Measuring Change as a Result of Program Pedagogy: 
An Exploration of Aspiring Leaders' Perspectives

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Abstract

National attention on effective schools has focused on the issue of the quality of leadership preparation programs (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). The need for more and better-prepared principals (Hale & Moorman, 2003) raises the question of how to measure the impact of program preparation on the perspectives of aspiring leaders. While other research may rely on self-reports of perception, this qualitative study explores changes in leader identity and problem-framing through analysis of principalship program student problem-based narratives. In an earlier phase of this study, we developed continua to describe leader identity and problem-framing. Through this process we developed five leader identity categories. Three of these categories reflect leader-centric identities: leader-in-solitude, leader-dictated, and leader-driven identity. Two of the categories represent participative-centric leader identity: collaborative leader and transformative leader identity. We also created a continuum to locate participant’s problem-framing as first-order change: student and family, teacher and classroom, administrator and campus, or second-order change: capacity building and culture frames. Comparison of pre-program and end-of-program data analysis support the majority of participants included in this study exhibited movement toward participative-centric leader identity and second order change problem-framing by the end of the two-year principal preparation program.

The full paper can be accessed at www.utprincipalship.org, under research.

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Measuring Change as a Result of Program Pedagogy:
An Exploration of Aspiring Leaders' Perspectives

The discussion regarding the quality and effectiveness of campus leadership has sparked a far-reaching range of research and inquiry. While the centrality of leadership to impact school effectiveness has been documented (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008) the complexity of the interplay of factors contributing to leadership influence continues to be explored (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Research indicates that effective campus leaders are adept at a wide range of skills including the ability to develop positive relationships with an array of stakeholders, foster professional learning communities, inspire the commitment to a shared vision of educational equity and excellence, guide instructional improvement and reform efforts, and implement structures and systems to support these efforts (Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckenooghe, & Aelterman, 2008; Harris, 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Questions regarding the preparation of aspiring leaders in light of this emerging body of knowledge thus arise. Given the extraordinary challenges that confront contemporary campus leaders, equipping aspiring leaders with the skills and content knowledge required to meet these challenges is a daunting task.

Recent research of innovative preparation programs suggests a range of promising pedagogical practices geared to address this challenge (Brown, 2004b; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007). Evaluating and measuring the impact of the curriculum and instruction of these program components is vital in the task to contribute to the body of knowledge examining preparation program effectiveness. The purpose of this paper is to describe the second stage of a multi-phase research project designed to determine the impact, if any, of a purposefully designed preparation program on the perceptions of program participants. We frame this research through the theoretical and practical underpinnings of effective leadership preparation programs, leadership identity and problem-framing as explored in the literature.

Effective Program Components and Pedagogy

The components and pedagogical approaches of effective leadership preparation stem from the literature analyzing effective leadership practices (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr & Cohen, 2007). The literature suggests that campus leaders who exemplify and embrace notions of social justice, bridge theory and practice through critical reflection, and embody qualities of servant leadership are more likely to guide a campus to substantive change (Brooks, Jean-Marie, Normore, & Hodgins, 2007; Gooden, 2002; Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007; Theoharis, 2009). Additionally, research indicates that leaders who implement improvement strategies geared toward the cultivation of a learning organization and professional community are more likely to realize campus-wide reform and improvement efforts (Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Leithwood, et al., 2008; Leithwood, Steinbach, & Jantzi, 2002). Research indicates that leaders who act from beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions anchored in values of social justice and who initiate capacity building strategies that emphasize relationships, collaboration, and shared decision-making are more effective in achieving transformational reforms that lead to more equitable and just school conditions for all students (Brown, 2004a; Jacobson, et al., 2007; Marks & Printy, 2003; Theoharis, 2008).
Innovative educational leadership preparation programs are revamping course content and instructional delivery to account for these findings (Brown, 2004b; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr. M. T., et al., 2007; Orr, 2006a). Taking into account theories relative to adult learning (Brown, 2004b; Orr, 2006a) educational administration scholars and professors are revamping program designs to include such elements as the cohort model, problem-based learning, internships, rigorous recruitment and selection, and critical reflection and discourse (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, et al., 2007; Orr, 2006a). Exemplary programs embrace adult learning styles by emphasizing self-directed, collaborative, and authentic learning experiences which foster the development of personal and professional beliefs and attitudes as well as promote flexibility in problem-solving.

