprisingly ample latitude in the creation and implementation of school choice options. Such latitude has contributed to a shock wave of new and complicated challenges facing those traditional school leaders most affected by charter school proliferation.

Upward trends in school choice popularity are particularly distressing to central cities because larger proportions of students who seek charter schools are minorities located in more urbanized areas, causing considerable revenue loss to already struggling urban schools (Hendrie, 2004). Hunter and Donahoo (2003) argue that the role of the urban superintendent has grown particularly complex in that it has become “just as political as that of mayor, governor, or president” (p. 10). Large city superintendents express frustration on all counts. The financial stake in the competitive market trend forces leaders to focus efforts on gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to more effectively maintain the fiscal stability of their districts. School choice initiatives, write Crow, Hausman and Scribner (2002), extend the outside boundaries of the leadership role thereby “magnifying the complexity of work relationships” (p. 205).

Superintendents are faced with creating and instituting marketing-based campaigns to attract students to the district as well as intensifying efforts to retain current student dollars. Instituting new and attractive programs to enhance effectiveness is difficult for many reasons in larger, more diverse districts. First, traditional schools do not have the opportunity to weed out undesirables, whereas school choice

options such as charter schools can force or counsel out problem students and return them to the public school (Teske, Schneider, Buckley & Clark, 2000). Second, in the creation of new programs and innovative school options, traditional schools are often severely hampered by union contracts and state and federal regulations. When attempting to establish new programs, charter schools do not face problems associated with unions, nor are they bound by the same state and federal regulations. Urban districts have particularly difficult uphill battles. Carr (2004) convincingly argues that urban districts are fighting a long history of negative images and can only emerge victorious through aggressive, expansive, comprehensive, and costly marketing campaigns.

Third, and perhaps most troubling to instituting new and attractive programs, is the problem of diverted funding. Data compiled by the Ohio Education Association (2005) reports that the 250 charter schools operating in the state of Ohio have resulted in \$424 million dollars in state foundation monies being diverted from public school coffers. Of the 62,000 students enrolled in Ohio’s charter schools, 39,000 or 63% are drawn from the eight largest school districts, costing the “Big 8” 267 million dollars for the 2004 – 2005 school year (OEA, 2005). The pervasive loss of state and local monies is having a devastating effect on already struggling districts. Of the charters that will operate in the state of Ohio, over 30% will be managed by for-profit companies. Following the market rationale, writes Howe (2002), school choice improves public schools by injecting market competition into the system, especially when combined with accountability systems that are to provide information needed for parents to effectively exercise their choice” (p. 222).

Method

Research from a qualitative point of view allows researchers to understand how individuals perceive and attach meaning to the world around them (Krathwohl, 1993). The purpose of this naturalistic inquiry was to gain an in-depth understanding of the school choice phenomenon from the context-specific lens of urban school leaders. Naturalistic inquiry focuses on how people behave when absorbed in genuine life experiences in natural settings. Through a descriptive multiple case study approach (Yin, 2003) the researchers present the context-specific leadership experiences of eight superintendents relative to the school choice phenomenon.

The study was interpretive in nature in that the views of seven urban superintendents were used to derive meaning through the lenses of the researchers. The primary researcher was a professor of educational administration at a northwestern Ohio university and the co-researcher was one of the eight superintendents identified in the sample. The superintendent’s role as a participant-observer in the study was vital because his long-standing relationships with the other seven leaders in the sample permitted ease of access to the other superintendents and strengthened the depth and candid nature of

the conversations and interviews. Additionally, his role as a participant-observer afforded immersion in the setting by allowing the primary researcher a rare opportunity “to hear, to see, and begin to experience reality as the participants do” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 100).

The investigation utilized direct observation and in-depth interviews to describe how large city school leaders perceive the effect of the school choice phenomenon on their school districts. The non-random, purposive sample consisted of the superintendents of the eight largest school districts in Ohio.

The observational data were gathered by both the primary researcher and the superintendent participant-observer using handwritten field notes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) during a 2004 meeting of the eight superintendents. The primary researcher was permitted to observe and interact while the leaders discussed, in an informal forum, their concerns relative to school choice trends. Data were also collected through handouts shared between the superintendents.

Individual telephone interviews, lasting from 30 minutes to 90 minutes in length were then conducted with seven of the superintendents in March and April 2005. Each telephone interview was conducted by both the primary researcher and the superintendent participant-observer via speaker phone together, with both researchers taking fieldnotes. The participant-observer was interviewed in person by the primary researcher. The fieldnotes gathered from both the meeting observation and interviews were coded for recurring phrases and selected words using constant comparison.

While the interviews were free flowing and conversational in nature, a degree of systemization in questioning was employed to provide a “consistent anchor” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101) between respondents. The questions were presented in a preset order, but maintenance of the contextual richness of the data necessitated allowing the participants to control the flow and pace of information sharing. Mishler (1986) notes that “we are more likely to find stories reported in studies using relatively unstructured interviews where respondents are invited to speak in their own voices, allowed to control the introduction and flow of topics, and encouraged to extend their responses” (p. 69). The opulence of the superintendents’ stories and experiences required follow-up questions that were posed by the co-researchers individually when needed.

During the individual interviews, superintendents were asked to respond to the following four guiding questions: (a) which students have been most likely to take advantage of school choice options, (b) why schools of choice are attracting public school students, (c) how the market-based ideology is affecting Ohio’s urban school districts, and (d) which retention and recruitment strategies are being employed to compete with school choice. That their thoughts gathered around similar sentiments is very much in keeping with Krathwohl (1993) who noted that the “concern here is not with the idiosyncrasies of a single case but with the com-

monalities of all the cases” (p. 18). The following paragraphs discuss the participant responses and are presented as they correspond to these four guiding questions.

As with all qualitative research, limitations may exist relative to the transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the findings. While this typically holds true, the researchers believe the rich nature of these findings are externally valid and transferable to urban school leaders in similar settings. The strengths of this qualitative methodology outweigh the weaknesses in that research that elicits subjective understandings and unstructured linkages requires a free flowing form and design allowing for participant interpretation not typically possible with quantitative methods.

Findings

Which Students are Most Likely to Exercise School Choice Options

According to Collins (1999), parents who seek charter schools do so because they are not satisfied with their local public school and are seeking higher standards, small class sizes, and a more supportive environment. Peterson, Howell, and Greene (1999) describe the typical school choice student as an African American (68.7%) who is significantly more likely to live in a single-parent home (68.2%) with an income of less than \$16,000. A research report by RPP International commissioned by the United States Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research supports this finding. The 2000 report notes that charter schools serve a disproportionate and growing number of poor and minority students who perceive that the charter schools will deliver what they believe the public schools are lacking. Viteritti (2002) notes that the appeal of charter schools to some disadvantaged parents is that they believe school choice is a way to flee underperforming inner city schools; at the same time, these parents believe that school choice creates a feeling of exclusivity.

Responding to what would promote a more user-friendly atmosphere for parents, four of the leaders reported that some parents perceive that teachers are not culturally sensitive, which leads to strong and often un-mended personality conflicts between teachers and parents who then seek alternative learning environments for their children. These types of conflicts will continue to plague urban districts as they face the cultural disparity between the homogenous teaching force in which the average teacher is white, female, and from rural and suburban areas (Frey & McKinney 1997; Van Hook, 2000) and the nation’s increasingly diverse student body (Breitborde, 2002).

Why Schools of Choice are Attracting Students from Public Schools

Participants in a study by Fox (2002) favorably described the charter school experience over the traditional experience because they perceived that the small schools allowed teach-

ers and staff to get to know the families better, and parents were more likely to become involved. May (2006) reports similar findings as parents articulated that their charter school provided (a) a sense community, (b) small schools, (c) opportunities to become more familiar with parents and families, (d) positive perceptions of the culture, and (e) increased structure and discipline. The findings in these studies are critical as they speak directly to an emergent theme among superintendents, namely, that a more customer-friendly school environment must be created in public schools.