These efforts are geared toward cultivating the aspiring administrators’ leadership identity and problem-framing. The conceptual notion that beliefs mediate action and are a critical element of identity (Bandura, 2001; Brown, 2004a) suggests that the development of leadership identity is vital to fostering campus leaders who are prepared to meet the complexities of the school setting. Bandura (2001) notes, “People are not only agents of action. They are also self-examiners of their own functioning,” (p. 165). Beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions are key elements to agency and identity which can be influenced through critical self-reflection and interaction (Bandura, 2001). Contemporary research suggests that campus leaders who are most effective at critically addressing educational inequities exhibit commonalities in terms of leadership identity (Brown, 2004a; Gooden, 2002; Theoharis, 2009). Theoharis (2008) notes that leaders committed to social justice share a common set of “beliefs” and “dispositions” which are “central to [the] principal’s work and identities as school leaders,” (p. 19). Moreover, Theoharis indicates that these principals maintain a “strong belief in empowering and trusting teachers,” (p. 19). The literature informing our current research study builds on the notion that beliefs, dispositions, and attitudes are key to the development of leadership identity. Learning experiences which challenge pre-service leaders to examine their assumptions through reflective practices and critical discourse are a key element of current innovative programs which strive to foster this critical consciousness (Brown, 2005; Orr, 2006b). As Brown (2005) advocates for a transformative pedagogy:

Pre-service leaders can then be challenged to explore these constructs from numerous, diverse, changing perspectives. Personal biases and the preconceived notions they hold about people who are different from themselves by race, ethnicity, culture, gender, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, and physical and mental abilities can be identified and discussed. As such, these courses require an active, sustained engagement in the subject matter and an openness of mind and heart. Aspiring leaders need time and structure to think, reflect, assess, decide, and possibly move from their current perspectives or status to another level of commitment and action, (p. 159)

Through the experiences of collaborative critical inquiry, self-reflection, and authentic learning experiences, emerging school leaders expand their worldview and cultivate more sophisticated dispositions and identities (Brown, 2005; Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2007).

Beliefs and attitudes regarding authority and power resonate in the literature relative to effective school leadership (Brooks, et al., 2007; Brown, 2005; Darling-
Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008) and are inherent in the concept of leadership identity (Theoharis, 2008). For effective leaders, the locus of control is distributed (Brooks, et al., 2007). As noted by Theoharis (2008), principals committed to the tenets of social justice exhibit identities that foster school environments that are “distinct from schools where the principal is autocratic and imposes decisions in a top-down manner,” (p. 19). Cultivating a collaborative and transformative leadership identity through authentic learning experiences and reflective discourse is a key component of exemplary leadership preparation programs (Brown, 2005; Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Orr, 2006b).

Research findings examining the development of graduate students’ leadership identity further informs our current research by providing a conceptual framework. Komives and her colleagues argue that “Understanding the process of creating a leadership identity is central to designing leadership programs and teaching leadership,” (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005, p. 594). They explain that as leadership identity develops, the perception of leadership as “leader-centric” evolves to a view of leadership as “a collaborative, relational process” (Komives, et al., 2005, p. 610). Importantly, the spectrum of leadership identity is not fixed (Komives, et al, 2005); rather individuals can move between stages in both linear and cyclical patterns. “Even as development through the stages occurs, development proceeds in a circular manner. A helix model of development allows for stages to be repeatedly experienced, and each return is experienced with a deeper and more complex understanding” (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006, p. 404).

Coupled with the development of leadership identity is the effort to cultivate pre-service leaders’ ability to frame the systemic and structure issues that lead to educational inequities, understood here as problem-framing. The literature indicates that effective leaders strive to foster a culture of collaboration geared toward transformational problem-solving (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). How a leader perceives the issues leading to inequities is key to successful school reform efforts. Leadership practices and behaviors which focus on implementing strategies to fix the problem student and his/her family are based in a deficit model which undermines authentic school reform (Brown, 2005; Gooden, 2002). Likewise, leadership practices that spur instructional and structural change through transactional agreements of reward and punishment fall short of reaching the goal of continuous school improvement and reform for all students (Hallinger, 2003b; Marks & Printy, 2003). Leadership behaviors that target curricular issues and instructional delivery methods alone are first order change efforts (Hallinger, 2003b) and reflect a first order problem-framing perspective.

Second order change efforts seek to influence instructional conditions through collaborative learning and problem solving. Leaders that perceive the organic and dynamic essence of the organization engage in practices that cultivate a collaborative campus culture by fostering the norms of a professional learning community and building the capacity of all stakeholders (Leithwood, et al., 2008; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). In contrasting the first order to second order leadership practices, Hallinger suggests that “transformational leadership creates a climate in which teachers engage in continuous learning and in which they routinely share their learning with others,” (Hallinger, 2003b, p. 338). Leaders who frame issues as second order change promote the collective capacity of the organization to problem solve and thus address issues underlying campus
ASPIRING LEADERS’ PERSPECTIVES

culture (Hallinger, 2003b; Ingram, Seashore, & Schroeder, 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Second order change leadership practices target the conditions that influence capacity building and school culture and thus indirectly affect student, family, and classroom conditions. The literature indicates that effective leadership preparation programs provide learning opportunities for pre-service leaders to exercise flexibility in problem-framing through a collaborative, reflective, and critical examination of authentic problems (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007).