While all eight superintendents noted, to varying degrees, that improvements in their customer service focus is vital, they continue to feel that their districts are unfairly targeted by the school choice game. Recounting recent experiences with school choice marketing strategies, one leader noted that charter school advertising strategies in his city target low-income parents by emphasizing the beauty of their schools, likening them to private schools with uniforms without costly tuition. Another leader accused charter school strategists of engaging in the most rudimentary of campaigns, including tactics such as offering Wal-Mart gift certificates to enrolling parents and lobbying at African American churches. Another leader from one of the smaller Ohio districts added, "Although I feel that race is a factor, I can't really support or prove it. The charter schools market in poorer neighborhoods offering incentives such as transportation, before and after school programs, and financial incentives such as laptops, phone cards, and store gift cards. I cannot compete with that, nor can I convince them it is a farce."

In light of the scant empirical data to support claims of increased academic achievement in charter schools (Carnoy, 2001; Gardner, 2000), the superintendents seem genuinely baffled by the increasing popularity of charter schools given the muddled reports of statistical success. While the National Charter School Research Project (2005) reports that academic comparisons between traditional students and charter schools is like comparing apples to oranges because of the variables involved, it is necessary to compare some data at some point. The data that does exist continue to indicate that charter school students do not outperform traditional school students. And in actuality, traditional schools outperform charter schools on proficiency tests (OEA, 2005). Predictions of charter school success have not been realized in many states, such as Colorado, Minnesota, Arizona, and North Carolina (Greene, Forster, & Winters, 2003).

By standards established in the state of Ohio, 87% of the charter schools are considered failing and only five percent are rated as "excellent," juxtaposed to twelve percent of the traditional Ohio schools that are considered failing and fourteen percent that are excellent (Jewell, 2004). Speaking on the statistical success of its charter schools, one superintendent asserts that only 2 of the 20 privately run charters in his district have demonstrated academic success beyond that of the public district. Another leader reported that one of their most popular charter academies for 4th and 6th graders is far below that of the city schools. "Even though that

[poor test scores] information was published in the paper, attendance continues to increase and is now about 50/50 black and white." Given inconclusive data on charter school success and the continued fervor surrounding school choice, why then have charter schools continued to flourish in the educational landscape?

Current research suggests that parents are seeking more than just improved academics; they are also seeking a welcoming culture and a caring environment. The results of one study theorized that parents who report "academic" satisfaction with their charter schools are in actuality reacting to "affective factors" that make them feel good about the school (May, 2006). The disparity between the affective factors and effective achievement that charter school parents report is a "perception gap." It is this "perception gap" that public districts must analyze and emulate to more effectively market what they have to offer.

Responding to the charter school fervor, one very frustrated leader lamented that the initial school choice movement was billed as a "cure-all" for kids from poor families. "In truth, they are actually receiving less service than what we offer here in the public schools. A great majority of our students who leave for charter schools [in my district] are African American; I'd say about 60-80%. I believe parents are leaving because of the promise of a 'private school' and the promise of transportation." Not to be underestimated, however, is the strength of the "perception gap." Charter school parents believe they are treated better and are receiving a better deal on the customer service end. In addition, they seem to feel more care, cultivation, and value of relationships. This same superintendent continued that "If little Johnnie says he loves his teacher, Mom is not going anywhere. And here in my district, parents have complained that the secretary is rude and the teachers have no time." Another leader noted that "in many respects we have become our own worst enemy." In that same vein another added, "We must stop acting as if we have a monopoly, because we do not." In the district with the least number of students exiting public schools to pursue alternative school choices, the superintendent interjected that "the ones that are leaving are complaining of personality conflicts that occur predominantly with African American parents and white teachers who are perceived as not being culturally sensitive."

The Effect of Market-Based Ideology on Ohio's Urban School Districts

The superintendents in this study said they are strongly compelled to respond to market forces for professional survival, even though they do not necessarily agree with the ideology. Considering the strong federal support for school choice and charter schools (Gokcekus, Phillips, & Tower, 2004; Nathan, 2005), district leaders believe the proliferation of school choice options will continue to have a devastating financial effect on their districts as well as other public schools. All but one of the superintendents pointed out their belief that the school choice movement was leading to the

demise of the public school system. The superintendents contend that while it may be an unintended consequence, school choice is destroying the fabric of traditional schools. Lasley and Bainbridge (2001) cite similar concerns noting that an unintended consequence of encouraging choice may be that urban and rural schools are left with diminished resources.

An emergent theme that reverberated throughout the dialogue with the superintendents was the notion that the school choice movement affects urban districts disproportionately. This may appear so because statistically urban school districts supply nearly two-thirds of the charter school population (Jewell, 2004). In fact, a study of the 46 largest urban districts in the nation reveals that the number of parents deciding to take advantage of school choice options tripled from the 2002-2003 school year to the 2003-2004 school year (Lewis, 2004). While some of the superintendents used stronger language than others, five of the leaders mentioned, in some form, that the school choice movement was a covert attempt to destroy the public schools. One leader referred to an "insidious attempt to rip the rug out from under us and out students." Attempting to explain the difficulties in mounting an attack on school choice and No Child Left Behind, another leader lamented that the "No Child Left Behind Act was a stroke of genius. Who is going to argue with wanting all kids to succeed? To dispute that notion would be, well, downright un-American." The majority of the superintendents in this study alluded to the political underpinnings of the school choice movement. As leaders of poverty-stricken urban schools, these superintendents believe they have unwittingly become the unfair target of a conservative political movement that has been dismissive of environments which may preclude swift changes and spontaneous leaps of academic improvement.

A final theme emerged regarding the effect of a market environment on school leadership. The superintendents believe that the spirit of market competition has transformed their job descriptions as well as the skills necessary to competently perform in the position of district leader. One superintendent said that the added dimension of competition has increased time at work because of the number of direct reports that need to be compiled in addition to the need to find "hundreds of thousands of dollars for advertising campaigns." This job transformation was accurately predicted and described by researchers such as Crow (1992) and Kerchner (1988), who noted that the day-to-day responsibilities of district leadership would be compounded by the inescapable pressure of becoming marketing strategists responsible for competitively promoting their schools and programs.

By all accounts it appears that the competitive market ideology has permeated the fabric of public education, and the largest, most diverse schools perceive they stand to be the big losers. Although all the superintendents strongly objected to injecting competition into the school marketplace in order to improve achievement, they all felt compelled to play the students-as-commodities game. Three leaders admitted that they have compromised their personal beliefs as well as the

basic mission of traditional schools, namely education for the public good.

Market Strategies Initiated for Retention and Recruitment

So what do Ohio's large district leaders foresee as their plan of action to move to a market mentality? Despite the charter school success debate, all eight leaders recognize that with continued voucher expansion and federal legislation such as NCLB, school choice has been stitched into the educational fabric and will continue to dominate the attention of those it most affects. All eight leaders project they will continue to see start-up, for-profit charters, and that as superintendents, they will have to be creative and innovative to ensure the future of their districts as well as public schools as an institution. One superintendent explained that moving to a market mentality includes massive campaigns to spread the public school progress story in her district. This leader insists that, "We, as urban districts, must be proactive, self-promoting advocates who market accessibly and visibly to the community at large. And our marketing campaigns must specifically and effectively target the needs that parents perceive are being met through the charter school experience."

The leaders of the five largest districts agreed that urban schools must demonstrate to the community that changes are in the works. They indicated that their districts need to embark on district-wide, long-term initiatives with commitment among all levels of the organization, from the school secretary's smile to the returned phone call from the superintendent. As one leader stated, "Our focus needs to be on the customer as a truly valued commodity." Additional activities mentioned included a need to raise district and community expectations, engage parents more effectively in the process, publicize more effectively what we do well, mount campaigns aimed at changing and improving perceptions, and ensure our customers are well informed. One leader surmised that "We must do business differently and make ourselves attractive to parents."