UTAPP Leadership Model

The University of Texas at Austin Principalship Program (UTAPP) has several components in common with exemplary school leadership preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr. M. T., et al., 2007): rigorous selection, cohort structure, problem-based learning strategies, field-based internships and coaching. The rigorous UTAPP selection process requires demonstration of prior leadership contributions at the campus and/or district level through submission of a portfolio that includes a résumé, leadership artifacts, written problem-based response, statement of purpose and reference letters. These portfolio items are analyzed to determine which candidates will be selected to receive a site visit. During the site visit, a team composed of at least one university faculty member and a current graduate student interview the candidate and conduct an observation of the candidate teaching or facilitating a leadership meeting. Final recommendations for graduate school admission are based on a compilation of GPA, GRE quantitative and verbal score, portfolio score and site visit results.

Once selected for the UTAPP program, graduate students experience a two-year leadership preparation program delivered through a cohort model. Class members begin to bond as a cohort before classes begin during Transition Camp. The Friday evening and all-day Saturday Transition Camp activities have been deliberately devised to foster collaboration among members. Summer coursework begins with a problem-based course, Foundations of Educational Administration (FEA). During FEA, students collaboratively conduct a study of an area school. This summer-long assignment has been intentionally designed to require cohort members to work interdependently toward a common goal, thus experiencing firsthand the special issues that arise from serving as a leader among leaders. As the two-year program continues, students complete additional coursework in the areas of instructional leadership; school law; data-based decision making; school business; class, race, and gender; and special populations including English speakers of other languages and special education. The final two semesters, students enroll in a year-long field-based internship course with an accompanying reflective seminar. During the internship, students are supported by an onsite supervisor, an off-site coach and a UTAPP advisor.

While leader identity and problem-framing are not addressed in specified coursework, throughout the program, through the use of case studies, readings, and class discussions, students examine researched practices that include collaborative systems, descriptions of transformative leadership and an emphasis on capacity building and culture associated with second order change. The findings from this research will be used to assess the efficacy of the current UTAPP pedagogy to impact the perspectives of
program participants and possibly inform adjustments in both course content and delivery.

**Research Project**

This paper presents the culmination of the second phase of our overall research project examining the impact of the program on aspiring leadership. Two research questions drive the inquiry:

1. What perspectives do pre-service leadership participants bring into a principalship program?
2. What is the nature of the shift, if any, in individual perspectives as a result of purposefully designed, learning experiences delivered through a cohort model?

In the first phase of the project, we addressed the first research question employing a grounded theory approach. In order to understand the initial perspectives of cohort members we analyzed participants’ written responses to a problem-based activity submitted as part of the application portfolio for admission to the program. From this research, we developed the Leadership Identity/Problem Framing template described in detail below (Young, O'Doherty, Gooden, & Goodnow, 2010). We then applied the template to the pre-program student narratives, plotting each cohort members’ position along both continua.

In this second phase of the project, we have analyzed the cohort members’ perspectives at the end of the program to determine if individuals experience a shift in leadership identity and problem-framing, and if so, to reveal the nature of the shift. We applied the Leadership Identity/Problem Framing Template to the cohort members’ written responses to a problem-based activity which mirrored the original task. Cohort members’ leadership identity and problem-framing position were plotted and compared to their original position.

**Data Sources.** For both the pre-program and end-of-program data samples, participants received AYP, school-based state achievement data and parent, teacher and student survey responses for an unidentified school. Participants were instructed to assume the role of an incoming principal and describe the process he/she would engage in to develop goals and a campus improvement plan. While the pre-program and end-of-program school data sets were from different schools, both campuses had been designated Academically Un acceptable by the Texas accountability standards.

A UTAPP staff member, who was not involved in the research, removed names and other identifying information from the data sources prior to beginning both the first and second phases of this research. Each student was assigned a unique identification number 001 through 016.

Using the Leadership Identity/Problem Framing Template developed in the first phase of our research, we individually coded each participant’s end of program narrative using the key concepts which frame the template (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). We then plotted each participant’s leadership identity and problem framing position. Next, we compared our findings to ensure inter-rater reliability.

**Participants.** Each of the 16 members of the 2008 UTAPP Cohort voluntarily consented to participate in the research. However, only 14 of the total 16 cohort members submitted the end of program responses within the time requirements of the research project. Therefore, two of the members’ responses were not included in this phase of the
research. In order to ensure confidentiality, demographic information on individual participants has been omitted. We have included a summary of demographics on all sixteen of the original participants below (Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Middle School</th>
<th>Elementary School</th>
<th>Central Office</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations. We acknowledge there are limitations to this research. Due to the small number of students selected each year, the 2008 UTAPP Cohort represents a small sample size. All of the past five UTAPP cohorts have been composed of fewer than 20 students. While generalizability is not the expressed or implied goal of this research, the small number of participants may raise issues in this area. It may also be a limitation that the end-of-program data source is part of the final program portfolio requirement and therefore also represents a graded piece of work. While the grading rubric for the assignment does not directly or indirectly address leadership identity or problem-framing, it is possible that responding to a graded assignment may have influenced the way participants crafted their approach to the end-of-program problem-based narrative.