The superintendents believe that data on the reasons why parents choose to leave the public school must be continually collected, analyzed and effectively used to implement recruitment and retention campaigns. One leader surmises that such campaigns must encompass and engage with the variety of academies and district-sponsored charter schools that offer smaller class sizes, safer environments, and more focus on individual relationships between teachers, students, and parents.

Many traditional public schools around the country have already taken lessons from available charter school research by instituting new strategies and activities to lure their students back. For example, Tucson Unified School District and Minneapolis, Minnesota have established specialized schools and are actively marketing themselves in the community. Following suit, one of the districts in this study has not only launched a recruitment and retention campaign to actively regain lost students, but they have also embarked on

the creation of specialized academies such as single-gender academies as well as an academy targeting parents seeking extremely demanding curriculum. The Ohio school leaders in this study report that they are instituting strategies to market themselves to their district constituents as a more user-friendly system. One district has begun a Customer Service Hot Line where parents and community members can discuss issues and receive an immediate response. In an effort to collect immediate data from parents, four districts have created exit surveys for parents who have decided to leave the district for other school choice options. The third largest Ohio district has created training videos for secretaries, bus drivers and other classified personnel geared toward assisting students and parents on a daily basis. Additional strategies include the placing of banners in all buildings with "I Can" statements, post card mailing campaigns that tout district successes, creating a Parent Knows Best Public Access Channel, and opening a digital charter school. Other strategies the districts report that they are either currently implementing or have in the planning stages include Before and After school programs, district sponsored charters, and weekly columns in the newspaper highlighting district successes.

Summary

The superintendents in this study believe that a market-based ideology will permeate the educational landscape for years to come. Although the sample in this study is small, the researchers believe that their perspectives are not uncommon to many school leaders, especially those in larger, more diverse districts. The superintendent interview responses in this study reveal that while the leaders offered different stories and commentary, their voices echoed similar sentiment on three major themes, namely, (a) they were initially ill-equipped to address the added responsibilities of marketing their schools to the public, (b) they perceive that the school choice movement unfairly penalizes urban schools, and (c) they recognize the need to make changes to more readily meet the needs of their customers.

Recognizing the powerful economic, political, and legislative aspects of the movement, the leaders in this study are making meaningful efforts to face and overcome the challenge of reclaiming students from alternative choice schools. School choice options present new and uncharted waters, and the superintendents in this study recognize that substantial institutional changes must take place to create competitive learning environments. In this endeavor, the urban leaders appear committed to creating public schools that will once again become America's schools of choice.

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Mixed Method Designs: A Review of Strategies for Blending Quantitative and Qualitative Methodologies

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Abstract

The historical debate surrounding quantitative and qualitative research paradigms has been at times rather passionate. Arguments for and against methodologies often have centered on the philosophical differences regarding issues such as generalizability, epistemology, and authentic representation of the phenomena under research. More recently, however, considerable focus has shifted to discussion on how mixed methods research can be performed and used effectively. Generally speaking, mixed methods can be conceptualized as the use or blending of research methods from both quantitative and qualitative traditions. There exists considerable complexity in how these methods may be used together. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of researchers are embracing the concept of mixed methods, and published articles using mixed methods are more common than they once were. Given the ongoing development of mixed methods research, the purpose of this paper is to provide a succinct summary of the most prominent mixed methods research paradigms. Papers such as this one are needed to communicate current status of the field in a concise manner for applied researchers.

The historical debate surrounding quantitative and qualitative methodologies and research paradigms has been at times rather passionate. Arguments for and against these methodologies often have centered on the philosophical differences regarding issues such as generalizability, epistemology, and authentic representation of the phenomena under research (see e.g., Howe, 1988; Reichardt & Rallis, 1994).

More recently, however, considerable focus has shifted to discussion on how mixed methods research can be performed and used effectively (Caracelli & Greene, 1993; Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Generally speaking, mixed methods can be conceptualized as the use or blending of research methods from both quantitative and qualitative traditions. There exists considerable complexity in how these methods may be used together. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of researchers are embracing the concept of mixed methods, and published research using mixed methods is more common than it once was.