The Nature of Shift

The research described in this paper examines the effects of purposefully designed collaborative learning experiences on principalship program participants. The first phase of this research (Young, O'Doherty, Gooden, & Goodnow, 2010) outlined the process used to develop a research template to describe perspectives along two continua: leader identity and problem-framing. In the original study, findings from examination of pre-program documents revealed participants entered the UTAPP program with a range of both leader identity and problem-framing perspectives with the majority of participant responses coded as leader-centric and first order change problem-framing. In this second phase, we seek to learn what is the nature of the shift, if any, in participants’ leader identity and problem-framing perspectives at the end of the two-year preparation program.

Examination of end-of-program documents revealed that participants’ responses continued to reflect a range of both leader identity and problem-framing perspectives, but with an increase in responses coded as moving toward participative-centric and second-order change problem-framing. The sections that follow define the categories of the leader identity and problem-framing continua as well as the findings of this phase of the research. A comparison of findings for pre-program and end-of-program results for 14
participants (001 through 016) is included below (Table 2). To illustrate shifts noted in perspective, pre-program positions are noted by PRE and end-of-program results are presented with EOP. Note: two participants (007, 012) had not submitted the end-of-program narrative in time for findings to be included in this phase of the research. Also, one participant’s (014) end-of-program data source did not include a description of the process he/she would use to develop the plan. Therefore, we were unable to determine end-of-program leader identity.

Table 2
Comparison Of Pre-Program (PRE) And End-Of-Program (EOP) Participant Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Leader-Centric</th>
<th></th>
<th>Participative-Centric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leader-in Solitude</td>
<td>Leader- Dictated</td>
<td>Leader- Driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td></td>
<td>EOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td></td>
<td>EOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>PRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>PRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>PRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>PRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>PRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
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<tr>
<td>011</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>012</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
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<td>013</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
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<td>014</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
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<td>015</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>016</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
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</table>

Leader Identity

Leader identity, for the purpose of this study, is defined as the intersection of leadership attitudes, dispositions, and agency positionality. In the first phase of this study (Young, et al., 2010), we located five leader identity perspectives along a continuum that included three leader-centric identities: leader-in-solitude, leader-dictated and leader-driven through two participative-centric identities: collaborative leader and transformative leader. Representative quotes that reflect each identity are included below (Table 3). The following provides a brief description of these five leader identities and related findings from our pre-program and end-of-program analysis.
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader-centric</th>
<th>Leader-in-Solitude</th>
<th>Leader-Dictated</th>
<th>Leader-Driven</th>
<th>Collaborative Leader</th>
<th>Transformative Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader- in- Solitude</td>
<td>“I would immediately look at enrollment in each level of academic class, review the course guide for exclusionary language and look at grade distribution in the classes” (010)</td>
<td>“Administrators will evaluate the outcome of the staff development” (005)</td>
<td>“I would debrief with the teams and have them share with each other what they observed, what they would like to bring to their own classrooms, and what they would like to research further” (013)</td>
<td>“When considering school improvement, it would be essential to create a team to collaboratively analyze the data, determine strengths, weaknesses, and the root causes of those weaknesses” (002)</td>
<td>“By establishing a committee, leadership capacity is built within the campus. This committee becomes part of the school culture and creates a systemized process which has a better chance of continuing after the principal leaves than disconnected individuals” (004)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Leader-in-solitude identity.** Leader-in-solitude reflects a positional view of leadership as in the leader is the one that leads and gets things done (Komives, et al., 2006). While the term leader may typically be associated with followers, the data revealed that some respondents approached problems and/or enacted processes in complete isolation from others as illustrated in the following quote, “I have designed a plan for Anywhere Elementary School...the focused areas that I will include…” (005). In leader-in-solitude identity, power is limited to the sole, formal leader. Responses examined prior to beginning the program revealed leader-in-solitude as the least referenced leader identity category with only one participant (005) demonstrating a preponderance of leader-in-solitude responses. In our analysis, participant responses occasionally supported two leader identities, in these cases where there appeared to be an equal distribution, rather than a preponderance of a single category, we noted a combined leader identity. One participant’s pre-program response (001) and one participant’s end-of-program response (010) supported a combination of both leader-in-solitude and leader-dictated leader identity. These individuals described processes that fluctuated between solitary actions, “…one area that must take immediate action from me will be addressing performance of the LEP population on the campus” (010) and leader-dictated actions “I would make the [advisor], the central contact person for the parents” (010).

**Leader-dictated identity.** The first phase of our study (Young, et al., 2010) indicated a second leader-centric category, leader-dictated identity. In leader-dictated identity the leader decides the direction for improvement, sets goals, and determines the process to be used, but then delegates the tasks to others to complete. All power is centered in the formal leader. This form of leadership is supported by the principles of bureaucratic administration: hierarchical structure, division of labor, control by rules, and impersonal relationships (Hanson, 2003). In the pre-program analysis, three participants’
responses (002, 003, 009) were found to contain a preponderance of leader-dictated identity. The end-of-program analysis did not reveal any participants who appeared to exhibit strong leader-dictated identity, though as noted above, one participant’s end-of-program response (010) supported a combination of leader-in-solitude/leader-dictated.  

**Leader-driven identity.** The third category of “leader-centric” identity, leader-driven identity describes leaders who determined the initial task, process, or goal, but then worked with stakeholders to carry out processes or strategies. In contrast to leader-dictated identity where the leader delegates tasks, leader-driven responses included active solicitation of input from stakeholder groups. Though stakeholders are consulted, decisions are still controlled by the formal leader. In other words, power continues to flow through hierarchy and formal roles. Our description of leader-driven identity is similar to what transactional leadership research describes as a constructive transactional leader. This type of leader sets direction, determines outcomes and invites participation “into the management process” (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 14). Leader-driven identity was represented in the data through providing opportunities for input, guiding or facilitating dialogue, and creation of structures for planning and committees, but with limits imposed on the committees. In pre-program data, leader-driven identity was the most prominent form of leader identity with five respondents (004, 010, 011, 013, 014) including repeated examples in this category. The end-of-program results revealed only two participants (005, 013) with a preponderance of data in this category. In three pre-program (006, 015, 016) and four end-of-program responses (008, 009, 011, 016), participants were found to exhibit a combination of leader-driven and collaborative leader identity. This is an interesting combination as these participant responses contained a fairly equal distribution of both leader-centric and participative centric leader identity.  

**Collaborative leader identity.** In our previous research (Young, et al., 2010), we define a collaborative leader as one who works alongside stakeholders to create structures that support sharing and invites others to set goals, determine processes and/or products. Power in collaborative leader identity is shared among stakeholders. In our initial phase of this study, collaborative leader identity emerged as the primary “participant-centric” category. Responses supported several aspects of collaborative leader identity including, the creation of structures, opportunities, and processes for increased collaboration as well as supporting participative decision-making processes. Respondents exhibiting collaborative leader identity shifted the locus of control away from a single leader toward participative decision-making, as exhibited in the following quote, “Each group would be responsible for updating, modifying, adding, or deleting strategies for achieving the assigned goal or objective or changing objectives when necessary” (012). In the pre-program data, only two respondents (012, 008) provided a preponderance of examples supporting collaborative leader identity though most of the respondents included at least one collaborative structure, support system, or process in their problem-based narrative. The end-of-program data supports two participants (003, 015) with strong collaborative leader identity and three others (001, 002, 004) with a combination of both collaborative leader and transformative leader identity.  

**Transformative leader identity.** The second category of “participant-centric” leader identity is that of transformative leader identity. A transformative educational leader is one who “focuses on developing the organization’s capacity to innovate”
In this research, we have identified transformative leader identity as a leader who develops the organization’s capacity through student, teacher, and parent empowerment, engenders common commitments and shared accountability. A transformative leader is one who is a leader among leaders. Power is distributed throughout the organization. Members have embraced the shared beliefs and are therefore not dependent on the leader’s direct influence. In the pre-program responses, only one participant (008) with strong evidence of collaborative leader identity was found to approach the synergy required for transformative leader identity.

In end-of-program responses, while three participants (001, 002, 004) exhibited a combination of collaborative leader/transformative leader identity, only one participant’s response (006) demonstrated a preponderance of transformative leader identity. This participant’s end-of-program narrative described a campus-wide approach to school improvement driven by the actions of a “Campus Advisory Team consisting of parents, teachers, local business owners, and members from the district …assembled to research the school’s history and present culture”. Throughout the response, the participant uses the pronoun we, and describes a community working together toward a common vision as illustrated by this quote (006):

All stakeholders were asked to describe a vivid picture of what he or she wanted for our school’s future. All responses were considered when shaping our school’s vision. Once a vision was established, stakeholders discussed their collective commitments and responsibility to one another in order to realize our school’s future vision.

In the 006 response, the Campus Advisory Team conducts an equity audit and needs assessment, leads the school in creating a common mission, vision, and commitments, determines priorities and establishes an expectation that strategies included in the campus improvement plan be research based.

While leader identity was distributed along the continuum in both the pre-program and end-of-program responses, our findings demonstrated a shift toward participative-centric identity in the end-of-program responses. In the pre-program responses, four participants, representing 29%, demonstrated at least a combination of leader-driven/collaborative leader identity. For one respondent, 014, the final data source did not include a description of the process he/she would follow as the leader. As such, we were unable to determine a leadership identity and therefore no end-of-program leader identity has been assigned. The findings from the end-of-program responses support ten participants (71%) moving toward participative-centric leader identity, including four with a combination of leader-driven/collaborative leader identity, two demonstrating a preponderance of collaborative leader identity, three a combination of collaborative/transformative leader identity and one transformative leader identity. These findings also reveal that the end-of-program responses for two of the participants (14%) appeared to move toward leader-centric leader identity. The implications of these findings will be discussed later in this paper.