Historical Perspectives

Historically, educational research was conducted in such a way that if one asked a good question and operated with scientific methodology, there could be an answer that was reliable, replicable, and generalizable. This position is termed *objectivism*, and those operating in this paradigm ask questions that can be measured quantitatively. In this traditional, quantitative view, science is seen as the way to knowledge, and the way to understand phenomena so that they can be predicted and controlled (Scientific research in education, 2002). By the use of deductive reasoning, objectivist researchers pose hypotheses that can be tested. This kind of research is characterized by an objective and dispassionate stance, with the researcher usually playing a neutral, observer role, in the study. It is grounded in variance theory, which deals with variables and the correlations among them, and is

exemplified, for example, in regression models of analysis (Maxwell & Loomis, 2003).

In the 1950s through the 1970s, researchers began noting perceived difficulties associated with this objectivist stance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, are there objective truths that exist outside of human experience and understanding? Is truth universal? As attention shifted to some of the problems, there was increasing rejection of the tenets of objectivist inquiry.

This rejection gave rise to the *interpretive* movement. Interpretive researchers believe there are multiple realities, and that individuals perceive, understand, experience, and make sense of reality in different ways depending on an individual's unique background and experiences. In the 1970's, interpretive researchers first began to express that what is learned from a study is related to the assumptions and perspectives investigators bring to the study. According to interpretivists, there is no single reality, because knowledge is subjective and culture-bound. Interpretive researchers work with qualitative, non-quantifiable data, including rich accounts of social phenomena, contextualized narratives, and the use of rhetorical techniques (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Qualitative paradigms are grounded in process theory, which deals with events and the processes that connect them, and how events influence each other (Maxwell & Loomis, 2003). The aim is to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the participants.

As qualitative methodology rapidly gained in popularity with some researchers, they began to engage in the so-called paradigm wars (Gage, 1989) with each side of the quantitative/qualitative argument criticizing the others' methods, procedures, and validity of outcomes. These paradigm wars served to polarize the two sides of the disagreement.

Meanwhile, by the 1930s, some researchers, particularly in the field of sociology, quietly began working in ways

that combined quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g. *The Hawthorne Studies*, Mayo, 1933). These early mixed methodologists seemed unaware that they were doing anything unusual (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003), and did not name their methodology. They used methods appropriate for their questions, and it was not until the “paradigm wars” that researchers began questioning the appropriate use of methodology blending.

There are distinct philosophical assumptions that shape the way researchers approach problems and collect and analyze data. Quantitatively oriented researchers believe that scientifically based rules and laws shape the social world as they shape the physical world. Researchers can discover these rules and laws, and then apply them objectively to answer questions and predict behavior. Qualitatively oriented researchers view an individual and the world as so interconnected that one does not exist without the other. The only way to understand human behavior is to focus on the meanings that events have for the participants by looking at what people think, feel, and do in a comprehensive way.

Data gathered through quantitative methods has sometimes been described as more objective and accurate because it is collected using standardized methods, can be replicated, and analyzed using statistical procedures. Qualitative is sometimes seen as less accurate and reliable. This distinction is too simplistic. Either approach may or may not satisfy the requirements of systematic rigor. Quantitative researchers are becoming increasingly aware that some of their data may not be accurate and valid. Respondents may not understand the meaning of questions to which they respond, people’s ability to remember events is faulty, and it is difficult to control for human experiences. On the other hand, qualitative researchers have developed better techniques for classifying and analyzing descriptive data. It is also increasingly recognized that all data collection, quantitative or qualitative, operates within a cultural context and is affected by the biases and beliefs of the data collectors. As Onwuegbuzie (personal communication, January 30, 2005) noted, “Everything starts out qualitative.” The topic of the research, test design, interview questions, and choice of wording are all reflective of the researcher.

Current Status

Broadly defined, *mixed method design* is research design that involves both quantitative and qualitative data in either single study or in multiple studies in a sustained program of inquiry (Creswell, 2003). As the field has evolved, there have been inconsistencies and confusion in the way various terms that relate to mixed method research have been defined. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) proposed *mixed methods designs* as the cover term that describes the use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures and research methods, and includes mixed methods research and mixed model research.