Problem-framing

While leader identity may be inferred from descriptions of how power is distributed and who is included in making decisions, carrying out plans, and determining progress, problem-framing concerns the interventions, strategies and/or actions selected by the respondent to address the indicators of low student achievement. The problem-
based data sets participants received for both the pre-program and end-of-program narratives indicated that the sample school received a state rating of Academically Unacceptable and had also failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress. In both cases, participants were to assume the role of an incoming principal and describe the process(es) he/she would use to develop goals and plans for improvement. The findings related to problem-framing are summarized below (Table 4). The following section provides definitions of problem-framing and findings related to pre-program (PRE) and end-of-program (EOP) analysis of first order change: student and family, teacher and classroom, administrator and campus, and second order change: capacity building, and culture frames.

**Table 4**  
*Comparison of Pre-Program (PRE) and End-of-Program (EOP) Problem-Framing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Student/Family</th>
<th>Teacher/Classroom</th>
<th>Administrator/Campus</th>
<th>Capacity Building</th>
<th>Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>011</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>013</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>014</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>015</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>016</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>EOP</td>
<td>EOP/EOP</td>
<td>PRE/EOP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In our initial study, (Young, et al., 2010) we originally thought the variance identified in participant responses merely represented the possible actions that a school leader, or school, might take to close achievement gaps. On further examination, we found that the actions participants selected appeared to be connected to how each respondent framed the problem. We clustered the original codes into categories representing the targets that would be impacted by the selected intervention. The
categories that evolved are associated with first order change: student and family; teacher and classroom; administrator and campus; as well as second order change categories of capacity building and culture. First order change has been described as incremental and can often be accomplished within the existing structures of an organization (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). In short, first order changes do not require changes in the capacity or culture of the organization. In schools, examples of first order change include setting goals, monitoring instruction, and providing interventions to students or families (Hallinger, 2003). Findings from respondents’ narratives exhibited first order changes addressed through a student and family frame, a teacher and classroom frame, and an administrator and campus frame.

**Student and family frame.** Participant responses included actions that directly impacted students such as: 1) intensive academic tutoring, 2) instituting pull-out programs, 3) providing incentives and motivational activities, 4) requiring daily test preparation, 5) providing after school clubs, and 6) enacting strict discipline and/or 7) attendance practices. Often these proposed solutions were accompanied by suggestions to address families through the development of parent information nights to teach parents the importance of the state tests, or provide tips on how to extend learning at home. Framing problems at the student and family level suggests that student achievement will improve if the students and parents improve. In the pre-program narratives we analyzed, only two participant responses (002, 009) indicated a preponderance of examples framed at the student and family level. Several other respondents combined student and family problem-framing with teacher and classroom frames. Analysis of end-of-program responses did not support any participants solely exhibiting student and family problem framing.

**Teacher and classroom frame.** Teacher and classroom frame indicators are those that directly impact teachers or instruction. Examples from our data include: 1) required lesson planning and design; 2) purchase and distribution of vendor products; 3) monitoring of lesson delivery, 4) required lesson delivery models, 5) prescribed professional development, and 6) punitive measures for low student achievement. The pre-program narratives (003, 005, 006, 011, 013) more frequently framed problems and solutions in terms of the teacher and classroom than end-of-program (015) narratives.

**Administrator and campus frame.** In the administrator and campus frame problems are approached from the perspective that if the administrator(s) would improve, or if systems could be enacted campus-wide, then achievement will improve. Both pre-program and end-of-program examples included changes in administrator behavior in the areas of supervision, increased visibility, monitoring classroom instruction, and communicating expectations. Campus-level changes included modifications in campus routines such as instituting advisories, revising schedules, rewriting course descriptions, or tracking dropout and other data. Fewer than half of the pre-program narratives included one or more strategies to address the administrator or campus frame, whereas all but two of the end-of-program narratives contained at least one example of first order administrator or campus change.

In contrast with first order change, second order change requires modifications in organizational culture as well as increasing the capacity of members within the organization to adopt and lead change efforts (Hanson, 2003). In our study, two strands of second order change are prevalent: capacity building frame and culture frame.
**Capacity building frame.** In this study, capacity building is defined as those actions or strategies designed to increase the ability of school community members to respond to the school’s needs. Findings attributed to a capacity building frame included: 1) job-embedded professional development delivered through teacher-driven processes such as book studies, network groups, observations and feedback with other teachers, and modeling of informed practices; 2) mentoring programs; 3) collaborative teaming focused on teaching and learning, developing common assessments and/or collaboratively examining student work; 4) developing collaborative structures such as providing planning time or substitute coverage for teachers to observe instruction; 5) increasing parent and student engagement; 6) conducting program evaluations; and 7) adjusting hiring practices to target diversity, teacher quality, and experience levels of campus staff. Pre-program responses support six participants (001, 008, 010, 014, 015, 016) included references to capacity building and a balance of first order and second order change with two of these participants (001, 008) substantially addressing culture issues as well. End-of-program findings reveal that 100% of the participants included at least one reference to capacity building. One participant’s end-of-program response (004) emphasized capacity building strategies while five additional participants’ (005, 009, 011, 013, 016) combined capacity building with strategies associated with first order change.

**Culture frame.** An organization’s culture includes the operating norms and mental maps that members use to make decisions and select behaviors (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Within this study, strategies associated with the culture frame included the 1) creation of vision, mission, commitments, and shared accountability; 2) changing campus norms and adult actions to focus on student learning; 3) fostering relationships and strengthening partnerships with families, community, district members and other schools; and 4) creating meaningful leadership avenues for teachers, students and parents. In the pre-program responses, only seven participants (50%) included strategies related to the culture frame. In the end-of-program responses, 100% of the participants included at least one strategy that represented the culture frame with six participants (001, 002, 003, 006, 008, 014) demonstrating a preponderance of culture combined with capacity building examples.

In summary, our findings on problem-framing from pre-program responses indicate that more than half (57%) of the participants addressed low student achievement primarily through first order change targeted at students and family, teachers and classroom and administrator and campus frames. In the end-of-program samples, all but two, or 86% of the participants’ narratives incorporated strong evidence of a combination of first order and second order problem-framing. Of these responses, 50% emphasized second order change through capacity building and/or culture problem-framing.

**Discussion**

The findings reported in this paper represent our attempt to understand the nature of the shift, if any, in participants’ leader identity and problem-framing perspectives at the conclusion of their participation in a two-year preparation program. Our comparisons of pre- and end-of-program narrative responses to problem-based learning activities demonstrate a clear shift in students’ problem framing and leadership identity. With few exceptions, the movement of the shifts was toward participative-centric leader identity
centered around collaborative leader identity and second order change problem-framing emphasizing capacity building and culture.

**Explaining the Shift**

What accounts for the shifts away from leader-centric and toward participative-centric leader identity noted in this research? Although our research did not test out cause-effect relationships, it is likely that the students’ participation in the preparation program is responsible for the shift. In their study of undergraduate leader identity, Komives et al. (2006) noted leaders in early stages of development may feel compelled to complete tasks alone, but that as the leadership tasks they undertake become more complex, they begin to realize that they must depend on others. In the following quote, a student describes how completing the end-of-program task revealed to her the growth she had experienced since entering the program:

This process helped me remember the value of involving others in reviewing data, establishing goals, and setting priorities. Before beginning this program, I believed I could accomplish great things alone. I viewed myself as a lone ranger and closing the gap on student achievement was a task I could accomplish by myself. After two years, I have discovered the power of having many like-minded individuals working together as one to achieve a common goal.

A similar explanation can be applied to the shifts we found in problem-framing. Problem-framing concerns the interventions, strategies and/or actions selected by the respondent to address the indicators of low student achievement. We initially thought the variance in participants’ approaches to problem-framing represented the range of possible actions that a school leader, or school, might take to close achievement gaps (Young, et al., 2010). However, on further examination, we found that, like in the case of leadership identity, problem-framing appeared to take place along a continuum. In this case, the continuum included shifts from a less comprehensive to a more comprehensive framing of a problem combined with solutions that shifted from first order changes to changes that emphasized capacity building and culture. Importantly, both problem-framing and the actions participants identified to address those problems shifted during the period that participants were engaged in leadership preparation.

**The Direction of Shift**

The literature informing our research builds on the notion that beliefs, dispositions, and attitudes are key to the development of leadership identity and that learning experiences that challenge pre-service leaders to examine their assumptions through reflective practices and critical discourse are key in supporting shifts in leadership identity. The fact that we identified significant shifts in the majority of our students, both in terms of leadership identity and problem-framing, provides further support to research that has found a link between a program’s emphasis on reflective practice and critical discourse and participants’ critical consciousness development (Brown, 2005; Orr, 2006).

However, it is also important to question why some students did not make significant shifts as well as why some students drifted in the opposite direction. Importantly, researches have found that the spectrum of leadership identity is not fixed (Komives, et al, 2005). Like the participants in our study, individuals often move between stages in both linear and cyclical patterns. Indeed, some stages may “be repeatedly experienced” (Komives, et al., 2006, p. 404).
The Intersection of Problem Framing and Leadership Identity

Not completely unexpectedly, we found a great deal of consistency between the nature of shifts in participants’ problem-framing and leadership identity. In both processes there is movement from less sophisticated and less complex understandings of problems and the role of leadership in addressing those problems toward more sophisticated and complex understandings. For example, as leadership identity develops, the perception of leadership as “leader-centric” evolves to a view of leadership as “a collaborative, relational process,” (Komives, et al., 2005, p. 610) wherein the problems that are identified and addressed are done so in a more comprehensive and inclusive manner. In the scenarios our participants addressed through the pre- and end-of-program data-sets, this translates into the realization that leader-centric behaviors and incremental adjustments will not create the conditions needed to eliminate pervasive achievement gaps.