Mixed method research studies use qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in the methods part of the study. These studies have both a qualitative and

a quantitative data collection procedure (e.g., an interview and test score) or research method (e.g., an ethnography and an experiment). Though mixed method research relies on qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, they often are parallel without much real mixing, and the questions they ask and inferences they make are often either qualitative or quantitative in nature, as opposed to blended (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

Mixed model research, by comparison, occurs in several or all stages of a study, in sequential or concurrent phases, including questions, methods, data collection and analysis, and the inference process. Underlying mixed model research is the assumption that it is possible to have two worldviews, or paradigms, mixed throughout a single research project. There may be multiple research questions, each grounded in a distinct paradigm, and there might be multiple inferences relating to different worldviews (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Additionally, mixed model research can involve a team of researchers from different disciplines who bring different theoretical and analytic perspectives to the analysis of a single problem (e.g., Green & Harker, 1988).

Mixed method research, then, differs from what is called *multimethod* research. Multimethod designs are those that use more than one method, but are restricted to one worldview (e.g., qualitative/qualitative, or quantitative/quantitative methods).

At the present time, researchers in social and behavioral sciences can be roughly classified into three groups. There are those who are quantitatively oriented, conducting research in empirical ways using statistical analysis and deductively arriving at conclusions. Qualitatively oriented researchers rely on more subjective construction of reality to arrive at descriptions of phenomena, and their work is influenced by the theory they are using.

The third group is the mixed methodologists. As Teddlie & Tashakkori (2003) claim, they are neither traditional (quantitative) nor revolutionary (qualitative). Those researchers using mixed methods tend to fit more closely with qualitative worldviews, including the belief that there are multiple realities that are dependent upon the individual, but they answer questions by combining qualitative and quantitative methods in various ways, in parallel, concurrent, or sequential order.

Rationale for Continued Use

Mixed methods approaches can sometimes be superior to single method designs. Mixed methods research can answer questions that the other single paradigms cannot. The methods researchers use depends on the nature of the questions being asked. Certain questions cannot be answered by quantitative methodology, and others cannot be answered by qualitative studies. Researchers can combine approaches so that one verifies the findings of the other, one can serve as the groundwork for the other, and the approaches may complement each other to explore different aspects of the same question.

An advantage of mixed methods research is that it enables the researcher to simultaneously answer confirmatory and exploratory questions. A researcher can confirm an effect on a phenomenon by statistical analysis of quantitative data, and then explore the reasons behind the observed effect by using field research, case study data, or surveys (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003a). A researcher may also use qualitative methodology to generate theory, and quantitative methods to test that theory.

Mixed methods research can provide for stronger inferences because the data are looked at from multiple perspectives. One method can provide greater depth, the other greater breadth, and together they confirm or complement each other. For example, quantitative data may be used to measure the success of an intervention, and qualitative data used to explain the process of the intervention. Mixed methods are useful when they give better opportunities to answer the research questions of interest, and when they help the researcher evaluate the “goodness” of their answers (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 14).

Common Models for Conducting Mixed Methods Research

Mixed methods research takes on different forms, depending on the researcher and the questions being asked. Three of the most common approaches are *pragmatism*, *transformative-emancipatory*, and the *multiple paradigm position* (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003a).

Pragmatism is considered a dialectical stance (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003b, p. 706), in which contradictory ideas are sought and played with. It rejects concepts like “truth” and “reality,” and instead focuses on “what works” regarding the research question. Researchers intentionally engage in multiple sets of paradigms, rather than making either/or choices, and “examine the tensions that emerge from the juxtaposition of these multiple diverse perspectives” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003a, p. 677). One of the reasons that pragmatism is the most common paradigm in mixed methods research is because it fits in applied settings where there are complex social phenomena. Pragmatic researchers consider the question to be more important than the method used to answer the question or the paradigm that shapes the method (Maxcy, 2003). They use a broad array of techniques, selecting based upon the question at hand rather than a sense of superiority of techniques. Questions that might be studied under a pragmatic paradigm include, “What are the reasons that Strategy A is more effective than Strategy B?” Researchers answering such a question would use quantitative data such as test scores and demographics, and qualitative data such as field notes and interviews, in a blended concurrent way in order to arrive at answers.