Why Develop Participative-Centric Leaders?

Our findings indicate that ten participants (71%) in our program advanced toward participative-centric leader identity, including four with a combination of leader-driven/collaborative leader identity, two demonstrating a preponderance of collaborative leader identity, three a combination of collaborative/transformational leader identity and one transformative leader identity. According to a growing body of research, “School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed” (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 27), thus it is essential that it be developed to its fullest potential.

Understanding the full spectrum of leadership and how to foster the development of leadership identity among preparation program participants has important implications for their leadership practice. In fact, cultivating a collaborative and transformational leadership identity through authentic learning experiences and reflective discourse has been identified as a key component of exemplary leadership preparation programs (Brown, 2005; Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Orr, 2006b).

Why Work Toward Second Order Change Problem-Framing?

Our findings also indicate that by the end of the preparation program, all but two, or 86% of the participants’ narratives incorporated strong evidence of a combination of first order and second order change problem-framing. Of these responses, 50% emphasized second order change through capacity building and/or culture problem-framing. This is an important shift for aspiring leaders to make because first order changes typically do not require changes in the capacity or culture of the organization, while second order change requires modifications in organizational culture as well as increasing the capacity of members within the organization to adopt and lead change efforts (Hanson, 2003). This is an important shift in a leader’s ability to comprehend, critically analyze and address problems, and it has been connected empirically to improved educational outcomes (Lambert, 1995, 2005).

Conclusion & Implications

Increasingly, national attention on effective schools focuses on the issue of the quality of leadership preparation programs (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). In recent years many educational leadership preparation programs have redesigned their content and delivery to be more influential in graduates’ leadership
development and subsequent leadership practice focused on school improvement (Young, 2009). Hypothesized relationships between programs’ standards-based curriculum and learning strategies and graduates’ learning and intermediate career outcomes have been validated and the evidence of this relationship continues to grow (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Orr & Pounder, 2008; see also the resources listed on the Evaluation Taskforce Page of the UCEA website www.ucea.org).

The need for more and better-prepared principals (Hale & Moorman, 2003) raises the question of how to measure the impact of program preparation on the perspectives of aspiring leaders. While other research may rely on self-reports of perception, this qualitative study explores changes in leader identity and problem-framing through analysis of principalship program student problem-based narratives. Based on an evaluation tool (the Leadership Identity/Problem Framing Research Template) developed through an earlier phase of this research, we were able to assess candidates’ leadership identity and problem framing approaches and to chart their development along a continua of leader identity and problem-framing. Comparison of pre-program and end-of-program data analysis reveals that the majority of participants included in this study exhibited movement toward participative-centric leader identity and second order change problem-framing by the end of the two-year principal preparation program.

Based on our findings and the existing literature on leadership identity development, we assert that leadership preparation can influence participative-centric and second order change problem-framing. That is, learning experiences that are intentionally designed to promote growth can create the conditions necessary to develop aspiring leaders’ identity development and problem-framing approaches. However, more research is needed to understand more fully the types of learning experiences that most powerfully influence students’ development as well as to explore why and how these experiences impact students’ development differently. As such, one of the next phases of our research will involve a curriculum audit around our theory of action. Specifically, given that through our program we want to develop participative-centric leaders and strong problem-framers, what aspects of our curriculum supports such development and what aspects should we change or enhance?

Furthermore we are interested in knowing what the results of future program enhancements might yield. That is, if we are able to identify key preparation elements that foster identity development and second-order problem framing and re-design our preparation curriculum and pedagogy accordingly, will all of our participants make the cognitive shift toward transformative leader identity and second order change problem-framing by the end of our two-year program? More importantly, if a participant’s end-of-program narratives indicate participative-centric leader identity and second-order change problem-framing, will these attitudes, beliefs, and actions transfer when he/she is a principal?

Also of interest to our team is whether or not there are differences in sex and race/ethnicity among students and their shifts as well as whether our continuum is biased toward the practices of men or women or towards individuals from certain racial or ethnic backgrounds. Like the questions of pedagogy and impact, questions of bias will be taken up in a future stage of our research on this issue.

In conclusion, educational leadership preparation programs can and do make a difference. This study contributes to the growing body of research on leadership
preparation suggesting that effective leadership preparation programs are distinguishable both by their features and by their influence on their graduates’ learning and career advancement (Orr & Pounder, 2008).

References