The second most common mixed methods paradigm is known as *transformative-emancipatory*. Transformative-emancipatory researchers hold that there are diverse views in social realities, but those views need to be placed in a social, political, historical and economic value system in

order for us to understand the differences (Mertens, 2003). This paradigm assumes that repression (racial, gender, ethnic, disability, etc.) is at the root of social problems, and asks questions such as, “When teachers are not sensitive to cultural diversity in their classroom, what is the impact on achievement and future options for the student?” Answers to questions that transformative-emancipatory researchers ask are framed in the importance that culture and repression of culture play on society, and have, as a goal, to improve conditions for the group being studied.

The *multiple paradigm position* simply states that researchers use the methods that are most likely to answer their questions. The methods vary according to the study at hand, and fit generally into one of four models based on simultaneous/sequential mixing (Creswell, Plano-Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). Qualitative data can be used as a base to help develop quantitative measures and tools; quantitative data can be used to elaborate a qualitative study; qualitative methods can be used to help explain quantitative findings; and qualitative and quantitative methods can be used equally and in parallel to arrive at the study results. The form of the model is dependent upon the questions being asked, and researchers reflectively choose methods. In addition, *when* data analysis occurs is dependent upon the questions and model chosen (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). In models where qualitative and quantitative data are gathered at the same time, the analysis of data from each may also occur concurrently, either during the course of the study or after all the data is gathered. In models where methods are used sequentially, the data from the first model will be analyzed prior to the collection of the data from the subsequent method.

Using Mixed Methods Designs

An awareness of the theoretical drive of the project is important (Morse, 2003), as it affects how the research questions are addressed and how the study is designed. If the purpose of a study is to describe or find meaning, the methods will generally be qualitative, with a focus on things that provide thick narrative descriptions. If the purpose is to confirm, as in theory-testing, the methods will usually be quantitative. The direction of the theoretical drive has consequences on study design issues. For example, qualitative data is usually gathered in small sample sizes, while quantitative data usually means larger sample sizes. Qualitative samples are usually purposefully selected based on the needs of the study, and don’t meet the assumptions that shape quantitative studies (i.e. randomization). The researcher will need to make choices that reconcile these issues.

Each methodology relies on base assumptions that guide the collection and analysis of data. Qualitative data is gathered in different, more subjective ways, than quantitative data. In order to quantify qualitative data, the researcher would need to assure that quantitative assumptions have been met, including such things as, “Were all the participants asked the same questions in the same ways?” Conversely, researchers working with quantitative data may be tempted to analyze notes that

respondents write in margins of survey instruments. Because the survey instrument was not designed to provide qualitative data, and all respondents were not requested to write in the margins, this data cannot justifiably be used (Morse, 2003). Researchers using mixed methodology must take care to select methodologies that serve the purpose and objective of the study. In studies with sequential designs for exploratory purposes, the decision on how to analyze data may emerge as trends become evident in the study. For example, the initial, qualitative phase the study may point to themes that will then lead the researcher to the quantitative data-collection and analysis methods; or the initial, quantitative phase may lead the researcher to use a certain qualitative methodology. In studies where quantitative and qualitative data are gathered and analyzed in a parallel phase design, the decisions regarding data analysis would often be made at the very start of the study, and the planned analysis would serve as a guide for the collection of data. The purpose and objective of a study determine what kind of data is collected and how it is analyzed. Data must be treated in ways that fit the purpose of the study (see Newman, et al., 2003).

Conclusion

The use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology can build on the strengths and neutralize the limitations of either methodology used alone. There are advantages and disadvantages of each singular methodology, but in combination, educational researchers are able to build stronger studies, which lead to better inferences, by using mixed methods research designs. The understanding that social phenomena is complex leads to an awareness that studying these phenomena using multiple methods supports the use of mixed methods research in education.

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